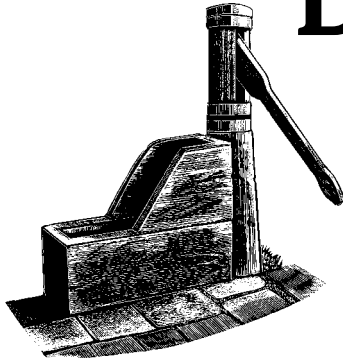


Here's to Ralph, Mrs. DeVoto, and Warren



"Your wooden arm you hold outstretched to shake with passers-by."

AS MANY READERS of this magazine are well aware, every five years the members of each College class are invited to write something about the state of their lives or the progress of the world, and Harvard publishes the results as a class report. Christopher S. Johnson '64, a contributing editor of this magazine, read his class's fortieth anniversary report straight through, taking pleasure from its miscellany of revelation, and commended to Primus the following from Walter Harp of Cambridge, a professor at Berklee College of Music in Boston. Harp devoted his essay to belated thanks "to two people who played important roles in my undergraduate life. I knew each of them very slightly, and I chose then to think that each of them mattered not at all. Now I know better.

"One was a tutor at Lowell House. 'Ralph' was gay (or, as we sneered, queer, a faggot) and he was proud—or at least he seemed to take pleasure in open displays of caring towards other men. (On the advice of Harvard attorneys, the editors of this book said I couldn't use his real name.) Ralph was an object of withering scorn in my small group of fiercely heterosexual friends, and he was a source of some embarrassment to me, because he liked me. He would choose to dine at our table (next to me), talk with me about lit-

erature, invite me to readings that he had organized. Most of the time I ignored these overtures, just as I would pointedly move my chair away from him or scowl at his approach. But his smile never faded, and I did accept one invitation: a special reading by Marianne Moore in the Senior Common Room in November 1962. What a treat to hear this grand old woman in the prime of her later years! A week afterwards, Ralph handed me a package at dinner: a 9-by-12 framed photo of Marianne, with me in the background. I remember blushing mightily at the gift and making some excuse for a hasty departure. Later we all joked about how Ralph must really have the hots for me. The photo is in my study today; Ralph's name is not on the back—just 'Marianne Moore. Lowell House. November 1962.'

"The second thank-you is to Mrs. DeVoto, secretary to the English department. I wrote my thesis on 'Loss of Innocence in the Novels of E. M. Forster.' On the day we were to pick up our copies of the graded theses, complete with anonymous comments from 'senior' and 'junior' readers, I approached Mrs. DeVoto with some nervousness, and she smiled as she handed me the binder. I flipped immediately to the typed comment sheet, on which Senior spoke with disdain and intense sarcasm about the 'marvelous self-assurance' I had displayed in churning out a work of such little merit; the junior reader was, interestingly, enthusiastic and recommended a *summa*. But that didn't count for me. I was blinded by my need for approval from those in power, those I had been

taught should really 'matter' in my world.

"I was so stricken by Senior's condemnation that I barely heard Mrs. DeVoto's soft words: 'I thought it was wonderful. Might I have a copy?' 'What? Oh...sure, yeah, I'll get one for you.' I never bothered. In fact, for a good while thereafter I interpreted her request as yet another reminder of my own status as a second-rate academic: Only the junior reader and the department secretary (for God's sake) thought I was any good.

"Looking back after 40 years, I want to thank 'Ralph' and Mrs. Avis DeVoto for caring about me as a person—for listening, appreciating—even as I cared not at all about them in their full humanity. I write this in the hope that such lapses in understanding will perhaps diminish, as we learn to accept and celebrate one another, regardless of social position."



WE BASKED in the comments of Cynthia Johnson MacKay, an eye surgeon from Brooklyn, in that fortieth anniversary report. Her communication to classmates went as follows: "My husband of thirty-nine-and-a-half years, Malcolm MacKay (Princeton '63) told me in June 2003 that he was leaving me to marry his mistress of two years. Two months later, I read a personal ad in *Harvard Magazine* written by Warren Keegan (M.B.A. '61, D.B.A. '67) and called him up. He was my first date in forty-one years. We have been an item ever since, and I am the happiest I have ever been in my whole life. I recommend: 1. Harvard boyfriends; 2. *Harvard Magazine*; 3. Love in your sixties." ~PRIMUS V

