

# *Not Bad*

## Fond Recollections of a Rather Unique Person

*Laurence Dickson Yont*  
*December 14, 1933 – December 13, 2006*



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Marjolein de Jong, and indeed, multitudes

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## Dens of Iniquity

In my second year as a graduate student in the City and Regional Planning program at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, my advisor-to-be, William Warntz, hired me as a research assistant in a strange subterranean warren called the Lab for Computer Graphics. I hadn't worked there very long before I made Larry Yont's acquaintance. My hair was long and black; his was medium and auburn. I had a tousled beard; he had a trim goatee and moustache. I was a 60's radical hippy; he was a 50's hipster. The year was 1967.

It was a groovy era, and despite the austere oversight of Director, Howard Fisher, the labbies were a fun-loving group and spent a lot of time with one another. People came and went, but tended to stay in touch, with Larry as the epicenter of that social network.

Larry started (or revived) his tradition of Wednesday evening open houses at his Harvard Square pad, which were well attended by certain labbies, friends and freaks, people that Larry constantly collected around him. It was sort of a pot-luck party where people shared pot, wine, snacks and stories. When he wasn't rustling up some grub, Larry presided in his Harvard chair in the kitchen at the end of a redwood picnic table. The adjoining dimly lit dining room was unfurnished, and used mainly for private conversations, dancing, fondling, and passing out on the floor.

Wednesdays at Larry's were a viscous mixture of labbies, students, academic wannabes, townies, foreigners, and other out-of-towners who never would have spent time in such company on their own. Tolerance prevailed for the most part, but sometimes tensions mounted, in no small part egged on by Larry, who loved provoking people just to get a rise out of them. I'm amazed that nobody ever clobbered him.



Larry and Linc O'Brien at the picnic table in his 10B Mount Auburn Street kitchen



## Local Color

Larry was a gateway drug for many of the characters I got to know around Cambridge, and those I've known the longest. Most of the others came through the Computer Graphics Lab, but I first mixed socially with many of them at one of Larry's soirees. Many have quit the scene, some for good, alas. Along with Larry, I remember

- Guerdon Bill. A roommate of Eric Teicholz who lived on Kinnard St., I think, upstairs from Larry, before I knew any of them. At 300 pounds or so, Guerdon was larger than life but still so cuddly. He and Larry shared a passion for vintage cars and both had owned a good number of them. Despite his long hair and predilections for recreational drugs, Guerdon had been in the Army, working as a Russian linguist during the Korean conflict. Around 1970, he split for Europe and never really returned. Larry managed to visit him and his famous lover (and eventually spouse) Albert Moll, in Holland, as I did, and always enjoyed his high humor and childlike delight in life. He succumbed to a heart attack around 2001 and Albert died about a year later.
- Jack and Ann Carr. These longtime Central Square denizens were also attached to Guerdon, and remained loyal to both him and Larry ever after. Indeed, Jack and Ann were the only folks from the U.S. who attended both Guerdon's wedding and funeral. Mr. Carr indeed is a Jack-of-all-trades, including construction, logistics, motorcycle repair, and food service. Ann was a teacher in the Cambridge schools for many years, and they raised two or three kids, now grown.
- Tim Reilly. A townie transplant from Rhode Island, Tim was a dope dealer who always had the best reefer. His mission in life seemed to be to get everyone so high they could not speak or stand up. Unfortunately, he was popped by the cops on the way to meet a client on Oxford Street, with a Snoopy lunchbox full of pot. Tim got off eventually, but it scared a lot of Larry's friends because he had our names and phone numbers.
- Judi Jones. Judi was Tim's lover; they shacked up in an apartment on Ellery Street for a number of years. Judi was very serene, educated, and well spoken, Tim's opposite number in most respects. She had a childlike quality and was involved in things like medieval fantasies and puppetry. As a mutual friend once said, Judi was "a half-level off" the plane most of us inhabit, far enough to seem otherworldly, but not so far that she had no way to relate. Later on, she worked as an assistant in the MIT Artificial Intelligence Lab, where she seemed to fit in just fine, so maybe she was a closet geek all along.
- Kickan and Max Chretien. Larry used to say that without her nickname, Kickan would be called "Christian Christian" in English. He fell for her when they met in the late 1950's but the lovely Swede was already spoken for by the quiet Swiss, Max, and they are still married. They were already old friends when I met her in 1970 at one of Larry's Wednesday affairs. Kickan has no vices, save for beer and handsome men; Max prefers wine and pretty ladies. It was always amusing to watch them flirting in parallel. Eventually, they found themselves spending so much time with Larry up at his Silver Lake boathouse that they bought a cottage there for themselves. To the end, Larry considered them his fastest friends.
- Linc O'Brien. I can't recall how Linc got captured in Larry's orbit, but he ended up moving in upstairs at 10B Mt. Auburn Street as Allan Schmidt's roommate. Linc was a scion of old Yankee stock; his grandfather was president of Harvard (an Eliot) but despite that, Linc was sort of a dropout who had gone quietly astray. When I met him he was taking courses in computer programming, and ended up working in the Lab with me for a while. Linc was a pilot and kept a Piper Cub in Norwood. He loved numbers and playing mind games; at some point he joined Mensa and threw a couple of parties for that crowd that I attended, only to

find them even odder than folks in Larry's crowd. Then, in 1972, after being rejected in love by his first cousin, Linc pulled the plug and was never seen again.

- A Centerfold of Roommates. Wherever he lived and loved, Larry always had roommates, mostly of the female persuasion and mostly of a certain youth. When Larry needed a roommate to fund his rent, he put out ads and alerted buddies like myself, whom he then called in to participate in interviews. Many of these ladies kept in touch with Larry, calling and sending notes, which was amazing considering how widely they scattered and how seldom Larry himself wrote letters. Larry's ex's are legion: Kay, Ting, Truda, Carolinn, Teri, Shirley, Mary Jane, Jean, several later ones who didn't work out and whom I never met, and a few near-ms's who kept the faith, like Aygöl, Barbara, and Bridget.
- Assorted oddballs. Lots of people hung out at Larry's places over the years, some I hung with, some I didn't. Besides the Harvard Lab crowd, among them were Eric Anderson, Kay Griffen, Gail Gutrad, Janet Lenkowsi, Dennis Murphy, Jack Page, Dave Perkins, Krishna Sharma (later my roommate) and a black guy with red hair named Carrot Top.



Larry & Gail Gutrad, Mt. Auburn St c. 1970



Kathy Kiernan, Jack Page, Larry, Karin Chretien Belmont St. c. 1972



## The Dean of Fun

At the time that the School of Design moved into its new quarters in Gund Hall in 1971, Larry had already been let go from the Computer Graphics Lab staff, and spent most of his time holed up in his Silver Lake boathouse. He was at loose ends, not sure what to do with his life, although he did mention a vague ambition to become a “country lawyer.” He let the impulse pass, probably because he felt inadequate to force his way in to the New Hampshire Bar, which might have been blocked by his having a felony conviction in England.

That blot on his record didn’t prevent Allan Schmidt from hiring him into the Lab in the first place, and it also had no bearing on Larry’s amiable relationship with the new Dean of the GSD, business professor Maurice Kilbridge. In fact, Maury asked Larry to cater his daughter’s wedding in Groton, which Larry somehow pulled off with heavy lifting by Jack Carr and some other redoubtable assistants. Jack recalled having to tell Larry to buzz off a few times that afternoon, because Larry was somewhat smashed and issuing random, redundant directives for stuff Jack had already organized.

Nevertheless, Maury apparently felt that the wedding feast was a great success, because he then asked Larry to help organize and cater a Halloween party at the GSD, and after that a children’s Christmas Party. For the latter, Larry constructed a kiddie-sized choo-choo train made from cakes and other confections, which was apparently a big hit. Naturally, Larry got all his friends and various GSD students and staff involved in these projects. The enthusiasm he projected for big parties was highly infectious, and the GSD faculty also prided itself on its long party tradition.



Something potted, Emerald Necklace Ball, 1976



Larry the Barrister, c. 1975

Shortly thereafter Larry proudly installed himself in a desk in the corner of the Lab, telling us that Maury had hired him as the school’s social event facilitator, a position that Larry promptly named “Dean of Fun.” It was great to have him back again, this time doing something he was truly loved and was so competent at. Although he wasn’t paid very much, Larry also had medical

coverage again, which would turn out to be a very good thing. His gig lasted about five years, but he kept his HMO coverage a long time.

Our mutual friend Kathy Kiernan remembers a special event at the GSD:

The largest party Larry orchestrated as the Dean of Fun was the Emerald Necklace Ball honoring the 100th anniversary of Boston's urban park system, designed by Frederick Law Olmstead in 1876. Guests were instructed to wear outfits typical of the 1870's, although anything that looked old-fashioned would do. Larry's budget was huge. There were two bands, four bars and several food areas. And Larry arranged for hundreds of potted geraniums to be delivered in an effort to make Gund Hall look like a park, which pretty much worked. Larry felt that this party was one of his finest accomplishments.



Kickan, Geoff and Karin, Emerald Necklace Ball, 1976

One of his most memorable GSD Halloween parties – always the highlight of the academic year – featured a spread of foodstuffs laid out like a cadaver on an operating table. All the parts were edible (including poached brain), if you dared. As I recall, he also set out a large punchbowl, smoking with dry ice and containing a number of eyeball-like objects floating around. My dealer friend Billy, visiting from Texas, had laid on me a generous stash of weed, and so I rolled about a dozen joints and tacked them up on the bulletin boards all around the first floor of Gund Hall to see how quickly they would disappear. Didn't take more than half an hour.

That may have been the party at which I appeared in two different costumes. First in fatigues and beret, looking like Che Guevara; halfway through the evening I went upstairs, shaved off all my face hair, put on a wig and a flowery dress, and sashayed on down as a seductress. Absolutely nobody I talked to recognized me in drag, and when I identified myself, nobody could recall that an hour earlier I had sported a full beard and moustache.

## A Trip and a Half

My witness is the empty sky  
~Jack Kerouac

Once upon a time, Larry and I flew to the Catskills as passengers in Linc O'Brien's Piper Cub. That crazy caper was my idea; I wanted to check out a hippie conclave that I'd learned was coming up called *Whiz-Bang Quick City*, along a river in Woodstock NY. This was April of 1971, the apex of the Whole Earth Catalog era. Here's a blurry image from the Net, purported to have been taken there, next to a photo I took of Linc, Larry and Max Chretien relaxing on the veranda at Silver Lake around that time:



Whiz-Bang Quick City was an encampment of domes, bubbles, tents and cardboard castles that went up in two days and vanished as mysteriously as it had begun. Linc had aero charts that got us from Jaffrey to Woodstock airspace in about an hour, but then we had to prowl around in the plane, looping over and around hills like the Batmobile, not really sure what we were looking for. I discovered that looking at one place on the ground could keep my head from spinning.

Before too long, we found a lowland field with long-haired people and strange large objects. Linc buzzed them, dipping his wing, and they waved back. A map helped us find a grass airstrip a few miles away, and Link bumped down there. We hoisted our packs and struck out on foot in the direction we'd come from and eventually hitched a ride from some longhairs who brought us to the gates of the city. Passing by a clutter of beat-up cars and psychedelic busses we came to a merry band of architecture students, hippies and assorted locals busy finishing up their abodes. Linc and I got intrigued with some of the structures being erected and talked shop. Naturally, Larry was chatting people up, especially the prettier womenfolk. We shared pot, lay in the sun and ate snacks, but decided not to stay over (we hadn't brought a house ourselves, and Linc's plane couldn't land there). So, we got a kind soul to ferry us back to where our plane was and soon we were heading home over the hills to New Hampshire. Naturally, Linc buzzed Silver Lake at an altitude of about 10 feet before setting down back in Jaffrey.

Another time (can't remember when), Linc rented a seaplane and set it down on Silver Lake, and gave Larry's friends and family air tours (those that dared). I also remember that some other guy landed a seaplane on the lake around that time; after a couple of hours he revved it up and took off to the North end of the lake. The plane didn't gain altitude fast enough, snagged on some

trees by the kid's camp at the end of the lake, and plopped into the water. I don't believe anyone was seriously injured, but it was enough to scare us all and certainly embarrass the pilot.

I think the Woodstock caper was Larry's first trip in the Lincmobile, my second. It was to have been our last, because later that year Linc hopped in his plane one fine morning, headed East, and disappeared forever.

## The Sultan of Swag

Larry always called himself a pack rat, and indeed the longer he lived, the more small objects he squirreled away. His apartment on Dimick Street bulged with thrift store swag, so much so that clearing out his dining room for a party wasn't possible; guests navigated around of stuff stacked against the walls and under his custom-made butcher block table that was cut out in the middle. His third bedroom served as a giant closet, impassable from stacks of tubs packed solid with every conceivable domestic item: bedspreads and comforters, toasters and blenders, shirts and shoes, bowls and boards.

Without venturing into psychoanalytic territory, my judgment about why Larry burdened himself with finding, buying, hauling, and stashing all those things is that he loved

- a) household goods that could be recovered from the curb or bought for a song
- b) haunting thrift shops and charming the various ladies who worked there
- c) his friends, with whom he wanted to share the very best that life had to offer

In Larry's mind, most of this stuff wasn't his anyway; it was earmarked from the day of discovery for certain people; he was just holding it for them until the proper occasion arose. Many did arise over the years, but apparently not often enough, because his mountain of swag only grew more precipitous.

On the occasion of my birthday about six years back, Larry took me on a midday excursion to the thrift shop operated by the Waltham Hospital Women's Auxiliary, one of his favorites. He picked me up in Belmont and then motored leisurely to a small frame house near the hospital, which was open only one or two days a week (he had in his head the schedules of a dozen such venues, and planned his days around their hours of operation). After introducing me to the ladies running the place, Larry directed me to where the best stuff could be found. We lolled around there for an hour, each purchasing five or ten dollars worth of booty. Then he grandly ushered me over to the hospital itself, navigating a maze of hallways and stairways to the cafeteria. Larry explained the food offerings and then gallantly offered to buy my meal – a bowl of salty, overripe soup costing about two dollars. How could you not adore such a man?

When Christmas or birthdays rolled around (give or take a couple of weeks) Larry was there, bearing gifts. They were generally unboxed, lumpy objects wrapped in white or colored tissue paper, decorated sparingly with pipe cleaner curls. Things like

- Cast iron cookware, slightly rusted
- Old butcher knives, resharpened
- Mixmaster bowls, sans mixer
- Food processors, beat-up and sticky
- Cookbooks, classic or offbeat
- Children's books, classic and well-worn
- Pendleton shirts, nice and right-sized
- Flannel nightshirts, size didn't matter
- Slippers, perhaps mismatched

He usually penned a to/from message on each parcel, never using a label or card, that rarely included any personal sentiment. What was special was his mark; instead of scrawling a

signature, Larry would doodle an impish image of himself, which always recalled for me his hipster visage from the early days of our acquaintance.

Hardly any of us wanted or had much use for the things Larry gave us, but more often than not we were usually genuinely grateful. Not only that, we've held on to most of his presents, because they reify his unique sense of aesthetics, his sensitivity to our needs, and the generosity of his spirit. It's something special that's sorely lacking in this age of dotcom gift certificates. Larry never paid much attention to the Internet; perhaps it was because he knew all along what it was lacking – the ability to touch stuff with your toes.

## Larry the Reluctant

After Larry was ejected from the Harvard GSD he eventually reemerged as a caterer, and chose for his nom de guerre *The Reluctant Chef*. I still have a T-shirt bearing witness to that alias, made by Dan Gover whilst my roommate in Watertown. While he also gigged solo, Larry cajoled many of his friends, acquaintances and roommates to help in to prepare for or even attend others. Some of these folks are pros, like Tammy, Jack Carr, and Steve Wayne. Others, including Kickan, Terri, Shirley and myself, were more like indentured temps, who swept into his kitchen for a few hours of chopsaki. Except for his forays to Harvard Forest, where he worked a church kitchen, all this happened in the confines of his Somerville apartments. Here is the crime scene:



Larry's Dimick Street Kitchen, Twin Woks Ready for Action

Out of all this clutter came meals for multitudes, up to 50 at a time. His caloric equipment consisted of a large gas stove with two ovens and extra-large burner orifices, a powerful old microwave on stilts, one of those big old electric roaster ovens, and a little hibachi on the back porch. The front room was the staging area, usually littered with plastic tubs, insulated boxes, and a clutch of paper + plastic grocery bags for transporting breads, crackers, cheeses, drinks and condiments. In between, the dining room was a no-man's land of recent thrift shop acquisitions, unread mail, glassware, serving pieces, and assorted Larry tchokies. That room was only functional for parties, just prior to which Larry would direct his minions to push as much clutter as possible to the margins, and shove the rest into the second or third bedroom.

His kitchen and pantry farted with exotic foodstuffs and liquors, but rarely did I observe Larry making much use of them. That was because, like me, he loved to shop for food, and used any excuse to pick up fresh ingredients, especially unfamiliar ones like black Asian rice, pink lamb kidneys, pungent Thai sauces, or tiny purple potatoes. Some items languished in his overburdened fridge for weeks, but Larry would find ways to prepare most of them, no matter how past prime they were (he claimed that he wouldn't toss things out of his fridge until they started moving).

When Larry cooked meat, his strategy was usually to season it sparingly and cook it either gently or fiercely until the innermost part was almost warm. Sometimes he would simmer a sauce, but usually he simply sliced the meat on a cutting board and served it with a slough of condiments. More often than not, his carb offerings consisted of crusty bread (store bought; Larry never baked much more than poppin-fresh rolls) and rice pilafs. Side dishes tended to be based on things like frozen green beans, peas, carrots, and lima beans, dressed up with pearl onions,

mushrooms, red peppers or broccoli. Usually Larry went with the stuff of the season – roast beef at Christmas, Ham at Easter, Turkey at Thanksgiving, Lobsters on Independence Day.



Whipping up a mouse

The total marketing budget for the catering operation was devoted to a telephone listing for Reluctant Chef. Maybe RC was mentioned on his answering machine outgoing message, but that was about it. He mostly depended on repeat business, the most reliable of which proved to be a weekly international student seminar luncheon at the MIT Urban Planning department. That gig began around 5 A.H. (after Harvard) and lasted more than 15 years. Despite having to deal with a shrewish administrator who regularly challenged his judgment, Larry really enjoyed working out menus around exotic cuisines and executing dishes he had never done before, truly a signature of a cooking professional.



## Misses and Near-Misses

Larry and I didn't become fast friends right away – that wasn't how either of us operated. But he was more of a people person, adept at probing personalities and pushing buttons to get people to let down their guard, expose their true nature, and play with him. This was despite the fact that he himself rarely let his guard down or revealed many deep feelings. Over a couple of years in the late sixties, Larry and I did grow close, and through him I met a fabulous assortment of interesting characters – probably making more friends than through all my other contacts combined.

Of all the people I've known, Larry was the most resistant to change – of his surroundings, his friends, his enthusiasms, his aesthetics, his demons, himself. He was also quite intelligent and perceptive, but mostly in subjects, places and times of his own choosing. In other circumstances he was in his own subjective place and time, sometimes wanting to be alone, other times begging for company. The people he chose to let in to his world will forever travel with him.

To hear Larry tell it, his main demon was his father, who seems to have leaned on Larry to become a lawyer to complete his and his own father's ego against Larry's better instincts. Larry was always doing things that seemed to either reject his father's influence or demonstrate how contrarily incorrigible he was. He made that point over and over in many ways. Having failed to exorcise the demon, he punished himself just to make it take notice.

His alienation led him to idolize intimacy but eschew commitment, a double bind from which he never really extricated himself. Larry ended up living for the kindness of strangers, people he wanted to be close to in the absence of a supportive family. This isn't to say he never found kindness, but it always had limits, got interrupted, failed to satisfy, or simply paled, unlike the kinds of intimacy – the good, bad, malignant and benign – that tend to connect blood relatives.

In his forties and fifties, Larry loved to live vicariously through his roommates, almost exclusively attractive young women whom he welcomed into his fantasy league of lovers. When one of them moved out, Larry would place ads in the Boston Phoenix and at the Harvard and MIT housing offices along the lines of

Fun-loving man who enjoys cooking, sharing and nurturing seeks female roommate for well-equipped apartment near Inman Square. Call 666-1313.

When candidates would come calling, Larry liked to station backup interviewers at his side, either ex-roommates like Teri Schwartzel or old friends like myself or Kickan Chretien. This made sense, because signing up to live with Larry was like taking a new job in a small, family-owned company. The roommate paid the whole rent, and Larry bought and prepared most of the food. Fair enough, given that his rent was never more than about \$350 and that Larry usually lived on less than \$10,000 a year.



With Roommates Jean and Shirley at Dimick Street

Despite careful vetting, about half the ladies who signed on didn't last very long. Some were unstable, a few were con artists, but most just couldn't adjust to Larry's neediness and misbehavior. Two of them even moved upstairs together in the same building. Sometimes I would try to talk to Larry about how he persisted in alienating his housemates, which I saw as a byproduct of alcohol abuse; he tended to agree with my diagnoses, but usually ended the conversation with words to the effect "I am what I am."

It was through this process of triaging attractive females that I met the woman who was to become my wife. I didn't interview her, though, and didn't even get to meet her until three months after she answered Larry's ad in September 1990. And when I informed Larry six years later that she and I were engaged, he reacted with a typical yontism: "Why spoil a good thing."

She remembers meeting Larry in her contribution called "A Stranger and a Stranger Man."

Missed opportunity or not, Aygül impressed Larry enough for him to track her down from the dormitory where she had resided to her school, where he inquired about a young Turkish woman he had met and needed to locate. Being all alone in a strange country, she appreciated his attention and gladly accepted his invitation to come to his annual Christmas/birthday party (Larry was born on December 14, the same day as my father). There in Larry's Dimick Street living room, amidst thirty odd people, a charming young lady introduced herself to me: "My name is Aygül Balcioğlu, and I am in Boston from Turkey to pursue my dream." I did not take that to mean me, but certainly it got my attention.

## **A Stranger and a Stranger Man**

I came to Boston with tremendous energy and expectation, all on my own. I did not know anybody in the city. What made me to take the risk to try it in a strange land was my desire to follow what I perceived as the right way to build an academic career in science, unconditional support and love by family and the generous financial support from the Turkish government. That was what I had to offer to this alien land expecting the reward and fulfillment of pursuing scientific questions, no strings attached. That was my American dream, which I pursued with my family's emotional and my government's financial support.

The first reality that I faced as soon as I landed in Boston was to find a place to live. I did not have enough money to live on my own. It was suggested that I become someone's roommate and I should consult advertisements to find situations to explore. My departmental secretary handed me a Phoenix newspaper open to the roommate ad pages, and asked me to look through them and choose some that appealed to me. Larry's ad kind of stuck out and I decided to call 666-1313. He answered and without much discussion asked me to meet him at Harvard Square. Of course, I did not understand most of what he said, where Harvard Square was or how to get there. He patiently explained all that to me but I could not make sense of it given that it had been only a couple of days since I landed in Boston and my English was still pretty spotty. But I kept the time and the location in mind and hung up.

Then I asked the secretary, who handed me a map and pointed to me to the T. I decided to make the adventurous trip. Up until that time I was only walking back and forth from my dormitory to school. It felt like a huge risk to leave my sanctuary and take public transport and deal with the locals. But I managed to get to Harvard Square, find the Out of Town newsstand and sit on a bench there. I decided that even if I failed to meet this person, this is already was a winning situation; I learned how to use subway, and the people were fun to watch.

I sat there and watched people pass through the traffic island to see if I could pick out Larry. As several waves flowed by, I could not figure out who I should be looking for. Then I noticed this man who seemed to be the only one that wasn't just passing through. As he did not look like somebody I might want to connect to, I decided to ignore him. He looked very suspicious to me, with his funny dark designer sun glasses, very old fashioned clothing, and a fragile appearance. After another two rounds of pedestrians, he was still there and it was becoming clear that this was the man I was there to meet. Indeed, he finally approached me and asked "you are not from Turkey by any chance, are you?"

I replied, "you are not Larry Yont by any chance, are you?" We both laughed and he suggested that we go to see his apartment. It was a strange suggestion I did not decline, having come all that way to see a room to rent. We walked to his station wagon and drove there. When we arrived there, I felt oddly secure and comfortable with him. It was that welcoming feeling in his space, however chaotic it was. He ushered me to the kitchen where the table had been set with cheese, crackers, cherry tomatoes, and slices of roast beef. He asked me if I would like to drink anything. I asked for a cup of tea, which he was pleased to fix that for me.

I watched him while he was making tea, and appreciated the pleasure he clearly felt doing it. He was very pleasant and wanted to find out many things about me. He clearly enjoyed how hard I tried to communicate with him with my broken English. He told me that I would need to contribute food expenses, but he was to fix breakfast, lunch and dinner for me. I was there over

an hour without seeing the room, and then I had to leave He gave me a ride back to Harvard Square. Only on the way out did he show me the room that he wanted to rent.

Larry impressed me as being very genuine and warm, but made me wonder why one old fellow would be so nice to me, what was it that he was after... So, I told him that I will see a few more places and after that I will get back to him. I did look few more places, but his remained my favorite. Still, I had doubt about him. So I took few days before to get back to him, and left a message informing him that I would like to take the room. He did not return my call for several days. By that time, I had taken another option.

Six weeks later, Larry reached out. By that time I was in my new place, but the manager made sure that I got the message. The message was very short, Larry Yont tel: 666-1313.

I knew right away who that was from. I called him and found out why he called me. He wanted to invite me to New Hampshire to show me the foliage. For some reason, I accepted, even though I was unsure of his intentions. When he took me to his boat house in Silver Lake, I fell in love with that landscape. Here is my picture that he took when I was admiring that beauty. I think he appreciated the fact that I was enjoying being in his favorite places.



Aygul at the Boathouse, 1990

During the following six months, I spent my all spare time with Larry. He was taking care of whatever I needed in my life: teaching me some favorite stores, shopping for authentic food, where to get reasonably priced clothing, where to get a car fixed, and even how to shop from big stores, use the items awhile and then return them. I remember when the first gulf war broke, he was concerned that I had no television to follow the news. He thought I ought to know what was going on in the region where my family lived. So, one night he showed up in my apartment with a brand new TV, set it up and taught me how to use it, very carefully. When a month was up, he

came over; we boxed the TV very carefully and returned it to Sears. He showed me how to fulfill my needs without paying or paying less than I would have otherwise.

Larry would invite me for dinner 4-5 nights a week. He always had food to give and he liked to have my company. I also enjoyed his attention and affection. He loved to teach me English when we so gathered. For instance, we studied different idioms containing the f-word and he spent hours to teach me their nuances. I always enjoyed the childish joy he had doing this and he enjoyed the fact that I was letting him to be who he wanted to be.

Larry had a huge Oxford English dictionary that we used to read for hours. Mostly I remember two big words that I learned from him with special fondness. One is *promiscuous*: He portrayed that word as being a very positive adjective, having open mind to possibilities, being brave to explore and distill the experience. He made out as such a special word that I decided to use it with one of my classmates, telling her “You have a very promiscuous mind.” Although I meant it as a compliment, she became quite offended. Later, when I found out the usual usage of this word, I knew that I could not count on Larry. The second word he taught me was *merkin*, a funny and puzzling word just to hear it. It turns out to be a wig for a female pubic hair. He had deep knowledge about the words and he wanted to convey that to me, but I was getting uncomfortable that he was spending this much time to explain the words God know why on earth one would need to know and use. I am also amazed that I spent all that time on those matters. I was a graduate student, and had a lot to do before leaving the country, and did not have much time to fool around. But I am glad that I had those times with Larry.

Larry gave me a family in Boston. That made my staying here all alone much more meaningful and connected. He always was extremely generous and caring for me. It was a miracle for me that to find such a good man in an alien land. It felt like I was meant to find him. It felt so right to connect with him despite his strange ways. His friends too welcomed me to that extended family. They shared so many occasions with me — birthdays, final exams, graduations, holidays, anniversaries, and one special friend.

Through that family, Larry also led me to find my fantasized, idealized, knight husband and, eventually, the world’s most spirited daughter. Even though I came to Boston with a different agenda, it feels like my ultimate destiny was to find my husband and bear my child. And Larry was the one who gave that to me. If you do not call that a miracle, what would you call it? I hope he is still with me and my family and he always will be. It would be comforting to know that he is still watching and finding new words for me to master.

~ *Aygül Balcioğlu Dutton*



## The Lake

Whenever someone mentioned going to “the lake,” I and most of my friends knew exactly what and where that was. Silver Lake is the westernmost of three in New Hampshire, in the shadow of Mount Monadnock. This photo makes it appear as though nobody lives there, but the East side (on left) is fully occupied by cottages, camps, and all-year homes. Larry’s family jointly owns one of these, which his grandfather purchased around World War I, as I recall. Back then, most people traveled to their cottages by train, which stopped in Chesham by way of Keene and made the last mile or two by wagon.



By the time Larry and his siblings had the run of the place, motorcars were common, and a large garage was constructed on what still is a dirt road, up a steep 50-foot embankment from the lake-lapped cottage. Nobody has used the garage in decades; a parking area was smoothed out next to it after a new leaching field was laid up there in the late ‘70s. Larry kept some treasures there, and always had intended to renovate it into a cottage for his stepmother Gladys, but what with money being short and family politics, it never happened.

When I first got invited to the lake, it was as part of a group of people from the Harvard Computer Graphics Lab, where Larry had recently been hired by Allan Schmidt as an administrator. The year was probably 1968, so I would have just recently been married to Martha, my first wife. I don’t recall her ever going up there, however, because she never really warmed up to Larry, and the marriage lasted less than four years anyway. Here’s a fuzzy photo taken of a bunch of labbies after supper in the cottage; it looks like they are having a dessert of chocolate chip cookies, brie, and wine:



Dave Sheehan, Larry, unknown lady, Dave Hancock, Kathy Kiernan, Linda Peacock, Allan Schmidt in back

The two-story cottage and its expansive porch easily slept a dozen people in squeaky beds with lumpy mattresses. Fortunately it had two bathrooms, because it was often nearly fully occupied. When they weren't partying, visitors liked to swim, boat, fish and play music. Some labbies, like Lance Benson and Mike Woldenberg, were fairly accomplished pickers and vocalists. Others, like Kathy Kiernan and myself, were more en , asing-along types. On occasion, I would bring my concertina and melodica to noodle along. Then, after Allan Schmidt hooked up with Ellen Santis, the music scene went semi-pro; several times a summer, various Folk Song Society of Greater Boston (behind which Ellen was a driving force) members congregated to perform far into the night. That sweet music wafted across the lake to wash over canoeists paddling in the moonlight.

About 50 feet north of the cottage squatted an old boathouse which Larry decided to appropriate as a bedroom around 1970. He removed the nautical detritus, cleared out the mice and cobwebs (but they always came back), and where there used to be a hoist to lift boats out of the lake, he cantilevered a rickety porch over the water. The structure outlasted Larry, but its bench seat gave way and toppled Jeff Karol into two feet of rock-strewn water, causing him multiple injuries; you see the bench in the photo of Aygöl, above.



Larry cooking with Geoff by the boathouse and re-roofing it, c. 1972



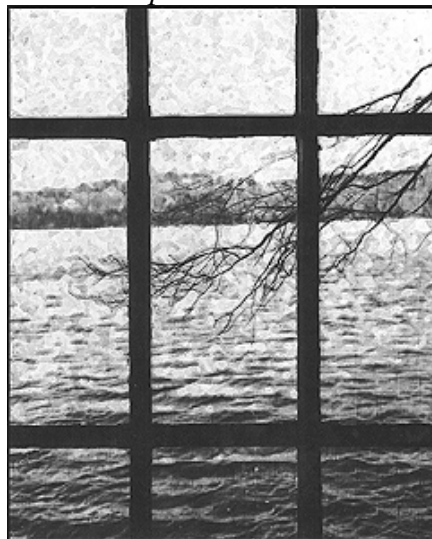
Then he insulated the roof, constructed a sleeping loft, updated the electricity, and installed a well-thought out galley along the back wall. Other updates included a wood burning, a new roof, brown exterior paint (never quite completed – my fault), and a mud room with an extra fridge. The last project was to add a bathroom and connect it to the septic system in the main house.

Larry had a thing about bathrooms. When he added this one, he threatened to build it as a “one-holer,” by which he meant a central drain which would service a combined shower, urinal and shitter, all in the same space. Fortunately his friends talked him out of that concept, and Larry ended up installing a conventional sink and a low-flush toilet over a plywood floor in a 6-by-8 extension of the building with a large window overlooking the lake. Naturally there was something weird about it: there was no doorway. Everyone had to enter through an open window, by ducking under the sash and stepping across a window sill that was about 28” off the floor. Once inside, they could roll down a bamboo shade for optional privacy.

As time went by, the cottage got rented out for most of the summer, Larry generally handling the arrangements. So, Larry began to invite close friends and those he wanted to get closer to up to the boathouse. The renters often dropped by too, particularly the Shmidt or Karol families. Larry rarely intruded on the main house except to borrow cooking utensils or ingredients, but usually showed up when invited for a gathering. Mostly he would sleep late in his comfortable queen bed in front of the French doors leading to the porch, then lie there reading a novel, historical biography, newspaper or car magazine. He was an avid reader, and mostly passed his time at the lake that way, when he wasn’t cooking, cleaning or fixing up the boathouse.

I recall countless evenings when I crashed in the loft after cooking dinner with Larry and then mixing it up at the main house. When I wanted more privacy, I would sleep in my camper, a 1968 Chevy van that served as my travel pod for about 15 years. I always anticipated reaching the lake on my way home after one of my cross-country summer trips. Usually hot and exhausted from driving the last ten hours straight, I would park my van, don a swimsuit and run headlong cackling to dive into the lake, no matter who might be there. After splashing around and cooling off, I would head to the boathouse and take a sweet nap in the long afternoon. I would like to think that Larry is doing just that now himself.

*Repose in Peace*





## How Larry Changed My Life

Our own life the is instrument  
with which we experiment with truth.

~*Thich Nhat Hanh*

After reuniting with old friends of Larry and me at his memorial it struck me how much the same we seemed to be, other than the obvious artifacts of aging. Perhaps some of our attitudes had changed over time; that would be normal. I'd wager that our thinking and everyday behavior had changed much more than Larry's over that span of decades. There are things I did in Larry's circle that I would never do today, like inhaling straight out of an industrial tank of nitrous oxide or having an extramarital affair. But then I'm the guy who bought a pack of cigarettes (probably his last) after Larry requested one while in Mount Auburn Hospital, saying he had found a back room he could slip into at night to have a puff.

I did that because as a smoker, it felt hypocritical to refuse, and that I had no right to stop Larry from being Larry, even though I believe I could have done more to curb his self-destructive impulses over the years. In any event, the damage had been done, and I didn't see much point in squelching the little pleasures he was still able to enjoy.

Speaking of my extramarital affair, yet another of Larry's profound impacts on my life now occurs to me. Not only did he introduce me to my beloved wife (which led me to end a domestic partnership of ten years, but that's for another time), I hold him partially responsible for ending my first marriage twenty-five years ago.



Geoff, Chatham MA c. 1970

Martha and I married in June, 1968 in a sunny outdoor ceremony at an estate overlooking the Hudson River with about 75 people and two Unitarian Ministers (hers and mine) in attendance. She wore a radiant white gown and I had on a dazzling white Nehru Suit from Barney's. Music was provided by her roommate Ruthie on the harp and her other roommate's husband, Itzhak Perelman, on the violin (Martha was a recent graduate of Juilliard, as was he).

That September, Martha and I took up residence on Ashton Place in Cambridge, two blocks from the Graduate School of Design, where I was a Master's student, while she jobbed as a freelance fiddler in the Boston classical music scene, gave music lessons, and held other odd jobs. Our friends were a mixture of school pals from New York on both sides, some of my fellow graduate students, local classical musicians, and several neighbors. I enjoyed the company of the musicians, especially during sweet evenings of chamber music that I attended, but I didn't

become close to them. Martha was a bit dubious about some of my friends, especially some new ones I picked up the following year after I started hanging out at Larry's apartment.

Having been in psychoanalysis, Martha tended to scrutinize people and make critical judgments about their behavior. This caused her to choose friends carefully, like she was buying expensive shoes that she wanted to last for a long time and would perfectly match her wardrobe. My inclination was to be more accepting, to enjoy a diverse circle of acquaintances without feeling obliged to be tightly bound to any of them. I had greater tolerance for bad behavior, she had greater brand loyalty. She also preferred to hang out with people in her profession, in part to advance her career within the small circles of Boston concert musicians. My Cambridge friendships began at school, but rippled outward after I met Larry. And that spelled trouble in River City.

Frustrated that Martha couldn't embrace my growing circle of friends or share the excitement I was experiencing as I delved into explanations of urban growth and form (hey, who wouldn't be turned on by Central Place Theory?), I began to feel as though I was doomed to spend the rest of my days with a partner who was close only by virtue of coming from similar backgrounds and having agreed we should marry. Being a couple of naïve suburban WASPS in our early twenties didn't help us prepare very well for the range of mind-altering experiences we would encounter in Cambridge, and we didn't handle it very well. It didn't help that Martha was pretty sure of the kind of life she wanted (a musical career and kids) but mistrusted feminism (which was personal: Betty Friedan was a family friend, but had earned Martha's distrust by somehow neglecting her children as she was writing *The Feminine Mystique*). It also didn't help that I favored feminist ideals and was a seeker of cosmic questions who held to few certainties – a certified member of the Whole Earth Catalog generation, and a foil for someone like Larry, who enjoyed when asked “why?” would often answer “why not?” (This led me to sometimes affectionately misspell his name as “Larry Ynot.”)

As our estrangement evolved, Martha focused more intently on making, teaching and studying music. She was getting more gigs around town by then, hung out more with fellow musicians, and had started taking music lessons with a Harvard professor who was well regarded as a composer and interpreter of modern music. Meanwhile, I threw myself into my research in spatial analysis and theoretical geography with my advisor, another teacher, and a computer programmer at the graphics lab. The programmer was an attractive lass my own age who worked for my advisor and wrote code for me too on occasions, and who enjoyed the subject of her work as much as the fellowship of the lab. Before long I found myself fantasizing about her, which disturbed me because I wanted to make my marriage work and being smitten didn't help. Neither did hanging out at Larry's place evenings when Martha was jobbing, where my programmer friend frequently dropped by too.

My friend – whom I'll call Gert – had two or three boyfriends while I knew her, but then let it be known that she and her current guy (also a labbie) were breaking up. Actually, they announced it jointly and publicly with a large, amicable poster taped to the wall of our lab, which ended “Anybody's Fair Game!” So, with considerable trepidation a few weeks later, when Martha went to Europe to visit her Swiss relatives, I decided to ante up in that game. I invited Gert to see the Mothers of Invention play at the Berkeley Performance Center and she said sure. After enjoying three hours of raucous rock and roll, we walked arm in arm to Cambridge over the Mass Avenue bridge back to Ashton Place and made sweet love. That is when I think I finally lost my virginity, having merely misplaced it for about four years.

Gert and I continued to grow closer, trysting once or twice a week at her apartment. We also showed up together at Larry's soirees most Wednesday nights. We tried not to advertise our relationship, but Larry sensed something was happening, and it made him happy. In fact, he suggested that Gert and I spend the weekend by ourselves up at his boathouse. Somehow we managed to do that, and as far as I know Larry never let on to anybody. All the while I was leading a more or less normal (which meant desultory) social life with Martha. But after several months of such goings on, things started to fall apart.

The weekend I spent with Gert at the lake was perhaps the last precious intimacy we shared for some time to come. Soon (because she got an offer and because she feared what might happen if she kept seeing me) Gert quit her job and moved out of Cambridge to work in similar capacity at a university in the U.K. And soon I was out of the graphics lab too, summarily sacked by Harvard after my grant expired and was not renewed. Because the lab's funding was drying up, Larry got the boot too, and a few months later sublet his apartment and spent the winter in his boathouse while he tried to divine what might be next for him.

I had no job, only a wife and a Master's degree, both useless to me. So I read the Whole Earth Catalog a lot, and wrote bad poetry and philosophical essays pondering how to create a community of kindred souls. I found myself drawn to participate in a commune, and started seeking people who were doing that. At some point I realized that this was a lot like what Larry had been trying to do for several decades (and continued to do for a long time, but with declining success). He had a concept of what I call a global commune – a confederation of crash pads in every continent where his crowd and their companions would always be welcome wherever they went. It made me feel closer to him than ever, even though he wasn't around. As much as it was in the air all around us, the idea of establishing a commune sorely disturbed Martha; she wanted control of her personal space and had no interest in raising anybody's children except hers. My strong feeling was that I didn't want Martha raising mine either.

Around this time, the young couple who lived across the hall also started to break up. Martha and I had become close to them, so seeing the wife run off with her one-year-old daughter to live with another man to her husband's astonishment made our situation feel even shakier. Then, late on a cold winter evening, we had it out. Ruefully I told Martha about my liaison (which she had suspected for a while), and to my astonishment she then admitted to a secret affair with her music teacher, the Harvard professor, which had gone on for the last two months. After the shock wore off, I told her I was very happy for her, which is probably not what she wanted to hear.

Despite the parity of our predicament, Martha felt more wronged than I – as women will. I felt more guilty – as men will – and so moved out that night, shivering until dawn in my camper van. About six months later she informed me that the divorce was finalized (I never went to court or received any papers). After her lover got divorced (from his third wife), he and Martha moved into a house a few blocks away from our old apartment.

I only saw Martha once or twice again after that. She had two daughters and stayed married for the next 20 years until her husband died. I assume they were mostly happy together, but don't really know. What I do know, and what haunted me for some years, was that ironically, she found a kindred spirit in her own profession to love, which is what I thought I had found in Gert but lost, never quite knowing why. So I stopped looking for that kind of happiness, which seemed unattainable for me. In fact, I lowered my expectations across the board.

In the next decade or so after that, I had a series of girlfriends, and lived with two of them. Whenever I would meet a potential love interest, I would more often than not take her to visit Larry before things got too serious, to probe whether the ladies would be able to relate to Larry. If they decided he was too weird – and some did – I figured it wouldn't work out. It worked reciprocally too: Larry was a pretty keen judge of character, so if Larry gave a thumb down, there was usually a good reason to avoid that person. A couple of my girlfriends, in fact, remained good friends with Larry after we broke up and didn't see each other any more.

*~ Geoff Dutton*

## Larry's Silver Lake Amusement Whirl

Somewhat like a whirling dervish, Larry liked to spin people together in order to enjoy life. There was always a party or dinner going on, either in town at his apartment or up at the boat house on Silver Lake in New Hampshire. Larry was the ringmaster, but every one else would bring something or contribute in some way. After good food and drink, good talk and music, Larry would lean back with that impish smile on his face, his eyes twinkling, taking it all in. And then it seemed he felt good enough to go to sleep. In the early morning he'd be up early, scurrying around the boat house inside and out like a big chipmunk.

Larry worked hard, but mostly for people, not for money. Life was to be enjoyed and celebrated, not driven compulsively to work and achieve. Lots of us shared that communal anti-materialistic urge, especially back in the 60s and 70s. I'm glad that looking back I was able to join in Larry's whirl and contribute a little to help it rise up and lift off.

I used to love doing hand-cut silk-screened t-shirts. Silver Lake was such a special place for me that one summer I printed up Silver Lake Boat Parade t-shirts. I rowed out onto the lake in order to get the right image of Mount Monadnock looming over the water and the hills. I also blended different colors together to get a nice silver ink to print with. The shirts were a little big hit around the lake, and I remember printing them long into the night. The following summer, I took off the Boat Parade and just printed Silver Lake shirts. A few years later, when Larry was running his own catering business, Geoff organized a birthday party for him. With the help of another friend who did the lettering, I printed up a bunch of Reluctant Chef t-shirts with a little profile of Larry wearing a chef's hat. Almost everyone at the part wore one of those shirts.

It was also because of Larry that I did my one and only gig as a stand-up comic. Back then he ran enormous costume parties on Halloween at the Design School in Cambridge. I wrote out an act and with the help of Larry's wardrobe, I dressed up as a security guard. When one of the rock bands went on a break, I came out to the mike with a few important security announcements. One was about a small car being eaten by a large crocodile on a local side street. Another was that the new building had just been sold to the Rockefeller family which meant that everyone who was in it at the party immediately became the property of the Rockefellers. I would be circulating among the revelers stamping their hands with a Rockefeller coat of arms. They were still to have a good time and enjoy themselves tonight, but tomorrow things would probably be different. One guy in the back was laughing hysterically, but everyone else was just looking at me really weirdly. That was enough. I never did stand-up comedy again. But during the party so many people asked me where they could check their coats, that I probably could have had a good career in the security or hospitality industries. And that was all because of Larry's magical connections..

During the 70s, I would often bring my guitar up to the lake and join in with Ellen, Lance, Geoff, and other music makers to sing up a storm. Larry would always ask me to sing Puff the Magic Dragon, and for some strange reason, I could never master the words to that well-known song. Larry tried to help me with the lyrics but only now, years later, do I realize why it was so hard for me to learn the words to Puff.

Larry lived and worked for the enjoyment of life and people. Had he chosen a different path and become a well-off country squire, which is how I imagine previous generations of Yonts, he

would have driven a restored Stutz-Bearcat roadster in the Memorial Day Parade through Dublin or Harrisville. Instead, Larry used his expertise about cars to help many roommates and friends buy good used cars at modest prices. But unlike Larry who had found paradise on Silver Lake and didn't really need to go anywhere, most of us were still working for The Man [as we used to say], even if the man was only a mean old Puritan professor out of the movie *The Paper Chase*. Eventually I wore out my welcome at Newbury Junior College and spun off outa here—back home to New York. To speak astrologically, as a true Aquarian—all air and water-- people who lack earth do well to go in search of their roots. I guess the Age of Aquarius was something else that we shared with Larry. So I spun back to the big city, even to Brooklyn where I come from. Then for years I would mostly see Larry at one of the great annuals of his social season: Kickan's fabulous Swedish Christmas dinner. I can almost taste the different varieties of herring. As Geoff has noted, Larry was famous for his utilitarian thrift store presents of kitchen ware, casually wrapped in tissue paper secured by pipe cleaners. That was Larry for you: something useful for the kitchen.

The upside of my spin cycle was that eventually I landed on my feet and got a good teaching job at Tony Soprano state college in Jersey. I even got married and have two bouncing boys, now 10 and 12. When they were little I found a used video cartoon version of Puff the Magic Dragon. And finally, after so many years, I learned the words to the Peter Yarrow song about a boy and his dragon. As our guys are getting bigger now, the words have started falling out of my head, but one of the last verses now seems appropriate to sing for Larry:

A dragon lives forever, but not so little boys,  
Painted wings and giant rings make way for other toys.  
One gray night it happened, Jackie Paper came no more,  
And Puff that mighty dragon, he ceased his fearless roar.  
Oh...

Thanks for the ride, Larry. You were a grand ringmaster, old friend. We'll see you over on the other side of the lake, where the rides are always brightly lit and humming. I can almost hear the lake water lapping on the dock.

*~Daniel Gover*



## Larry Yont Remembered

Eric Teicholz introduced me to Larry Yont. Eric, a Research Associate at Harvard at the time, walked into my office at the Harvard Lab for Computer Graphics one day in 1969 with Larry and asked whether I would consider hiring this friend of his. One possible problem, Eric mentioned, was that this individual had just returned from serving time in an English jail for presumed drug possession. I said I did not know how Harvard would react to such a potential new employee, but escorted Larry over to Robinson Hall where he was interviewed by Jay Brown and Sue Dennison, the Personnel officers of the GSD. When he put his mind to it Larry could be very suave and convincing, and so the GSD hired Larry as a provisional employee.

Larry's initial duties involved record keeping for enrollees in the Laboratory's correspondence courses and conferences. He took particular glee in working on an upcoming three-day conference on computer-aided mapping that Howard Fisher, the Lab Director, was planning to conduct at the University of Chicago. Howard's tyrannical side got that conference off to a bad start, with many of the 150 attendees threatening to leave after one of Howard's outbursts on the second day. Fortunately, Larry was responsible for social events related to the conference; the party he organized on the evening of the second day turned out to be a smash, with much good food and drink that had the affect of soothing many hurt feelings and saving the conference from dissolution.

Larry became well known and admired at the GSD as a consummate party planner and host. One of his official responsibilities for the Dean (Maurice Kilbridge) of the GSD was to set up several massive student parties for the GSD students each year. Larry also initiated TGIF beer and hot dog parties for students and teachers in the GSD Cafeteria in Gund Hall.

For years Larry also assisted the Department of Landscape Architecture by providing meals (in a church basement) for the annual 3-4-day retreat for new students at Harvard Forest in Petersham, Massachusetts. Around that time Larry adopted the name of "The Reluctant Chef" for his catering business that included an ongoing contract with MIT for a weekly international student luncheon.

Larry will long be remembered for his parties and meals in the Cambridge community and also at his family's summer retreat on Silver Lake in Harrisville N.H. I have had the good fortune to rent in the main house for one or two weeks with my wife Ellen and our seven children for thirty years. Larry maintained separate quarters in the property's boathouse, which he had renovated and insulated for occasional year round occupancy. Before meeting my wife Ellen, Larry and I spent many happy hours listening to Jean Shepherd's radio programs late into the night and enjoying a meal – always capped with a frozen Hershey bar with almonds.

*~Allan H. Schmidt*

## Sodade for Larry

Larry, in my heart I sing this song for you. It is called Sodade and sung by a Cape Verdian Woman named Cesaria Evora. She has this beautiful deep voice that immediately captures your soul and heart. It made me think of you and cry.

Sodade is the experience of sweet pain of the many beloved memories one has of someone who has left. It makes one long for all the special times that have been yet at the same time there is the incredible sadness that it will never return.

I wish Larry I could tell you how much you have meant in my and in our lives. All the important events you were with us, all the important dinners in our lives you were there. You were family in a way I have never forgotten. We did not write, we did not call yet capturing you in my heart made you feel ever present.

To this day you are a prominent presence in our kitchen. You gave me from your famous thrift shop trips, many kitchen presents. A few of these have gotten special names and will survive for ever. The best of all is the “murder knife”. It is the bread knife with little sharp edges that is ever present when we have breakfast and dinner. When this utensil is not at the table for whatever reason, the family will impatiently yell “shit, where is the murder knife, can’t cut my bread this way!! You can imagine how every dinner guest wonders who will be the next victim.

There is another name going around the kitchen which even my daughter is using now when cooking dinners with her students friends. It is called “the garbage bag trick.” Little do you know how much lettuce I have mixed with vinaigrette this way, throwing the whole thing in the garbage bag for perfect mixing!! You taught me when making your MIT meals for many people.

As I am married to Jan who, among many other things, loves cars and has previously been in racing, many memories of your dirt road driving frequently come to mind, like the dust left behind driving high speed in your Volvo in the New Hampshire woods. Of course we would often end in the general store for just one errand, a good excuse to hit the road.

Larry I loved your humor, your cynicism of all that was bourgeois, your living on the edge in your bohemian manner. Of course you scared us many a time with your living on the physical edge. But Max and Kickan kept you near in many loving ways.

You lived your life like an ever-going, jamming jazz session where special people would join, be with you for a while and leave. But like good artists playing together on and off for years, you made your friends so very close to your heart.

Larry, you are in my heart and I feel incredibly sad not to be able to hug you next time when I come to Boston. Silver lake will always be beautiful but it will never be the same without you and the many special hours we have spent in the boathouse.

Sodade Larry I love you.

*~Marjolein de Jong*

## Soul Survivors

No clergy was in attendance at Larry's first memorial gathering in Concord, April 2007, but there were nearly fifty individuals who had known him for anywhere from five to fifty years. We brought and ate a lot of food and consumed some wine in his honor, including a vintage bottle of Piper-Heidsieck that had belonged to Larry. As we silently toasted our friend, I think many of us felt the loss of the irreplaceable being who had brought us together in that communal space.

In order of seniority, the connections between those in attendance and Larry variously involved

- Vintage automobile trading in Concord,
- College venues in Cambridge,
- Locals and expatriates around Boston,
- Comrades at the Harvard Graduate School of Design,
- Local and visiting Silver Lake junkies,
- Actual and erstwhile housemates in Cambridge and Somerville, and
- Their circles of friends throughout the western world.

Over the course of an hour or so many of us took turns standing up and explaining why we were there. A few of us read remarks, most improvised them. We the survivors traded strange details of our friend's remarkable life, such as

- In his teens, Larry and Coburn Benson possessed more than 30 vintage automobiles, mostly Packards and Rolls Royces
- Larry boycotted his graduation from Harvard and never claimed his diploma
- Then he traveled to England on the Queen Elizabeth, stowed away in a lifeboat, bringing only a toothbrush
- He demolished a wall in his Cambridge apartment, then covered up the pile of debris with a large carpet and left it there
- Saturday night parties at his triple-decker pads in Cambridge drew upwards of 200 guests
- He enticed almost every tenant in buildings he inhabited to join his big happy family
- He watered pubescent girls at bars and presented them with Victoria's secret underwear
- He shanghaied an architect to plumb a bathroom in his boathouse that was accessible only by clambering over a window sill
- Later in life, Larry organized his week around the hours of operation of thrift shops
- He was always cooking something, and believed almost everything tasted better with butter and cream

The night before the memorial, April 21, some far-flung soul survivors gathered at the Chretien House in Waltham for a reunion – billed as a cook-in by prime instigator Carolinn Kuebler. She had been Larry's roommate in the early 1980's while studying Architecture at the GSD. Also present was Walt Geiger, one of Carolinn's classmates, now an architect in Chicago (Carolinn practices in D.C.). Trude Schermer, Carolinn's other roommate from Larry's Buckingham Street pad, made the trip all the way from Holland. Larry was very fond of these ladies, and even named his kitty Schermer in Trude's honor. Roomie Teri Schwartzel and hubby John Hallam joined us too; Teri is also an architect who lived with Larry during most of her time studying at B.A.C. John is a technical writer, like me, and as cheerful a Brit as you would ever like to meet.

Hosts Max and Kickan were joined by daughter Karin, now a psychiatric nurse living in Connecticut. Karin was part of Larry's life and vice versa ever since she was born. I first met her at a soiree at 10B Mount Auburn when she was 12 going on 18. Allan and Ellen Schmidt were there, as was special friend Kathy Kiernan from Middlesex Vermont. Cantabridgian Steve Wayne showed with his fiancée Mary who came down from Maine to be there even though she had only met Larry once or twice. Steve is a new age caterer who was an invaluable friend and loyal sous chef to Larry (but sometimes the other way around) for most of his later catering escapades. With me of course were Aygül and Deniz, the only child at the party and at the memorial the next day – but like Karin when she was a kid, she fit right in.

At the cook-in there were cheeses galore (John is the group's fromage maven) with unusual breads and crackers. Of course Kickan prepared a whole salmon in her poacher, just the way Larry liked it (whenever he decided to serve salmon at some function, he always roped Kickan into cooking it) with roasted mini potatoes and tons of asparagus. Kathie lovingly cooked beef tenderloin rare (but not quite as rare as Larry would have), sliced it thin and served it at room temp with spicy mustard. Yours truly defied his spouse's dietary laws by preparing slow-cooked pork roast sort of à la Larry with a wild mushroom sauce (definitely à la Geoff). Max served up many bottles of wine, and Karin capped the meal with two delicious frosted cakes just like ones she always made for holidays in the old days. The only thing I felt the meal lacked was one of Larry's signature hors d'oeuvres – like a block of cream cheese inebriated with a bottle of mango chutney and served with stoned wheat crackers on a black platter.

Here is everyone who showed up at the memorial the next day (with a lot of good food including another whole poached salmon from Kickan):

Debra and Ted Beauregard	Carolinn Kuebler
Coburn Benson	Kathie Kiernan
Lance Benson	Mary Jane
Woody Chapman	Bridget Matros
Karin Chretien	Gene Mihaly
Max and Kickan Chretien	Dennis and Gemma Morrill-Dreher
Shaun (Huntley) Costello	Jack and Kristin Page
George Dallas	Wendy Santis
Geoff, Aygül and Deniz Dutton	Bob and Eve Sharkey
Deborah Ellington and Steve Kyner	Trude Schermer
Walt Geiger	Allan and Ellen Schmidt
Beth (de Latour) Gordon	Jay Shuchter
David Hancock and	Teri Schwartzel and John Hallam
Judi Jones and Don Campbell	Greg Supernovich
Debby, Jeffrey, Ashley, Nathan Karol	Steve Wayne and Mary

## So It Goes

The eye with which I see  
God is the same eye  
with which God sees me.

~Meister Eckert

Larry was not a churchgoer, nor was he what I would call a God-fearing man. He had his fears, but they certainly weren't of divine consequences. In fact, I cannot remember him ever uttering the G-word unless it was part of an argument against someone attesting to faith. But he wasn't an atheist either; perhaps he was a pantheist. He did revel in the power and beauty of nature and in his own fashion nurtured the ecology of the places and souls he encountered. I sense that long ago he must have decided that deciding the existence or nonexistence of God was a wacky waste of time and that he had weirder things to do.

We tend to examine lives that are over more acutely than we do lives that are still in progress, even more so when they are not our own. On the other hand, we also tend to be more forgiving to the deceased than to the living for their transgressions. Neither of these proclivities serves us or our loved ones well.

As much as we are all indebted to Larry for enriching our lives, we can't ignore the price he paid for being a beatnik sultan of swag, pied piper of partying, professor of promiscuity. We want to think of him as one who explored possibilities, loved life, and treasured relationships, but in his time he held few jobs, never wrote a résumé, penned few letters and typed no email, cooked but hardly ate, and slowly drank himself to death while cutting himself off from most everyone dear to him. We ignore these contradictions at our peril.

Larry lived in a double bind, trying to create a simpatico substitute family while fearing that finding it would imprison him in its imperfect dynamics. Thus he gathered a protective shroud of compatible souls about him but kept psychic distance from it, lest he feel obliged to do stuff he wasn't willing to do. In trying to have it both ways, Larry achieved neither: his familial relationships festered while his alternative network atrophied, both barely supporting him.

Regardless, reciprocity somehow tided him over, and the core of his network never failed. In the end, kind Kickan and merciful Max Chretien stood by and did a lot of heavy lifting when nobody else came forward. It was usually Kickan (unless it was Teri Schwartzel, Steve Wayne or me) who was Larry's gofer when he was hospitalized. It was Kickan who got Larry to file for disability payments and coached his transition to retirement living. A handwritten will c. 1993 names Max as the executor of Larry's whatever estate, and Max is faithfully handling it. I am convinced that Larry would have died years ago without their ministrations. But I am sad that it had to come to that.

So I wonder what would have happened if Larry had declined Harvard's acceptance and continued to hang out with Coburn Benson to deal in used cars. Coburn said that he and Larry were 50/50 partners in the several dozen classic automobiles they acquired together, distributed between the barn and barnyard at the Benson Concord farmstead and the driveway at the Yont house on Elm Street. Larry specialized in Packards; Coburn preferred Rolls-Royces. It seems they worked well together, probably because they were in it for joy rides more than for bucks.

Larry never gave up his passion for autocars. He subscribed to car magazines until the end, and insisted on helping friends find good used wheels for a small commission. He bought the last car he owned, a nicely-appointed Volvo wagon, on favorable terms and happily shoveled at it large amounts of money (at least for him) to keep it in tip-top condition. Not only that, he spent four mornings a week for most of his last 15 years in a garage, having convinced Eddie Santa Cruz to employ Larry to book in jobs and transport customers for A&M Foreign Motors in Somerville. (Larry didn't normally work there on Tuesdays, when he was busy prepping and cooking his MIT Luncheons.) The pay at the garage was minimal and in cash, but as a benefit (there were no standard ones), Larry got to engage Eddie's mechanics to fix up his cars at below-market rates on their off-hours.

Cars were clearly up there with sex, drugs and food in Larry's list of fond obsessions. But his bohemian, low-rent lifestyle got in the way of his pursuit of automotive excellence. He just didn't have the resources to be a used car dealer. I consider that a tragedy, because if he could have followed his bliss and driven himself in his autodidactic way, he might very well have cornered the market for Packards and died with substantial assets. Instead, Larry left just one major item, his Volvo, to cover Max's expenses of executing his mini-estate.

All that's left is stuff reclaimed from his apartment, more stuff he salted around to us, his people, and our memories of him. As special all the stuff may be to us, if we are to honor his spirit and rescue anything from his passing, we best work to keep his circle unbroken. Perhaps, then, every year from now on until we are too decrepit to carry on, we should throw Larry a birthday party and exchange some of the goods he left behind with us – sort of a Yankee Swap minus the Yankee. Why not?

See you in December, then.

## Your Turn...

This document can be found on Geoff Dutton's Web site, here:

<http://www.spatial-effects.com/yont/NotBad.pdf>

Feel free to copy, print or publicize this memoir. Of course Larry never had a Web site or even an email account, but he might have considered blogging if he didn't have to type. So this page will have to serve as his web site for the time being.

Larry knew a lot of people. Some of them may eventually read this and something in it may stir their memories. If this happens to you, give some thought to writing down some recollections of him and contributing to this collection. You can send a text file, Microsoft Word file, an email, or even a letter or postcard to me, indicating you would like your words inserted as a chapter in this document, and I'll do that for you. If you want to place some files of your own on Larry's Web Page, send them to me and I'll install them, hopefully as a real page with commentary and images, and blogging going on, not just a list of files.

As Garrison Keillor says, be well, do good work, and keep in touch.

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