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Something About Books

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field. Our tabletops are going to be intelligent. Our rooms, our environments are going to be intelligent. The Net will be everywhere. That poses the biggest challenge and opportunity for us because as the hardware and software becomes less of a focus, information becomes more of a focus. We'll have true information appliances, whether it's a portable slate or a "softbook." Whether it's my keyring or my earring, it might be my communications connection. We'll exist in this information environment that is parallel to the real world that will feedback on it constantly. I have no idea what the implications of that will be, but I know that the focus won't be worrying about filtering software on the bank of 20 computers in the corner of a public library or that 300 station computer lab in an undergraduate library on a campus. How are we going to reuse that room? I've got some eyes on that now. That's what's great. I've seen it in the **Health Sciences library** in the footprint for the shelving, and it's shrunk dramatically. They're probably 1/10th the size that they were 20 years ago. Now they're filled up with computer terminals. So 20 years from now, those will have shrunk to 1/10th and there will be something else that kind of looks like a computing terminal, but the table and other objects will be intelligent and they will be feeding information to people. There will be computing everywhere. The collaboration role, the "unique place" access to information resources, the broker or the intermediary role in physical or virtual environments—all of those things are the kinds of concerns that we have to deal with. And to those who say that everything will be digital and so we don't need librarians, I say that it's just the opposite. So much will be digital that we'll need librarians and librarians even more.

ATG: *Death of the book?*

ME: People say that. I don't believe that. I think the book is very healthy—it's a wonderful format for a lot of different uses. One of our faculty, **David Levy**, has just finished a book called *Scrolling Forward: Documents in the Digital Age*, which raises a lot more questions than it answers. But, it's really good in raising those questions. No, I don't believe in death of the book at all. Many more things will be digital, and to me that's all great for us. The more information problems there are in the world the more there's a need for librarians and information people, and information schools. Selection and quality become more and more paramount. That's why the work of collection developers and acquisitions folks is so important. Libraries select quality things. You don't waste your time in selecting something and putting it into a library collection, whether it's a database, or an artifact, or a Website, unless you know it's quality. Want quality, forget **Yahoo!**, forget **Google**, get a library.

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Something About Books

by **Jack Walsdorf** (Jack Walsdorf Books,
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I was, quite by chance and good for tune, recently spending a weekend in Lexington after giving my book-collecting lecture at the **University of Kentucky**. My visit coincided with the 20th **Annual Kentucky Book Fair** held at the **State University in Frankfort**. As good luck would have it, this Book Fair included a number of authors I collect, read and admire. Authors such as **Wendell Berry**, **Allen W. Eckert**, **James Baker Hall**, **Bobbie Ann Mason**, **Sharyn McCrumb** and **Richard Taylor** were in attendance. As they like to say in the ad writing business, a star-studded cast.

One of the authors with the longest line of people waiting to get books signed was **Homer Hickam**, the product of a small coal-mining town in southwestern West Virginia called Coalwood. His name, for many of the readers of *Against the Grain*, may not ring a bell. But the movie, "October Sky," based on his 1998 book *Rocket Boys: A Memoir*, went a long way towards introducing this retired NASA engineer to a wide range of readers.

I was struck, most pleasantly, to find that the boy **Homer Hickam, Jr.** we find in the movie is very much like the character to be

found in the trilogy which started with *Rocket Boys*, followed by *The Coalwood Way* (2000) and *Sky of Stone* (2001), all published by **DeLacorte Press**.

I was also very pleasantly surprised at the writing style, referred to on the blurb of his last books as "an eloquent evocation... a thoroughly charming memoir" by the *New York Times* reviewer. In a strange and totally disconnected way I was reminded of the writing style of the English critic and mystery writer **Julian Symons**. Here, for example, is Symons writing in his 1950 mystery based on the life of an English businessman in *The 31st of February*: "At a quarter to ten on Monday morning a small regiment of black Homburg hats marched down Bezy Street. Beneath the hats advertising men were to be found..."

Here is **Hickam** writing in *Rocket Boys* some fifty years later and 4,000 miles from London: "He joined the line of men and quickly disappeared, one black helmet in a river of black, bobbing helmets, all going up the path to the [coal mine] tippel."

Hickam's memoirs, totally more than 1,050 pages in three volumes, are written in the best tradition of the southern storytellers, with lots of warmth, humor and sadness. This

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American Mathematical Society

by **John Long** (Consultant) <john-long@worldnet.att.net>

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201 Charles Street
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Books (general interest):

Edited by: Curtis D. Bennett and Annalisa Crannell, *Starting Our Careers: A Collection of Essays and Advice on Professional Development from the Young Mathematicians' Network*; Barry Cipra, *What's Happening in the Mathematical Sciences*, Volume 4; Steven G. Krantz, *How to Teach Mathematics*: 2nd Edition.

Books (professional interest):

Robert E. Green and Steven G. Krantz, *Function Theory of One Complex Variable*, 2nd ed.; Wolfgang Kühnel, *Differential Geometry: Curves - Surfaces - Manifolds*; N. V. Krylov, *Introduction to the Theory of Random Processes*; E. B. Dynkin, *Diffusions, Superdiffusions and Partial Differential Equations*.

Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting the AMS's Executive Director, **Dr. John Ewing** at AMS's offices in Providence, RI. Here is a snapshot of a great scholarly society and its multifaceted, worldwide efforts to improve mathematical research and scholarship.

Founded, 1888 in NYC, the AMS is a catalyst for "comradeship and communication among mathematicians." The AMS has "nearly 30,000 members and over 500 institutional members in the U. S. and worldwide." I asked Dr. Ewing about AMS's Support for Young Scholars and Epsilon Fund¹ (an effort to create a AMS endowment fund): Presently the AMS awards grants to selected summer programs totaling about

\$80,000 per year. The Epsilon Fund's goal is to reach \$2 million dollars, which will provide about \$100,000 in spendable income per year for the support of the young scholars program, without using any outside funding at all. An example of a very successful program is one held each summer at Ohio State University, the *Arnold Ross Program*.

Undoubtedly, encouraging lots of talented young people to pursue careers in mathematics is a *critical element* and a salient issue in America's scientific and technological future—AMS's continuing support of young scholars, summer programs is a crucial move in that direction.

AMS Book Publishing Program:

Books are extremely important to the mathematical community, and mathematicians have a keen interest in the history of mathematics. It is not uncommon for a mathematician to delve back in mathematics literature that was published 20, or 30, or even 50 years ago. Just as librarians are acutely aware of the extraordinary value of archival material, so to the mathematics community. AMS has a vigorous book publishing program (100 new titles per year) and does not allow individual AMS titles to go out of print (there are over 3,000 backlist titles). AMS is closely watching developments with print-on-demand technology and how that might benefit the international mathematics and scholarly community.

As a society publisher, AMS has paid

special attention to complex factors affecting individuals and institutions in "dollar poor countries." For example, following the breakup of the Soviet Union, AMS provided grant money to Russian mathematicians and institutions in order to sustain them during a very difficult time.

In my conversation with Dr. Ewing, I was reminded of the fact that we—as librarians, society publishers, commercial publishers, book or serials vendors—are in a *People Business*.

We are successful because we are working side-by-side with many talented, dedicated people. So, if you have a moment, please take a look at the AMS Web page (www.ams.org) and a inspiring remembrance of the late mathematician, **Prof. Radha G. Laha**.

Finally, I hope *ATG* readers will take a few moments to check out the AMS's *Mathematical Moments* on the Web (www.ams.org/ams/mathmoments.html). *Mathematical Moments* is a "series of informational flyers...designed to promote appreciation and understanding of the role mathematics plays in science, nature, technology and human culture."

Endnotes

1. Epsilon ("small or close to zero") was a term—at once humorous and affectionate—that the great mathematician, Paul Erdos, used in speaking about young, very talented, scholars of mathematics.

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is, first and foremost, the story of **Hickam**'s young life in a company owned and controlled coal mining town. It is also the story of **Homer**'s attempts to make his father, the mine superintendent, understand why his youngest son wanted to be a rocket scientist, not a mining engineer. Finally, it is the story of **Homer**'s mother, **Elsie**, who dreams of helping

both her husband and her son break the ties of the mine, ties, she feels, which will eventually kill both her men.

The **Hickam** trilogy does not have to be read in the order first published (I, for example, read the second and third books first, followed by *Rocket Boys*), and if time does not permit the reading of all three volumes, then any of the three titles will stand alone. The reader will find the storytelling crisp, compelling, and entertaining.