

PROVINCETOWN

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My stars—Mary Vivian Pearce, Mark Stone, Cookie Mueller, Sue Lowe—all worked at the fish factory. They cleaned fish, but at night they washed up and became glamor queens.
—JOHN WATERS

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JOHN WATERS IN PROVINCETOWN

BY GERALD PEARY



We agreed on ground rules on the phone before I flew to interview him in Baltimore. No laborious discussions of his movies. He'd done that so many times before, and there's already an excellent book, John Ives's *John Waters* (Thunder's Mouth Press, 1992), in which his career is analyzed thoroughly via Q & A. Also, please, not another one of those tours of "John Waters's Baltimore." He's exhausted hauling journalists around to show them his fair city's fabulous underbelly. Anyway, what it means for the films was articulated long ago by Waters himself in the "Baltimore, Maryland—Hairdo Capitol of the World" chapter in his great book, *Shock Value* (THUNDER'S MOUTH PRESS, 1981).

Waters wants to talk only about Provincetown. He's genuinely excited about partaking of a detailed oral history of his glorious, deliriously happy (often deliriously drugged), days on the lower Cape. From 1966 to 1980, he spent the whole summer, every summer, living in Provincetown. Normally, he worked in bookstores. Always, he hung with, and shuttled from lowly apartment to apartment with, a bevy of abnormal Baltimore friends. In the early P'town days, they were an unapologetically wild bunch, a veritable Manson family minus the homicides. Swimming on acid and pumped up on speed and dead drunk at the Fo'c'sle, the Baltimoreans shoplifted, stole bicycles, sold drugs, failed invariably at menial jobs, skipped out on their rent, and some fucked everyone in town.

Waters loved all of it. He'd vomit at the New Agey sentiment, but he "found himself" in the midst of P'town chaos. Spiritually, communally, intellectually, sexually, aesthetically. He became a free man. He read every unusual book in his years clerking at the Provincetown Bookstore. He saw every movie playing at P'town's then three movie theaters. In crazy, wonderful P'town, he wrote the sublime, insane screenplays which he'd turn into film productions in Baltimore. *Eat Your Makeup* (1968), *Mondo Trasho* (1969), *Multiple Maniacs* (1970), *Pink Flamingos* (1972), *Female Trouble* (1974), *Desperate Living* (1977), *Polyester* (1981). Each of these films had its second screening in P'town, the summer after the world premiere at home in Baltimore. That was Waters's inviolable rule. History will note that Provincetown is where it happened: gala unveilings to the world of the oeuvre of film's still-undervalued Aristophanes.

What was America like in the 20th century? Schizophrenic! In a time capsule, all you need is a bunch of '50s TV shows with nice moms, decent dads, chummy children, plus the sleepwalking-stalking-heavy breathing nightmare comedies of John Waters. His apparitional ensemble were called Dreamlanders, and they consisted of his motley, squash-the-nuclear-family, Baltimore-to-P'town pals.

Marlon Brando might have hitched to P'town to beg Tennessee Williams for a chance to play Stanley Kowalski in a new play called *Streetcar Named Desire*. P'town is also where a 300-pound Divine ran wild in a dress in the streets, and where he shaved his head and eyebrows to

emerge as the dog turd-consuming "Filthiest Person Alive" in Waters's classic *Pink Flamingos*.

Also I add what a joy it was visiting Waters in Baltimore. He's a sweet, funny, civil man. I'm being glib, but he has high-minded books in his living room, and brilliant modern art. John Updike would be comfortable here. Even the crazy stuff is neatly framed: an enviable Patty Hearst collage, delicious posters of matricide maven Patty McCormack in *The Bad Seed*, and snarling Ann Margaret in *Kitten With a Whip*. The shelves are tightly organized: downstairs, fine books any intellectual might have; upstairs (remember Alfred Hitchcock), serial-killer lit. Also a tiny alcove of peculiar presents from Travis Bickle-type fans.

After taping, Waters and I discussed Karl Marx and T.S. Eliot. Not really. We talked of the last days of Liberace, the "real" Pia Zadora, Michael Jackson's off-putting sex life, and the odd fact that we are probably the only two people on earth to have interviewed 1950s Hollywood star Dorothy Malone at the Dallas Country Club. He showed me a cut-out picture of Zsa Zsa Gabor after 3000 facelifts, huffing along with her heavy-as-Divine, middle-aged daughter.

At last, Waters broke his no-tour rule and, because I'm such a genuine fan, took me to Divine's grave at a cemetery above a shopping center. There lay the immortal Glenn Milstead



JOHN WATERS IN THE PROVINCETOWN BOOKSHOP, 1972
PHOTO: STEVE YEAGER

(1945-1988). But Waters hates, hates, hates sports, so there was no convincing him to drive me to Babe Ruth's boyhood home. In his half-century in Baltimore, Waters is proud that he's never ventured to the baseballer's birthplace.

While in Baltimore (great town, great Southern food: New Orleans without the attitude), I also met with friendly ex-Provincetowners associated with Waters' movies: Pat Moran, Vincent Peranio, Susan Lowe, Mary Vivian ("Bonnie") Pearce. Others were talked to later by phone where they lived: Dennis Dermody in New York, Mink Stole in L.A., Sharon Niesp and Channing Wilroy in Provincetown.

Waters was happiest that our story would be as much a celebration of his Dreamland group on the Cape as about his time there. Of course, many of the key Dreamlanders with the most amazing Provincetown histories are no longer alive. It's to them that this feature on John Waters is dedicated: John Liesenring, David Lochary, Howard Gruber, Cookie Mueller, and Divine. ■

What's the first you heard of Provincetown?

I was in Baltimore in the summer of 1965, and that had been a bizarre year for me. I'd been expelled from NYU for pot, and they told my parents I needed extensive psychiatric treatment. I'd come home to Baltimore and made this movie, *Roman Candles*. I was very confused, and somebody said to me, "Have you ever been to P'town? It's a very weird place." It was a guy named Doug, who was sort of the beatnik I wanted to be.

This was a very long time ago—I had a girlfriend at the time, that's how long ago it was! I changed her name to Mona Montgomery in my book, *Shock Value*, because I don't know where she is today. She's not in show business and she's not a public figure. Anyway, we hitched to P'town. I don't know how my parents felt about it, but I was 19, and there wasn't much they could do.

Can you recall your first sight of P'town?

I remember getting off Route 6 by the A & P and walking up and seeing Commercial Street and thinking, "God, is this cool!" And the first person I saw on "The Benches" at Town Hall (The Benches were then what Spiritus Pizza at 2:00 A.M. might be now) was Moulty, from the Barbarians. They were the only rock act to come from P'town and have a huge hit, "Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?" He had hair to his waist, a two-year growth, which meant that he'd start growing long hair before anyone else in the world. Plus he had a hook instead of a hand, which is something I always wanted. I was so impressed. I thought this must be the coolest place I've ever been, although Mona and I didn't know anybody.

We got this tiny room on Bradford Street with a lecherous landlord. He tried to come into our room and actually, I guess, have sex, though we never did. We ran into Mink Stole's sister Sique and also this woman named Flo, both from Baltimore, and they showed us around a bit. But we only stayed two weeks because we were broke.

But you quickly returned?

The next year, 1966, I came for the summer, with Mona and Mary Vivian Pearce. We stayed at a place on the corner of Pearl and Bradford, where the landlady said we could never have a visitor. What? We're 20 years old. We thought she was kidding. The first day, we had someone over, and the landlady came in screaming. God, our guest wasn't staying there or anything! Rather strict!

Mona worked at a dress shop called the Queen of Diamonds, and I got a job across the street at a clothing store called No Fish Today. The owner quickly learned to hate me. I was

JOHN WATERS, FILMING PINK FLAMINGOS, 1971
PHOTO: STEVE YEAGER
A FEATURE-LENGTH DOCUMENTARY, DIVINE TRASH: THE MAKING OF PINK FLAMINGOS, PRODUCED BY STEVE YEAGER, WILL BE RELEASED NEXT YEAR



MOLLY MALONE COOK AND JOHN WATERS, 1995
PHOTO: MARY OLIVER

fired after a week because she'd come in and I'd be sitting there reading. I think she expected me to say to the customers how great they looked in our Levi's. I wasn't very good at the job.

Instead, I went to work in the East End Bookshop for Molly Malone Cook, who was a photographer at the time, and Mary Oliver, then a struggling poet. They couldn't really afford to hire me, but they let me work when it rained, when P'town bookstores are packed. So wherever I was when it was about to rain, I had to RUN to work! But I loved being there because Molly was a great boss. She did not believe the customer was always right. As a matter of fact, the customer was always wrong.

I saw Molly snatch a book out of someone's hand and say, "Get out!" I was very impressed. I thought, "This is my kind of job."

At the time, they worked a lot with Norman Mailer. If anyone said something bad about Mailer, I was allowed to be really rude and say, "Get out of the store and never come back!" Molly encouraged it, so it was fun to work there.

I loved them, and I'm still friends with them. I was at their table at the ceremony in New York when Mary won the National Book Award. Very exciting!

But you moved on to the Provincetown Bookshop.

The third summer, 1967, I came back and Elloyd Hansen and Joel Newman offered me a full-time job, which was weird because they were kind of competitors to Molly and Mary. They sought me out, I don't know why, but probably because I was passionate about books. I decided to work there because it was the only way I could afford the outrageous summer rents.

It was great because, as part of the job, you could have any book as long as you read it. I didn't abuse the policy. On the recommendation of Elloyd, I got a valuable reading list of free

books I'd never heard of in my life. I also got \$100 a week, which was really a fortune then, more money than anyone I knew made. But the greatest thing was that every winter they closed up, and I could go anywhere in the country and collect unemployment, and some of the early movies were financed by that.

When I showed my movies in P'town, the Bookshop let me turn the window into a billboard. Elloyd and Joel were such good bosses they didn't care if my friends hung out. Mary Vivian Pearce and David Lochary would come in every single day.

Do you remember your first Provincetown screening?

In the 1960s, many churches were almost political. They would do almost anything to attract hippies. So I asked the reverend of the church on Shank Painter Road (who he was, I have no recollection) whether we could show the movie there. He was nice about it, though he never saw my movie, *Eat Your Makeup*.

Among the cast was Marina Melin, who had worked at Queen of Diamonds, and who I'd taken back to Baltimore to be a Dreamland star. The film is about models who are kidnapped and have to eat their makeup and model themselves to death. I got the idea from the candy store, the Penny Patch, which I still go to in Provincetown. They sold candy lipstick with the little slogan, "Eat Up Your Make Up."

To promote our screening, I went in and bought every candy lipstick. Bonnie (Mary Vivian Pearce) dressed in full Jean Harlow drag, the way she dressed every single day of her life. We would walk up and down Commercial Street, I would hand people a flyer from the movie, she would hand them candy lipstick and say, "Eat it, read it, and come."

People thought we were giving them drugs! But we sold out at the church. The crowd reaction was fine, though *Eat Your Makeup* only showed in Baltimore and P'town because it was so technically bad.

Also, it was in horribly bad taste for a church showing.

Divine was Jackie Kennedy. We had the whole assassination scene, in which she climbs over the junk in the car, covered in blood. At the time, only a few years after the real assassination, believe me it was eyebrow-raising! JFK was played by Howard Gruber, who lived many years in Provincetown and owned the restaurant Front Street.

Your living arrangements?

In 1966, Mona and Mary Vivian Pearce and I had a basement apartment. It was OK, though the ceilings were so low that I couldn't stand up. When we had parties, I had to be hunched over serving food. Meanwhile, my breakup with Mona was very gradual/weird because we hung out with a very mixed group of people—gay, straight—though it did sort of happen that the final breakup was in that apartment.

Was Mona your last girlfriend?

Yes.

There's one extremely odd place you lived in 1967.

Prescott Townsden's tree fort! It was right behind The Moors restaurant, but it's no longer there. Even the tree is no longer there. I lived there with Mink's sister, Sique, and Flo, who both worked at the A & P.

Prescott was about 78 years old, I think from a very wealthy family in Boston, and the first gay liberationist I ever heard of. He would ride around the beaches on a little motorcycle giving out gay liberation material. Mink became engaged to him. She was about 17, so it was a strange time. Was it a serious engagement? I don't know. They certainly didn't have sex.

Living in that tree fort was like Swiss Family Robinson. It was part of an old abandoned submarine, kind of like a lunatic had built it, and there was no roof, so rain poured in. But you could live there for free if Prescott liked you, and I can remember it as some of the happiest moments of my life, of complete freedom for the first time. I was away from everything I rebelled against.

You'd climb a rope ladder, and then there were apartments, if you could call them that. There was one mixed couple, he black, she white, with three mixed children, which was kind of radical for the time. We also lived with a guy named Alan Dahl, who was a bleach-blond fashion radical. He was great. He wasn't my boyfriend or anything, but communal living was inspiring, and we certainly had fun.

And summer 1968?

I lived in a little rented cottage with Mary Vivian Pearce on Mechanic Street called Aspin. It's still there. I had a boyfriend, John Liesenring, and for a while I lived with him. He played the "shrimper" in *Mondo Trasho*, but he's no longer with us. People always ask me if I sleep with people in my movies. I think beside him there was only one other person in my movies I slept with and it was years after the filming. No, not Divine.

The first time I had a glamorous apartment was in 1970 when I lived with Mink away from the water, on Franklin Street, where Chaim Gross's studio was. It had a glass roof with different colors in the glass, and a pool, and a bridge you walked over, and a fireplace, very Kim Novak. My other apartments with Mary Vivian



ORIGINAL PENNY PATCH SIGN JOHN WATERS COLLECTIONS

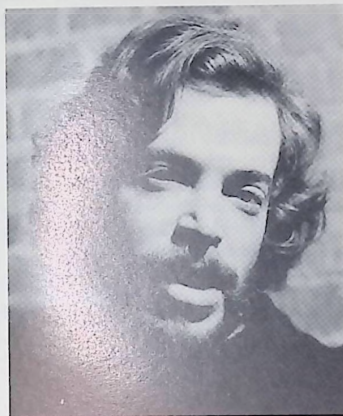
Pearce had been pretty bad: linoleum floors and dropped ceilings.

Was there any P'town scene you wished then to be part of?

There was one person I was obsessed with. Her name was Donna, and she lived with Brick and Ron. They were hairdressers, and Donna was their artwork. Every day they spent all day getting her dressed. She had this amazing '60s look, long before anyone had it; Sassoon hairdo, miniskirt, 25 sets of eyelashes. Every night about 11:30, they'd walk her through town on the way to the A-House. I think that was their job, that they were paid to go there.

Donna was upper echelon, the Queen of Fag Hags, and we were lowly yuppies. By the end of the summer Donna said "Hello" to Bonnie. To me, she might nod, or wave like a queen.

Ten years later, I met Donna. I told her how I was obsessed by her. She's much more normal now, has a husband, but remembers those days fondly. I know that one of the others, Brick or Ron, was in a shootout with the police in



HOWARD GRUBER IN MULTIPLE MANIACS, 1970
PHOTO: LAWRENCE IRVINE, DREAMLAND PRODUCTIONS

Provincetown. They did a lot of speed then, but so did we.

The pills came from Dr. Hiebert, who is no longer with us, the notorious Dr. Feelgood of Provincetown. He seemed to have given diet pills to everyone in the town. I think he didn't know that everyone was getting high. But I was six-foot-one and weighed 130 pounds. It was kind of hard to think I should go on a diet.

On a bicycle I sold diet pills that I'd gotten from Dr. Hiebert. I sold them to friends. It wasn't that I was a major dealer, but it was once the only way to raise money for underground movies.

By this time, 1968-70, you were seriously into filmmaking.

Everyone but me lived in Provincetown in the winter. I'd go away to "further my career." I needed more action. I'd go to California or to Baltimore and make movies, such as *Mondo Trasho* and *Multiple Maniacs*. Then I'd come back

to Provincetown on June 1 and work at the Bookshop. I worked there for—I don't know—seven years? A long time. I could still work there today. When I go in now, I feel like walking behind the counter and saying, "Yes, we have *The Outermost House*." We sold millions of copies of that one!



DIVINE, 1980S PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Also by this time, many Dreamlanders from your films were P'town regulars.

Besides Baltimore, it was the other city where we all lived, though the reputation of the Baltimore people was not really high because of the dubious practice by some of not paying rent.

My stars—Mary Vivian Pearce, Mink Stole, Cookie Mueller, Sue Lowe—all worked at the fish factory. They cleaned fish, but at night they washed up and became glamor queens.

There was the time after *Multiple Maniacs* when Mink, Sue, and Cookie Mueller hitched to Provincetown. They were almost raped along the way. This time was the height of drugs, lunacy, and fag-haggness, and they would have made the Manson girls run, these girls!

Mink looked like she looked in *Multiple Maniacs*. Her image was the religious whore, black lipstick, black nail polish, and she was covered in rosaries. Sue wore skirts we used to call "cunt ticklers." Skirts so short her vagina just showed! Quite a look! And Cookie was Janis Joplin meets Susan Atkins. They were punkish 10 years before punk. Their attitude: make fun of hippies, peace, and love, which our films also did. All these little earth mothers baking bread and then Sue, Mink, and Cookie arrive!

The police said to Sue, "Even for Provincetown you can't dress like that, look like that." They made her leave town. She was the wildest Dreamland girl of them all. Remember the *Foc's'le*? Cookie was in there always. The Provincetown *Advocate* used her picture to illustrate an article about alcoholism. The headline was SKULKING IN THE DEPTHS OF ALCOHOLIC DEPRAVITY. She sued and won, I don't know how!



DIVINE, 1982 PUBLICITY PHOTO

Did Cookie ever work?

Let's just say "she got by." She lived on Railroad Avenue, I remember that, and she chose to have her son, Max, in Provincetown. She moved to New York, then she'd come back in the summers with her girlfriend, Sharon Niesp. Sharon's a big part of my later Provincetown, maybe '75 on.

And Divine in P'Town?

Divine always believed he was a millionairess, even when he didn't have a penny. He was really fiscally irresponsible. The most shocking thing he did was that he had a job in a gourmet cooking shop and took all the money. He did not bother to cover it up. At the end of the summer, when they asked, "Where are the books?" he said, "I lost them." His reputation was pretty strange. When his landlady was away one weekend, Divine paid an auctioneer in full black tie to auction off all the landlady's furniture in his apartment, antiques and stuff, to cover his rent. That's how he would think. He had to sneak back into P'town for a long time, after she called the police.

Divine never believed anything was going to happen to his career. After *Multiple Maniacs*, he was penniless with Cookie in Provincetown in the winter. The poorest they ever were. Divine was obsessed with Christmas, really wanted a Christmas tree, so they sawed down a decorated one growing on someone's lawn. Legend has it that it was the lawn of the chief of police. The theft made the front page, the town was pissed off, but Divine never got caught.

I was in San Francisco, and *Multiple Maniacs* was playing at a theater called the Palace, which was a big deal. I called Divine and said, "They are paying you to come to California." He didn't believe me. Van Smith was there, my costume designer who was responsible for Divine's looks. I said, "Do something weird with his hair." Van shaved the front of Divine's head, what would become the *Pink Flamingos* look. Divine got on a plane for San Francisco without one penny, in full

drag and with this pathetic little purse. When he got off the plane, the Cockettes were there at the airport, it was a huge media event, and he was a star. He never went back in his mind. He was no longer Glenn Milstead.

I don't think he went back to Provincetown from 1971 until a few years later, as a star instead of a criminal on the run. He'd blatantly ripped off so many people there, and I don't think they were impressed by his stardom, but the statute of limitations must have run out.

Back in Provincetown in 1976, he acted with Holly Woodlawn in *Women Behind Bars* at the Pilgrim House. He lived with Holly as roommates—you can imagine that! A famous story about him was that he was driving so stoned on pot that when he was looking to check his name on the marquee, he drove his whole car through the window of Land's End Marine Supply.

And David Lochary?

His favorite thing to do in the ripoff years was to get a job in a Provincetown restaurant, and then the second day throw himself on the floor and say he hurt his shoulder. He'd get workmen's compensation. I saw him spend a whole summer in a fake neckbrace, but he couldn't go down to the beach because of insurance agents, though there was nothing wrong with him. I lived one summer with David and David's boyfriend, Tom, who was killed in a boating accident. We lived right behind the Mexican Shop, and MDA was the drug that summer, though I don't know quite what was in it.

What are your memories of places in P'town?

I'll always remember The Benches! That was the main hangout then. And behind the bar relief, depicting the signing of the Mayflower Compact, across from Town Hall, was the big gay scene. It was shocking to think people were giving blow jobs on the other side of a 12-inch wall of bronze, so close to the police station.

There was a great theater around 1966-67 called Act Four, and Mary Vivian Pearce and I went to every performance. We were on speed watching the shock-value plays with off-off-off-Broadway theater with lots of nudity.

Piggy's was also great in the '70s, a bar that was totally mixed, gay and straight. That's my favorite kind of bar. I don't like segregation. Dennis Dermody was deejay there, and that was where we went every single night. And the A-House was the coolest, where all the jazz greats played. When Reggie Cabral died, I guffawed in the alley outside the A-House. And his wife, Mira, who I was fascinated by, died too.

The Little Room in the A-House was always gay. They were very smart and hired straight men to be the bartenders, and boy did they make a lot of money! The big room, you didn't know each year if it would be gay or straight, but it was good either way. It wasn't like now, always 100% gay.

The Art Cinema and the New Art Cinema, owned by Bill and Fran Shafir, and the two theaters owned by Monte Rome, The Movies and Metro, premiered all my movies: *Mondo Trasho*, *Multiple Maniacs*, *Pink Flamingos*, *Female Trouble*, and *Desperate Living*. With Bill Shafir, who is since dead, I had to "four-wall," meaning I was financially responsible for every seat in the house, but we always sold out, which was great for both of us.

Bruce Goldstein, who books Film Forum in New York, was programming The Movies at the time, the competing theater across the street, upstairs where Whaler's Wharf is now. He showed my films in repertory.

Then Howard Gruber opened Front Street. That was the big hangout for the last years, the cocaine era, and that place was really jumping. I think Front Street was the last really big club scene. Howard died in Provincetown of AIDS in 1993.

Did your group mingle with the famous artists and writers of P'town?

We didn't hang out with famous people. We didn't know any of them. Robert Motherwell, I knew only because he was one of the best book customers. He certainly didn't know me as a film director. I was a book clerk.

I saw Faye Dunaway and Peter Wolf, because they made out in the store for half an hour. And I remember the funniest thing, seeing Judy Garland walking down Commercial Street with 10,000 gay people following her like the Pied Piper. She went into the little bar at the A-House. She was pretty drunk, in bad shape, having fun, wearing a big hat. It was like the Virgin Mary appearing, a Miracle. Imagine: JUDY GARLAND LIVE IN PROVINCETOWN!

You've mentioned how *Eat Your Makeup* was inspired by candy bought in a candy store in Provincetown. What other props did you locate locally for your movies?

Do you remember in *Multiple Maniacs* where I had that giant lobster rape Divine? That was inspired by the postcard they sold in Provincetown for 20 years: a big lobster over the sky at the beach. I wrote *Desperate Living* about the worst community you could live in. It wasn't Provincetown but it was certainly about living in an eccentric small town. When writing *Polyester* in Provincetown, I'd go every day next door to Dennis Dermody's house and we'd watch the "normal" family on *Father Knows Best*. That's how I was raised. In the *Polyester* script, I tried to subvert it.

What were your last complete summers spent in Provincetown?

In 1979 and 1980, when I wrote *Polyester* there. In the '80s, I would stay with Howard. In the last years, I've stayed by myself. If I go for a short time, I'll always stay at the White Horse Inn. I like Frank Schaefer, the owner. His place is very homey, and I feel comfortable there. But here's one thing I don't understand about Provincetown. Why isn't there a nice hotel with a phone in the room? It's a nightmare for me. I

have to have a phone in my business. Nobody has phones except the Holiday Inn. I'm going to Provincetown and stay at the Holiday Inn. Does P'town today strike you as substantially different from when you first arrived in the '60s?

People always say that Provincetown is different. I think it's always exactly the same. Most of those shops have been there for 25 years. They must make money. I think sometimes I dropped a Kleenex in 1965 it's still there. I always into Adams' Drugstore for a vanilla Coke. Otherwise, I never order a vanilla Coke anywhere else. It's really amazing how Provincetown stays the same. In a great way.

Provincetown was a little more mixed, gay and straight together. Certainly there were more lesbians. That's the big difference now: cool summer lesbians. I'm a big lesbian hag. Punk lesbians? They're my favorite.

Except for AIDS, kids at 20 are having exactly the same wild summers we had at 20 years old. It's always remained pretty radical. My parents never came to visit me there. Never. To this day they'd be shocked and nervous walking down the street. If you aren't used to Provincetown, it can still be disorienting.

Do kids stop you on the street in P'town today?

They do. I feel like Uncle Remus: "Let me tell you of the time that Divine ate dog shit." But it's great: many kids today have this amazing knowledge of exploitation films, which they've discovered on all these weird videos. At Sundance, they actually called me "Sir."

Sir, no more drugs?

As I started having success about the time of *Pink Flamingos*, I gradually stopped taking drugs, but I can't do anti-drug ads. I can't be that much of a hypocrite. But I'm not pro-drugs because many of the people who took them with me, including David Lochary, are dead because of drugs. Cookie and I were estranged for a while because of her use of drugs, but we made up later in life. She died of AIDS in New York but she was in Provincetown till near the end, when she was very sick.

And your future in Provincetown?

I'd like to have a house there: that's one of my last fantasies! And I haven't missed a summer since 1965, even if it's just being there one week. end. Something bad would happen to me if I missed my annual Provincetown visit. ■



MARY VIVIAN PEARCE AND DAVID LOCHARY IN *MULTIPLE MANIACS*, 1970
PHOTO: LAWRENCE IRVINE, NEW LINE CINEMA

Superstars of Dreamland

MARY VIVIAN PEARCE

John Waters loathes sports metaphors, so I'll use one instead for Mary Vivian ("Bonnie") Pearce, Waters's great pal since high school. She's the Lou Brinkley of Dreamland cinema, with the long, pretty record of eight straight Waters films. Her acting began when she danced sexily in 1964's *Leather in a Leather Jacket*, and it concluded with her poor, harassed princess in 1977's *Desperate Living*. (Later, she's somewhere about in 1994's *Serial Mom*.) On screen, Pearce is the ditsy, paroxided Jean Harlow who moves lithely as a silent movie apparition, even as she (often) removes her blouse. Or has her toes sucked—who can forget the eye-popping scene—in *Mondo Trasho* (1969). In *Female Trouble* (1974), she plays a fascist beautician. Normally, she's Waters's ingenue-in-residence, his neurotic "nice" girl who, alas, gets molested and defiled. Something's ever-seedy in Waters' blighted Baltimore.

Acting in *Pink Flamingos* ("I was with the good guys, of course."), Pearce is proud to have led an actors' revolt over the fact that cast and crew weren't fed. "John sneered when I complained to him," she recalled. "But the next week there was cheap wine for lunch and bologna sandwiches."

Pearce lives in a downtown Baltimore apartment with two cats. That's where I interviewed her. She's no longer a dyed blonde, though she's certainly got her Dreamland superstar, good-breeding looks. For years Pearce worked at the racetracks. This spring, she retired to become... a bicycle messenger. When she asked Waters for a reference, he replied, "What should I say if they call? That you can ride a

two-wheeler?" Pearce is completing an MFA in Creative Writing at Johns Hopkins University, specializing in short stories, one of which is published in this issue.

...

In 1965 I had a Baltimore apartment with Pat Moran, when John went to P'town with Mona and came back impressed. "It's really cool. Everyone's gay or they're 'heads,' or they're gay heads." The next summer, I went with John and Mona.

I was 18, and it was three months after I got married. My husband was a jockey at Saratoga, and he told my father I'd left him and run off with beatniks. I was so pissed at him for telling! As far as I was concerned, it was a fake marriage to get me out of the house. I'd taken all our wedding presents back and bought books and records.

We got to P'town before Memorial Day, and it was freezing. But we wanted to be at the opening day of restaurants and get free food. We'd go to art openings and guzzle the wine. Later, we'd go to Piggy's or the A-House and as soon as people went to dance, we'd snatch their beers. There was a restaurant across from the A-House. I'd go there and snatch people's food. We had a basement apartment, and I'd cut through the back yard. We got thrown out because a guy complained to the landlady that I hopped his fence.

I'd been dying my hair blonde since I was 14. In P'town, I cut it short, began wearing red lipstick and looking like Jean Harlow. It was kind of harsh, not as pretty as Marilyn Monroe, who I really wanted to look like. But I remember I

had a really good time. Dr. Hiebert gave me speed, "black beauties." I told him I wanted to be a model, for an acting part. He said, "OK, do you want the strong pills?" He was very old, and fell asleep examining people.

Speed was easily available. You could go into any doctor's mailbox and get free samples, or get it prescribed: it was either for depression or obesity, and everyone was fat or depressed. You didn't have to spend money on food, and speed gave you a lot of energy. For example, it would take us about 10 hours to get dressed and put on makeup for our movie premieres. We could start at 10 in the morning with a couple of hits.

Because I'd worked at the race track and knew how to ride, I got a job at the stable taking people horseback riding through the trails and dunes. But I got fired because of too much P'town night life. I'd be out until two or three in the morning. I'd have to get to the stable at nine, but I was showing up for work at noon.

So I was a chambermaid at a hotel. They'd pick me up, in this carpool of other maids, local girls. I was hideous. I lay around on beds watching TV. Then I was a waitress at the Flagship, and had to get this outfit that was supposed to look like a peasant. I didn't last long. I poured coffee in someone's lap. One person gave me a nickel tip I gave him such bad service. The owner said I had a mental block.

Then I had a job at Bridge's Breakfast. I lasted a week. Then I worked in a dress shop, and they liked the way I looked. I didn't do anything. Sometimes children screamed when I moved because they thought I was a mannequin. Then I was at the fish factory. There, they found out

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at St. Peters, year in and year out, summer and winter. She went about her work, and like others in the Portuguese community, did not inquire into the business of the "nice young fellas" who came annually to stay in her guest quarters.

Now that the gay community is established and ascendant, the question arises: what is next for this place open to all? We live in a time wryly described by *The Boston Globe* columnist Ellen Goodman as "post-family," when so many rules are challenged or rewritten entirely.

The town fathers of my youth are largely gone, none casting a longer shadow than my late stepfather, John C. Snow, longtime town moderator and, as an early Democrat in a land of Yankee Republicans, a symbol of another kind of Cape Cod diversity. The current custodians of the town's traditions must know that just as the fragile land is at risk from the forces of nature, Provincetown is uniquely accessible to anyone coming in on next week's tide. To insure its future, the town must pay homage to the contributions that family, custom, and tradition have made as foundations for its flourishing.

Today the external restraints imposed by our Carver Street neighbor must be supplemented by controls self-imposed by those who enjoy the freedoms that the town has constructed. There is nothing to focus this priority quite like the presence of children and the elderly. Provincetown should not awaken one day to discover itself a town only for self-sufficient adults; it must welcome families. I am bringing my own three youngsters to town this season -- a fifth generation on my mother's side to visit a place so often associated with transience.

Implicit in the Provincetown Portuguese Festival has been a full range of diversity, with all its changing definitions. This year's organizers of the Festival and the Blessing of the Fleet consciously reached out to broad groups in their celebration of diverse heritage. In their invitation they cited "our country's first resort" and mentioned "our seafaring heritage," and perhaps most importantly, took note of the town's success in having "fostered a tolerance and respect for human diversity."

Provincetown as a place and as an idea has been decades ahead of the larger culture in its reconciliation of differences. We have seen it in the acceptance of gays, in the flourishing of an artists colony, in the magical and quirky character of the town revealed in the writings of Heaton Vorse, and in the bohemian culture typified by Harry Kemp. As the town grapples with new questions arising from diversity, and redefines yet again its small corner of the American community, may it keep its wonderful sense of accommodation in mind.

Stephen Burgard, a California-based journalist and author, grew up in Provincetown and Cambridge. His book, *Hallowed Ground: Rediscovering Our Spiritual Roots*, was recently published by Insight/Plenum. His first newspaper job ever was working with Roy Atkins, the printer of the Provincetown Advocate.

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"Honey, We're All Swimming to the Left of Straight"

Provincetown Harbor Annual Swim for Life AIDS Benefit

for David Ruth
 by DOROTHY ANTCAK

We have been training for weeks. Every morning at 7:00 I meet K.C. on the beach from the Cape Codder guest house, and swim out to the breakwater and back, push ourselves and each other a bit further each time. From the deck, the line of rocks that marks the destination looms almost too close; once in the water, it seems to recede as if with the ebbing tide. On mornings after a long night of swimming, I struggle to force my sleepy limbs to move. The commorants, gazing from their perch on the wall, mock my graceless lumbering strokes with their awkward tumbles into the water.

The swim has become an odd obsession, a responsibility calling me from the warm cocoon of my bed into the damp bathingsuit hanging in the shower. This is the closest I've come to commitment in a long while, but what I'm committing to is not exactly clear. It's not only knowing that K.C. will be waiting at the beach, left to swim on her own if I don't show; it's not only the sponsors and spectators we've gathered; nor the fact that it's a worthy cause, to give back to the community. It has more to do with the convoluted version of a version remembered from Catholic masses I attended as a child: a phrase that comes into my head as I plunge into the chilly bay: "I am in memory of you."

This combination of commitment and recreation keeps me to our schedule; we head out in shape, build endurance. On the way we focus on perfecting our crawl, stroking with determination, trying to find a way to swim in a straight line. We have not yet grasped the mechanics of tandem swimming; we start side by side, and invariably stray off course. After 10 minutes of cutting through the waves, I stick my head up to find I've veered toward the pier, due west. K.C. is barely visible, bobbing through the water sleek as a seal, heading for Wellfleet.

We spend a lot of time swimming to catch up with one another, yet the camaraderie of these early morning dips has proved a pleasant surprise. For me, swimming has been a solitary sport, an individual endeavor, even when I was on a swim team. Striving for a personal best against the stopwatch, or in direct competition with a line of swimmers from another team, it was me, alone on the block, staring down those long, impeded-off lanes, ready to fly out over the water at the crack of the starter's pistol. Countless hours at the YMCA, the quiet meditative rush and splash of lap after lap, interrupted only by the tuck and turn at the wall.

We are in tandem as we approach the breakwater, managing to talk and swim at the same time, when K.C. mentions an article she's writing for the *Cape Cod Times*, about a Truro man who was walking on the flats and had a stroke.



DOROTHY ANTCAK

bitten out of his leg by a 10-foot blue shark. "Can you imagine," she says. "Guy's wading along the shoreline, and wham! This thing comes out of nowhere, attacks him."

"I heard he made it up, about the shark, to get some sympathy from his girlfriend—he hurt himself on broken glass and then the whole story got out of hand."

"I don't think so," she says. "I saw his leg. Definitely a bite mark."

Shafts of sunlight and silica probe the green-black water below me. It seems suddenly colder, as if something lying on the bottom is stirring, sending the chill of those lower layers up to the surface. The beach looks very far away. A sense of powerlessness invades my body; it takes an overwhelming effort to kick my feet, but when I pause, I sink from horizontal to vertical. "It must be the year for sharks," K.C. continues. "Did you know they found a dead one by Norman Mailer's beach last week?" I did not know this, ever would have been content not knowing. There is something to be said for the safety of pools: the humidity, the chlorine, the clear water that reveals only thick blue stripes painted to give direction. A controlled and regulated environment. The ocean is life, a vast unknown that admits danger.

When I was a kid, my overprotective parents cushioned, coddled, and cared for me like a Ming Dynasty vase. I had training wheels attached to my bike until I was 10. I wasn't allowed near large bodies of water; in winter the ice would surely crack under me, and in summer the undertow would choose me, of all the others playing in the surf, to drag to a watery death. They told stories of little girls who wandered too far from home and were never seen again, little girls who didn't stick right close by their parents in the supermarket and had to be advertised as "Missing" on milk cartons and cereal boxes.

Naturally I rebelled. I was convinced I had the spirits of all my dead relatives watching over me. I assumed an air of in-

vulnerability; nothing bad could possibly happen, not to me. And I proved it by disobeying every one of my parents' commands, doing things that even I questioned the safety of—diving from gorges into tiny pools, skitching from the bumpers of speeding cars, hitchhiking across Massachusetts. The injuries I brushed off were minor, which further proved my immunity. Only in recent years, as I've witnessed young, vital friends succumb to AIDS, has this feeling of invincibility frayed. Swimming in these gentle waves, submerged in the elixir of life from whence all living things originated, might be a form of rebirth. Instead I am immobilized by the thought that I have simply been incredibly lucky.

Greased and goggled, 172 of us stand shivering on Long Point, at the very tip of Cape Cod, waiting for the Ninth Annual Swim for Life to get underway. Brainchild of Jay Critchley, the generates money for local AIDS support groups and health organizations that work to service our disproportionately large population of people suffering with HIV. In his master of ceremonies hat, Jay checks off our names, insuring that someone will notice if we don't surface on the opposite shore.

The overwhelming expanse of bay before us reduces everything to miniature. The town is a collection of dollhouses; the boats are bathtub toys. We blaze an imaginary trail across the 1.4 mile distance from shore to shore. To the east the Pilgrim Monument touches the sky; to the west, the finger of the Coast Guard pier is like a narrow road built on water.

A man in a black mesh maillot holds his arm straight in front of him and squints down the length of it, as if sighting a rifle; several swimmers next to him hover at his shoulder, staring past his bicep at an imaginary line across the water. Everyone is nervously chatty, discussing the best course to take, what to do about leg cramps, telltale signs of hypothermia. As we scuff in the sand, the powder-fine grains dust our vaselined legs like a coating of flour. "Swim to the left of straight," a friend advises, factoring wind and current. "Honey," the man in the maillot says, "we're all swimming to the left of straight," and the crowd laughs.

"Swimmers, are you ready?" Critchley calls out, and we answer with a roar. He blows his whistle and we plunge into the bracing surf -- feet, legs, hips—and when it is deep enough we dive, striking off through the waves, as though our lives depend on it. The water churns with bodies. I feel a flicker of panic, and something like regret, but I am in it now. I miss K.C., whom I have lost sight of. But there are boats. There

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JOURNALS OF MYRON STOUT
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Myron Stout, who died in 1987, was a distinguished painter who moved year-round to Provincetown in 1952. While painting, for 20 years he kept a meticulous journal in which he explored and revised his thoughts about painting and painters, both living and long dead. The Whitney Museum published excerpts from these journals in the exhibition catalogue that accompanied the artist's retrospective there in 1980, the major recognition of his career, occurring when he was disabled with blindness (described in the journals). The entire manuscript deserves comparison with the classics of writing by artists, including Delacroix's *Journals* and Van Gogh's *Letters*. The curator of the Whitney retrospective, Sanford Schwartz, wrote that Stout "takes for granted that he can say exactly what he wants to say, and this gives his prose a flowing ease. Always articulate, frequently eloquent his sentences and thoughts come to him as complete, balanced, effortlessly many-claused entities."

■ ON HER FACE THE LIGHT OF LA LUNA BY MARIYM CRUZ-BERNAL

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Mariym Cruz-Bernal is a native of Puerto Rico and a graduate of the MFA Program in Writing at Vermont College. She is the author of a book of poems written in Spanish, *Poemas para no morir*, and the translator, with Deborah Digges, of *Ballad of the Blood* by Maria Elena Cruz Varela (The Ecco Press, 1995). Her poems in English have appeared in the *American Poetry Review*, *Boston Review*, and *Provincetown Arts*. She lives in Puerto Rico and is the mother of two small children.

"In the last years of the 20th century it seems to me that poetry has become fearful, and poets will not come out from behind their work. Some of us wear the masks of dead gods. We lean against monuments and with our fingers trace the epitaphs, piece together fragments and call them poems. Those of us who are obliged to be political rant and rant, but this can be another form of hiding. And oh, the tired third person, ourselves cast as others! I am grateful to Mariym Cruz Bernal whose magical lyric opens, full faced, on a life entire."

—DEBORAH DIGGES BOSTON REVIEW

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are people watching over us. We are all in this together

A few hundred yards from shore, the swimmers thin out. The temperature seems to rise from freezing to refreshing, but my stroke feels off-kilter, bringing to mind childhood swim lessons, kicking and paddling in the shallow end of a clear blue pool, reluctantly learning to breathe in, blow out with 20 other children. It hardly seemed worth the effort then, all that struggling, the panicked flapping and flailing beneath the surface to propel yourself a few feet—until the instructor delivered the key. "Just relax," he said. "Stop fighting the water and let it carry you."

His long-ago advice calms me. I lie in the sea as if it were a bed, immerse myself in the thrust-push-glide, thrust-push-glide of my stroke. Waves kiss the back of my neck; they break and ripple like fingers across my shoulders. My hands pull the water to me, then push away. Underwater currents, pulses down my sides and across my stomach. My feet flutter like a heartbeat behind me. Two strokes and I turn to gulp air, the bubbles of my exhalation loud beneath the surface.

Lulled by the lifting, rocking swells and the rhythm of respirations, my mind moves beyond the mechanics of breathing and stroking. Thoughts come unbidden, without connections, like floating things. Days ago, after one of our early-morning training sessions, I found the bowl of an old clay pipe, darkened by algae and smoothed by a century of tumbling beneath the waves. Thinking of it now, I dream the life of the man who smoked that pipe, think of him standing at the deck of an old wooden ship in this very harbor, scanning the coastline for something recognizable, some moving shape that might hint at the future.

I look ahead for my reference points. The shore doesn't seem any nearer. The grease on my goggles renders everything blurry. I don't have any trouble spotting the monument, but the line of the pier is harder to find. A few swimmers are far ahead of me, a few swimmers far behind, and I am oddly alone in between. Probably a mile still to go. The sandy bottom has fallen away to a black-green darkness, and that familiar dread, an uneasy sense of danger, seeps inside me. The rhythm of my stroke falters. Something's lurking just out of sight, I can feel it—something hungry and waiting for the perfect opportunity to strike.

In a frantic effort to see more clearly, I nip off my goggles and tread water while I spit-rinse each lens and once again fit them over my eyes. My legs dangle below me, like bait for sharks, and I make an effort to kick strong and sure—no weak and dying fish am I, no easy prey.

I think "faster!" and some of that forgotten competitive spirit takes over, and I pull through the water with renewed determination. "Don't surrender, Dorothy!" my late friend David once shouted to me in a road race. I hope he is watching now. He wouldn't let me be eaten alive like some silly actress in a lousy horror flick. Besides, I know there is something after the death

of the physical body. I think of the names I helped to print on the rainbow of prayer ribbons snapping in the breeze on the deck of the Boat Slip, and the faces they belong to: David, Frank, Ernest, Mark, Jimmy, Albert, John, Billy, Thom, Raymond. So much energy doesn't disappear.

And then I see them, floating in the water below me. Blobs no bigger than eggs, opaque milky-colored spheres, ghostly globule souls of the dead. Jellyfish, comb jellies, hundreds of them, flashing miniature lightning bolts of glorious brilliant neon, green and purple. I dive for a closer look and swim through clouds of them, cupping them in my hands until my straining lungs send me to the surface. The moment has the radiant logic of epiphany: a cycle, yes, the unquenchable electricity of human energy returning to the sea. My friends float below, urging me on, cheering in phosphorescent pulses. Even though we no longer speak the same language, I appreciate this communication, this communion. Flashes pass before my eyes like poorly spliced film, things I'd suppressed for years to save myself from death by sadness—silly things, trivial things, the stuff a life is made of. Remembering is not quite so painful, is almost a comfort.

Just a few feet in front of me I spot an orange head bobbing in the waves. Eager to share my new found optimism and pass on some encouragement, I call out "How you doing?" No acknowledgement, so I call again, louder, so that they might hear through the tight wrap of their bathing caps. When there is still no answer, I think perhaps the swimmer is suffering the confusion caused by hypothermia, and I kick harder to reach him or her. As I swim beside the orange head, I see that it is in fact a buoy marking someone's anchor. "Never mind," I say, and look around to make sure none of the spotters have noticed me and think I'm delusional, talking to buoys and jellyfish. I laugh out loud, and in that instant I swallow a lungful of water. Panic returns as I gasp for breath, but nothing comes for a long minute; then there is a gurgling in my chest and I choke and sputter and wheeze, desperate for air. The sounds bring back another memory: David in the hospital, a respirator pumping oxygen, blasting indifferently through his spasmodic, guttural coughs, and me sitting on a chair beside his bed, counting his breaths and the hissing of the machine, as if my counting would keep his inhalations and exhalations coming. "Just breathe," I hear, like an ancient echo of my bedside pleas, or a whisper from the jellyfish below.

As my feet touch sand, I glimpse the rainbow of ribbons that includes the names of so many lost friends. I am able to remember now, to dream those lives that touched mine. I have done this in memory of you. ■

Dorothy Antczak is a fiction writer who lives in Provincetown.

PHOTO: SALLY WALKER

BY WALKER GILMORE

We have gone to P'town every summer of my life, and along with dinners out, sun, and general vacationing, digging in the sand has been part of the whole experience. What I make in the sand has grown from what my father used to make with us as children. As we stopped making things as father and sons, I started making things myself. It was a year by year, from castles, number of towers, or forts, to pure design. I noticed that the snow messages like "Aliens Land Here." During summer days, the yellow sightseeing plane flew along the bay, and I liked to think that the people in the plane could see the work I was making. I liked to think that the pattern was, whether I was distracted in the sand, and the children and dogs helping to make and unmake the piece. Then, when the tide rolled over the flats, the waves would re-embed the pattern under them by how they broke. I liked to think that the piece usually survived the night tide, the piece usually survived the next day. Sometimes the lines were softened and blurred by the weathering of the tides, rendering the pattern integral with the flat itself, and this helped me to see the design.

East End Environmental Sculpture

earlier stuff, which seems to be more about animating the beach with a face or a reaching hand. Then I was more concerned with accuracy to form; now I am accurate to the pattern but I seek a less strict goal. Before I was interested in shells, seaweed, and colored sand; now, when I set out to dig, I only deal with sand, light, and the shadows of the day that progress across the pattern.

I like the feel of the shovel's repeated biting into the sand, and the burnishing of the tip, which gets shinier. I like the way my body works. At the end, I like the ache in my back. The animals go over it, the children touch it, and the adults keep off. I often wonder when that boundary was established—when had a certain amount of sand been moved, and it was clear I was making a thing? I don't care. What happens gets absorbed in the process. I was more protective as a child building castles with my father, even if we used to jump on the castles after the tide had swallowed them. I was less a participant then in the moving of sand, and more underfoot, where I loved watching the mounds grow into guard towers, and the moats and canals get deeper.

With some of my patterns, I stray from simplicity, and these fail. When I make one I really



like, I have a feeling of accomplishment that is not in any way diminished by the transience of the work. In fact, the short life of hard work makes me more appreciative. I know I would lose the feeling if machines did my designs. ■

Walker Gilmore, whose family summers in the Walker compound in the East End of Provincetown, is the great-great of T.B. Walker, the founder of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Now living in New Orleans, he says he finds "stream-of-consciousness writing more natural to thoughts on sand stuff."

