

This February, 1982, issue of Horizons is not for sale in Persia, Ceylon, Siam, or Seventh Fandom. It is volume 43, number 2, FAPA number 163, and whole number 168. Harry Warner, Jr., 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland, 21740, U. S. A., does the typing and the Coulsons do the rest.

### In the Beginning

The Fantasy Amateur: I hope November polling catches on, although it's regrettable that we were forced to rough it this year without the assistance of Peggy Rae's annual index. I still feel there are too many categories each year, perhaps tending to make the task of voting seem imposing enough to keep down participation among the more faint-hearted FAPAns. Typographic Oceans: Every time I read about the terrifying motor vehicle breakdowns which afflict most fans, I wonder why they don't adopt my recently discovered cure for mechanical troubles. I was encountering flat tires or starter failure or some such trouble several times annually. Two years ago, I decided I shouldn't risk any longer another problem which might occur at a time and place which would create danger to myself. So I joined the Auto Club, in order to be able to get help anywhere. From that day to this one, I haven't had any difficulty with the car unless you count the progressive decay of my sparkplugs and their eventual decease, a situation which I allowed to build up knowingly so I wouldn't waste even the last feeble spark during the current need for energy conservation. ' ' Old age is helpful in a few minor respects. For instance, I needn't spend all that extra money on the higher priced audiophile records. My hearing has deteriorated far enough to make the difference between the and standard records too insignificant to bother about, as far as my perception of the sound goes. Loc Dave Fugge: I won't repeat the comment of a famous actor who attended a show in which all the great actors of the day including him were parodied by comedians. He ventured the opinion that he could have done a more realistic job himself. But I do claim the belief that I would have spelled merento correctly. Floc ci&: I hope something comes of this proposal to create a no-frills worldcon. But worldcons are like many other national institutions: once they overgrow, it's almost impossible to cut them back to size and still survive. Newspapers, for instance: they're in the absurd condition today of costing less per copy than the publisher pays for the paper required to print that copy. The ideal modern daily newspaper would contain four or six pages of news, nothing else, priced at whatever figure would provide an attractive profit for the owners. But people are too accustomed to monster newspapers which are sixty per cent advertising, thirty per cent non-news features, five per cent unnewsy news, and five per cent actual news. The public would ignore the very same kind of four-pagers that were the size of most of the nation's newspapers for many decades in the 19th century. Big cities have grown too big: travel time becomes impossible, criminals accumulate in unmanageable quantities, no government department can cope with the complaints from hundreds of thousands of residents, but when people begin moving out of a big city, as they've been doing for many years in many metropolitan areas, the difficulties grow more acute for those left behind, not better. The principal difficulty with a back-to-basics worldcon, I suspect, would be the budgeting and planning problems. What sort of relations could a worldcon committee have with the host hotel if



nobody had any idea how many persons would show up for the first worldcon of the new type? Should the committee for the worldcon in the following year plan for an old style or new style event? What happens if a thousand Star Trek fans show up despite the announcements of no fringe programming or movies? ' ' Meanwhile, I think Mike should think about applying the same philosophy to fanzine publishing. I enjoyed tremendously the sensational issue of Energumen which cost him so much time and money and labor. But I'd much rather see a smaller genzine published several times a year by Mike with fewer pictures and imperfect reproduction than one superzine every five years. Number Thirteen: I've always thought "feud" ought to be considered a sacred fannish word, to be applied only to the most frightening and violent extended fights between fans. A simple argument in an apa or an insulting remark can be the start of a feud, not a feud unless the trouble grows to awesome proportions. It's something like the misuse of "hoax" in fandom to apply to several instances in which this or that fan wrote a letter or published a fanzine which contained a big lie. Lies aren't hoaxes until they're as extensive and laborious as the Joan Carr affair. Another Remarkable Fanzine: There's only one difficulty with this business of communicating only to the select few with the intelligence to comprehend the artist's hidden meanings. It spawns entirely too many untalented people who gain a reputation for genius because they signify nothing at such length that the arty-farty people assume there must be something tremendous implied by the art work. "Vagueness is not to be mistaken for suggestion," Joseph Jefferson wrote almost a century ago. He was thinking about acting, not writing, but his epigram is still valid as Brandon and Spinrad both have proved to the un hypnotized consumers. Out of the Ded Forest: Easter is supposed to commemorate the resurrection of Christ, not his death which is marked by Good Friday. The mobility of those two holidays in the modern calendar is supposed to be a legacy of when they were scheduled to permit pilgrims to religious shrines to travel after dark by the light of the moon. I've already suggested in a newspaper column that Christmas will some day be switched to a date in summer north of the Equator, so merchants won't lose any holiday shopping business to blizzards and unduly cold weather, as sometimes happens just before December 25. The United States has changed the holiday commemorating the birth of George Washington for similar reasons. ' ' Most street numbering systems in United States cities are based on two principal intersecting streets as a starting point. The first block of any street intersecting with those two streets has buildings numbered 1 to 100 in the block closest to the key street, and the next block gets buildings number 101 to 200 and so on. In the case of streets that don't intersect with the main ones, numbers are assigned as if they extended that far. If the city is big enough to sprawl over a radius of three or four miles, from its center, a new subdivision in a suburb might have streets which begin nowhere and end nowhere, stretching only two or three blocks, but they'll get house numbers in the thousands due to their distance from the starting point of the numbering system. This is a good system in some ways. It helps a person to figure out how far out an unfamiliar address may be if he's looking through listings of houses for rent. If you're driving in an unfamiliar city and want to get to the business section, you drive in whatever direction the house numbers grow smaller and eventually you'll get there. Unfortunately, the system isn't adopted everywhere. Older parts of a city may retain house



numbers bestowed on some other system before this method went into use. There are problems in some suburban developments where streets writhe and twist in all directions instead of running straight. In Manhattan, the borough of New York City which attracts most tourists, east-west streets are numbered systematically but north-west streets have buildings numbered irrationally, requiring application of logarithms to figure out which intersection a number on Fifth Avenue or Broadway is near. To make the situation worse, in some entirely rural areas, postal authorities and planners have begun assigning numbers to persons on rural free delivery routes that start at some arbitrary high figure like 20,000 and are bestowed without exact consideration for distance. And you can't be sure a city is a big one from the fact that someone's address in it is 6,456 Main Avenue because it may be a suburb of a neighboring metropolitan area which has its own post office and a different name. ' ' I don't remember a separate secretary and treasurer in FAPA's past. The name was probably chosen for the office because it's descriptive of the duties involved. It's more convenient to combine the two offices in one when an organization functions through the mails. The Books in My Life: I meant to follow John's instructions and list my most recent acquisitions. But just recently I took the latest stack from quarantine in the car to the spare bedroom, they promptly immersed in the jumble in which they found themselves, and now nobody could possibly determine which is which. The quarantine results from the fact that I acquire most books in second-hand condition. I leave them in the car a few weeks so the light will kill the silverfish, the carbon monoxide from my rickety auto body will dispose of any larger insects that might lurk behind a spine, and there will be time for any eggs or larvae to hatch out. So far, this system has kept the spare bedrooms free from insect problems. ' ' I sort of expected a personal purge like the one John encountered, both last year and this year, at the office where several employees have been disposed of. I doubt if I would have fought back as John did. I can't be sure, but I suspect that my survival on the payroll up to now means I'll be retained until I reach minimum retirement age at the end of this year, unless I blow up to the wrong person or begin misbehaving in some other way. Fantasy Commentator: These revelations about Robert Duncan Milne are fascinating and surprising. One thing should have been explained fully: was this Argonaut a purely local circulation publication, or did it sell copies over a wide area? I suppose there must be thousands of fantasy and science fiction stories buried away in old files of newspapers published in the 19th century all over the United States. Those I'm familiar with, the ones published in this area, frequently ran fiction regularly. Hagerstown area papers seem to have lifted their fiction from other publications but bigger newspapers must have bought a lot of it from local writers. ' ' The fog index should have one more factor, the number of lines in the average paragraph. I can't imagine why it is but the average reader seems unable to cope with long paragraphs. ' ' If Steve Fabian's statistics are correct, the use of cheap to refer to pulp magazines as in Cheap Thrills seems less valid than ever. (Has anyone studied cover prices from the pulp era? I believe the average pulp cost more than the average slick during the 1920s and '30s.) But I don't think the per word rate for fiction has risen as rapidly as inflation has pushed up most other forms of compensation for labor. ' ' I suspected that the Cavestown which was mentioned in a previous installment of the White biography was



actually Cavetown, a small town eight or ten miles from Hagerstown. So I did some snooping and sure enough, I found The Willows where White spent so many summers. It's still known by that name and the present owner is aware of the author's association with his home, once met him, and has a poem by White about his memories of the house hanging framed on a wall. 'I believe the old fondness of newspapermen for alcoholic beverages has mitigated somewhat with the passing of years. When I went to work for the local newspapers almost four decades ago, several staff members were roaring drunks on a regular basis on the job and others exhibited less conspicuous clues to having had too much on a working day. I see little of this among the younger generation of reporters today and I hear fewer horror stories about newspapermen going to the dogs via the bottle. It could result from conversion to other forms of drugs and their use on days off. Fanzine Fanatique: It's curious how two different intentions produce similar results. Keith complains about Star Trek fanzines with too high prices. From what I know of that subfandom, those zines are produced with the intention of acquiring the largest possible circulations. Yet there are a few publishers in mainstream fanzine fandom who ask an exaggerated price for a small fanzine for the sole purpose of keeping down circulation, overcharging so most copies will go to fans the editor wants to have his publication rather than the unknowns who are most apt to obtain fanzines by paying for them. Hawai'i: A while back a few fans toyed with the concept that all fans are related to one another through a couple of ancestors quite a few generations back. There have been quite a few instances of people encountering one another in fandom only to discover a distant cousinship or some non-blood ties. Staggerwing: In theory I think a bimonthly apa would be a good one, because of quicker response via mailing comments and less inclination to put off the start of work on a fanzine for the next mailing than when the mailings emerge only quarterly. But six FAPA mailings per year would mean next to no time between receipt of a bundle and the deadline for publishing something for the next mailing, if mailings continued to go out two or three weeks late. It's hard enough now for me to read through a mailing and cut stencils in time to give the Coulsons a fair amount of leeway on their production work. 'Cause and effect might work both ways when so many persons die within a year of retirement. Retirement might have a bad effect on many employees' health. On the other hand, lots of people decide to retire because their health has been deteriorating badly enough to make it hard to hold the job any longer. 'The local newspapers' files were microfilmed about a quarter-century ago. I don't notice any serious deterioration in the condition of the oldest microfilms. Some have suffered tears that might result more from misuse than from changes in their physical condition. About fifteen years ago, the firm that does the microfilming started to use a thinner film which seems more flexible and less readily damaged than the older ones did. Since new copies can be ordered at any time from the original microfilms, deterioration wouldn't seem to be a serious problem. The photographic image itself doesn't seem to change at all and the life expectancy of any black and white film's image is extremely long, compared to the few years after which any color film or print other than Kodachrome will fade or change hue. Even Kodachrome lives only a few decades. Mad Scientist's Digest: I don't know how long it would take me to produce a genzine nowadays. Normally I get the Horizons stencils cut over a period of five or six evenings and it takes an-



other evening or two to glance over them and correct any mistake which is bad enough to distort meaning. I have great difficulty reading typed stencils with this ailing pair of eyes and I don't think I could do a good proofreading job nowadays even if I felt like it. I could type more stencils in an evening in the sense that I don't tire of the brainwork involved. But after a couple hours at the typewriter, my back starts aching and normally only four or five stencils emerge from that time period. Naturally, a gazette would require more time because I wouldn't do everything on stencil as a first draft, the barbarian practice which I inflict on the Horizons stencils. " I had the same hospital experience before my operation eleven years ago, a memory blank between being in my room and waking after the surgeon had done his work. I don't know if something they gave me in my room knocked me out before they took me to the operating room or if my memory decided to censor the anesthesia process. Philosophical Gas: United States politicians used to be as informal as John Bangsund found Sir John Gorton. Within my lifetime, the wife of a United States President used to get on a bus to ride to a private school about 15 miles from Hagerstown where their son was studying. A bit earlier in this century, a former Hagerstown newspaper editor who was then employed by the Baltimore Sun paid a visit to another President in the White House, talked for a long time, and wrote nothing about his visit except an editorial on one of the matters they discussed. " Rubik's Cube has joined the impressive list of modern fads which I haven't experienced. It's right up there with eating at McDonald's, attending a drive-in movie, and owning a calculator. " John's list of favorite composers seems influenced by a preference for instrumental over vocal music. I can't account otherwise for the omission of people like Wolf and Verdi, or the sixth-rater category given to Palestrina, Faure, and one or two others best known for composing for the voice. John has enough respectable company in his admiration for Schoenberg to make me realize that his music must be better than it sounds. Cognate: I thought only baseball players tore their rotator cuffs. I'm relieved to learn that Rosemary seems to be getting well, because it is a mishap that usually means the end of a pitcher's career. " I enjoyed the little essays by the Mensa members, although it's obvious that atmospheric intelligence doesn't guarantee skill in writing. Stawgn: I don't think I could endure a con if I shared my room with someone else. No matter how compatible the roommate might be, I get too tired of fans two or three times each day during a con weekend and I feel the imperative necessity to get away from all of them for a halfhour in my room in order to recharge endurance batteries or something. Moonshine: Len's word picture of Al Ashley is particularly interesting in this installment of the memoirs. Al seems neatly poised in characteristics in Len's description between the near-superman impression he gave to one who knew him only by his fanatic in the Battle Creek era, and the mongoloid bungler image which Burbee and Laney fixed up for him. I wonder if his incessant talking could have been a result of his taxi-driving occupation. Taxi drivers used to share with barbers the reputation of being the most obsessive talkers around the middle of this century. It's also nice to see kind words for Walter J. Daugherty and his projects. Gypsy: The con trip report was in the old tradition and it was welcome for that reason, even if it was late. I wish it had been longer. Vainomoinen: Did any of the seers who used to be written up in tabloids for their predictions of the future, twenty years or so ago, foresee a situa-



tion by 1981 which would cause every four-letter word to become acceptable except "girl"? ' ' Jitterbugs thrived during the swing era in popular music. They apparently got their name because of the frantic gyrations they indulged in when they danced to the liveliest bands of the day. I seem to remember the jitterbug term being applied to the more extraverted youngsters of the time no matter what they happened to be doing, not just to them when they danced. Horizons: Apologies are in order for the second consecutive issue with a lame m on this typewriter. I intended to get it repaired and kept putting off the task, mainly because this typewriter is so heavy and it's normally such a long walk between the nearest available parking space and the Underwood agency in Hagerstown. ' ' After writing the Dickens article an explanation for his "magic reel" occurred to me. He might have been thinking of the artists who painted a long series of illustrations on some substance which was sewed together to permit wrapping around a pole at either end and was displayed by unrolling one end while the other was being rolled up, to impart an illusion of movement for illustrations to a travel talk or something of that sort. The Rambling Fap: The listing of FAPA officials since 1949 is quite educational. I hadn't realized, for instance, it's been a dozen straight years of a west coast official editor. My appearance under the three other office headings reminds me how I've long thought I should become official editor sometime. I've put the holders of that office to so much work that it's only fair I should assume the labors for a while, and it's one of the few FAPA activities I haven't experienced over the years (being on the waiting list is the only other one I've missed, I believe). But I'm reluctant to take the responsibility unless some day another FAPA member should live in Hagerstown or so close that help would be available in case something prevented me from getting out a mailing. There is the additional problem that the February mailing should go out when Hagerstown is most likely to be suffering from ice and snow, and parking near the post office in those conditions is usually a nightmare.

The Devil's Work: Somewhere on the attic is a novel written probably in the 1930s, Sugar in the Air, which I think would qualify as depicting a scientist realistically. But I can't remember the author's name. E. C. Large comes to mind in connection with the book but it's accompanied by a pulsating asterisk which warns me that it probably isn't right. Damballa: I hope it was a malevolent after-effect of his illness that caused Chuck to type that threat halfway down page 2. It's a dangerous utterance, the way things are going in the world and nation, particularly if federal authorities have access to FAPA mailings. ' ' If there's no such reptile as a swamp adder, the Oxford English Dictionary compilers must believe A. Conan Doyle rather than reality. The crittur is listed there with a reference to the Sherlock Holmes story. ' ' Here's a problem that I usually encounter at least once or twice in each FAPA mailing: an apparently incomplete FAPazine which may be that way in all copies or only in mine. My copy of Damballa lacks the splendid Hunt cover and I'd like to see it if it is missing only from my copy rather than from all copies. I have the same difficulty with Philosophical Gas this time: one side of one page is blank, John refers to having discarded one stencil, but my copy has nothing between pages 635 and 639, so I'm uncertain if all copies are like that. Synapse: It's a computer terminal, not a word processor, on which I'm supposed to space only once after a sentence. The one space has nothing to do with its electronics but with the printing industry convention that normally



leaves the same amount of space between two words, whether within a sentence or following a period. I don't know how the convention of double spacing began for typists. But I remember some oldtime fans who got scoldings for ignoring it in their fanzines. ' ' Isn't it irrational for Jack to find sixteen fallacies, non sequiturs, and errors in my opinion on how the universe began, then to ask me for an opinion on Russian domination? I know nothing about Russia but I think I have as much experience with the universe as the next person. In fact, I was tempted to point out in these comments that it was John Huston who was director of Treasure of the Sierra Madre. But if I'd been that rash, Jack would have cited three legal authorities, two schools of philosophy, and a long passage in Aristotle to back up his claim that Walter Huston was director. I often wish I had an education. Deep Structure: John Keel isn't anyone I remember in fandom during the 1940s. The Fanzine Index fails to list anything called The Lunarite. Maybe he was one of the Smaverites who had little or no contact with the fandom I was in, or maybe he was one of those people who exaggerate their past to gain the pioneer reputation. ' ' If people who wear hats are bad drivers, there should have been a major improvement in the highway accident rate, the number of arrests on driving charges, and a lowering of insurance costs after the bare-headed trend swept the nation toward the middle of this century. I don't think statistics will show such changes. I wear a hat outdoors most of the time and I'll watch my driving record against the unhatted. The only real difference in the hat habit is the fact that some of us have the common sense to recognize that a hat keeps you cooler in hot weather and warmer in cold weather, in addition to protecting against the sun's glare. Loigeornost: I doubt if lying about the contents of FAPA mailings to postal authorities would be practical, even if it were morally acceptable. An official editor who presented postal workers with 65 large identical bundles, each marked as a manuscript, would be automatically suspected. ' ' Two Hugos for fanzines divided at an arbitrary point into big and small circulation publications would also cause trouble. How could the worldcon committee verify an editor's claim that his circulation averages 590 instead of 600 if 600 were the dividing point? Much easier to verify would be division into fanzines whose circulation is more than 50 per cent paid and those with less than 50 per cent paid circulation: most fanzines are quickly identifiable as those that are mainly given away or mainly sold and very few would be doubtful cases. Phantasy Press: I have been trying to remember details and can't, but I seem to recall someone long ago having met Percy Wilkinson and identifying him as real, not a Dale Hart penname. ' ' I like the paragraphs about old prozine letters. As I've lamented frequently in the past, the reader sections of the prozines are the most neglected area of fan history and there's an enormous wealth of information as well as amusement to be found in them. I had several reasons for skipping the matter in my fan history books (uncertainty about where to get the right to quote, inaccessibility of some prozines, and the already too thick manuscripts I was creating) but I should have covered the topic anyway. Yhos: Retired educators seem to have considerable difficulty assuming that new posture. A former high school teacher in Hagerstown enrolled this fall in a course in computers at the local junior college. He is 82 and thinks he might want to get into that field, so he's boning up on it. ' ' The "message from the stars" makes me realize how consistent I am in my stupidity. I have a vague notion it might symbolize everything from an atom's structure to a spiral nebula.



## The Worst of Martin

Here Today And...

...being a cumulative historical document covering our hero's past and more recent ramifications....

Modulate to a "Winkle" yawn.

What! 1945! Why the last time any agitation issued from me was during 1939. Today must be my Groundhog Day.

Those cobwebs? Well, there may be telling strands on my a-jail, but there ain't no gray threads on me--'ceptin' in my hair. But that's a saga to be related....

True! That is an unenviable stack of musty smelling unanswered mail. Made an estimate some months ago: 78 letters from 52 members. Tanned with age they are, and forever forgotten. Got away from me for a week once. The mounting stack fascinated me. Never tried to put a dent in it.

No! It's not gray. That's dust on the press. It's really painted green. I built the stand myself. It's thrown together with the craftsmanship of a cabinet maker. I lapped the joints and dives, screwed, tattooed and stewed it in varnish. Sturdy little thing. I do admit that during the past fiscal year (silent press days) there has been a decrease in the number of disturbances on the local seismograph.

Feel how smooth the finish.

See how sturdy?

Ah!--

Termites, no doubt.

Let's place the press on that bench and dash off a petit papier for Auld Lang Syne.

This is my type barrel. Type is kept in a barrel to facilitate distribution.

I've prosecuted the compilation of a format with disturbing irregularity before this: complete a page or two and then toss the entire mess out. The prose work comes easy during "spare" hours. Maybe I'd better mimeograph?

Admitted! For one who used to print like Hell to become Hell of a printer and mimeograph is truly retrogression. Ah! But then, after the die is cast, I have many and involved explanations....

It is written that the associations will substitute the word "Timeograph" for "Press" in their cognomens. Grim my grin: I shall grit my last two teeth and not contribute to this deplorable dusk.

### Colophon

being a spasmodic and vernal avocational embroidery of facts, dreams and aberrations of one Edgar Allan Martin: printed for him at the signe of the Lycanthropy Presse (who necessitates new rollers and such) and Crushed Wood Cuts, at 56 Newton St., Hartford, Conn., where the latch string was purged with formal invitations: and this edition could not be sans the Devil assistance of one wife, Mary Madeleine Suzanne LeFoll Favreau who approximates an eighteenth of a ton and a quarter-century, and shews cheering abilities as type distributor...and Janine--Janine spreads ink.

### Post Script

Ah! So true...type distributor...But then "Hello." Self introduction of the cause, the reason, the what-all. My fault that it has been so long since a contribution from said Edgar A.

S'been nice meeting you all, so long.--Madeleine.

(From the Spring, 1945, issue of Sayric)



## Catching Up with Today

I'm chronically behindhand on most of my activities. I haven't caught up with loc-writing for a couple of decades, I have tottering stacks of books and magazines unread in the spare bedrooms, I've been buying used records faster than I can get properly acquainted with them, I haven't watched any of the new season's television series, and I haven't learned yet to enjoy pizzas. So it isn't surprising that several acquisitions in 1981 were a bigger surprise to me than they are to the on-their-toes people who made their acquaintance right away.

Another problem is that I can still get starry-eyed over new creations of science which most people take lackadaisically. A prime example is how I've reacted to my new VCR. Both the mundanes within my orbit and fans seem to have accepted video recording equipment calmly as an inevitable development which should be ashamed of itself for not coming sooner. I'm naive enough to feel a massive outbreak of my sense of wonder which still hasn't subsided, several months after acquiring my first video cassette recorder.

It isn't as if it were an impulse purchase which startled me. I'd wanted a VCR for a long time and I kept putting off the decision to buy one for what seemed like good reasons: nobody could predict whether the VHS or Beta format will triumph, every audio magazine contained in its latest issue a news flash about an additional feature which VCRs would acquire in the next month or two, there were periodical reports that the television industry would find a way to prevent VCR users from taping programs off the air, litigation was in progress which could conceivably stop the sale of cassettes, and one firm was predicting a video disc system which would permit home recording in addition to playback. So I was torn between the common sense impulse to wait a while longer until the field settled down and the irretrievable loss of opportunity to tape things on television which might never again become available to me.

Eventually, late this summer, I came to my senses. I realized that I still wouldn't own an audio tape recorder if I'd waited until the industry settled on one speed and width of tape and reel type. Despite the danger that I might choose a VCR destined to be obsoleted within a few years, I reasoned that by then, I should have a good-sized collection of tapes and there would be plenty of other owners of my type of equipment with whom I could trade or purchase more tapes, just as the 78 rpm record has been dead in the commercial sense for three decades but still is readily available in secondhand sources and turntables revolving at that speed are still manufactured. So I started looking at VCRs in local stores. I was startled at the poor salesmanship I found in several establishments. At two stores, the clerk didn't even offer to demonstrate. One salesman seemed shocked when I suggested I might prefer a more expensive model than the one he was trying to sell me. At another place, the clerk put into the VCR a cassette which gave terribly inconsistent results, ranging from good to unwatchable. But finally I swung around to the decision that I preferred something in the VHS system. It is reportedly outselling the Beta machines by a fair margin, the way the tape is wrapped around its innards is somewhat less complicated which should mean less strain on the tape and fewer things to go wrong, and the cost of tape per hour of recording is slightly less. I finally came home with a Beta-type VCR despite all that reasoning. The thing that



inspired this perversity was my belief that the Beta machines seem to give virtually the same result at either speed. I foresaw myself taping everything on a VHS VCR at the fast speed for a better picture, resulting in more expense and fewer hours of program per cassette. Understand, this is my personal reaction which may be caused by my less than perfect vision or the idiosyncracies of the particular models I watched and I don't mean it as a recommendation for any other potential purchasers to go and do likewise.

It wasn't until I got the VCR home that the sense of wonder over it emerged in full force. One thing I still can't get used to is the simplicity of its operation. No meters to watch, no levels to set, no controls to adjust according to the type of tape in use, no A and B tracks to keep in mind, no paper leader to be careful you don't try to record on, no confusing jumble of many wires going into and out of a long row of jacks. Heaven help us, you don't even need to set the right speed for playback because the machinery automatically sets its own speed according to what is recorded. Even harder for me to accept is how much recording time is available from such a small hunk of tape. I look at a partly recorded cassette and the amount which is visible on the feed reel looks as if it'll run out in ten minutes or so, but it lasts for a couple of hours. I also marvel at the price structure for VCRs. They're admittedly expensive. But they cost perhaps two or three per cent of the price of a professional quality open reel video tape recorder meant for studio use. You don't get professional quality recordings on them, of course. But a good audio tape deck may cost twenty or thirty per cent of the price of professional-quality audio tape equipment.

Instead of following my usual policy of buying name brand equipment, I chose a Sears VCR. The results looked as good to me as the VCRs sold under their makers' names, the Sears models are made by Sanyo which is a reputable firm, and the chances of getting continuing service on a VCR in a remote outpost of civilization like Hagerstown are better than if I bought from an independent store which might go out of business next year. I surprised myself by getting the thing hooked up and operating properly the first time I tried with no need to call back for advice, and up to now I haven't had to use my three-year service warranty. The only trouble I've had with the VCR (except an indirect problem I'll tell about later on) has been to conquer my natural urge to tape everything I see listed in TV Guide. Up to now, I've managed to hold down my cassette purchases by taping mostly things which aren't sure to be repeated on the tube within my lifetime: a few favorite series which are now in syndication and may vanish completely in a year or two, plus anything which is blessed by the presence of two of my obsessions, Kim Darby and Julie Andrews. Curiously, I find myself not taping what I'd thought beforehand I'd surely want, the Metropolitan Opera telecasts. I decided the superimposed lettering with translations of the things being sung are too distracting. My biggest coup so far, I suppose, has been six or seven of the feature-length Laurel & Hardy films, which by good fortune a Washington channel began running weekly as soon as I bought the VCR. They were aired at a time when I wasn't home so I have them complete with commercials. But an unsung virtue of the VCR is the way its automatic volume control mechanism reduces the sound of the commercials to that of the non-commercial programming.

My guilt complex, which I've explained in Horizons, has remained cooperative for VCR tapings. I feel there's no moral or legal difference between my taping a television program off the air for my own



use and my purchase of a used book at a second-hand store or yard sale. In neither instance does my action add to the profit of the creator. But the book publisher got the income from the original sale of the book and doesn't try to control what happens to it after that. The television industry gets money in one way or another from everything it puts on the air and shouldn't be concerned with my personal use of what it sends out. The used book will probably be shop-worn, the binding may be shaky, and I can expect a page to be torn or some dogeared, penalties I accept for not paying the full price for a new copy. The VCR tape I create won't be as detailed as the telecast appeared on my television screen due to the limitations of the machine, there will probably be some electrical interference, and it's impossible to do a perfect job of eliminating commercials or other interruptions in the program because the VCR pause control doesn't have the instantaneous effect of its audio tape recorder counterpart and the video cassette tape can't be spliced. So just like the book situation, I'm getting an inferior product for my money.

This brings me to my main complaint about video recordings: the prices asked for pre-recorded tapes. Almost all of them are made from things that have already existed for other purposes: commercial movies made for the theater, old television programs, athletic events which sold admission tickets and TV rights, and so on. But a pre-recorded video cassette costs perhaps four or five times as much as the cost of an equivalent amount of blank tape. A pre-recorded audio cassette is almost always something that was created specifically for lp and cassette and eight-track purposes and its price is usually about twice the cost of first-rate blank tape. Right here, I think, is the real reason most VCR owners aren't buying pre-recorded tapes and why the video disc equipment has flopped so spectacularly. If I could buy a movie pre-recorded on a video cassette for twice the amount I'd pay for the blank tape to record it myself, I'd buy the pre-recording for its freedom from all the imperfections which result from recording off the air. But I won't pay the prices that are being asked for films and other things which have already been highly profitable in many previous ways before they went onto video tape.

Incidentally, I've suffered from one problem since acquiring the VCR which I've never heard any other owner admit. It's sitting atop the television set where I can see it from the two rooms in which I spend most of my waking hours when I'm home, I'm using it almost daily and yet I occasionally forget about it. Two or three times, I've turned off the television in the middle of a late movie because I couldn't lose any more sleep, thinking wistfully how nice it would be to enjoy the rest of the film, without realizing all I needed to do was insert a cassette and press a couple of buttons on the VCR so I could see the remainder of the film the next day. There haven't been just two or three instances where I had a terrible struggle deciding which of two simultaneous TV programs I really wanted to watch. It's apparently a heritage of the conditioned reflex which I'd developed in the more than twenty years I've had television in the house, that anything on the tube was here today and gone tomorrow unless by some chance it should someday be rerun. I still can't automatically react to the fact that telecasts can now be preserved, even though I know it pretty well by now. And right here, I think, is the important thing about VCRs, the reason why they're much more important than they're given credit for being. A television set with no capability of recording what it offers is like attending school with only a slate, no books or paper and pencil for copious note-taking. I think ownership



of VCRs by most people who watch television and their intelligent use could force the broadcasting industry to improve its offerings eventually.

One simple example of what I mean involves newscasts. They're preposterously vague, slanted, and misleading on the national networks and considerably worse on local newscasts. But you don't recognize the full extent of their awfulness when you're watching and listening to them as they come over your television set, because most of your attention is occupied by the need to absorb the general gist of what you're hearing and seeing. If you video tape a newscast, and play it back several times, you'll be surprised at the number of examples of bad journalism you'll detect, now that you're able to concentrate on details rather than the overall substance. Notice how often the announcer refers to "sources" or "Democrats" or "public reaction" compared to the number of attributions to individuals identified by name, and you'll realize how far rumor and media ideas have replaced specific sources as the basis for news. Watch the expression on the announcer's face and the pitch of his voice as he refers to a president or baseball commissioner or anyone else in authority; and you'll quickly understand how these innuendos can alter the impact of what he's saying about them, not to mention the probability that authority figures will be shown scowling or in an unflattering pose on the screen. Try to think about the semantic significance of individual words used in a newscast. For instance, almost always you'll hear the announcer say that this or that group took "responsibility" or "credit" for a bombing or arson. You'll rarely hear him say that they took the "blame" or claimed their "guilt" for such things. When that happens time after time, the unwary listeners gradually are conditioned to consider terrorist activities creditable and responsible behavior.

It's also instructive to watch an episode in a dramatic series several times to find how many loose ends and unexplained angles its plot suffers from. Most series scriptwriters apparently count on the rapidfire succession of events and the one-time viewing of the episode to prevent viewers from noticing what's wrong. In all fairness, syndicated series reruns may be particularly bad in this respect because stuff has been cut from them by local stations so there will be more time available for commercial messages than the episodes needed in prime time when they were new. If you tape a basketball or football game, count the number of times the announcers use a commendatory superlative and remark on the action associated with each use, to discover how many of those superlatives are applied to the most routine plays. Baseball announcers, fortunately, are more realistic.

Maybe old age is one cause of my greater delight in the VCR. I am old enough to remember when the only way the television industry could record its offerings was the kinoscope system of making a conventional movie with the camera pointed at a television tube. At that time, there were authorities explaining the enormous problems which blocked scientists from creating a video tape system analogous to the audio tape which had already come into general use. Then when television stations finally acquired video tape equipment, the audio magazines explained to readers all the reasons why video recorders for use in the home couldn't be created for prices an average person could afford: the tape would need to move so fast, the electronics would occupy half a living room, and so on. So the creation of VCRs in their present form is as much a marvel to me as was the Apollo program after so many years of reading scientific reasons why humans



couldn't travel to the Moon with rocket propulsion (their bodies couldn't survive the jolt involved in attaining escape velocity) and how radiation at certain points just outside Earth's atmosphere would be fatal to any space travelers tough enough to stay in one piece on the way out, not to mention the impossibility of communicating with people back home beyond the heaviside level (this was before the FM era) and various other objections which seemed quite valid at one time. It's enough to cause a fellow to hope the barriers to solar power installations in outer space, a colony on the Moon, and other conveniences will turn out to be less serious than the experts now claim.

After several months of ownership, I haven't made much use of some of my VCR's capabilities. It has a memory feature which I'm reluctant to operate regularly, lest my own faltering memory circuit should suffer additional breakdowns from lack of use. I haven't put the sound from the VCR through my audio equipment even though there is a jack for that purpose. But I do know that my VCR doesn't produce the pumping effect with its automatic level circuitry that has bothered me with some other models. I saw a much more expensive one in operation at the local junior college recently and I was appalled at the hiss that emerged every time a speaker hesitated for even the briefest instant between words. I don't feel in the mood to buy a camera for the VCR. The cameras are frightfully expensive, the VCR is too heavy to carry around conveniently; there's no way to create a good show from what I'd get with the camera without complicated dubbing procedures with the help of another VCR, and it seems more sensible to buy a fairly good super-8 sound camera if I decide there are things going on around me that I want to preserve. The way the industry is progressing, this VCR will probably be obsoleted by improvements and developments in the field within six years or so. By then I'll either be in no condition to use a VCR or ready to acquire one of the new wonders which, I hope, will be able to edit out commercials when recording unattended a television show, will have a button which will prevent the laugh track from a sitcom from reaching the audio part of the tape, and will be able to record on ticker tape at a considerable saving to the user.

It wasn't many weeks after I'd bought this machine that I had a special sort of bad experience which had come only once before, fourteen years earlier. I saw the picture on my television set grow fuzzy, lose contrast, and change from a positive to a negative image. I was pretty sure, even before I called the service man, that the same thing had happened in 1981 that I'd watched with dismay in 1967, the final agonies of a picture tube. As it turned out, I was right. I didn't need much time to decide what to do. The bill for a new picture tube, labor of installation, and adjustments of other components affected by the change would be about \$200. The TV set was fourteen years old and had been giving me increasing trouble with burned out tubes and other maladies the past two or three years. A technician whom I trust advised me that the high voltage transformer in this particular make and model of TV sets has a habit of burning out after about ten years, so mine was overdue to go and replacement would be expensive. If I had the old set repaired, I would soon need to buy a converter for the extra channels which the local cable plans to provide customers. The service man's call for the burned out tube would be free if I bought a new set as a result. The store where he works was offering a free small black and white set with the purchase of a 25-inch color console just then and I'd been planning to buy one of



those little TVs for watching channels not available on the cable and as a backup when the big set goes blooie. I'd also save a few bucks each year on my electricity bill, because modern transistorized TVs consume much less power than my old tube model.

So this time I didn't shop around, instead going back to the place which had sold my old set to me fourteen years ago. The only change I could see there was slightly older appearance of the couple who run it and the acquisition of a dog that growled at me until realizing that I was a customer, not just someone who would look around without buying. All I needed to do was decide which 25-inch console I wanted. Maybe it would be more sensible to use a smaller one for a house where I normally watch alone, but I'm used to a big one. At this point I encountered once again a phenomenon which might be local or national, for all I know. I have long felt that hardly anyone in Hagerstown adjusts the television set properly for the best picture. I like a television picture which follows the guidelines for a good photographic print. There should be a long range of tonal contrast, from the lightest to darkest areas, but details should be visible in both highlights and shadowed areas. The blacks should not be greyish black, but coal black. Faces should not consist of eyeballs and nostril apertures in a black surroundings. The picture shouldn't look as if it were submerged in dirty dishwater. But almost every time I enter and every television set I see running in a store shows me a different sort of television picture, with the contrast control set too low and the brightness control turned up too high. I can't remember if someone told me or if I read it, but the only explanation of this habit which has reached me claimed it's a useless survival from the earliest years of television, when dealers and set owners adjusted their sets for this kind of picture to hide as much as possible the fierce amount of snow and electrical interference that prevailed before transmitters, sets and antennas became more powerful. The store I was visiting was following the custom (I don't watch television when I go to other areas so I don't know if it's that way everywhere) and I discovered something else. After I eliminated all but two models from consideration, I looked at their screens. They were tuned to the same channel, the contrast and brightness were just about the same on both sets, and the clerk thought I should buy the cheaper one if I didn't mind turning a channel selector instead of having a pushbutton system of changing channels. But the faces on the soapopera characters on the screen of the cheaper set were perfectly uniform in appearance in the fully lit areas and in the shadow areas they were gray with little or no color visible; on the more expensive set, you could see gradations in skin tone between the foreheads and the cheeks and the color of the skin was clearly visible where shadowed. I pointed this out to the clerk and she just couldn't see it. My vision is worse than average so it couldn't have been my physical abilities that caused me to notice the superior nature of the more expensive set's picture. I bought that one. When we went to the office to settle up, I was touched by the dog's coming to me, lying down at my feet, and putting its head on my shoe. It wasn't until I was out on the street, walking to my car, that I noticed he had eaten part of one of my shoes.

This new television set doesn't represent the quantum leap in scientific wonders that the VCR does, since it's an improvement on something I'm familiar with, not an entirely new toy for me. Nevertheless, the old sense of wonder got more exercise when it was delivered. After I'd adjusted the controls to provide the kind of picture



I prefer, I was greatly impressed by its quality. It's hard to compare a present impression with the memory of how something was more than a decade earlier, but I don't remember my old set as having done nearly as well when it was new. The new set has automatic fine tuning, a godsend for a person who has suffered for years from a set whose increasing age resulted in a need for manually changing the fine tuning after it warmed up. I was less ecstatic when I discovered there's no horizontal hold control, but the service man told me it's no longer needed and so far he has been correct. My ears are accompanying my eyes in the gradual descent in operating condition, so it was nice to discover that the new set can produce much greater volume of sound than the old one did. It's convenient to be able to change from one channel to another without running through those in-between the two. And perhaps the strangest thing about all this is the fact that large television sets haven't followed the inflationary trend like most merchandise. If I remember correctly, I paid about thirty per cent more for this set than I did for the old one, an inflation rate of about two per cent per year without taking into consideration the improvements in technology.

But not everything is perfect in anything in this imperfect world. One other control which is missing from the new set should be there, a tone control. I know that the television industry uses only the most primitive type of tone controls which do nothing but chop off some of the highs if rotated to the "bass" position. But even this much of a control is useful for taming some programming which is particularly shrill. Maybe I'll settle eventually for playing the television with the sound coming from my audio equipment. A less serious matter is the "automatic light sensor" which according to the instructions that came with the set is meant "to give you a pleasing picture under varying light conditions." This tiny eye in the cabinet's front can be a nuisance under certain circumstances because the picture changes too noticeably in daytime if the sun keeps going behind clouds and emerging again, and after dark I sometimes accidentally cause the picture to adjust itself by moving my arm or some other area of my anatomy into the direct path of the beam from the floorlight. It would be easy enough to fasten something opaque over the sensor cell but it would be unsightly. There should be a switch to turn it off when not wanted.

Unfortunately, I can't be specific or detailed about one improbable capability of the set. I have only partial comprehension of the forces which are at work to create the circumstances. But without doing anything illegal or inventing something, I'm getting things on this set which theoretically aren't available in Hagerstown. I don't feel like saying more because the description might affect the situation. That dealer in second-hand books at the nearby flea market whom I described at length in Horizons never showed up again after that issue appeared and I've become superstitious.

One other much less expensive video-related purchase during this year can be safely explained at length. Squirrels repeatedly broke the lead-in wire from my rooftop antenna, forcing me to go to cable two years ago. This gave me better reception than previously on a couple of channels, and a couple of satellite channels which can't be picked up with a rooftop antenna. But it also cost me ability to see some other channels. In most cities, the cable gives customers everything they got from their own antenna and more but it isn't that way in Hagerstown. A rooftop antenna aimed at a compromise direction between Baltimore and Washington will usually provide a home with good



reception of the seven VHF stations in those cities, and fair to good pictures from two UHF stations there. Hagerstown's two UHF stations have their transmitters in a different direction but they are close enough to be received on the same antenna in most homes. If the antenna is equipped with a rotator, a half-dozen or more other stations can be picked up, the number depending on the height of the house and the lay of the land in each particular location. But the local cable system is set up for only the dozen VHF channels. It gradually dropped some of those Baltimore stations so it could run via satellite an all-news channel and an all-sports channel, and it took over another channel for HBO's subscription service. This has caused all sorts of problems. It used to be possible to be almost certain of seeing any network program, because if a station in Baltimore or Washington preempted it for other programming, it was available on the network's station in the other city. Some syndicated series are shown only on stations which aren't on the cable. Some viewers got angry because they could no longer have the news or the weather delivered by favorite local announcers. Just recently, the cable company announced plans to rewire the city and upgrade itself to a 35-channel operation by the end of 1983, which was why I wanted to make sure my new tv set would have built-in cable channels capability.

But meanwhile, the worst thing about the change from antenna to cable for me was the fact that the Philadelphia Phillies' games are carried on channels which I could get with the antenna but aren't carried by the cable. The first summer I was on cable, the Phillies' Sunday afternoon games were inserted where a Baltimore station normally appears on the cable, but picture and sound quality were abysmal and in this most recent summer, the cable didn't offer any of the Phillies' games.

I knew there was no hope of being able to pick up the portion of the Phillies' schedule which is telecast at night via a UHF station about a hundred miles from here, without a first-rate rooftop antenna. But I thought I might be able to get the Sunday afternoon games over a VHF channel which I'd seen in use on several of those tiny portable sets with only rabbit ears antenna. One day, I noticed in TV Guide a K Mart advertisement for an inexpensive antenna which is considerably bigger than the variety that sit atop the television set but not as bulky as the rooftop type. I thought it might enable me to watch the Phillies on Sundays if I attached it to my tv set after removing the cable wires. But when I tried to purchase one at the local K Mart, the clerk was stern and implacable. He pointed to the advertised antenna which was on display and advised me that he would not sell it to me or anyone else because it wouldn't be any use in Hagerstown for any stations except the two local ones which you can get with nothing at all attached to your antenna terminals. He was sending this particular one back to headquarters so people would stop trying to buy it. I didn't see a lawyer or complain to my senator, but I wasn't convinced. I experimented with my tv set, taking off the cable connection and attaching an antediluvian set of rabbit ears I once used for an Ft radio, and also testing a medium-sized length of wire in various positions. I couldn't get a clear picture or undistorted sound on the Phillies' VHF channel but I came close enough to decide I should gamble on the price of an antenna which I could set up inside the house. I tried to buy one like the K Mart type at several other local stores. Wherever I went, I got the same rejection and the warning that it can't be done in Hagerstown. There was only



one remaining subterfuge: I cheated. After being indignantly rejected in my attempt to buy this sort of antenna at the local Montgomery Ward store, I went to the catalog order desk and gave the clerk instructions on what I wanted from the spring-summer Big Book. She acted for a while as if she were ready to call higher authority, but finally she accepted my order. A few days later the antenna arrived, and I carried it from the store with my most innocent look on my face but my most severe twinges of conscience in many months in my cortex, subconscious, superego, and assorted other places.

My thought was to install it on the attic, since it would be possible to run the wire inconspicuously along the side of the staircase, then under some rugs to the vicinity of the television set. But I couldn't wait to see if it worked, attached the ends of the lead-in to the set's antenna terminals after removing the cable connection while the antenna reposed on the living room floor, and I found a watchable picture in color with good sound on the Phillies' channel. What's more, later experimentation produced a preposterous result: that very spot in the center of the living room gave me better reception than anywhere else inside the house, even on the upper floors. So I simply added the antenna to the jumble in one of the spare bedrooms six days a week and connected it up each Sunday afternoon except when the strike wiped out major league baseball.

If I live through the summer of 1982 and the Phillies don't switch to another channel, I'll probably use the small black and white set for watching them and reserve the indoor antenna for use with the VCR whenever I feel I must preserve something on an uncabled channel. I hope nobody reading this account betrays me and informs the radio-television department of any large Hagerstown store how I went behind their backs, preferring the Phillies to honor.

Yet another acquisition during 1981 was much less expensive than the television set and VCR. For some time, I've found myself increasingly reluctant to take my two good 35 mm cameras out of the house, except when I have some particular photographic purpose in mind. I used to carry one with me much of the time, just in case something turned up. But the less I'm seen with an expensive camera, the less opportunity the Devil will have to suggest larcenous things to someone around here. So I've been wanting a camera which I could use for casual snapshot purposes, which wouldn't represent a major loss if it should be stolen. Around the middle of this year, many advertisements in the photography magazines offered a 110 Vivitar camera which had just been discontinued at bargain prices. The manufacturer apparently unloaded its inventory of the 742XL because of the new fad for automatic film advance in these little cameras. I have enough spare time to push the film advance after each shutter release, so I bought one. It pleases me as a camera and it also staggers my imagination as a symbol of how science has influenced even modestly priced cameras in recent years.

For instance, about twenty years ago I acquired my first electronic flash unit, which came free as a bonus to me for purchasing my Contax. I seem to remember that its retail price was around \$50, not much different from the price I paid for this Vivitar after two decades of inflation. That old flash unit was about the size of a quarto book and two or three times as thick, it gobbled up large batteries at a prodigious rate, and the flash head itself was about three times the size of my new 110 camera. It had no provision for changing its light output. Around the same time, I began to use a much more expensive electronic flash unit on the job with the Speed Graph-



10. Its power pack weighed about ten pounds and forced me to stagger along crabwise when it was hanging around my neck because of its sideway pull, the head weighed almost as much as the Graphic, but at least it could be adjusted to give either full power or half power. My Vivitar camera has an electronic flash unit built into its body but the entire camera can easily slip into a coat pocket. Admittedly it doesn't have as much light production as the huge older equipment I once used, but it will cover things to a distance of about forty feet with ASA 400 film, not bad performance. Moreover, the amount of light which it puts out is governed by what you're focused on, so you'll get proper exposure whether you're focusing on something at that maximum distance or an object only three or four feet away. I adjusted the diaphragm on my Contax and Graphic to get proper exposure with the old electronic flash units, except when I forget to. It's a good thing I needn't adjust the diaphragm on the Vivitar because it doesn't have one. (This isn't a cost-cutting economy; the extremely expensive Minox cameras that started the 110 idea also had no provision for stopping down the lens from maximum aperture.)

With the Graphic, I either guessed or carried along an exposure meter, when I took pictures without flash. My Contax has a built-in meter but it still requires the photographer to adjust things after receiving this device's advice on the proper exposure. My tiny Vivitar has its own method of setting the shutter speed automatically when flash isn't used, depending on light conditions. All I must do to make sure of proper exposure is to remember not to let a finger stray to where it will block the tiny opening for the sensor when I'm taking a picture. You couldn't buy a dependable exposure meter for less than about \$25 in the pre-inflation days of a quarter-century ago, and those were the selenium type which weren't as sensitive in poor light conditions as the CdS cell which operates the Vivitar's exposure mechanism.

There are also things in this small camera that were unknown in even the most expensive cameras not too many years ago: a diode which lights up, for instance, when the light is poor enough to make it advisable to use a tripod or some other support because the shutter will remain open longer than the average person can hold the camera without shaking it, and another which indicates the two tiny batteries which power everything in the camera are in good condition. A third diode signals that the flash unit is charged and ready to fire but a similar ready light was part of the huge old electronic flash equipment I used to use, so I don't marvel so much at the third one.

And this Vivitar is primitive compared with some of the other modestly priced cameras on the market today. I read somewhere that more than forty things happen inside one of the new Polaroid cameras between the time you press the shutter release and the opening of the shutter itself. I wonder what the pioneers of the first years of Hollywood's talkies think when they look at what sort of a sound movie camera two or three hundred bucks will buy today, capable of doing many more things than the equipment half the size of a house which could create only inferior sound and black and white films little more than a half-century ago for professional movie purposes.

At this point, I'm conscious of having given a false impression of coping too capably with this new equipment even while I marvel at it. I should squelch this promptly by the memory of what happened when I hooked up the VCR to the new television set. Consternation, disbelief, near-panic over the possibility I'd somehow acquired non-compatible equipment. I had carefully followed instructions that



came with the VCR and television set. I turned on everything and nothing resulted. No sound, no picture from the new tv with the VCR hooked up, not even a raster on most channels. The VCR didn't make any impression on the tv screen when I tried to play tapes I'd previously recorded. I disconnected everything, started again from the beginning in the belief I'd made some sort of fundamental mistake, paying even closer attention to the instruction booklets. The result was as complete a failure as before. So I flipped all the switches and controls I could find on both the tv and VCR, singly and in various combinations, reversed the polarity of the plugs, slapped both pieces of equipment briskly, and stared at them long and thoughtfully. Nothing happened, and I couldn't forget how I'd done everything correctly with perfect results the first time I hooked up the VCR to the old television set.

I slept on it, and the next day I couldn't think of anything I'd done wrong or any way I could change things for the better. I called Sears but the man I know there was off that day. The person who answered the telephone claimed to know a little about VCRs, listened to my detailed account of what I'd done, and admitted to bafflement. All he could suggest was to try plugging the cable input directly into the socket on the VCR instead of fastening it to the VCR's antenna terminals via the adapter which came with the VCR. That was not helpful because, as I explained to him, the VCR's instruction booklet not only instructs you to use the adapter but also includes a sketch showing it hooked up in that manner. But after I hung up, I decided to try it anyway, so I could call him back and show him how wrong he was. I did and the VCR and TV mated to perfection.

Then there was my acquaintance with a different type of modern technology which occurred after Montgomery Ward stopped selling stencils. I found Sears still offers them via catalog order although they aren't stocked in the local Sears store (and does anyone know why Roebuck has fallen out of favor? I find Sears getting all the big type and Roebuck appearing only in very small type or not being mentioned at all. There must be company politics involved.). I had grown familiar with the procedure of ordering things through the catalog at Montgomery Ward. I would show the clerk what I wanted in the catalog, she would write out the order blank, a few days later she would telephone me at home to announce the merchandise's arrival, and I would stop by the store to pay for it and take it with me at my first convenience.

But this was my first experience with a catalog order at Sears. Things went normally until I'd finished explaining to the clerk the item I wanted. At this point, she asked for my telephone number instead of my name. I felt flattered but I always suspect anyone who behaves that way. Nevertheless, I gave it to her. She punched a few buttons and said, "Thank you, Mr. Hoover." "But I'm not Mr. Hoover," I told her. "You are Charles Hoover and you live on West Church Street," she told me. I began to feel as if I were in the midst of one of those Monty Python skits. She repeated my telephone number and told me again I am Mr. Hoover. Usually I don't argue with people but somehow I had a dim sense that something important was at stake here. I finally persuaded her to punch the buttons again. She never admitted that I was named Warner but she didn't call me Mr. Hoover again, instead telling me I'd be informed when the stencils arrived.

The telephone call came several days later. It wasn't from a clerk. Instead it was a recording. And when I went to the store to get the stencils, I discovered that I couldn't just stand in line and wait until my turn came to get the order. It was necessary for me to



pick up a number from a large stack of numbers, then stand around waiting until my number was called. I waited long enough to observe that if a number was called and nobody rushed forward within about ten seconds, the next number was called, and I can't imagine how the persons whose attention or feet had wandered eventually got their orders.

Maybe such automation of merchandising is common practice in other cities. But it seems to be new to Hagerstown. I've since encountered several other persons commenting on it, so Sears apparently hasn't been using it long. It impresses me as a case of overkill of automation. There must be endless amounts of labor involved in keeping up-to-date information on telephone numbers and their holders in the computer. The least slip of the tongue by a customer or an error by the clerk in pressing the numbers on her keyboard will result in a complete messup, unless the customer listens as attentively as I did. If the customer is just going out the door to spend the weekend out of town when the recorded message arrives to pick up the merchandise, the customer must go to the nuisance of hanging up, then telephoning the store and explaining why he won't be able to get it for a few days. Mistakes happen when orders are taken and filled in the human manner but normally it will be possible to figure out where the mistake is lurking by checking with a telephone directory or calling the customer; his complete identity won't be irretrievably lost by getting one digit of the telephone number wrong.

Fortunately, science and technology have not made further inroads on my job. There are rumors that the newspapers here will soon be getting AP news by a satellite dish antenna but if it happens, it won't affect me. The only major change in my working conditions during 1981 was primitive in nature. I was moved to a desk under the fig tree. I haven't the faintest idea why there should be a fig tree in the news area of a daily paper or why I should be assigned to sit under it unless they think that I can be trusted at such an advanced age to be in close proximity to this female fig tree. I don't mind the tree but I don't feel comfortable for another reason. I'm now readily available to visual inspection by occupants of the buildings on the other side of the street, because there's nothing but glass on the wall along which I'm now sitting. The buildings are a residential hotel which caters to all the riffraff and poor white trash of town and a saloon whose upper floors are occupied by almost equally dubious people. If anyone ever becomes quite angry with the local newspapers, it would be child's play to pick off a dozen or so journalists with a high powered rifle, because so many desks are up against this glass wall. Fortunately, I'm not there after dark when it's easiest to see potential targets.

But it's strange how things work out: if I'd been given this desk in this building the day I started to work for the newspapers in 1943, I probably would have been unable to continue working there. I used to suffer severely from acrophobia. My new desk is perhaps ten feet above the street on the dangerous side and about forty feet over the parking area outside the mailing room on the other side. I'm sure I could never have sat there in my youth. Besides, the only entrances to the main level of the building require you to walk on little bridges which run about fifteen feet above a sort of moat on two sides of the structure, and I would have gotten the blind staggers and probably dehydration from perspiration if I'd been required to walk over them long ago. By now, the acrophobia has eased enough that such things don't bother me. But there are



still uncomfortable moments in other situations. For about a year, I had as laundress a woman who lived on the second floor of a house, with access via an exterior stairway. I no longer have trouble going up such a stairway when I have my arms free but I perspired mightily doing it with both arms occupied with a large basket of clothing. I also feel discomfort if I must sit at the front row of a theater's balcony or a baseball park's second deck. And there are ceiling lights in two rooms of this house which have been burned out for years because I feel too shaky to climb to the height required to reach them, then reach up. Fortunately, the fixtures in the other rooms are reachable from standing on a chair or stool which is low enough to be within my height tolerance.

Meanwhile, I'm only a year away from the date I've long cherished for retirement and I find myself exhibiting no signs of cold feet over the approach of that occasion. I'd feared I might start to chicken out and want to endure another year or two when I got this close, but so far it hasn't happened. Actually, the decisive moment is only perhaps six months in the future, since I'll need to issue a communique about my intentions to the authorities well in advance of the end of 1982. The way I feel now, the only thing that could change my plans (aside from the little matter of getting fired first) would be discovery of the need to undergo very expensive medical treatment in the near future. I understand there's a way to transfer the company's medical insurance plan to retired employees but I wouldn't want to risk getting caught in some sort of transition escape clause for the insuring firm.

Not long ago, something unexpected came to mind while I was contemplating retirement. The decision to retire will probably be either the last or the next to last major, decisive decision I'll make in this life. The only other future decision comparable to retirement for its importance that I can think of would be a decision involving leaving this house and going into a retirement community or rest home or funny farm as appropriate at the time. And that decision might be rendered unnecessary by my dropping dead while still residing here or suffering such a complete breakdown that there's no alternative but to get out. I think it's very unlikely that I'll ever make a decision to get married or go into business or buy another house or run for public office or do anything else of like importance. I'm the sort of person who generally listens to the doctor and does what he recommends without seeking second opinions or rebelling, so I probably won't make a major decision whether or not to have this or that done to me in a hospital, but instead will follow instructions. My old dream of finishing up my life in some other part of the world seems shattered by a variety of circumstances which have bobbed up since I first envisioned it, so there's another potential decision which needn't be faced.

There was one other big thing for me in 1981, but in a sense it was at the other end of the gamut from the scientific wonders that impressed me so much in the VCR, television set, and camera. It was the return of professional baseball to Hagerstown. After the amusement park I loved so much as a boy was resurrected as a county park after one-third of a century of oblivion, and after the most ornate Hagerstown theater was restored to its former gawdiness after it had apparently been destroyed by fire, I could hardly have dared to hope for yet another return of something I loved and lost long ago. Hagerstown was the home of minor league clubs for two extended periods: in the class D Blue Ridge League before the Depression, then in the



class B Inter-State and Piedmont Leagues during the 1940s and early '50s. When television and other factors like small town fan resistance to black players decimated the minor leagues, Hagerstown lost its franchise. There had been a couple of tentative efforts to move a franchise to this city over the years but they didn't come close to turning into reality.

I'd maintained all along that the city would support minor league baseball. But there were a lot of doubters in high places because of the lousy support given other sports which are popular elsewhere. The city had a semi-pro football team for several years but it disbanded because of meager attendance. High school football games often attract crowds numbering in the hundreds around here instead of in the thousands and coaches even have trouble getting the kids to come out for the team; one county high school struggled through the 1981 season with only 17 players on its roster. The coach of the local junior college basketball team wrote an excited letter of glowing thanks to the community last spring because his season attendance for 14 home dates was around 6,000, which gives you an idea of how much support basketball gets in a normal season. You can't blame high prices for the lack of high school teams to draw; a season ticket for the entire football and basketball schedules combined at a local school costs students only \$10 and adults \$20.

So when unknown people announced an interest in giving Hagerstown a franchise in the class A Carolina League early in 1981, there was a lot of skepticism. (Organized baseball has changed its classification system for the minor leagues since the 1950s; the old class D is now known as class A, and what used to be class B is called nowadays class AA.) My colleagues at the newspaper were particularly wetblanketish about the idea. A former sports editor who now writes headlines and does page layout wrote his first article in a long time to tell readers "There's no way a Carolina League team could operate out of Hagerstown without suffering a tremendous financial loss. One road trip would eat up all the profits...." Who's going to pay to see a minor league team when you can sit at home and watch the Orioles or other major league clubs in action?... Now let's forget all this foolishness about a Carolina League club coming to town." An editorial page editorial urged: "Let's forget about pro ball but make the stadium safe and secure for the many amateur teams." A current sports editor headlined a long column "Pines would play to an empty stadium" and asked: "Who's going to support a minor league baseball team in this city?... If the Pines were to come here,...they would get off to a horrendous start and nobody (fans) would show up after the first 15 games or so." Another sports page article found five former minor league players in Hagerstown who, the article said, "fear that attendance, or lack of it, could present a real problem," although if you read the quotes themselves you found their opinions much less pessimistic than that. A bit later, when negotiations to lease the local stadium from the city began, articles appeared with headlines like "Council strikes out baseball" and "Strike Three?" when problems were discussed.

And after all that, the Hagerstown Suns as they finally were nicknamed opened on schedule on April 10. There were 2,463 paid admissions for the opener, even though it was a Friday afternoon game which required a lot of lying or sick leave decimation by the working people around here who wanted to be there for the historic occasion. The Suns won, too. Advance stories had pointed out that the opening day opponents, the Peninsula Pilots, had been last year's league



champion, were a farm club of the world-champion Philadelphia Phillies and had just completed a full month of spring training. The Suns were a co-op team drawing players from several major league farm systems' leftovers while the Suns' players had not for the first time only four days before the opening game. "It could be one long weekend for the Suns," one sports writer predicted. He couldn't have been wronger because after the Suns won the opener the Saturday and Sunday games were rained out.

What happened after that seemed drawn from one of those boys' books about minor league baseball that were published in such quantities a few decades back. When the Suns went on their first road trip their bus overturned Down South, several players were afflicted with major injuries and almost all of them were bruised and shaken up. The club's owner suffered a cerebral hemorrhage which left him hospitalized. Health authorities got strict and prevented the sale of most refreshments at the local park for a while until the antiquated city facilities could be improved. The new lights for the stadium were late arriving, forcing day games at the start of the season. Hagerstown suffered its rainiest spring in many years and there was hardly a home game the first four or five weeks of the season which wasn't either rained out or delayed by rain or interrupted by showers. The Suns got nationwide publicity in at least one periodical when local high school authorities insisted on playing a previously scheduled high school game at the stadium at night, forcing the pro teams to start in the afternoon and stop before the end of the ninth inning.

How did it all come out? I felt like bawling when I saw the final statistics. Hagerstown in 60 home games drew attendance of 145,335, the highest average attendance in the entire league even though most of the other Carolina League clubs play in cities two or three times the size of Hagerstown. The team won the first half championship in the split season and became league champion in the playoff with the winner of the second half. Dan Overstreet, who was general manager of the Suns, was named executive of the year in all class A leagues by the Sporting News. And the Baltimore Orioles decided to stop supporting a farm club in that declining small town, Miami, so it can utilize the Hagerstown Suns in a growing big city as its farm club in 1982. Moreover, the Suns provided Hagerstown with more national publicity than this general area has received since the Battle of Antietam. The Los Angeles Times gave the success story a front page article instead of putting it on the sports page. UPI sent a representative to Hagerstown (only the AP has a bureau here) and he wrote a long, glowing article about the Suns and the "picture perfect" stadium where they play. (He must have failed to look closely about him because the perfection of that picture is marred by the fact that the grandstand part of the stadium burned down years ago and has never been rebuilt.) The Baltimore and Washington newspapers had their attention attracted to the Suns when the big leagues went on strike and big caravans of Orioles fans started to make pilgrimages to this city, including Wild Bill Hagey, the celebrated taxi driver-cheerleader of the Orioles.

To complete my happiness, most of this success was achieved without the kind of gimmicks that are overdone in some minor league cities. There wasn't a great deal of padding the attendance by giving away tickets with purchases at super-markets and only one game, as far as I know, was involved in one of those promotions where a big firm buys out the ball park for the night and admits employees and their



families free. The only continuing gimmick came almost by accident without the ball club's instigation. A nearby country music station hires a high school boy who makes appearances in parades and similar events in a costume as Scuffy Duck (one of its disc-jockeys is named Stacey Drake) and Scuffy began going to the ball games, where he showed positive genius for doing the mascot thing like the Phillies Phanatic and the San Diego Chicken. The fans loved him, and he must have aided attendance immensely, although the jinx that followed the ball club around in its first weeks struck him, too, hospitalizing him for several weeks.

It's hard to be sure if the 1982 season will be as successful. One difficulty will be the lack of continuity with players. Older residents of this area got used to having a few members of the class B squads held over from one year to the next. That doesn't happen often in the lower classification of the Carolina League and the chances of old favorite players from 1981 returning are further reduced by the conversion from a co-op team to farm system membership with the Orioles. But the uncertainties which plagued the team at the season's start last year won't be a hindrance this year, there is plenty of time this winter for club executives to work on the sale of season tickets which couldn't be done before the first season, and the tieup with the Orioles could be helpful. There's even talk about rebuilding the grandstand at the stadium. And there hasn't been a newspaper article for months about how impossible it is to have a minor league baseball club in Hagerstown.

Paradoxically, one reason I love baseball is its lack of scientific advance and technological changes. Its rules change more slowly than those for any major sport. Games are never delayed because the electronics of the timing clock have broken down or the faulty ice-making machine has caused the surface to become too slushy for the skaters. I would personally prefer to see an experiment with all-daylight games instead of night ball. In Hagerstown's position on the globe, it stays light enough for ball games until 8 o'clock or later during the season, thanks to daylight saving time, and I think a 4:30 p. m. starting time would draw as many people as the night games do, once the fans had got used to the idea of going direct from work to the ball park. But the use of artificial lighting is the only major way in which baseball has yielded to science in the past half-century. Even the equipment is partly handmade, because nobody has invented a machine that will manufacture baseballs without human assistance or create gloves on an automated assembly line. I find it pleasant to follow a sport whose records and trends can be compared with those of many decades ago without too many allowances for changes in the game itself.

And I don't know quite how I could have survived the baseball season's major league strike without the Suns as a surrogate. When the big leaguers went on strike, I didn't do any of the things which newspapers described baseball fans as doing, like vowing never to be interested in baseball again or promising to switch patronage to football. I just suffered and hoped it would end soon and would never happen again. Despite all the publicity about the effect of the strike on fans, I think most baseball lovers reacted as I did. The decline in major league attendance was minimal after allowance is made for canceled games, and most or all of it could be written off as the effect of cancellation of group excursions to ball parks which must be scheduled far in advance and can't be rescheduled in such a shortened season.