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STANFORD MAGAZINE

Out of the Ordinary

For one longshoreman, ideas were everything.



Courtesy Hoover Institution Archives/Eric Hoffer Collection [View photo album >>](#)

OFF THE WATERFRONT: Hoffer drew crowds on campuses across the country.

By Jeanene Harlick

In November 1969, 15-year-old Bobbie Kavanaugh pulled out her best penmanship and wrote a fan letter. Not to some Hollywood heartthrob, but to a social philosopher. On lined binder paper in the most careful script, she told Eric Hoffer about her father.

“He reads and loves every word you write,” she began. “He calls *The True Believer* his bible and he carries a pocket-book-type version in his hip pocket. He has worn out several books. . . . One day at supper Dad said he dreamt that one day he talked with you, he said it was his life’s ambition. I believe it! So I started thinking—it would cost too much to talk with you on the phone, my dad’s a working stiff—but I thought, if it wouldn’t be asking too much, if you could write to my dad, sort of a Christmas present, and he could write back. Sort of a ‘correspondence.’ (I guess that’s the word!) I wouldn’t ask this of you, if it didn’t mean so much. . . .”

There are almost 50 boxes of letters to Hoffer in the campus-based Hoover Archives, which acquired the commonsense author’s papers in 2000. His fan mail confirms the extraordinary impact of a man who insisted he was ordinary. If he’d ever had a résumé, it would have listed 10 years of odd jobs on L.A.’s Skid Row, another decade doing migratory farm work and panning for gold, and a quarter-century as a dockhand on the San Francisco waterfront.

But Hoffer also read and soaked up knowledge endlessly, wrote pithy books about society and politics, held Wednesday seminars at UC-Berkeley and served on Lyndon

Johnson's Presidential Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. In Hoffer, people from all walks of life found an original thinker who bemoaned intellectualism and championed the common man.

He never attended school. Hoffer was born in the Bronx in 1902 to working-class German immigrants. He learned to read German and English before age 5, but his mother died when he was 7, and shortly afterward he went blind—presumably for psychological reasons. Unaccountably, he regained vision eight years later. From then on, Hoffer devoured every book he could get his hands on, starting with Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. After his father died in 1920, he moved to California.

Wherever he went as a migrant worker, he would take a room “halfway between the books (library) and the girls (brothels),” as James T. Baker reports in *Eric Hoffer* (Twayne, 1982). Hoffer called his library cards his “credit cards” and accumulated dozens up and down the state. He would copy favorite book passages on index cards, storing many of them in an old card-catalog drawer that now sits in the archives.

Hoffer's sources reveal the breadth of his literary explorations: Seneca, Churchill, Chomsky, Spinoza, Stendhal, Swift, Aristotle, Bacon, Einstein, Confucius, Euripides, the Bible, Tennyson, Chekhov, Tertullian, Thucydides, to name just a few. And the headings he devised to organize his notes— “virility and decadence,” “the idea of a chosen people,” “asceticism,” “ennui as a motive of activity,” “discovery of mind,” “hope”—show the range of his interests. He also mastered science textbooks and once amazed Berkeley researchers by discovering a remedy for chlorosis in lemon trees.

In the late 1930s, Hoffer started keeping diaries. At Hoover, the transcriptions of Notebooks 1 through 52 fill 1,200 typewritten pages and offer a window on his preoccupations. From Notebook 2: “Is there a specific situation which stimulates an interest in politics and another situation which stirs interest in economic problems? The question is: Given a person who has neither political nor economic rights, what would he crave first?”

Rejected from service in World War II for medical reasons, Hoffer settled permanently in San Francisco in 1941 and became a longshoreman. In his tiny McAllister Street apartment, on a board laid across two chairs, he wrote his best-known book, *The True Believer* (Harper & Row, 1951), a study of mass movements and the psychology of those who join them. The Hoover collection includes his first penciled outline as well as the full text handwritten in ink.

Some of Hoffer's thoughts seem eerily apt these days. “A mass movement attracts and holds a following not because it can satisfy the desire for self-advancement, but because it can satisfy the passion for self-renunciation,” he wrote. “Faith in a holy cause is to a considerable extent a substitute for the lost faith in ourselves. . . . When our individual interests and prospects do not seem worth living for, we are in desperate need of something apart from us to live for.” Quoting Pascal, he adds that for a doctrine to attract the true believer, it must be “contrary to nature, to common sense and to pleasure.”

Before his death in 1983, Hoffer published 10 more books covering topics from crime to automation, including *The Ordeal of Change* (1963), widely considered his best, and

The Temper of Our Time (1967). But it wasn't until his CBS-TV interview with Eric Sevareid in 1967 that he became a pop icon. Airing in September, the broadcast drew such high ratings it was rerun in November to an even bigger audience.

Fan mail poured in by the truckload; much of the correspondence in the archives relates to this one interview. Letter-writers confided their personal struggles, believing they had finally found a leading American thinker with a sympathetic ear. One young man said he had dropped out of graduate school at Yale to write a mythic adventure novel with Hoffer as the protagonist.

Sevareid explained his guest's impact this way: "Hoffer had made millions of confused and troubled Americans feel very much better about their country. He had pulled aside the veils of supposed sophistication and, in new ways, showed them again the old truisms about America and why they remain alive and valid."

Not long after, Hoffer signed a lucrative contract to write a nationally syndicated newspaper column called "Reflections." He was now welcome in San Francisco restaurants that used to refuse him because he wouldn't wear a tie. In 1973, President Ronald Reagan awarded Hoffer the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

But fame never really turned Hoffer's head. He once said of his life, "It is not important. It is not even interesting. Ideas are all that's important."

Had it been up to him, in fact, there would be no Hoffer collection. Lili Osborne, his companion for the last 30 years of his life, secretly saved his papers despite his insistence that no one would have any use for them. "I knew that he was unique. I knew that it was important. But he didn't look upon himself as anything special," Osborne says.

"It is very hard to write a biography about Eric," she adds, since Hoffer was tight-lipped about his personal history. The material now at Hoover can only help.

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Life of the Party

From her Communist escapades in the 1920s to her twilight years at Stanford, Ella Wolfe was overshadowed by husband and friends. But the papers she left behind reveal the passions and politics of a remarkable woman.



Hoover Archives

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By Jeanene Harlick

The scene is a spellbound Mexico City in the Roaring Twenties. The characters are draft evaders, social idealists, astrology-spouting vegetarians and artists seeking a communal utopia. Here, fiestas rule, murals adorn the walls and measured time is a laughable notion. The pursuit of beauty is paramount—even the mules wear colorful *serapes*. Dante and Homer, popularized and paperbacked by a progressive government, are read over coffee alongside the morning paper.

In this bohemian setting, a young American woman reads and writes away the days, supporting her Spanish studies at the local university by teaching English. Her life looks idyllic. But there are complications.

Ella Goldberg Wolfe is living in exile, a fugitive from America's anti-Communist dragnet during the "Red Scare" after World War I. One of her "students" is a Kremlin agent, whom she will later provide with a false passport. A passionate partisan still in her 20s, Wolfe eventually will rub shoulders with Trotsky in Mexico City, face off with Stalin in Moscow and devote years to "the Communist experiment," then renounce it utterly and spend much of the rest of her life helping chronicle its history. Along the

way, she will befriend some of the 20th century's most colorful figures. And she will live to 103, the last remnant of a historic upheaval and a fixture around Stanford.

Yet Ella Wolfe's life has remained mostly unexamined, a footnote to the well-documented stories of her husband and friends. Bertram Wolfe helped write the 1919 manifesto that led to the establishment of Communist parties in the United States. He first made a name for himself as an impassioned advocate of the working class; later—after the Soviet Union's 1939 pact with Nazi Germany—as the far left's greatest critic; and last as a historian who wrote the classic 1948 biography of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, *Three Who Made a Revolution*. He became a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution in 1966.

Ella was no appendage. Born in the Ukraine in 1896, she moved with her parents to Brooklyn around 1906; her marriage in 1917 didn't interrupt her studies at Hunter College. While taking law courses at NYU, she worked for socialist causes. Over the years, apart from her own political activity and a career teaching Spanish literature in New York colleges and schools, she helped Bertram with research and editing. After his death in 1977, she spent 20 years organizing his papers and her own, housed in the Hoover Archives.

Still, until she died in January 2000, Ella Wolfe was never a subject, always a source, for biographers and historians—called upon to shed light on the male Communist leaders or her friend Frida Kahlo or the Red Scare, as she did for the screenwriters of Warren Beatty's *Reds*. The longest reference to Ella in Bertram Wolfe's autobiography, *A Life in Two Centuries* (1981), which she saw through to its posthumous publication, tells of her housewifelike service sewing money and documents inside his coat when he feared deportation from Mexico.

But history's bit players often deserve a closer look. Hundreds of Ella Wolfe's archived letters and an oral history taped by Hoover senior fellow Ramon Myers in 1982 offer the observations, insights and worldview of a fascinating character. Above all, they reveal a bright, energetic woman's struggle for her own identity at a time when women were breaking free of Victorian restraints but hadn't fully emerged from men's shadows.

During the couple's many sojourns in Mexico, Wolfe threw herself into Party work. She recruited members; prepared reports for Jay Lovestone, one of the American Communist Party's founders; launched an anti-imperialist bulletin; served as a go-between for the Russian and Mexican Communists; and wrote for the Party press and Communist newspapers in Mexico. Much of the time she fended for herself, while Bertram traveled abroad on Party business.

In a letter dated August 16, 1924, she wrote provocatively of her exploits trying to locate “dope on American imperialism in Mexico” at the request of Party member Scott Nearing. “The only way to obtain things here is by personal pull,” she writes. “The original documents Nearing refers to are under lock and key in the Ministry of Foreign Relations. The government will not give any permission, especially at this time, to look at them. The only way is to make love to the man who holds the keys. I am arranging an ambush for him. You see, I have a pull with Señor Rafael Lopez, the Chief of the National Archives. He has some good friends in Foreign Relations, and we

shall work these advantages for what they're worth and watch for results.”

In fact, Wolfe helped advance the anti-imperialist movement in Mexico. At critical junctures, she often served as the diplomatic liaison between the American and Mexican Communist parties, as well as a valued source of inside information gleaned from her contacts.

Later, she accompanied Bertram to Moscow, where he was a delegate to the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in 1928. After a stormy dispute with Stalin over what he considered the American Party's too-democratic policies, Bertram fell out with the Soviets. Two years later, Ella quit the Party herself rather than denounce her husband as a traitor. But the two did not renounce communist ideals until 1939. A passage she wrote in 1924 sets forth the critical distinction: “My communism is much more of a faith, a religion if you will, than a rational striving.”

For all her organizational zeal, Wolfe didn't lose sight of the common laborer whose plight inspired her politics. In one letter to Lovestone from Mexico, she told of an eight-day trip to an Indian village:

“I had the feeling that I had gone back four centuries. . . . You can see the broad sombrero and a colorful *serape* (blanket) following the overburdened donkeys . . . from before sunrise until late into the night. . . . The class that suffers most are the servants, especially in the small villages, where they work without end for two to three pesos a month—that is from one to two dollars. They are absolutely enslaved. And I see no hope for the Mexican revolutions—they are struggles for personal power. They have done nothing for the people in whose name they are fought. Until Mexico develops industrially and lays the foundation for a true workers' organization that can struggle and fight from the point of view of classes—and not mere personalities—I see no hope for the Mexico Indian.”

Wolfe's letters to Lovestone also expressed her frustration with the sexism of the times, displayed even by the Party and Lovestone himself. On one occasion, he wrote of his surprise at her facility in Spanish: “To tell you the truth, I was not surprised that Bert is doing well in his new venture. It's just like him to swallow up languages. Yet, I did not think that you were so ravenously inclined in that direction. However, under Bert's inspiration you can do anything and everything very well. I am not kidding about it either.”

Her reaction was sharp. “The world—even our radical world—seems to feel that when a woman marries she is completely lost—that whatever charm or ability she may have had before marriage upon marriage either disappears or is attributed to the husband. Curiously enough I feel that my personality has remained unchanged. Influenced—yes, modified, perhaps, but at bottom the same. Do you think I am studying because Bert wants me to? Do you think I love books because Bert reads? Do you think my mastery of Spanish is due to Bert's acquisition of a large vocabulary of Spanish? As a matter of fact (unbelievable as it may sound to you), everybody here says I speak Spanish better than Bert does. And you never suspected that I had any such capacity.”

Back in New York in 1928, Ella railed against the treatment of women by the Lovestone faction of the American Communists. “They are looked upon and treated as

fourth class citizens, although I consider the native ability of most of them at least on the same level as the native ability of some of the mediocre peacocks strutting about 14th Street. I consider you [Lovestone] completely responsible; for you are the one who sets that tone and mode. The women of our group . . . are given no opportunity for growth and development. On the contrary, should they show some special aptitude, they are squashed.”

Wolfe may have been reacting to more than the sting of sexism, for some of her correspondence with Lovestone suggested she had deeper feelings than friendship toward this charismatic figure. She called him her “dear blond beast.” She took his offhand comments as personal insults and defended herself with disproportionate rage. But whatever feelings she had, the letters indicate that Wolfe and Lovestone respected each other’s intelligence and enjoyed verbal sparring. Like the Wolfes, Lovestone turned against Communism, working behind the scenes with the AFL-CIO and CIA during the Cold War.

Wolfe took it upon herself to lend a common touch to both Lovestone’s and her husband’s writings, which she often thought assumed too much political and historical knowledge on the part of readers. In her interviews with Myers, she described poring over the rough drafts of all Bertram’s books. “I would say, ‘You know, Bert, no man on the street would understand this unless you cut this up,’ or whatever. And then he would have a tantrum every time. . . . two or three days later, he would correct it and bring it back for another reading. . . . I found that very interesting.”

Ella Wolfe’s social life was as active as her politics. In Mexico City in the 1920s, the Wolfes became staunch members of the bohemian crowd and grew popular for their Friday night dinner parties. Soon the two were hiking lava-pocked mountains with the muralist Diego Rivera, who always walked with sketchbook in tow. It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. In 1939, Bertram’s biography *Diego Rivera: His Life and Times* was published.

In her oral history, Wolfe described to Ramon Myers a telling scene at the painter’s studio. She’d discovered a box of unopened letters and offered to look at them for Rivera. “Listen, Ramon, I opened those 75 letters which had been lying there for several years. Each one of them had a check—for \$500, \$1,000, \$2,000—checks that people had sent in for things they’d purchased. That was really something!”

The couple also came to know Rivera’s second wife, the fiery Frida Kahlo. An unlikely bond formed between Ella and the sensual, bisexual, foul-mouthed painter, whose numerous paramours included Leon Trotsky.

Perhaps it was a shared lust for the beautiful that drew the two women together. When each of them had a near-fatal experience, neither thought first of her health. “Que precioso [How beautiful!],” cried a hemorrhaging Kahlo after a miscarriage, as she was wheeled to a basement operating room and saw a kaleidoscope of colored pipes above. Wolfe, recounting a traffic accident that left her lying on the ground with 30 shards of glass piercing her lungs, said to Myers: “I looked at the sky, and it was the most beautiful blue sky in June, and I said to myself, ‘What a shame to die on a day like this.’”

Whatever cemented their friendship, it survived the communication lapses that mar less hardy relationships. Until Kahlo's death in 1954, Wolfe was a confidante, as Kahlo's correspondence, also housed in the Hoover Archives, shows.

"Beautiful Ella," Kahlo wrote in 1934, "I don't know why I feel such a relief by telling you what is happening to me. Maybe it is because you love me a little and so I take advantage to unload on you a bit of the burden on my shoulders . . . Write to me, beautiful, and tell me what you have been doing, how you are, and when you are coming so you can take away Chicua's bad mood. . . ."

Overshadowed by her husband in politics and letters, Ella Wolfe finally found her own place in the field of Spanish literature—a love discovered in Mexico. She told Myers about her first visit to the Mexico City library, where she and Bertram discovered hundreds of books and manuscripts piled every which way behind a large Chinese screen. When they asked the librarian about them, she replied that they had been brought to Mexico by Cortez and his men, and the librarians simply hadn't had a chance to catalog them yet. Wolfe was captivated by that response and by "a culture and a civilization where time has stood still." In June 1923, she wrote Lovestone: "The university courses [she was taking in Mexico] have opened up fields of rich treasures." Her socialist compassion for the common laborer and her love of Spanish letters came together in her postgraduate work at Columbia University in the 1940s, when she discovered Argentinian literature, with its heroic depiction of the peasant class.

Wolfe seemed proudest of her teaching years—Spanish literature at Columbia, Hunter College and New York City public schools and English to foreign students at the city's Rand School of Social Science. "That was my province," she told Myers. "I loved what I was doing . . . [teaching] the love of excellence and truth and integrity . . . you had a feeling that you were doing the best that you could."

Still, Ella Wolfe's voluminous correspondence suggests an unfulfilled potential. Her niece, Beth Rubino, says that Ella's "pride and joy was Bert . . . what gave her value was Bert's value" but concedes things might have been different in a different era. "I tend to believe that, if he had died earlier, she would have pursued more of her independence. It probably was fear that she as Ella Wolfe would not have succeeded."

Indeed, when Ramon Myers asked Wolfe if there would ever be a project to publish her papers, she seemed dumbfounded. After a moment of silence, the 86-year-old laughed awkwardly and said, "They have no importance, really."

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Local couple weds at Denny's

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By Jeanene Harlick
The Bulletin

Dot Morrow and Don Johnson know the recipe for love: a Philly Melt, a Charleston Chicken, and two counter seats at Denny's.

That's what sealed it for this couple that calls Denny's home. It was just about a year ago when Dot saw Don, whose right hand is disabled from a stroke, struggling with his dinner. She reached over and cut his steak for him.

The rest is history.

On Monday, the couple feasted on mozzarella sticks, onion rings and cheeseburgers and then said their vows in the diner where they met, got engaged and dated. For this quiet man and brassy lady, it was a sweet — and logical — beginning to a marriage that wouldn't exist without Denny's.

"You're the love of my life, and my soul mate," Dot told Don in a restaurant packed with friends and good humor. "And I just want you to understand that I'll be with you through thick and thin, sickness and health, because I love you so much."

Then the two indulged in a marathon-length kiss, and friends jeered: "Get a room!" they yelled.

The civil ceremony, emceed by Dot's favorite cook, was not short on kitsch.

Vases wrapped in pink cellophane, shiny foil balloons and a literal money tree — a small, potted plant that guests clipped \$5 bills to as wedding gifts — rounded out the decor. Familiar Denny's characters, including A.B. Culwell, a retired drug salesman who entertained guests with his Polish tape measure — a gag gift — hugged Dot, slapped Don on the back, and complimented, in all seriousness, the quality of the fine fare.

"This is good!" exclaimed Persh Balding, a World War II veteran who's frequented the Third Street Denny's 30-some years, as he gulped down a cheese stick.

For Persh, A.B., and other seniors that stop in daily at Denny's, the restaurant's staff is family. A.B., whose wife suffers from severe depression and rarely leaves the house, basks in the love of waitresses who know he likes a lemon wedge in his water. A veteran too, the tiny, wry, man reminisces with Persh about Pearl Harbor, and listens attentively when his buddy rambles about the sparrows in his backyard or long-ago family vacations.

"This is my home away from home," A.B. said of Denny's.

The restaurant is also a safe haven for Dot, who's eaten breakfast and dinner there every day the past 12 years — ever since her first husband died. Denny's staff call her a dear friend who quells the restaurant's grouchy customers and imbues it with cheer.

"She's got the biggest heart of gold, and she's everybody's friend," said Theresa Fisher, a former, longtime Denny's waitress who has Dot over every Christmas. "Dot is our buddy. (Denny's) adopted her."

When the Tumalo resident, who works the night shift at a local hotel, doesn't show up for a meal, staff call her house to make sure she's OK. And when Dot's doctor told her she needed to lose weight because her health was in jeopardy, Denny's staff cheered her on every step of the way. Over the past year, she's lost 145 pounds frequenting a diner where at least half the meals are deep-fried.

"I just stuck with salads," Dot said. "The salads here are just excellent."

She and Don, a retired U.S. Army officer, fit together like two pieces of a puzzle. Don, whose speech is impaired by his stroke, doesn't talk much, but when he does, Dot gets him. And Don teases Dot mercilessly, but always knows where to stop.

"They were made for each other," said Darriel Clark, the cook that officiated the wedding ceremony. "And they both need each other."

The couple will now share Dot's Tumalo home, where they like to watch WWF wrestling matches every Monday night. Fishing for catfish at the Prineville and Ochoco reservoirs is another favorite pastime. When apart, Dot spends her free time serving as a model for students at Phagans Beauty College, and Don rides his "hot rod," a 1972 Plymouth Barracuda.

Watching guests joke and toast the newlyweds Monday, it wasn't hard to see why — despite losing \$31 million in 2003, according to Yahoo! Finance — Denny's will likely remain a force to be reckoned with. Boasting almost 1,700 restaurants in 49 states, the diner is probably as close to an American icon as you get. For its patrons, it's the last vestige of an era when waitresses called customers "honey" or "doll," and cooks riled them with good-natured insults from the kitchen.

"Oh you sweetie pie," Persh said sadly to Theresa, the former waitress, as she left. "I love you, you know that?"

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<http://www.sfgate.com/books/article/At-Manzanar-an-old-enemy-2509793.php>

At Manzanar, an old enemy

Jeanene Harlick

San Francisco Chronicle Book Review

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The Legend of Fire Horse Woman

By Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston

KENSINGTON; 340 PAGES; \$23

In "The Legend of Fire Horse Woman," author Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston returns once again to the landscape of the World War II internment camp she chronicled in her acclaimed 1983 memoir, "Farewell to Manzanar."

While the previous book showed how one family dealt with oppression from the "white ghosts" who reviled them, in "The Legend of Fire Horse Woman" the enemy comes from within. The internment camp is used as a symbol of a different kind of oppression -- the subjugation of women.

The novel, Wakatsuki Houston's first attempt at fiction, explores an important and worthy theme with relevance to today's Japanese American women. And with the book divided into Act 1, Act 2, etc., you get the impression that the author had grandiose aims for her story, attempting to fashion a sort of femi-nisei epic.

But unfortunately the novel, while possessing an intriguing structure and enticing subject matter, collapses under the weight of melodrama, contrivance and one-dimensional characters. One feels as if Wakatsuki Houston is still writing for the elementary-school children who were largely her audience in "Farewell to Manzanar." She is not able to sustain her strong beginning with the complexity and subtleties adult readers demand of a book's characters.

The story focuses on Sayo, a Japanese picture bride who comes to the United States in 1903, and her daughter and teenage granddaughter, Hana and Terri. All three find themselves imprisoned by barbed wire and armed soldiers in the spring of 1942.

It soon becomes clear, however, that it is the women's cultural heritage that is the greater enemy, in particular for Hana, a depressed, quiet woman married to a tyrannical, hot-tempered husband. She battles against an oppression she at first doesn't even realize exists.

The novel follows Hana as she befriends a handsome male internee, Shimmy, who treats her as an equal and helps unlock the door to her independence. That journey is paralleled, through flashbacks, with her mother's transformation from meek picture bride to a woman who divorces her husband, shacks up with his best friend and becomes proprietor of a successful Watsonville teahouse at the turn of the 20th century. Interspersed throughout these two tales is the story of Terri's friendship with a young Southern soldier who mans the sentry tower near her prison block.

The novel starts out beautifully, with an energy, rhythm and wit that seem to hint at a cross between Maxine Hong Kingston's "Woman Warrior" and Amy Tan's "The Joy Luck Club." Sayo, upon arriving at Manzanar, surveys her surroundings, drawing strength from the peaks of Mount Williamson and refusing to resign herself to bleak circumstances, vowing to turn them instead into a legend of empowerment. We learn

that Sayo was born under the Fire Horse sign, a ruinous birth date occurring once every 60 years that produces powerful, cunning women who elude the control of men:

"Hadn't she defied the portents surrounding this birth sign, transforming morbid omens into qualities of courage, imagination and splendor? Her history would not end here. ... Let the winds rave, the sun scorch, frost and snow congeal. ... She would harness their kami power and transmute it into compassion and beauty."

The page-and-a-half epilogue that concludes the novel is also a wonder to behold, painting a luminous vision of Sayo and her American Indian warrior lover, now transformed into gods, astride a black horse galloping across the sky.

But the meat of the novel is marred by wooden dialogue, predictability and rampant cliché. Its melodrama is painful to read at times, giving the plot the air of a daytime soap opera. The story line involving Terri is superfluous and seems to serve no real point. And while the three women do grow, they are so flat and generic it's hard to care.

Wakatsuki Houston also falters in her attempt to link the internees' plight to that of the Paiute Indians, who had been forced, decades earlier, out of the valley where Manzanar stands. When Hana learns that her true father is an American Indian, it's supposed to symbolize the birth of a new breed of Japanese American women -- fearless, independent women powered by the warrior blood of the country's first real Americans. While the literary device is an interesting attempt to link two heritages, one feels as if the two cultures are stuck together with tape, here and there, instead of being slowly united to form a new cultural weave.

In the end, the novel just isn't able to meld and shape a potful of good ideas. It's too bad, as the premise could have produced a thoughtful meditation on Japanese gender roles. The irony of Hana achieving personal freedom in the midst of a literal prison is cleverly done, and it demonstrates how Japanese American women's greatest enemy may be their blind adherence to tradition. Finding the delicate balance that preserves the good in that tradition while chucking the bad is a theme the author should be praised for broaching.

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<http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Santa-Cruz-surfers-crash-gender-barrier-Beach-2592612.php>

Santa Cruz surfers crash gender barrier **Beach town's women have been riding the waves for decades**

- Jeanene Harlick, Special to The Chronicle
Friday, August 29, 2003



Rosemari Rice and Earlyne Colfer may qualify for senior citizen discounts, but the two still rip.

It's little wonder. The women were surfing Cowell's, the Point and Steamer Lane -- popular Santa Cruz surf spots -- before it became all the rage, before there were wetsuits and leashes, when boards were hard and heavy.

Colfer remembers, as a teenager in the late 1950s, swimming hundreds of yards in the chilled water for a lost board.

"I would get out of the water so cold, I'd go into my Volkswagen and turn on the heater full-blast, and then go home and take a warm shower until the hot water ran out," Colfer said.

Rice remembers having to fight for respect in a male-dominated sport. Even now, out-of-towners give her the stink eye when they see the 64-year-old position herself at a break. But Rice won't stand for any of that nonsense. She plays as hard as the boys.

She recalls one run-in two years ago at the Hook -- near 41st Avenue in Capitola.

"I had these young kids who just kept dropping in front of me. I said to Johnny, 'These kids just keep burning me,'" she said, referring to husband and board shaper Johnny Rice. "He turned to me, looked at me and said, 'Well, run them over, then,' and that's what I did. And I've got the skid marks to prove it."

Turn on the reality shows of MTV and the WB network or browse through a girls' clothing department -- where surf lines like Roxy, Ripcurl and Hurley predominate -- and you'll discover that surfing is the latest pop culture craze. With the nationwide proliferation of all-girl surfing schools, women's surf magazines and more, women have exploded onto the scene in the past five years and now make up 15 to 20 percent of the surfing population, according to the Eastern Surfing Association.

But in Santa Cruz, thanks in part to a female surfing community that stretches back to 1910, those numbers appear to be even higher. Go by Cowell's Beach on West Cliff Drive, a famed beginner's spot, on any morning and you'll see at least as many women as men. The population is large enough to support one of the nation's only women-owned and operated surf shops, Paradise Surf Shop, started in 1997 by two female surfers frustrated with the difficulty of finding surf wear that fit them.

"We have a total sisterhood here of women surfers," said Liz Hess, business manager of Paradise Surf Shop.

That crop includes big-wave rider Sarah Gerhardt, the only woman to charge the 30-foot-high waves of Maverick's, a reef near Half Moon Bay. Before Gerhardt came along, big-wave riding was considered an extreme sport for men only.

"Santa Cruz is a trend-setter," said Gerhardt, who recently earned a doctorate in chemistry from UC Santa Cruz. "I grew up learning to surf up and down the Central Coast -- Pismo Beach, Morro Beach, etc. I was always very outnumbered (by men). But when I came to Santa Cruz five years ago, I saw the most women I had ever seen in the water."

Female surfers stepped onto the national scene in the '50s, when the book "Gidget" -- about a 15-year-old girl's summer surfing in Malibu -- became a best-seller, spawning three feature films and a TV series. But with the ascendance in the 1970s and '80s of shortboard surfing -- a faster, more dangerous ride that requires bigger waves and greater upper-body strength -- women lost their small foothold, and men dominated the sport. Then, a decade ago, the longboard -- slower and easier to balance and paddle -- came back,

surf-apparel giant Roxy launched its first clothing brand for women, four-time world champ Lisa Anderson made the cover of Surfer Magazine, and a resurgence in women's surfing kicked into full gear.

The California Mermaid

Through it all, the Santa Cruz female surfing community stood apart as a microcosm immune to the vagaries of trends. Since 1915, when teenager Dorothy Becker stunned locals by becoming the first woman to perform a headstand on a board, Santa Cruz has been home to an ever-growing, tight-knit network of surfer girls who simply, in industry parlance, "shred."

The growth of the community is chronicled in a new exhibit at the Capitola Historical Museum. The exhibit begins with old photographs of Becker, a woman who took to the ocean at a time when traditional seabathing for women meant jumping through the waves while holding onto a rope attached to an off-shore buoy.

Known fondly as the California Mermaid, Becker defied convention by spurning the wool bloomers, short dress and stockings that passed as bathing wear -- and that carried as much as 20 pounds of drag weight when wet -- for a form-fitting, knit suit that cut off before the knees and left neck and shoulders bare. Becker was also a champion swimmer who went on to break the world record in the 50-yard freestyle.

"People didn't even start swimming in the ocean until around 1910, so to have strong women swimmers here at that time was pretty amazing," said museum director Carolyn Swift.

Soon, more women joined Becker, including Mabel Hathaway-Jeffreys, who, in 1922, rode a redwood board made by surf legend Duke Kahanamoku -- a.k.a. The Duke. The Capitola Museum has the 80-pound board on display.

By the 1960s, women were a regular sight at Santa Cruz surf spots, as the exhibit's numerous photographs attest. Big names included people like Rice, Jane McKenzie, Kathy Bridges and Debbie Gustavson.

Arlene Gnade, 55, remembers getting her mother to drive her and her sister to Santa Cruz from their Campbell home so they could be part of the local scene.

"I saw (surfing) on TV and thought, 'Oh my God, I'm going to learn how to do this.' It is the only thing in my life I felt I had any destiny about," said Gnade, who now lives in San Diego. "My mother would sit up in the front of the car crying -- she was convinced my sister and I would never be able to have children."

Strong community support

By the '70s and '80s, when women's surfing was at a low nationwide, Santa Cruz was sending a pack of accomplished female surfers to Women's International Surfing Association competitions up and down the West Coast. Some were so young that WISA had to create a division to accommodate them. Community support for female surfers was so strong that the WISA event held in Santa Cruz every March soon became one of the hottest stops on the circuit.

"All the girls always wanted to come up to Santa Cruz because we always had great prizes," said Julie Skromme, one of the pack, and the woman who collected the pictures that now make up the Capitola exhibit.

Wetsuits for every shape

Skromme's crew was so strong it produced the 1973 winner of the U.S. Surfing Championship, Laura Powers, and the 1978 World Cup winner and Rookie of the Year, Brenda Scott-Rogers. Scott-Rogers later went on to start Hotline wetsuits, which, among other things, prides itself for carrying wetsuits that fit every size and shape.

Local women say the swelling ranks of female surfers nationwide has brought grace to the sport.

"Whereas a guy is kind of a go-getter, a charger. . . . (women) work more in concert with a wave, flow with it," Gnade said.

Yet, flowing beneath the grace is an undercurrent of power that has women taking on the same mammoth swells and complicated tricks as their male peers. And they're commanding widespread respect for it.

"The best woman surfer on my team is 5-1, 90 pounds, and she shreds. Among my (male) friends it's a common joke that we wouldn't want to draw her in a heat," said Carl Olsen, a shaper with Pearson Arrows surfboards who works with many of Santa Cruz's best female surfers. "There are many women who have advanced up the (local) pecking order. They're not a guy, they're not a girl, they're just surfers."

Colfer now looks at today's generation of muscled, daring female surfers and is filled with awe.

'Part of the evolution'

"They've all gone so far beyond what all us old gals were able to do," she said. "They surf as well as the guys. I think it's right on. I'm very proud of it. And I'm proud that I'm part of the evolution of it."

Opinions vary as to why such a strong female surfing community burgeoned in Santa Cruz. One theory is that the town has many surfing families, so the lifestyle has been handed down from generation to generation.

Others simply chalk it up to great surf. With more than a dozen good beaches, Santa Cruz is more accessible than other coastal areas where beaches are spread out, locals say.

Santa Cruz also has Cowell's, whose sloping beach and gentle, forgiving waves make it a prime spot for beginners.

"It's got to be one of the best learning beaches in the Northern Hemisphere," said Greg Cochran, president of Half Moon Bay's Pedro Point Surf Club.

Cochran says Santa Cruz's user-friendly surf is the main reason its female surf community is markedly stronger than that of Half Moon Bay, 40 miles to the north.

"It's been a very slow, arduous process to develop women's surfing here," he said. "Whereas you've had very good women surfers in Santa Cruz for the last 15, 20 years, here you've only had women surfing for the last five years. " Women are starting to make their presence known on Half Moon Bay waves, Cochran said, thanks to all-women workshops held at Pacifica State Beach in Pacifica.

Scott-Rogers credits some of Santa Cruz's rougher surf spots -- such as Steamer Lane, behind the lighthouse on West Cliff Drive -- for producing female surfers that are some of the toughest on the West Coast.

"If you want to advance, then the places you have to go surf at (in Santa Cruz) keep getting more challenging -- the currents, the power of the wave, the distance you have to paddle," she said. "Even the women who haven't achieved the limelight of some of the (more famous local surfers) can hold their own in Hawaiian surf -- and that's the ultimate."

Raised to ride

But good surf can only be part of the answer, said Gerhardt, who is unsure of what has caused local female ascendance.

"Yes, the surf in Santa Cruz is really good, but I've been to a lot of spots where the surf is really good," she said. "If that was the reason, there would be more women surfers all over."

Colfer and others think they know the missing piece to the puzzle.

"We are a special little town here that has always encouraged a freer lifestyle and more liberal thinking," Colfer said. "A lot of us women were raised to live up to our full potential and seek our own bliss, whatever it might be. We didn't have cultural spires, so to speak, like other areas did."

Swift, of the Capitola Museum, agreed.

"The first feminists lived here in 1850 -- they didn't surf but they wore pants and built houses," she said. "Santa Cruz is known to be very unique in having very strong, independent women."

While hot female talent is coming out of surf spots nationwide, there are some particularly notable up-and-comers who hail from Santa Cruz.

In addition to Gerhardt, who is sponsored by Roxy, there is big-wave rider Jamilah Star, who is reported to have charged Maverick's as well -- unfortunately when there were no media around to catch it. Julie Cox, also sponsored by Roxy and who recently moved to Southern California, is a rising professional longboarder who has popped up on the pages of surfer magazines of late.

Some say the biggest Santa Cruz talent is Kim Mayer, a shortboarder sponsored by Trixie surfboards who recently won a string of professional events.

"She straight up just kills," Olsen said. "If I was going to name one girl who was going to be famous from Santa Cruz, it's Kim."

But Olsen says to also keep an eye out for Micaela Eastman, a 19-year-old amateur longboarder known for her ability to hold maneuvers like "hang five" or "hang ten" for long periods of time.

Her graceful execution of classical moves is punctuated by an aggressive, rapid-response style more characteristic of male longboarders. Olsen thinks Eastman, who will appear in her first professional competition this fall, could become one of the best.

Many, in fact, think longboarding may be the sport where the gender barrier finally comes crashing down. Characterized by graceful, banking turns and long glides, as opposed to shortboarding's slashing and lunging, longboarding is about beauty, balance and finesse, and, as such, is a perfect fit for women. The surprising thing is many of the strongest proponents of women's superiority in the sport are men.

"A lot of women can be better longboarders than guys. I know a lot of women who already are," Olsen said.

But Olsen thinks shortboarding is equally open to female dominance. That sport is about aggression, not strength, evidenced by the many lightweight, skin-and-bones men who dominate male divisions, Olsen said.

Despite the thrills and accolades that have come with conquering a sport once viewed as inherently male, Santa Cruz's hard-core female surfers don't do it just for bragging rights. Like all surfers, the women describe the sport as a natural extension of themselves, something that, once discovered, becomes as vital to survival as oxygen.

"Surfing isn't something we do, it's something we are," Gnade said.

A sport that soothes

Like most others, Gnade has to feel the soothing glide of the surfboard beneath her every day. If she doesn't have time to ride the waves, she says she has to at least see the ocean. Many of Santa Cruz's female surfers are in the water two or three times a day, and say they sink into a depression during times -- such as now -- when the surf is often too flat to ride. They say the sport brings oneness with nature, a direct feed into the universe's rhythm that is an unbeatable antidote to stress.

"You release so much bad energy when you surf -- you just go out and forget everything," Eastman said. "It's seriously like one of the best things in the world -- even eating it -- totally falling and getting worked by the wave. Seriously, there's beauty in every single spot on the wave."

Gerhardt has a hard time putting into words her experience atop the 30-foot swells only a relative handful of surfers worldwide are brave enough to charge. She compares it to the stomach-dropping thrill of a good roller-coaster ride.

"It's this weird kind of Zen, this focused tunnel, this full rush of adrenaline, and I'm just stoked," she said. "I'm just freaking out on how rad it is, and that I'm alive."

E-mail comments to penfriday@sfgchronicle.com.

<http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Indian-director-s-works-find-home-in-Santa-Cruz-2585935.php>

Indian director's works find home in Santa Cruz

- Jeanene Harlick, Special to The Chronicle

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Chronicle/Nemai Ghosh

Dilip Basu didn't realize it back then, but when he set off for India one March day in 1992, with an Oscar in his briefcase and a first-class plane ticket - his very first - clutched in his hand, he was embarking on a journey that would last more than a decade.

Traveling with a cameraman and technician provided by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the UC Santa Cruz history professor was charged with a mission that lay close to his heart: presenting renowned Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray, his mentor, with a Lifetime Achievement Oscar for more than three decades of award-winning movies.

Though a proud day, the journey was also bittersweet: Ray, his body ravaged by heart attacks, lay on his deathbed in a Calcutta hospital.

"When I saw his condition, I couldn't say a word," Basu said recently in his deep, patient voice and lilting accent. "He looked like a skeleton of himself. I had tears in my eyes."

Peninsula residents will soon benefit from Basu's unwavering determination since that trip, to restore and archive the films of one of India's most famous artists. Starting Oct. 10, Ray's entire 36-film oeuvre is scheduled to play at the Stanford Theatre in Palo Alto during a 10-week film festival.

Basu returned to the United States following the visit, but not before making a video of Ray's acceptance speech, delivered from his bed. With Basu's hands supporting Ray's, too weak to hold the Oscar, the

trembling filmmaker delivered his acceptance into the video camera. Ray talked of his long love affair with American cinema and the opus-length fan letters written to stars and directors like Billy Wilder, Deanna Durbin and Ginger Rogers.

Afterward, exhausted, Basu returned to his hotel room and took a long shower. When he emerged, there was a knock at his door. Basu opened the door wearing only a bathrobe and looked into the hall.

"There must have been 50 photographers and reporters out there," he said.

Basu dressed and went downstairs to field questions from the media. Since that ad hoc press conference, his life has never been the same.

"This," he said, referring to the Ray legacy, "has become my life. Every day."

Basu, a Bengali like Ray, has come a long way after just a decade of work. His archive, the Ray Film and Study Collection, a tiny room on the fourth floor of UC Santa Cruz's McHenry Library, boasts 31 of Ray's 36 films and more than 7,000 journals, scrapbooks, posters, stills, books, records and other memorabilia still in the process of being cataloged. The films themselves -- on 35-millimeter reels and too large for Basu's small office -- are housed in climate-controlled vaults at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles.

But equally important as the archive have been Basu's efforts to restore the original celluloid prints of Ray's films. Many were found to be in tatters when the academy, moved by Ray's acceptance speech and dismayed at the unavailability of prints when it set out to make a montage of Ray's work, commissioned Basu to survey the state of Ray films in 1992. Basu and an academy film preservationist discovered half a lifetime of work in danger of being lost.

"Our report was devastating. It said that unless something was done immediately, 18 of Ray's 36 films would disappear. The world would never see them again," Basu said.

Thus began Basu's quest to preserve the work of the first director to make Indian cinema something to take seriously and to ensure, simultaneously, that Ray did not suffer the fate of so many other Bengali artists.

"In Calcutta, there are many great works of art that would be deemed world treasures in any other part of the country. But they are falling apart and I was afraid the same thing would happen to Ray's luminous legacy," Basu said. "I won't be fully satisfied until all of the films are restored."

An idol for decades

Fullfilling his quest has been a dream come true for a man who has idolized Ray since his youth. As a child, Basu devoured the illustrated books written by Ray, who started out as a graphic artist. When Basu moved to the United States in the 1960s to attend graduate school at Harvard and UC Berkeley, watching Ray's films became a way to keep in touch with his roots. The other films produced by India's Bollywood, the world's largest film industry, never appealed to him.

"They're all formula films . . . the characters break into songs at critical moments," he said. "Nobody made movies like (Ray) did."

Ray burst onto the scene in 1955 with "Pather Panchali," a coming-of-age film about a small Bengali village boy and his family. The movie, which Time called "the finest piece of filmed folklore since Robert Flaherty's 'Nanook of the North,'" won the Best Human Document Award at the Cannes Film Festival in 1956 and brought Ray instant fame.

After "Pather Panchali," Ray went on to establish a reputation as a true auteur, a craftsman and master storyteller who kept tight control over every aspect of his films -- writing, producing and scoring them, in addition to directing. Often his hand reached down much farther, designing sets and costumes. Despite his admiration for American films, he refused to work in Hollywood the length of his career, fearful that artistry would get lost amid studio demands.

Compared to directors like Akira Kurosawa and Federico Fellini, Ray has been called the most sublime filmmaker since Jean Renoir and helped revolutionize world cinema from the 1950s to 1970s. His films are known for their celebration of the human spirit, their ability to see "that life is good no matter how bad it is," as critic Pauline Kael put it.

The cinematic techniques he pioneered, such as charging place with meaning, or tying camera movements to character psychology, have become a staple of film today and are why filmmakers like Martin Scorsese, James Ivory, Philip Kaufman and more count him as a primary influence. Scorsese has called watching the Apu trilogy -- starting with "Pather Panchali," which follows Apu's growth - one of the great experiences of his life.

Salman Rushdie, who paid homage to Ray by naming two talking fish -- Goopy and Bagha - after Ray characters in his novel "Haroun and the Sea of Stories," said Ray's influence cannot be underestimated.

"In Indian cinema, Satyajit Ray is the grand master, the greatest cinematic artist the country has ever produced," said Rushdie recently, interviewed over e-mail. "I don't believe it's possible to work in any art form in India and be unaffected by his oeuvre -- by its poetry, lyricism and humanity, by the fluidity of his camera and the rhythm of his montage."

Carrying on the humanist tradition of great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore -- who, as a close family friend, was also Ray's mentor - Ray's work is often praised for its emotional realism and complex characters, who, Basu said, are shown "warts and all."

"He shows us human beings as they are, which is imperfect. There is no true hero and no true villain in his films," Basu said.

All Ray characters grow through the course of his films, Basu said, with key moments often expressed cinematically or through a gesture, facial expression or sigh, without a word of dialogue. Critics have compared Ray to Anton Chekhov, calling him a master of evoking the unsaid. It's one reason Ray's films are able to touch an international audience despite being set in a land and region unfamiliar to most of the world, Basu said.

"The stories transcend culture. Even though they're about Bengal, anyone who watches them will laugh or cry," he said.

Many of Ray's films explore the theme of how the individual and family cope with social change. They are populated by a surprising cast of strong female characters, whose domination of Ray's movies give his work a feminist edge. The 1964 film "Charulata," for example, set in 1880 India, chronicles the bored, lonely life of a strong-willed, opinionated woman who quietly challenges her oppression through writing.

Work often unknown

Despite Ray's widespread renown inside the film industry, much of the general public and younger generation of film buffs are unfamiliar with his work, says Russell Schaffer, a recent UC Santa Cruz graduate and film minor who works at Basu's archive.

"It's sad, but I don't sense that Ray is that popular with younger American movie obsessives," said Schaffer who, as a movie "obsessive" himself, should know.

The reason has largely to do with the previous void of quality copies of Ray's work and, as a result, the unavailability of his films in video stores, Schaffer said. It made Basu's work even more critical. Now, with 14 of the most damaged films restored, and nine of those in video stores, Ray may see a comeback. Of the films still awaiting restoration, three are in critical condition, including "Kanchenjunga," a 1962 film scheduled to go under the knife next. The film's original negative is lost.

The road to restoring the films has been far from smooth. When Basu first set out a decade ago to preserve the movies, the outlook was bleak. No foundation was willing to step forward with money to jumpstart the project.

Basu's first break came when Ismael Merchant of Merchant Ivory Productions committed to funding the restoration of nine of Ray's most lauded films, with the goal of distributing them to metropolitan theaters throughout the nation, in order to expose more audiences to the filmmaker. But soon after Merchant procured the negatives from various producers, depositing them in a London film lab, a fire destroyed them. Film critic Steve Vineberg called the incident an "enormous cultural loss."

"It created a big crisis for our project," Basu said.

Merchant sought help from India's National Film Archive, which gave him the films' interpositives -- master positives created from the films' original negatives. Merchant took those to the academy, which agreed to restore the films - at Merchant's expense. When work was completed in 1996, Merchant sold the distribution rights to Sony Pictures, which showed the films in theaters nationwide. In 2000 the Academy, happy with the success of the project thus far, committed to restoring the rest of Ray's films, and footing the bill to boot - at a cost of several million dollars.

The restoration, which involves handling deteriorated, triacetate film, is tedious. Over time, the acid in such film stocks degrades, seeping into the canister and warping the film it holds. It's called "the vinegar syndrome," and India's hot, humid climate exacerbates it.

Josef Lindner, the academy preservationist leading the project, encountered the syndrome while restoring Ray's 1962 film, "Abhijan."

"One of the reels had acetate deterioration so bad it was a solid block - it's what's referred to as a 'hockey puck,'" he said. "It was a fused mass of film we could not unwind."

The 10 minutes of audio the reel held would have been lost forever had it not been for a 35 mm copy of the film found in London.

Fading and mold present additional challenges. Color films made during Ray's time used stock whose dye layers collapsed within 10 years, turning films pink and brown. All of Ray's color films - which have yet to be restored - face that risk. Mold's tendency to grow on film stock - a condition also fueled by India's tropical climate - presents even greater threats. The mold eats into the emulsion, the heart of a film's data.

"What you'll have is holes in the image, and there's nothing you can do to restore it," Lindner said.

Getting in touch with Ray

Basu's communication with Ray started in the last decade of the filmmaker's life, by which time Ray was living a hermit's existence, holed up in a Calcutta apartment, avoiding friends jealous of his success.

Introduced to the director through a friend, Basu was soon a regular visitor, bringing coveted U.S. goods - such as American movie videos - that Ray couldn't find in India.

By the late 1980s, the two were close. During Ray's last months, it was Basu who coordinated his medical treatment, consulting with a UC San Francisco cardiologist and phoning in orders to Calcutta doctors every morning. Some nights would find the professor hounding passengers at the gates of Singapore Airlines, begging them to smuggle prescription drugs into India that Ray couldn't get there.

Rushdie praised Basu for his efforts to make sure Ray's legacy is a lasting one.

"Dr. Basu's project is invaluable," he said. "Film is such a fragile medium and some of Ray's best work has almost been lost through a series of disasters."

Ray's wife, Bijoya Ray, speaks similarly of Basu's work.

"I give him full credit for his untiring efforts to help preserve and now disseminate my late husband's films," she said by phone from India.

With just under half of Ray's oeuvre restored, Basu's work is far from over. Distribution rights - necessary for commercial theater showing and video distribution -- to all but nine of the films have yet to be purchased.

Without those, Ray's films, even if restored, will continue to languish.

Basu's film archive also sits precariously, in dire need of funding. Basu hopes to eventually establish an endowment to secure the archive's future.

Yet despite past and future hurdles, Basu says he won't rest easy until Ray's celluloid is thoroughly buffered against time. Basu's resilience is due, in part, to something Ray said to him from his Calcutta hospital bed, the day before receiving his Oscar.

"He said, 'You talked about building an archive of my works. Whatever became of that?' " Basu recalled. "I couldn't say anything because I was choked up with emotion. He said to me in Bengali, 'Ota Koro' - 'Do it.' Those are his last words to me on literally his deathbed, and I cannot forget that."

E-mail comments to penfriday@sfchronicle.com.

<http://www.bendbulletin.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20040920/NEWS01/409200304/-1>

Bend man's body recovered from Lake Billy Chinook

BY: Jeanene Harlick
The Bulletin
Sept. 20, 2004

LAKE BILLY CHINOOK - Chuck Baldwin spent his Sunday sinking through four atmospheres-worth of pressure in black, frigid water, to bear hug a corpse. But at the end of the day, when the body of a former, firefighter from Bend was safely recovered for a family that had waited by the phone 36 days, it was more than worth it.

‘That’s one more family that will sleep better tonight because their relative is home,’ the Klamath County dive rescuer said as he rested on the bow of a pontoon boat. ‘That’s why we do it.’

It was a long, hard, two days of work this weekend for the Klamath County Dive Rescue Team and Jefferson County Sheriff’s officers.

Christian Cowell, 21, had fallen into the water from a boat’s bow in mid-August.

Sunday’s recovery will allow the Sheriff’s and District Attorney’s offices to move forward with their investigation. The body will go to the state medical examiner’s office in Portland for an autopsy today.

But more importantly, it will give Cowell’s family closure. His mother’s side, who live in Barstow, Calif., received the news shortly after the recovery, said Jefferson County Marine Sgt. Marc Heckathorn, who called them.

‘They broke down.... They really needed this and it happened at just the right time,’ he said. ‘The family was together and they knew the dive was happening. It’s been tearing those guys up this last month.’

Cowell’s father, who lives in Alaska, was also notified Sunday.

The recovery was made possible by a sophisticated sonic scanner that looks like a small, yellow torpedo. By dragging the machine beneath a boat, rescuers were able to locate the body, which would have otherwise been hidden by darkness. The side scan sonar, as the machine is called, transmits an ultrasound image of the lake’s bottom to a laptop on-deck.

On shore, Baldwin and back-up diver Tim Erwin had slung on their insulated pajamas and heavy, rubber, bright red ‘dry suits.’ In addition to a 27-pound helmet - through which Baldwin would receive compressed air - the 2nd Lieutenant carried a 40-pound weight belt.

‘I always go a little heavy, just in case I hit a current,’ he said.

While Jefferson County Sheriff’s officers voiced concern about the state of a body that had decomposed submerged for days, it was routine business for Klamath divers, who specialize in deep recovery. Baldwin looked almost bewildered when an observer asked if he was nervous.

‘Naah, I’ve been on the team 12 years. It doesn’t take much,’ the modest and big, red-haired man said.

The thirteen divers gulped down Subway sandwiches and sodas as they gathered around Klamath team Capt. Conrad Caillouette for a final debriefing on shore. Caillouette discussed the decompression stops that would let Baldwin shed dangerous nitrogen his body would accumulate. Then Caillouette announced boat assignments and approved launch.

‘You guys all know your position. Take everything you need in your boat, because it’s going to be tough to come back,’ he said, referring to the long boat drive out. ‘All righty... Well, let’s do it.’

Then the six-boat flotilla sped away, leaving a long trail of high, frothy Vs in their wake.

Forty minutes later, floating on the pontoon boat one mile west of Three Rivers, in the Metolius arm of the lake, divers comradery was on display as they waited for Sheriff's deputies to retrieve forgotten equipment. The Klamath team laughed as they affectionately teased Sgt. Mike Parsons - aka `The Iceman` for his calm demeanor under stress - and exchanged war stories about dives past.

Soon, however, the equipment arrived and it was back to business. Two crew members zipped up Baldwin and Erwin, and attached the tubes that would supply air. Parsons stationed himself at the `dive control system` - a big, plastic suitcase filled with gauges that would monitor Baldwin's oxygen and pressure levels.

The boat sidled up to a buoy and Baldwin jumped. He vanished in a mass of bubbles.

Within three minutes he hit bottom. Caillouette looked at the TV monitor recording Baldwin's trip - the diver had an infrared camera attached to his helmet. Baldwin's foot hit the target that had been lowered near the body. Right after, his other foot hit the body, as Baldwin explained later.

Baldwin, who had about four feet of visibility, moonwalked over and grabbed the corpse.

`He's got him!` Caillouette said.

Within another few minutes, Baldwin was 20 feet from the surface, resting during decompression, as he handed the body to two scuba divers.

Soon after, Baldwin was sitting on the bow of the pontoon boat with backup diver Erwin, describing his trip. Crew members celebrated.

`Good job, buddy, good job,` Erwin said, as he shook Baldwin's hand. `Well done.`

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Ag officials fight bugs with bugs

BY: Jeanene Harlick
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Deceptively beautiful as adults and revoltingly dirty as kids, Central Oregon's new beetle is a beguiling creature.

In its first few weeks of life - as a tiny, yellow larva - the exotic pest covers itself with its own poop, masquerading as a slug and eluding watchful farmers. But when wheat fields start looking frost-bitten in June - the larvae feed on leaves' green surface, revealing the white cuticle - growers know the cereal leaf beetle has arrived.

A couple weeks more and the pupated larvae morph into sapphire-blue bugs with bright orange legs and quickly move on to greener pastures. But for the farmers, the exodus comes too late. As much as 75 percent of their grain fields could be destroyed by a pest that's rapidly storming western states.

In a state where wheat, hay and grass seed crops bring in \$750 million annually, the infestation is cause for alarm.

Fortunately for local farmers, an equally beguiling parasite has been introduced to combat the leaf beetle. A tiny wasp, barely visible without a magnifying glass, hatches and develops inside beetle larvae, devouring the pests' innards and killing them. Instead of an adult beetle, an adult wasp pops out of the yellow shell. The beetle's natural enemy, the wasps, which don't sting humans, have nearly eradicated the pest from other parts of the country. But it takes nearly 10 years and pesticide-free fields to do so.

Can local farmers afford to hold off on spraying and wait?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture hopes so. Having just brought the wasp to Central Oregon, the department is counting on farmers' patience to ensure the success of a form of pest management that's gaining popularity. Insect biological control, or biocontrol for short, combats bugs with bugs by using the parasite or predator that normally attacks pests in their country of origin. As more foreign insects enter the country with globalization, biocontrol has become an eco-friendly and cheap way to combat them. What's even better: After several years, these natural enemies do all the work.

Help with the cereal leaf beetle, which feeds on small grains and some grasses, couldn't come soon enough. The bug first migrated to the country from Europe and Asia in 1962, when it landed in Michigan, and quickly spread through eastern states. Strong flyers, the beetle easily travels long distances.

By 1966, more than 1.6 million acres of small grains were being sprayed for the lethal yet tiny - about a quarter-inch long - beetle. Today, because of biocontrol - in the East's case, wasps that feed on the pest's eggs rather than larvae - farmers in that part of the nation don't even know the cereal leaf beetle exists.

Somehow, however, in an agronomic mystery, the beetle later jumped over the plains, and landed in Utah in 1984. Nearby states were soon infested, and the beetle touched down on Oregon soil in 1999. Now in 19 counties, the beetle hit Crook County in 2002 and Jefferson County last year.

Prineville growers applied insecticides to at least 500 acres of grain last year to protect crops from the pest, said Gary Brown, a USDA plant protection and quarantine officer. Statewide, nearly 38,000 acres of grains were sprayed at a cost of \$421,000 - more than twice the amount of insecticide used two years prior, Brown said.

Dean Davis, who operates a farm six miles north of Prineville, was the first Central Oregon grower to witness the bug's stealthy and rapid devastation. He didn't see the camouflaged larvae sucking out his wheat's chlorophyll. By the time he did, nearly a third of his field was destroyed.

'If we hadn't sprayed, it would have been a total loss,' said Davis, who grows 350 acres of wheat. 'They were pretty devastating. You don't notice them until the wheat starts getting a funny color to it ... By the time we sprayed we were losing 10 percent (of our wheat) a day.'

Without chlorophyll, which fuels photosynthesis, grain heads will not fill out.

Particularly anxious are farmers in the Klamath Basin, where the beetle has yet to set foot. Most of the wheat grown there is shipped to California, which won't take grain from infested fields during spring and fall harvests. Much of Prineville's grain is shipped to Asia.

Enter the Oregon Hay and Forage Association, which gave the USDA's Animal, Plant & Health Inspection Service (APHIS) division \$100,000 to help establish the *Tetrastichus julis* and *Anaphes flavipes* wasps in Oregon. Neighboring states already use the parasites.

The former wasp, which has proved most effective in Oregon, lays its eggs in beetle larvae that start lining wheat and oat leaves in spring. The larvae later drop to the ground to pupate. If parasitized - that is, injected with wasp eggs - the larvae casings remain there all winter, sheltering sleeping wasps, instead of giving birth to adult beetles in June. When high populations of wasps are established in an area, an equilibrium between pest and parasite is achieved, just enough beetles survive to host the wasp, but few enough that damage to crops is minimal.

'Farmers are still going to see larvae in the fields, but the larvae die before they do damage,' Brown said.

The *A. flavipes* wasp, which parasitizes beetle eggs, kills the pests before larvae - the next stage up - form. While egg parasites are preferred in biocontrol, USDA officials have had difficulty establishing them in Oregon. There has been recent success with *A. flavipes*, however, in Washington County.

The USDA hopes to achieve the same sort of success with the cereal leaf beetle as it did last decade with the Russian wheat aphid. Small wasps were also used then - but in a different way. These wasps, a different strain, inject their eggs into both baby and adult aphids, which then continue about their business as usual. But as the eggs develop inside aphids' bodies they slowly, like *T. julis*, eat the pests' inner tissues, turning the bugs into mummies.

'They're just empty cases. It will look like a normal aphid and all of a sudden it will stop moving and out pops an adult wasp that will go sting more aphids,' said Brown. 'You don't hear many people talking about (the aphid problem) anymore.'

Since launching the cereal leaf beetle biocontrol program in 1999, the USDA has established insectaries in Malheur, Union, Benton and Washington counties. This year, one came to Central Oregon as well, with the creation of an insectary at the OSU Agricultural Research Station in Madras. The bug breeding ground's primary aim this year is to build up a beetle population that can support parasitic wasps.

The roughly 5-acre plot was planted with strips of oats - the pest's favorite food - in April, May and June to provide a continuous supply of fresh leaves. In early summer, USDA staff started bringing in beetle larvae, which the department gets from better-established insectaries in neighboring states. Only a small batch of parasitized larvae were introduced in Madras this summer, with a bigger batch to come next year. Some parasitized larvae were also applied to a few private fields in Crook County.

It will take at least two years before researchers can tell if the wasps take to local soil. But the prognosis is good. The parasite has already settled down in Malheur and Union counties, where, for the first time, USDA plant officers this year recovered larvae parasitized by wasps before borrowed larvae were introduced.

The finding, which means the wasp is reproducing and hibernating in Oregon soil, was a major victory for the biocontrol program.

Insecticides that kill the beetle also kill its prey. Getting farmers to wait until wasp populations are high enough to make a difference is one of the greatest challenges the USDA faces, Brown said. It means sacrificing valuable acres of grains that will be eaten by beetles until wasps take hold as many as 10 years later. Farmers must have patience with a tactic that will reap big rewards - both financially and ecologically - later on, he said.

Scott Simmons, a crop consultant with Round Butte Seed Growers, thinks the expectation is impractical and will stymie the success of biocontrol in Central Oregon. Growers should be paid for acres they don't spray, he said. Even if farmers start small and leave just small plots chemical-free, spraying most acres until the parasite takes hold, the loss hits hard, he said.

'Let's say you don't spray 10 acres. You take a 70 percent hit in a severe infestation. That's 500 bushel of wheat you lost - that's a couple thousand dollars,' said Simmons, who manages many Prineville growers' grain crops. 'I don't know many people out there who would give up \$2,000 of their paycheck.'

Brown's response to Simmons' proposition: no way. The USDA has already invested plenty of money into a program whose main purpose is saving growers dollars in pesticide use down the line, he said. That's pretty generous, in Brown's estimation.

'Growers need to do their part,' he said.

Compensation or not, Simmons hopes that farmers will eventually be willing to chalk up the loss for the long-term benefit that ensues. Davis, the Prineville wheat grower, is ready to lead the way, and says the risk is worth it.

That's music to the ears of Barry Bai, an entomologist with the Oregon Department of Agriculture, which is helping run the biocontrol program. The project marks the ODA's third foray with insect biocontrol since its Plant, Pest & Disease division took a stab at it in the mid-1990s. That's when the ODA released parasitic wasps - a different strain than *T. julis* - into Northern Oregon to control apple ermine moths, which were attacking orchards and neighborhood trees with vengeance. The moths now pose little problem.

If the department can find the funds, it also wants to use biocontrol on the European crane fly, a mosquito-like bug that is now killing grass on golf courses and residential lawns in the Willamette Valley and will likely soon - if it's not already - be a pest to contend with in Central Oregon, Bai said.

Bug backers hope local growers will curb spraying while wasps settle into their new neighborhood. Although the parasites are slowly starting to take hold, the state has far to go before the cereal leaf beetle is under control through biological means, Brown said. But in this scenario, at least, the proverb about what happens to those who wait rings true, Brown and Bai said.

'Farmers have to think long term with biological control. There is no success right away, but once (the parasites) are established, the problem is solved once and for all,' Bai said. 'With chemical control, you can often solve the problem right away, but next year you have to do it again. With biocontrol, you will see a good result forever.'

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