DEEP SPRINGS COLLEGE

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER
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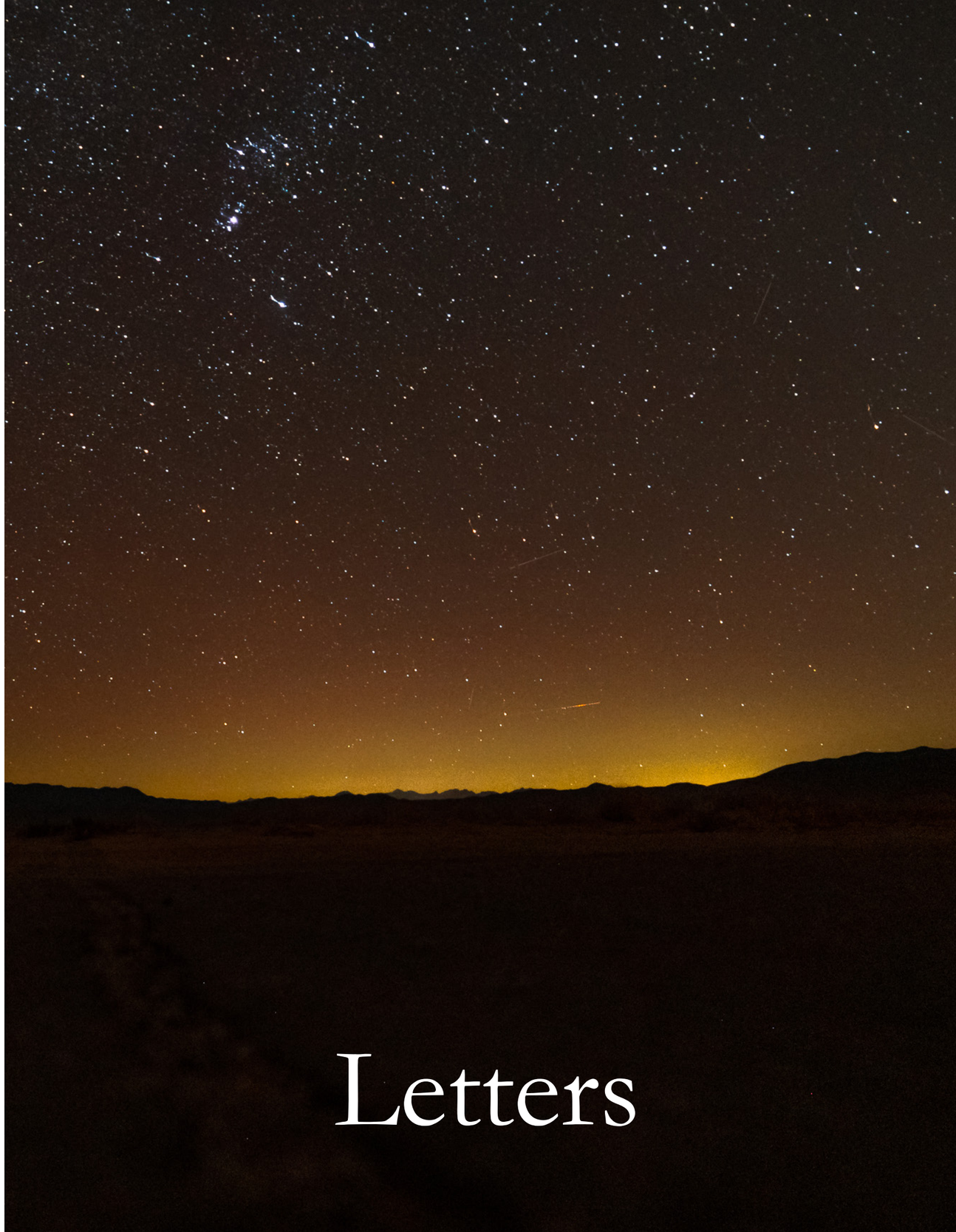
Deep Springs College Newsletter

Spring 2021

"Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the more often and the more intensely the mind of thought is drawn to them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."

– Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason
(from the plaque dedicated to Ross Peterson on the porch of the Main Building)



Letters

Letter From The President

Sue Darlington

Greetings From Deep Springs

After a quiet term 4, when the students were off campus and we fixed the dorm's heating system, Deep Springs returned to its usual vibrant, lively self. Schedules have been complicated as terms 5/6 became the spring semester, including several single-term courses overlapping with semester-long courses. Horsemanship picked up from its Covid-interrupted fall. Of course, the students proved up to the challenges, engaging in classes, labor, and self-governance as usual. ApCom selected the new DS21 class. CurCom hired most of next year's faculty, and RCom and ComCom are buzzing with exceptional efficiency.

We welcomed several new staff members to campus since January: Steve Turner, Office Manag-er; Brian Shulse, BH Manager; and Skylar Favier, Assistant Ranch and Farm Manager. Soon we will hire a new dean to replace our dear Sarah Stickney, who decided to move on after term 6. It is impossible to replace Sarah, who will be dearly missed! Having a full staff again after a long time is exciting. I appreciate Padraic MacLeish (Director of Operations) and Shelby MacLeish (Associate Dean and Garden Manager) for picking up most of the slack for far too long.

Another exciting event is the groundbreaking for the new BH and the Triplex for faculty housing. Both were delayed for various reasons, but as we hired a new general contractor, Ken Carpenter, from Bishop, the construction began apace in March. Even though the SB cannot be as involved in the process as hoped due to Covid, the GL provides support digging holes and finding buried pipes and lines needed to hook up the new buildings and the dorm's sprinkler system. Everyone adjusted to continued cooking in the kitchen trailer (affectionately called the PUNIT) and eating outside at picnic tables around the MB and Museum.

Additional Covid-related news includes that most of the staffulty and all students are on their way to full vaccination. Covid Com will assess what this means for our protocols as we continue to emphasize safety for the entire community and the occasional visitors. In a similar vein, Zoey and Beau received rattlesnake venom vaccines to protect them as they run through the desert.

For me, the past eight months flew by. I have finally begun to understand self-governance and value the innovative approaches students have to deal with various challenges. I continue to value the wisdom and insight L.L. Nunn had in establishing Deep Springs as I observe the holistic education our students get. Even I learn from my mistakes as I grasp the intersections of the three pillars and the ways in which the staffulty and students work together. As green again becomes a prominent color on the farm and campus, we race towards the end of term 5, an abbreviated Shakespeare week reading The Tempest, and a well-deserved break for the SB. The dogs and I feel at home at Deep Springs, and I continue to feel honored to be part of this amazing school.

Sue's dogs, Beau and & Zoey, after their rattlesnack vaccine

Letter From The SB Chair

Lucia Pizarro DS20

Term 5 has been a busy time for the SB. Coming out of our remote Term Off, a couple students suffered various injuries this term, ranging from ACL to torn ligament to fractured hand. We were worried people would start dropping like flies, but the injuries seem to have stablized at this point; fingers crossed! These unexpected events have prevented the prominence of Deep Springs physical rigor for our injured students, but they are making up for this loss with their abundance of heart.

This term has also involved great transition in staff hiring. Over Term 4, we welcomed our new office manager Steve Turner to the valley, which resulted in a much needed wave of organization and order. Brian Shulse officially stepped into his role as our new Boarding House Manager, and the SB has benefited greatly from his culinary expertise and management skills. We also look forward to Skylar Favier's arrival next term as our new Assistant Ranch and Farm Manager, and we are working to hire a new Dean for next year.

We've enjoyed the end of the Term 3 bubble, when concerns about community spread of COVID-19 resulted in a divide between some Staffulty and the SB. We are grateful for the Staffulty's sacrifices during that difficult time, and are delighted we can enjoy more interpersonal contact now that we are out of it. The warmer weather is presenting more opportunities for outdoor, maskless classes, and while temperatures still fluctuate regularly, some SB members have be-

-gun their basking. A few brave souls have even started swimming in our reservoirs.

As we readjusted to life in the valley, we have engaged in ongoing conversations about privacy and the press. We allowed a free-lance reporter from a prominent outdoors magazine with plans to write an article about Deep Springs to visit in April. That article will mark the first major piece featuring Deep Springs since the Co-Education transition. The SB also gave permission for a nationally-known documentary news show to film a segment about the college for a series on isolated places in May. That piece will air in the fall and we will be sure to let the extended community know.. A recurring discussion this term remains the SB's connection to the outside world. That conversation has been filtered through an isolation breach motion, debates about the best ways to speak to the press, and a proposed Term 6 internet ban that we will vote on this week.

The SB looks forward to a (email free? we'll see) term of more stable weather, outdoor activities and good books; we have three visiting professors arriving to teach courses on Machiavelli, Aesthetics and Politics, and Secularism and Its Critics term six. We are stoked to make more room for even more intellectual vibrancy as the year dies down and the blossoms flourish. After all, there's nothing better than the high desert at its peak season, as alfalfa fills fields with its flimsy, seafoam green and the garden bustles with great produce and pesky weeds that we must combat.

Lucia Pizarro by the upper reservoir

POWERLINE EXTENSION WITH BASALT

By Milo Vella DS19

Humanity's most visible marks in the Deep Springs Valley show a distinct tendency toward the linear. Arriving on the valley floor from either pass, the macadamized course of Highway 168 races decisively forward with little evident regard for what may have stood once in its way. A distance of 5.5 very straight miles separates its two bends, beneath the Elephant and at Henderson Station; on either side of these, straightaways connect to the foot of the hills where winding becomes the rule. While racing toward the college (or away from it, maybe toward town or the Fish Lake Valley hot well) one doesn't always experience the straightness of the road. The exciting vertical undulations of the roadway distract from its overwhelming uninterruptedness, and besides, it's likely that the shape of the road is the last thing on your mind.

But from above, and at a distance, the straightness of the roadway shocks. Every once and a while, depending on where you're walking, or riding, or working, you may chance to look up, down, or out, and observe its course as a whole. This sight is most pronounced when looking along the highway's length. If you're walking along the main road, for instance, or riding out past the stackyards, or meandering to the newly raked Tortilla, you'll cross this plane in space where the straightaway between the foot of Gilbert and the Henderson Station bend would continue. The experience is extraordinary. The whole stretch of pavement foreshortens into something comprehensible, condensed, and pointed at you.

The highway may be the longest and most obvious mark across the landscape, but there are other important lines too. Deep Springs Ranch Road is even more linear, with only one bend, outside the outer Kelly Williams Cattle Guard and having a far flatter surface (probably by virtue of its being shorter than the highway). On either side of the main road, farm team dedicates most of their working hours to the project of straightening wheel lines. Much like the highway's trajectory, the course of these irrigation lines is not always precisely straight, but rather "abstractly straight," in the words of a first-year farm teamer. This is a more poetic way of saying that they tend toward the linear, even if linearity is not fully achieved or achievable (personal shortcomings aside, there is always our uneven ground and arcing aluminum). Fence crews also deal in straight lines. They've strung miles of barbed wire tightly across the valley, approximating linearity with the guidance of a special surveying tool and Red Stegall's poem "the Fence that Me and Shorty Built." But I've heard that somewhere, a fence takes a jog around a site of Cultural Significance before continuing on its course.

In my eyes, the most remarkable linear form is that of the power lines. If you're reading this, you probably already know the ones I'm talking about. They stretch from the Deep Springs Substation (by the Main Building) right through middle of North field, past Henderson, across the highway, and way out towards Wyman Canyon where they meet the "Silverpeak A" line. Their heavy, forest-derived poles suspend three spindly cables over the arid valley floor as if they are something

delicate and ethereal. A dirt access road follows meanderingly below their length. It's a fairly long course; looking down it, you gain the best sense of distance and proportion available in the valley. Perhaps it is precisely that sudden sense of unattenuated distance that makes the visual experience so viscerally staggering.

The poles, all about the same size and with only subtle distinctions in form, punctuate the valley in intervals of 250 to 340 ft. In this we find the first contradiction in their nature: they are at once intermittent and continuous. Other paradoxes follow. The poles are both individual and unitary; ubiquitous and strange, crude and delicate, static and directional, utilitarian and aesthetic; objects and subjects. They respond, visually, to your location. To behold them up close is incommensurate with seeing them from afar; a perspective from the side is very different from one along their length.

I must confess now that I'm not sure what other people see when they look at power lines. I wonder if my astonishment is communicable. What does it mean to look at them? What might powerlines mean for us Deep Springers in particular, given their direct historical relation to L.L. Nunn. Does our connection to the common power grid trouble our "isolation"?

Last fall's Land and Place-Based Art Making class gave me an opportunity to explore the possibilities for transmitting some of the aesthetic essence that the power

line impresses upon me. I'm not convinced that this my writing does much toward that end, though I think the analysis matters in its own right. But anyway, after a fair amount of scouting and considering various "actions" and "interventions" of varying feasibility, I visited the hill at the northern end of the powerline. Scrambling among the saltbush and over the basalt scree slides, I followed the axis (the plane) of the powerline northward, looking back along the poles toward campus and the lake. Out of that breathtaking visit, a clear project emerged. Over the remainder of the term, I would gesture toward extending the powerline. I would re-arrange the native basalt boulders of that slope, laying them transect-wise across the contoured topography.

Through slow and heavy work, a delicate scar of my own making materialized, especially once I began removing dead brush and standing boulders upright, like telephone poles. The process — carried out by hand and on foot — struck me as at once violently obtrusive and also sensitive and subtle. To date I remain ambivalent about the significance of my own mark. I consider my intervention less conspicuous than Justin Kim's "Box," or Tom's Cabin, and certainly less impactful than any fence. I am relieved by the understanding that before long, my little menhirs will topple, my shallow dry-stone wall will slide and erode, and more salt-brush will fill-in and obscure the stone that remains in place. I know better than to think my "intervention" is something of much consequence outside of myself, and yet there it is on the hill, visible even from campus if you care to look at it. I don't think the project has been successful in amplifying or distilling the aesthetic properties of the powerline for anyone other than myself. So far as I know, only the professor Zane Fischer's drone has ascended to the vista at the top of the hill, and even it died before he could get any images facing southward, along the powerline!

The last day of IV-V break, I tore my ACL. The course of my life took an unexpected twist and turn. And yet when I returned to campus, those stones still stood there high on the hill, unflinchingly aligned and inhumanly obdurate.

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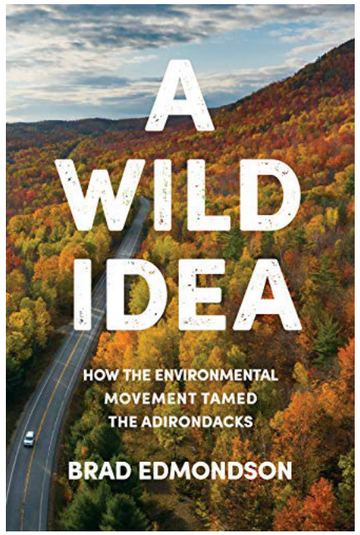
A Wild Idea

A new book by alumnus Brad Edmondson DS76.

A Wild Idea shares the complete story of the difficult birth of the Adirondack Park Agency (APA). The Adirondack region of New York's rural North Country forms the nation's largest State Park, with a territory as large as Vermont. Planning experts view the APA as a triumph of sustainability that balances human activity with the preservation of wild ecosystems. The truth isn't as pretty. The story of the APA, told here for the first time, is a complex, troubled tale of political dueling and communities pushed to the brink of violence.

The North Country's environmental movement started among a small group of hunters and hikers, rose on a huge wave of public concern about pollution that crested in the early 1970s, and overcame multiple obstacles to "save" the Adirondacks. Edmondson shows how the movement's leaders persuaded a powerful Governor to recruit planners, naturalists, and advisors and assign a task that had never been



attempted before. The team and the politicians who supported them worked around the clock to draft two visionary land-use plans and turn them into law. But they also made mistakes, and their strict regulations were met with determined opposition from local landowners who insisted that private property is private.

A Wild Idea is based on in-depth interviews with five dozen insiders who are central to the story. Their observations contain many surprising and shocking revelations. This is a rich, exciting narrative about state power and how it was imposed on rural residents. It shows how the Adirondacks were "saved," and also why that campaign sparked a passionate rebellion.

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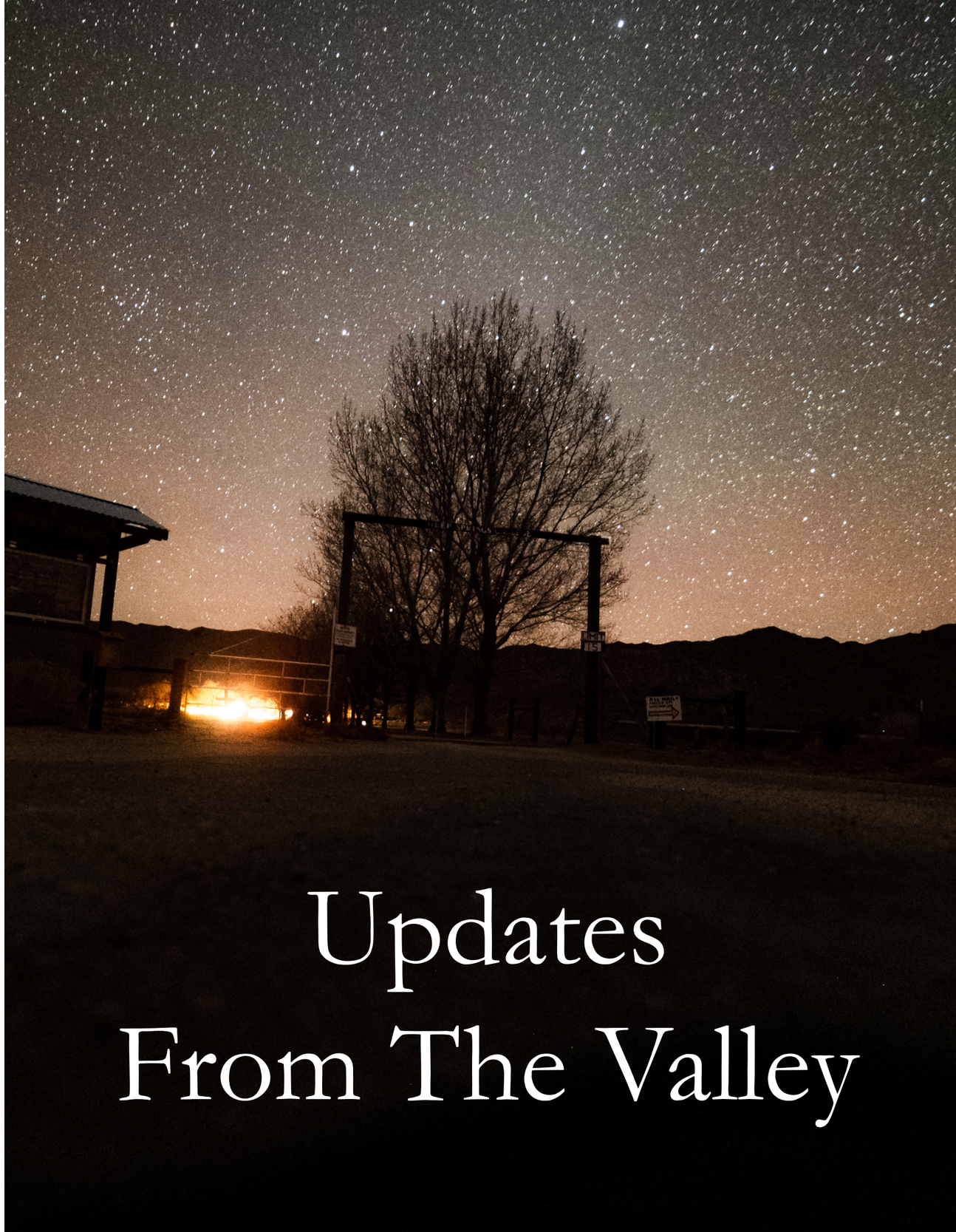


Updates From The Valley

Mystery Resolved

The Russian Connection

By Yinuo Ding DS20

Since publishing my essay on Russian posters in the Fall 2020 Newsletter, I have received many emails from the Deep Springs network! I appreciate all the tips, conjectures, anecdotes, and institutional memories. Most of these emails disagree with each other. I suppose it means the Russian Connection has been a mystery for many of us!

I'm deeply grateful to be in touch with a small piece of institutional history through this.

Jack Newell (DS'56) has confirmed that the posters came from Norton Dodge (DS'43). The display of these Soviet labor posters led to the resignation of board member Madeleine Pelner Cosman. In *The Electric Edge of Academe*, Jack describes Cosman's tenure on the board and her resignation (Page 329).

"Medievalist and lawyer Madeleine Pelner Cosman had joined the board with something of a flair in 1995. She announced that she had lofty standards for giving to nonprofit organizations and hoped that Deep Springs might be the first institution to merit her support. After several years and a brief romance with widower Dick Cornelison, Cosman determined that Deep Springs had also failed her charitable giving test and asked to be excused from service.

She returned to the board in 2003 at the behest of Jeff Johnson, Cornelison's successor as board chair. When she noticed a display of historic Soviet labor posters in the library, a gift from Soviet dissident art collector and alumnus Norton Dodge (DS43), Cosman protested vigorously. Finding no sympathy among board members, she resigned again, explaining that the college was too liberal for her."

Land Acknowledgement Update

By Milo Vella DS19

A group of students and members of the staffulty have been, over the past several semesters, laying groundwork for a Native Land Acknowledgement statement. Our progress is slow, as we consider process to matter as much as any outcome. Of particular concern for us is the question of how to make a meaningful acknowledgement, especially given the high turnover of our community, limited relationships and contacts with tribal members, the isolation ground rule, and other con-cerns. Bringing some of these questions to the SB, conversation came to a conclusion that we could better acquaint ourselves with this valley—and quickly too. An impromptu resolution led to us all reading "A Fortuitous Place," the fourth chapter of Jack Newell's Electric Edge of Academe. There seems to be consensus that our orientation tradition, "Sense of Place" should be expanded to familiarize incoming students and staffulty with local—and particularly indigenous—histories, presents, and futures.

Illustration by Annie Kelley DS20

The BH and the Triplex

Construction Begins

By Brian Hill (Herbert Reich Chair of Natural Science)

After a rocky start due to unavailability of crews in the midst of the COVID lockdown, the project was re-awarded to Ken Carpenter Construction of Bishop, California and since then the new Boarding House (BH) and Triplex work has taken off. As of this writing, the forms and under-slab plumbing for both buildings were mostly in, and the Triplex pour was just completed.

The Triplex and the BH are each a major project, running concurrently, with the Triplex slightly ahead. Christian Stayner, principal of Stayner Architects, chose ProCore for these projects. Digital versions of the complete plans for both projects can be rendered by the ProCore software on any of the team members' computers in the field. On a remote job with complex projects such as these, being able to communicate with the structural engineer or the mechanical engineer as if you were looking at the same set of plans in an office is a boon.

Director of Operations Padraic MacLeish highlighted features of the triplex, which include a high amount of reconfigurability to accommodate the endlessly changing mix of faculty, staff, visitors, and their families. He is also pleased that the triplex provides the campus with its first ADA-accessible dwelling.

Meanwhile, the new BH (which replaces the kitchen and dining area) is taking shape as well. The BH is configured as almost two independent buildings. Scott Kibler of Dean's Plumbing & Heating described the complexity of the BH plumbing. "In addition to the normal sanitary plumbing, there are two other plumbing systems — one to capture gray water, and one more that needs to be separate for the kitchen grease trap." It is challenging to get three independent systems into the space underground, flowing, and serving all the right spots.

Ken was born in Bishop and grew up between Bishop and Lone Pine. His dad was a concrete guy and still is. Ken got into construction as a teenager working summers in his grandfather's company more than 30 years ago. After a few years in college preparing for a degree in construction management, he realized that he already knew and was doing everything the courses were supposed to be teaching. Furthermore, if he stayed on the college track, he would likely end up stuck in an office instead of doing the hands-on, outside work that he loves.

Gary Schley has been in the

711 Materials and Mammoth Concrete Pumping Deliver a Pour to the Clair Concrete Team

construction trades for 50 years since he was 17. He was born in Bishop, and also has lots of family here. On most jobs he is focused on all aspects of carpentry from the forms to the finish. On this job, he is helping Ken Carpenter coordinate materials and subcontractors. This is particularly tricky with the supply chain issues that have developed this year. Long lead times and substitutions have to be worked out, and there are incredible ripple effects whenever a substitution is made.

Everyone on the crew commutes from Bishop an hour each way. Gary likes the challenge of the project, coordinating with the architects and engineers, and grasping their ideas. He admires the thought that has been put into this project. Both buildings are going to be very attractive and bright inside, with shading on the west side.

Gary makes a point to compliment all the workers on the project. "They work hard." So far, Clair Concrete has so far been out here the most. Dean's Plumbing & Heating, Eldridge Electric, Bishop Heating, Mammoth Welding, Sierra Counter Tops, and of course Ken Carpenter Construction are all part of the team. Gary describes Ken as "a good guy to work with. He works hard, and is admired by a lot of people." Western Nevada Supply, High Country Lumber, and Roof Components Inc are some of the major suppliers.

For Padraic, as Director of Operations, "it is tremendously exciting to see these projects come to life despite the challenges of the past year. They will provide the foundational infrastructure needed to carry Deep Springs into its 2nd century of education."

Triplex Interior Rendering by Stayner Architects (Above) Rendering of Boarding House by Stayner Architects (Below)

Welcome to the Valley

New Staff

By Nathan Becker DS20

Steve Turner (right), our new office manager, has added a much needed level of cheerfulness and organization to Deep Springs. After growing up in Mississippi, Steve enlisted in the military. He was first deployed in Korea, where in addition to training as a soldier, he managed an Army bakery. Most recently, Steve worked at the Art Institute of Las Vegas, where was initially hired as an office manager. When the Institute eventually closed, he was one of the only employees left, and got good at "wearing a lot of different hats," whether it be academic, registration, or overall organization. At Deep Springs, this skill of his serves all of us. In addition to his managerial skills, Steve has filmmaking skills and runs a non-profit organization. Steve loves being a part of the DS community, and is grateful for its familial and self-governing qualities.

After too many months of a leaderless BH operation, we are lucky to announce that Brian Schulse (left) has immensely improved the eating experience at Deep Springs. Brian's culinary skills are very exciting, and his guidance to the cooks and the BH crew has been invaluable—the P-Unit 5 is cleaner, more orderly, and is soon to receive a fleet of new appliances. Brian grew up in Cotati and Nevada City, graduated from Sierra College, and spent his early career in the printing industry before moving to waiting tables. From waiting tables and managing the front of the house, a coworker encouraged him to attend culinary school, after which he focused his energies on cooking. After spending time as a line cook, soús chef, and eventually head Chef, Brian got interested in culinary instruction, which has been his main gig for the past decade or so. Brian was drawn to the unique educational program at Deep Springs, and is planting his roots here, taking up one project at a time.

Steve Turner (top right) & Brian Schulse (bottom left)

We are also grateful to announce that Skylar Favier (right), our new Assistant Ranch and Farm Manager, has arrived in the valley. Skylar has gotten straight to work on the farm operation, trying to tackle questions of gophers, weeds, and soil management. Skylar has many years experience working in construction, and on commercial cattle ranches in Montana, California, and Wyoming, most recently. Having grown up in a ranch and farm family in Merced, CA, the work is in his roots. During high school, he was involved in FFA, and went on to study Animal Science and Agriculture Business in college. Skylar is a father to two boys, to whom he's passed on his ranching skills. His younger son Frank, 15, joins him in the valley, along with their mare, Ginger.

"The purpose of Deep Springs is to secure in its members complete renunciation of self, the dedication of one's self and all he can ever become, all he has and all he can ever acquire, to sentient universe—the taking of the oath of allegiance to the moral order of the universe." - L.L. Nunn, The Grey Book

Skylar and Frank Favier (top right), the Class of 77 Discusses the Observatory Plan via Zoom (bottom)

Thank You DS77

Observatory Status

By Brian Hill (Herbert Reich Chair of Natural Science)

The Deep Springs class of 1977 meets regularly via Zoom. After reading about the observatory project in the Fall 2020 newsletter, and that the observatory had not yet found funding for such key things as the telescope itself, they put their heads together and decided to make funding the entire project a gift from their class. In their late-December meeting, with Sue Darlington, John Dewis, and Brian Hill joining to answer questions, details were hashed out, critical questions raised, and a plan made to fully fund the observatory.

Term 4 was held remote to reduce COVID risk. When the students returned to campus at the beginning of March, Labor Commissioner Hannah Duane DS20 began organizing work parties to move 1000s of pounds of concrete and water to the observatory site. Other tasks for the General Labor crew included excavation, leveling forms, tying rebar, and positioning conduit. As of mid-April, the footing and stem wall are complete, the conduit and drains are in, and the slab is about to be mixed and poured.

The parts to assemble a Losmandy G11G telescope mount have been ordered and the last of them will arrive shortly, and the Celestron EdgeHD 11" optical tube assembly budgeted for in the Class of '77s gift has also been ordered, but its unique features have put it in such high demand among astrophotographers that it will be multiple months until it arrives.

The gift for the observatory includes a small field station room adjacent to the dome where astronomers can store equipment, process data, and stay warm during long nights of monitoring the telescope's work. The field station will be built in the 2021-2022 academic year. Brian Hill, the current Natural Science Chair, is keen to start doing astronomy in the dome, and he looks forward to enjoying exceptional views of the dark skies in Deep Springs valley with students, DS77, and other visitors.

(left to right) Michael Nyakundi, Hannah Duane, Julia Farner, Elias MacLeish, Connie Jiang, and Rosemary Kelly Mix Concrete to Fill the Stem Wall Forms

Interviews

An Interview With
Andy Kim DS00
By Milo Vella DS19

1) Last time we interviewed you, Fall 2017, you were running for your seat in the House of Representatives. Does your experience of self-governance at Deep Springs inform your work in the Capitol?

The core principle of "service to humanity" continues to guide all of my work. At Deep Springs, I gained a real appreciation for the responsibilities within a community and how to engage with others members of that community to draw up shared values and actions. I approach my work at the Capitol with that same approach.

2) How about Labor and Academics?

The multifaceted aspect of Deep Springs education has taken on new meaning for me. I feel like I often live multiple different roles right now. Public servant, political operative, father/husband, community member, etc. Similar to how I sought to find the balance between the life of the mind and the work with my hands through the labor and academics program, I try to maintain those dynamics with my current work.

3) Last time we asked you what you thought the biggest problem in politics was, you replied "narrow vision." Is that still the case?

The narrowness of politics is severe. We get nearsighted with what we work on and we lose capacity to address the strategic challenges we face. But after the January 6 insurrection, I think I've come to see the deeper problems of narrowness that starts to reduce our politics to tribalism and partisanship. It starts to make us see politics through electoral campaigns rather than governance. This is a serious problem and one that gets at the heart of the challenge we face to our democracy.

4) Many of us saw headlines about you helping janitors clean up after the rampage on the Capitol, January 6th. If you're not tired of talking about that, is there anything you want to tell us about about that experience, or your reflections on it?

I'm still processing what happened on January 6. The insurrection hit home for me that we are but mere caretakers of our democracy. We are on an unsustainable path of vitriol in our governance and we have a long road to recovery ahead. The reaction to the photo of me cleaning to Capitol has also taught me a lot about what people are looking forward to healing our nation. What I have come to believe there is a hunger in our country for a politics grounded in service, humility and respect.

5) What would you like current Deep Springers to know or practice? If you were to teach come back and deliver a speech, what would you most like to say?

For me, Deep Springs was a constant education in humility. Every day I encountered something new, something I needed to figure out. I also learned that there is never just one way to solve a problem. There are more efficient and effective ways, but never just one. Hubris is often the belief that we have all the answers and know exactly what to do. That tension between hubris and humility is something I still grapple with.

6) What's harder, SB meetings or the House of Representatives? (We might stop complaining if you say the latter :)

When I was at Deep Springs, we had a lot of differences, but we had respect for one another and believed people were coming to it with good intentions. That is not true for the House of Representatives. There isn't a sense of community or commonality. We lack the sharedness that I felt I had at Deep Springs. And that makes it incredibly difficult to get things done.

Andy Kim DS00 in the old BH

An Interview With

Philip Kennicott DS83

By John Dewis DS94, Development Director

Philip Kennicott DS83 is the Senior Art and Architecture Critic of The Washington Post. His memoir Counterpoint: A Memoir of Bach and Mourning, was published by Norton in February 2020.

Philip, thank you for agreeing to the interview and congrats on your book and your Pulitzer.

Thank you. I can't imagine an audience I'd rather talk to about my book than Deep Springs.

I've got many questions, but how about you start with your own start at Deep Springs?

There are so many Deep Springses. I was there in the 80s, and it became a much more robust and socially nurturing institution since I was there. I love it and in many ways it saved me from the paths and social expectations laid out for me by my parents and the environment I grew up in. DS was the juncture that steered me away from those. I was a TASPer in between junior and senior year. I fell in love with the landscape in a hard and passionate way and didn't want to be torn out of that beauty. And educationally it was so superior to the high school I was attending. At the end of my TASP I petitioned the Student body to stay and become a student, and they let me. I never went back to high school to get a degree. I just stayed at Deep Springs. After Deep Springs, I had lots of catching up to do, not the least of which was learning some essential social skills. I landed at Yale in a crowd of kids who had the veneer of social polish and brilliance, and in fact they were very smart. This was new to me.

When I first emailed you I explained that my eagerness to interview you was a result of my two-and-a-half year old son's taste in books. Even at his age there are books he likes and can hear at length and also books that test his patience. He doesn't think much of the Upanishads, Spinoza, or the Federalist Papers. But he really likes Melville, Wordsworth, Browning, Pater, and as it turns out, Kennicott. My son's appreciation is not quite the same as your Pulitzer, but I wonder if there is a question here about style. What is your style?

I hope your son is right about the book. There was a point twenty years ago when I was reading 18th-century writers--Boswell, Johnson, Gibbon--and falling in love with the way they pack so much into an English sentence, how malleable it is and how it can have such tensile strength despite its length. Journalism is all about punchiness and a stripped-down style. I realized, no, I don't want to write like that. It so easily devolves into cliche. That was a revelation in my 30s, after having worked at various jobs in NY, St Louis, Detroit. Suddenly, when I landed in Washington at the Post, I had more freedom. And I changed the way I wrote at that point. It opened up more possibilities. We are never conscious of our own style, but to young journalists my advice is that you can always do more with language than you think you can. You don't need to whack every thought into short sentences that go ratatatat! like a machine gun.

Philip Kennicott DS83 at Deep Springs

Did you get pushback?

In the newspaper world there was pushback. The New Journalism is still the prevalent model of how we think everyone should write. But I get a bit of a pass because I write about the arts.

And does this style serve to help us understand art, or Bach, better?

The fundamental challenge of the book was that there were several different narratives and they needed to be stitched together but not in a forced way. I would read something about Bach's life that resonated with something in my own understanding but then think, "Well you can't do that, you can't compare yourself to Bach." But I discovered the blank spaces between one thread and the other were not empty spaces. If you set them up carefully, the reader will go with you. One thing can be held in abeyance while something else is happening. The mind can still make sense of them, and one thing can be paused and doesn't appear to be from nowhere when it returns. This was essentially a musical solution.

In Counterpoint you describe a moment on your kitchen floor listening to the Goldberg Variations that provided an epiphany for you. Did you have any such moments at Deep Springs?

I think I did. There are moments from Deep Springs that are still very present and meaningful to me, often about finding ways to deal with the inculcated fears that came out of a suburban childhood. But there was also falling in love with that landscape. I would stand on the Main Building front porch and look at that little slice of the Sierra that you can see, and I was so overwhelmed by its beauty that I wanted somehow to understand it and to consummate a relationship with it, whatever that might mean. In an encounter with an enormously beautiful thing, you are left with the sense that its beauty is incommensurate with your ability to think it through. This is what I encountered with Bach. When or how can understanding a piece like the Goldberg Variations be consummated? When you internalize it? Memorize it? Write the next variation? What I conclude in the book is that you never complete it. You never have the feeling, "Well, that is the truth of it." You have to accept that process and that your unsatisfied longing as a part of it.

That sounds a little like Kant on the sublime. I read that you studied philosophy at Yale after Deep Springs. Is there a philosopher you spent the most time with or think is most right about things?

Yes, in fact it was Kant, but that was probably because of the masochism I carried with me from DS. He was the philosopher whom I find the coldest and chilliest and off-putting and so I wanted to wrestle him to the ground. But I don't feel about the sublime the way Kant does--that it produces terror and then through rationality and our ability to comprehend things we resolve that terror. For me, the sublime and the landscape are really about longing. The landscape seems to offer the chance of filling something, satisfying some longing, but it never really does, at least not fully. You are mortal, and it's not. It doesn't care about you.

Did you find any answers in philosophy?

I liked the English writers of the Augustan age and the later 18th century, which I'm embarrassed to admit because they are so deeply implicated in the arrogance of that society and its imperialism. Hume—the clarity of the mind he brings to every subject. And Kant, because of its complexity and ferocious determination. I wrote a senior thesis on Kant and Rousseau and their models for education. I always felt more sympathy for, but then fell in and out of love, with Rousseau.

Why?

The unwillingness to take responsibility for the radicality of his ideas and their practical political consequences. He centers his educational ideal on something that is very Deep Springs--how to bring students to highly structured epiphanies that would blast entire structures of ideas into their heads at one moment. But in Emile you realize how contrived these epiphanies are--it's theater, you set the stage, pick the moment, get the lighting right and then deliver it. I don't think this is actually how we learn. For a musician, the work of learning is so repetitive and incremental. If you don't do that, there is no "Inner Game of Tennis thing" where you can suddenly let go of your insecurities and just go with

Illustration by Annie Kelley DS20

the flow. If you haven't spent the five weeks learning the notes, those ephanies are never going to happen. That pain, the misery of the work, is part of what I'm trying to write about in the book.

Is that why you didn't become a musician?

There are lots of things that we think, "If I put in the time, then I could probably do that." And you have to decide if you want to do that: Is this a skill I need to be happy or productive? Growing up, in part, is learning how not to make those unnecessary investments. Someone else can do it, and I can take great pleasure in someone else doing something well. There were some painful times at Deep Springs because I was still in love with music. But while I was there and in the year or two after at Yale, I realized there are other people who get such a high rate of return on their practice and effort that it's better that they make the music at a professional level. So then what role does it play in your life?

Is the role it plays being a critic of it rather than a practitioner of it?

No, that was just to make a living. I was always doing music on the side and then trying to reconcile those efforts and my attachment to them with the emotional distance necessary to be a critic. And I haven't ever really quite resolved those things. I wrote about music from 1989 to 1997 and then mostly got out of it and haven't really been drawn back. I can write about art because I'm not in the art world and I don't sense the tension between participating and being critical.

Is writing a skill or a technology or something else?

Deeva Gupta DS19 feeding the bulls (photo courtesy of visiting professor Margiana Peterson-Rockney)

It satisfies the unresolved thing for me about music which is basically about connection or communication: the feeling that you've conveyed something from your head to someone else's head. Writing comes more easily for me. I don't want to presume to be a literary figure; I am a journalist and I like that format. But I was happy to have some time to write at greater length and spend more time with one subject, and I think at the end I feel proud of the book and feel a greater sense of accomplishment with it.

If you were a philosopher would you have embraced the analytical style, where everything needs to be only three pages long and every sentence three words long, the opposite of Kant?

My sense from communicating with those still in philosophy is that it has once again become more narrative and discursive. If you stay in a field long enough eventually your generation gets to set the parameters. But I feel fairly detached from philosophy at this point. I'll pull the old books off the shelf from time and time and think, yes, I could still be in that world, but my mind doesn't really work that way now. At the same time, I don't think I could have written the book without my background in philosophy.

Are you saying that a sentence means more than its content? If so, what?

Simply adding more stuff into a sentence won't make it more accurate or more true. But a nicely turned sentence can carry a lot of weight, a lot of detail and nuance. Like most college kids, I bought and read Strunk and White, and learned all those lessons about stripping out unnecessary verbiage. And I absolutely agree with Orwell and his warning about how the ten-dollar words, shop-worn cliches and little obfuscatory turns of phrase can be used to hide ideology, like little squirts of cuttlefish ink. But I'm allergic to a lot of Strunk and White at this point, and I think too many writers are cowed by blanket statements about good writing, like, never use adverbs. I love adverbs, not everywhere, but when they refine a thought, why not use them? I also love phrases that qualify and refine ideas or introduce subjects with a bit of shading or light. Like your son, perhaps, I love being read to aloud, and even if I quibbled with every fact and every claim the author makes, the phrasing and rhythms of Macaulay's History of England are pretty thrilling.

Who is your audience for Counterpoint, apart from my son?

Most books about music don't do a good job conveying what it's like to practice, to live with music, to have it running around in your head night and day. Musicians are good at lots of things, but when I've interviewed them, I have never been able to get them to talk about that, the inner life of always being obsessed with this abstract thing in your head. Perhaps that's because the work is precognitive on some level. Maybe because I'd studied philosophy, I was privileged to be able to write about these things in ways that others could not. So the book is for people who love music but maybe don't engage with it on a phenomenological level.

And can you talk about your Pulitzer? Deep Springs is sometimes, most times, still skeptical of anything that sounds like a credential, but congratulations to you.

The prize is in the category of criticism and was awarded for a body of ten pieces selected by the newspaper over the course of a year. I had no idea that they submitted them, and I was surprised when I won. My editors chose the pieces they liked, and they obviously had a better sense of what the judges would like.

How does it feel?

I was very happy about it, of course. And it helps to have won. The word institutional is key, here. It's an asset in institutional hierarchies. It lets you negotiate a bit better for doing the things you want to do. There were times before the prize when I might have backed down. It's not that I've become more stubborn, but I have more resolve to press those questions within the system. Your institutional status goes up within the minds of institutional thinkers, and those are often people with whom you are arguing. You want the institution to be a place where you are able to do things that are meaningful to you.

I've been trying to temper native Deep Springs iconoclasm with a willingness to be more strategic as our students leave the Valley, in part because alums tell me they wish they'd said "yes" to doing more conventional and even careerist things earlier than they did. Is that bad advice?

It is one of the charming eccentricities of the institution that is Deep Springs. In the years following Deep Springs, I did not apply for things or put myself out for things that might have been helpful. I decided I didn't want to go to grad school, mainly based on my impatience with the process and academia at the time. If I had been a little more tolerant of conventional academic paths, it would have given me more freedom, rather than being perversely iconoclastic at every step. One of the assets of the place is its truculent contempt for convention. But most people from Deep Springs are going to have to make their way in institutions that can help or hinder them. Even the smallest non-profits and most highly regarded NGOs have rules and you have to learn to work within them. Instead, I came out of Yale and went straight to NY and lived a hardscrabble life for years, making money in $200 increments. I really value that time. But only when that period of my life was over did I take stock of the enormous bandwidth it took to be constantly piecing together a living—bandwidth that could be used for other things. After almost a decade of freelancing, I moved to Detroit, then left that job, and later ended up at the Washington Post. So I worked both in and out of institutions--and I can't say one is better nor can I say one is superior. I enjoy the freedom I have at the Post because I can mostly control my time, pursue the things that interest me, and don't have to worry constantly about sending the next pitch letter.

What's next?

This interview is timely because I am working on another memoir that touches on my time at Deep Springs. It isn't centered, like Counterpoint, on a specific piece of art, but recalls the years between high school and New York, including the time at Deep Springs, through the prism of about a dozen different art works, or forms of art, things that have structured my life. The chapter I've been working on most recently is based on the Annunciation as a trope within Christian painting. It's something I've wanted to write for a long time, but only after the school went coed could I really write it. A lot of it has to do with being a gay kid at Deep Springs and thus it touches on what could have been seen as a vulnerability of the institution.

If Deep Springs Valley had a leitmotif, what would it be? Which musician and which piece?

Anyone who was there while I was a student knows the answer to this: Chopin's Ballade in g minor. I played the piece incessantly, so much that I could hear doors slamming all down the main building hallway everytime I started to practice. I had heard Horowitz play it on the radio, and taped the performance, and fell in love with every detail of his interpretation, which I wanted to reproduce so exactly that I even interpolated in the wrong notes. There were professors there, the Newtowns, who were both very musical, and they were very kind, too, and at one point one of them suggested that I try something new, maybe some Bach. But I was in a romantic frame of mind, and couldn't get enough Chopin. Years later, when I started learning Bach seriously, I thought back to how little love for him I had as a 19-year-old. I wanted Chopin, and Liszt and Scriabin. I think I'm lucky, in some ways, that I've tended to add new things to my own pantheon without having to evict too many of the long-term residents. Horowitz playing Chopin isn't my ideal any more, but I still love to hear it. And Bach is much more important to me than Chopin, but I haven't abandoned Chopin by any means. The opening of the Ballad I was playing while at Deep Springs is a rising line played in octaves, and that leitmotif is actually the musically parallel for the Annunciation that I am trying to write about now.

We appreciate your time, your insight, your book, and for your ongoing reflection on how time at Deep Springs has shaped you. Many thanks to you. Counterpoint can be found at Norton or on Amazon.

An Interview With
Vernon DS57 & Dorothy Penner
By Sean Coomey DS19

Vernon Penner: Vernon DuBois Penner Jr. (born October 20, 1939) is a retired United States diplomat. He served as Ambassador to Cape Verde (1986–1990), as well as tours in Frankfurt, Warsaw, Oporto, Zurich, and Kobe-Osaka. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, he was Director of the Visa Office in the State Department in Washington in 1983. Vern currently lives in Annapolis, MD, is married to the former Dorothy Anne Skripak (who was coach of the National Tennis Team of Cabo Verde) and has two grown children.

Sean: Hello Vernon and Dorothy. Thank you both for agreeing to speak with me. Why don't we start with an easy question, can you walk me through a day in the life of a foreign service officer?

Vernon: Whatever I did every day depended on whether I was a junior or mid or senior officer. As a visa officer, I issued visas or interviewed people for immigrant or visitor visas. If I was a protection and welfare officer, I was checking on how many Americans were in jail and how they were doing. If I was a political officer, I was probably reading the daily newspaper to see what was going on in the city. If I was an economic officer, I was watching the stock market. Frankfurt, for example, was a huge administrative post in Eastern Europe because, at that time, there was the wall. It was divided. The wall was just going up, as a matter of fact.

Dorothy: The Berlin Wall, that is. It was already finished when we go there. They were building a second wall because people were escaping, remember?

Vernon: Yes. Dorothy has a more accurate memory for some of these things than I do.

Sean: And what was it like to be an ambassador?

Vernon: There's no doubt that being an ambassador, especially before the digital world had arrived, was different. I was looking at the daily traffic coming in from Washington via telegram, both what was going on in Washington and considering what I should be doing in Cape Verde, this little archipelago, set about five-hundred miles West of the African mainland, in the Atlantic, with ten islands, nine of which are inhabited. When I did my work, I had a list of instructions from the Cape Verdian desk officer at the Foreign Ministry that the State Department had written. I would try to follow the instructions, but because it was not the digital age a lot of what I did was my own initiative.

Dorothy: Let me just add, you also had an embassy to run, not just all this political work with the whole country. You were running your own staff. When you were a political officer, in Porto, Portugal, for instance.

Vernon: My wife brings up a good point. I was the American consul in Porto, Portugal and in Salzburg, Austria. Porto was a much more sexy place at that moment because it was going through a revolution. Everybody loves a revolution.

Dorothy: It wasn't sexy for me but it might have been sexy for him.

Vernon: In Porto, I had a very political position. Which was to report what was going on with the revolution—it was one of the last revolutions in Europe, so called the "Carnation Revolution", where they threw out the Salazar regime which had been there since 1929. It was, actually, in Porto that I was tear gassed for the first time. The government was trying to get hold of a leftist stronghold. They went marching and the tear gas came out and my driver said to me, "Grab your handkerchief and urinate on it and put it over your face. This will stop the effects of the tear gas." Thing is, there was so much going on that I couldn't pee right then. I said, "This is the American consul being seen taking a leak in public, which doesn't look so good either." Anyway, we did a lot of reporting that indicated that while it seemed like the communists were running the country, this was a country with a democratic future.

Vernon: This is all to say that every post was different and that every post determined what you did.
Dorothy: We traveled around a lot. In the space of three years, we had one year in Salzburg, Austria, then one year in Princeton, New Jersey. Vernon was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson School. Then we went to Frankfurt, Germany for our second tour. So we moved three times in less than three years. We were never bored.

Sean: Can you draw any parallels between your time in at Deep Springs and your time in foreign service?

Vernon and the horse he trained called SOS (or son of SOB)

Three classes in front of the Main Building in 1958. Vernon is in the front, farthest to the left

Vernon: There are a lot of similarities. You're living in an isolated community. At Deep Springs we were living by the Nunnian rules of behaviour: no drinking, no smoking, no visitors, all of that. You live by the same kinds of protocols as a diplomat. You can't make a mess of yourself and you're always under the looking glass. I would also say that Deep Springs gave me a certain sense of self-reliance in what I was doing. You were asked to do something that you'd never done before and you just did it, and you knew that if you didn't do it then it wouldn't get done.

Dorothy: But when Vernon attended Deep Springs it was a three year program.

Vernon: I was a three year guy. It was also a time of political unrest at Deep Springs, the so called Fort administration, where we had a clear right-wing guy of the John Birch variety. There was a mini rebellion and we lost most of the students: I ended up with only two in my class, my final year, because the rest dropped out. It was awkward for me because I was trying to work my way through college, like my father did, and so I was stuck monetarily and the scholarship at Deep Springs really helped. I ended up transferring to a small liberal arts college on the east coast, where I met my wife, thank God. Anyways, as a diplomat I also had the same kind of isolated community as Deep Springs. You're swept up in the embassy and the rules and what's going on and how you act. Certainly Deep Springs gave me self-reliance.

Sean: Great. Is there a tension for you between service to humanity and service to your country?

Vernon: That's a fantastic question. Yes, there is a tension for me. I went to Vietnam very late in the war. I went to Vietnam not because I was a Vietnamese specialist but, you wouldn't believe it, because I spoke Polish. They had a peacekeeping force composed of four-hundred Polish troops, and four-hundred each of Hungarians, Indonesians, and Canadians. This was the force that Kissinger put in when he got Nixon out of Vietnam. Anyway, when I first got to Vietnam, the war was still going on but I knew right away that the war was lost. Why were we trying? That was humiliating because I knew we were trying to make something happen when we knew we weren't going to win. I see a comparison with Afghanistan today, after twenty years. You might ask yourself, "Hey, we've invested billions of dollars and lost thousands of troops and now we're going to go home?" I'm sure there were people writing reports saying, "This isn't something that we're going to win. This is something that the Afghans are going to have to do for themselves." It was the same with the Vietnamese.

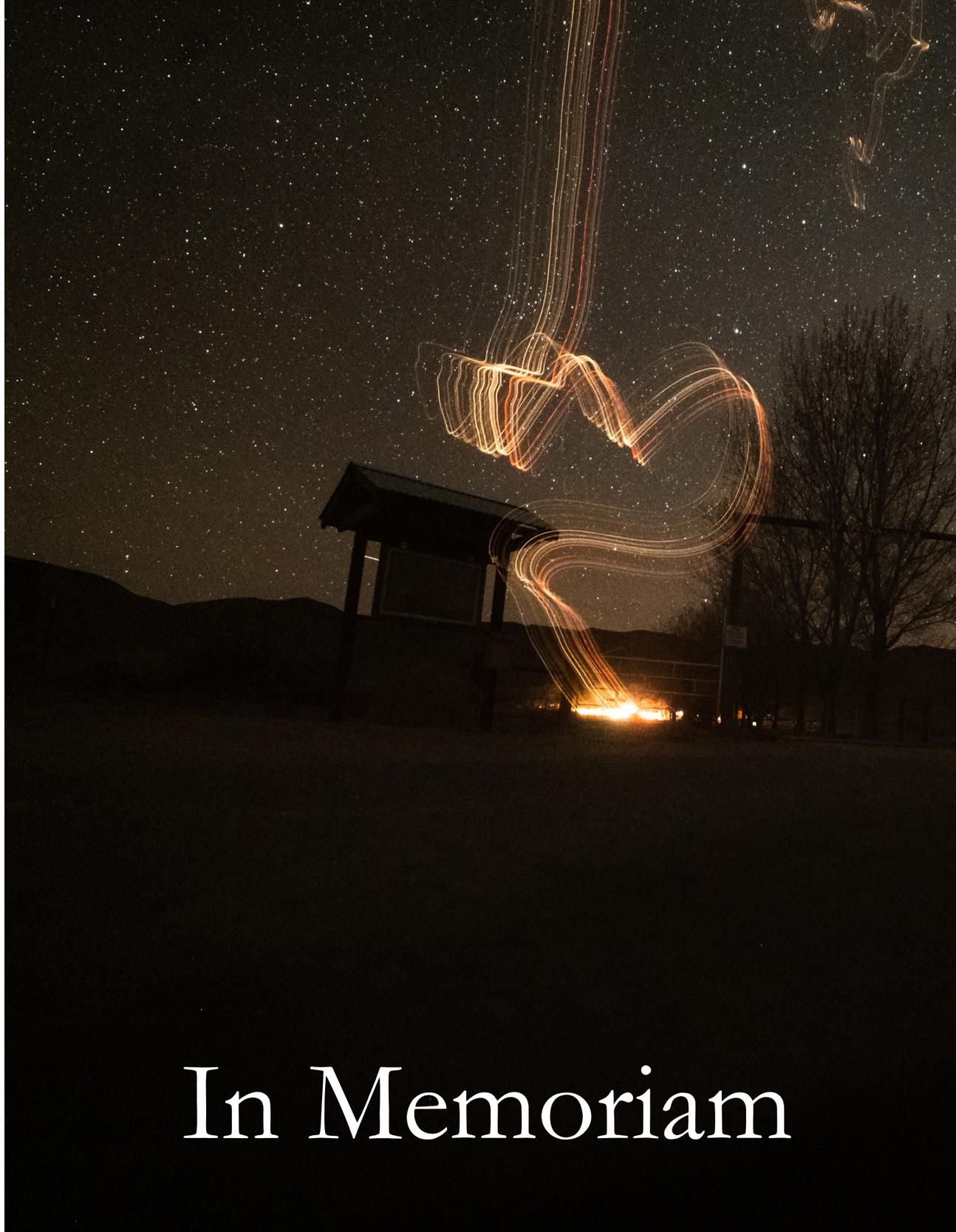
Sean: What was your most difficult post?

Vernon: For us, I think, Warsaw was very difficult because of the surveillance by the secret service in Poland. We didn't get any training on how to handle surveillance before we arrived. If you invited people to your house, they wanted to make sure that they knew who was there. And that's when I started doing stupid things like going to a public phone-booth, because our wires were tapped, to make a few extra phone calls. That would drive them crazy. So that they would end up watching the house, hiding in the shrubbery, and photographing everything.

Vernon: I also think it's worth considering the work that Dorothy did in Cape Verde as a potential model for a life of service. She was a physical education teacher, which was an occupation that could fit in almost anywhere. I feel greatly satisfied that there was at least one post where people in the country knew her as well as they knew me. In Cape Verde she taught one of her specialties, which is tennis. She was the coach of the men's national tennis team.

Dorothy: I actually started coaching more for me, because I enjoyed it, but soon it was very gratifying to hear things like, "Thanks coach. The tennis team was a wonderful thing." What gave me even more satisfaction was that I started a tennis class for women, who usually just stood on the side of the court, even though they wanted to play. So I set up a class and it was the first time that anyone had ever done that.

Illustration by Annie Kelley DS20



In Memoriam

Economist, Foreign Service Ambassador, Deep Springs Dean, Director, and Medalist

Ed Cronk DS36 (1918-2020)

By Brian Hill (Herbert Reich Chair of Natural Science)

Edwin Monroe Cronk, a distinguished member of the Deep Springs class of 1936 passed away on September 1, 2020, aged 102 years. His service to the country and humanity included being on the staff of the Supreme Commander for Asia and the Pacific (SCAP), where he was in charge of the food import program in Japan. In the estimation of David Cole, DS45, "Ed Cronk played a very important role, probably helped save hundreds of thousands of lives in postwar Japan, and more that I am not aware of. God bless him."

Ed came to Deep Springs as a student from Central High School, where he was class president of the June class of 1936 and won its Leadership and Service award. Even then, his "readiness to co-operate and his genial manner in everything he does, have made him admired and liked by everyone." He cited "commercial law, civics, and Shakespeare as his favorite subjects."

In a letter to MaryEd Hartnell, his daughter, Ed recollected that "everything about Deep Springs was a shock—the beautiful mountains, open desert, bright students, difficult academics, hard physical labor. The physical labor part was ok, but the academics were baffling. I was simply not prepared for it. But the professors, Dean Kimpton, and the other students were quite tolerant, and I gradually began to do better."

After Deep Springs, Ed went to Cornell University and majored in Economics (class of 1941). He married Dorothy Montgomery in 1943. During World War II, Ed served in the Air Force from 1942-1946 in the Pacific. After WWII, Ed was part of the SCAP. David recalls that "the program that he developed gradually morphed into the US PL480 program for supplying surplus food all around the world," and that Ed "was brought back to Washington to help design and manage that program."

Ed's own words add insight into the recovery of Japan, decimated after its defeat. He asks, "what would it take to put the Japanese back on their feet, so they could begin manufacturing, and exporting, and getting more or less self-supporting? Well, the Korean War eventually solved that problem, because Japan became the source of an enormous amount of material needed by our forces in Korea. Just the ordinary things, like cement, and barbed wire, and thousands of items."

Ed's recollections of the Foreign Service also provide insight. He was recruited into the Foreign Service as part of the early-1950s Wriston Program. In his words, when he arrived he "found a shortage, really, of talent and understanding about economic matters. And you can understand this, because before the Wriston Program—and before World War II—the Department didn't have a great deal of economic responsibility. And political, consular officers predominated—administrative people. A crackerjack economist was pretty hard to find."

Ed was the Economic Counselor at the US Embassy in Seoul in the latter part of the 1950s. He was very successful in reaching out to Korean officials and academics who were involved in formulating the country's economic policies. His tours of duty in the US Department of State Foreign Service after Korea included Germany and Australia, with a final assignment as Ambassador to the Republic of Singapore from 1972-1975.

After his retirement from government service, Ed accepted the position of Dean and Director of Deep Springs College, where he served with his signature dedication from 1976-1980. When he arrived he was immediately confronted with a series of major crises: an unstable faculty and staff situation, high attrition in the first-year class, a shrinking endowment, and the death of Pat Schrock, who had single-handedly been serving as executive secretary, bookkeeper, registrar, alumni relations officer, and newsletter editor. "More than once I wondered what I'd gotten into," he said retrospectively. Ed rose to the challenge, and expanded and professionalized the faculty, nearly eliminated student body attrition, strengthened relations with The Telluride Association, and improved the financial situation and the physical plant.

In his words, "Deep Springs is, in many respects, like an extended family. Most of us develop an affectionate relationship with the institution and the people who shared with us the experience of living, working, and studying here. Names of people associated with the founder, and others who preceded us, became familiar and are like cousins or distant uncles whom we may not have met that are, nonetheless, part of the Deep Springs family. These relationships are for me, and I think for most of us, one of the very special things about the college." Upon Ed's departure the Spring 1980 newsletter concludes that "Aristotle suggested that the way to assess a leader was to ask if he left the polis better than he found it. By this measure, [Ed and Dorothy Cronk] will long be remembered for their success."

After serving as Director, he then served as a Trustee of the College including serving as Chair of the Board for 3 years. He also was in charge of a department at Goodwill. For his lifelong service to humanity he received the rarely awarded Deep Springs Medal.

He and his wife Dorothy called Washington, DC, home for many years until moving into a retirement community in Frederick, Maryland. Ed was preceded in death in 2008 by Dorothy, after 66 years of marriage, and is survived by 3 children (MaryEd, James, and Nan), 8 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren. Ed lived a long and fulfilling life; he worked hard and played hard, laughed easily, was a friend to everyone and a terrific father. Few can dream of, let alone attain, the ideals of service set out by L.L. Nunn and achieved by Ed Cronk. RIP.

Ed at Deep Springs ca. 1937 (from the files of MaryEd Hartnell)

Ed Working the Griddle, ca. 1937 (from the files of MaryEd Hartnell)

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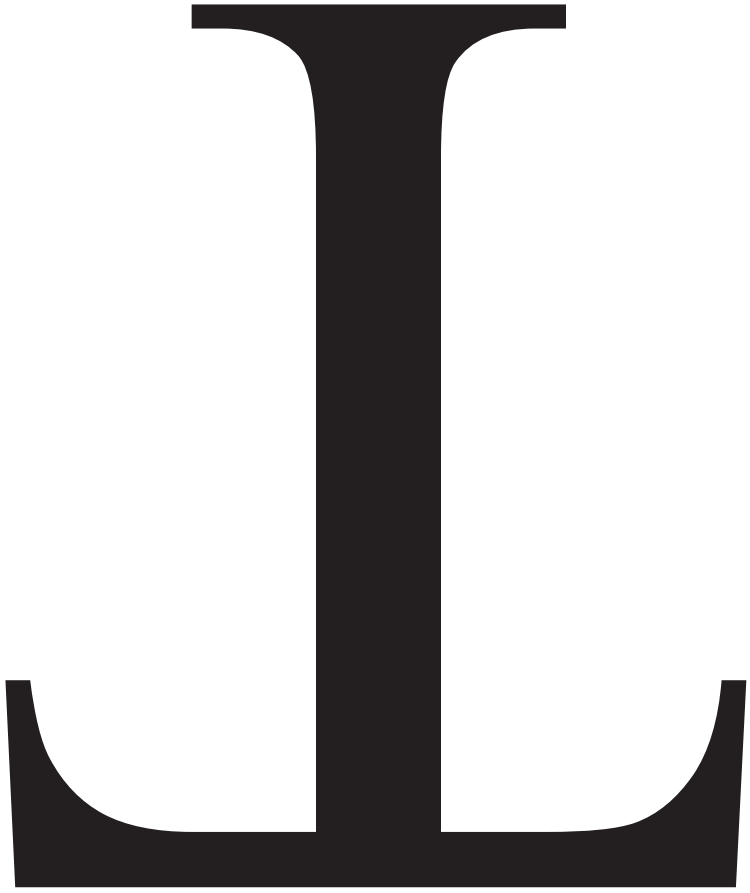

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Special Thanks to all who agreed to be interviewed and to Tashroom Ahsan DS20 for the photos of the night sky above Deep Springs.

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