

ALAN PHELPS

Commune teaches life lessons

A batch of old communemates were back in the fold over the weekend.

I was sort of misty-eyed at the sight of former roommates, and while it might have been because of the Rumpel Minze, I like to think it was thoughts of the camaraderie we shared.

It made me remember all the people who had passed through the Isle Broddick doors, all the waifs of society, the tired, poor, huddling masses yearning to use our electric skillet.

Many have paid their dues at the Isle before going on to bigger and better things. Twelve people have called the Isle home at various times.

Gabe was at the Isle on Saturday night. A regular of the old days, Gabe took his Winstons and moved in with another former Islemate, Dave. Right now they're in the process of being evicted from their new pad because of a silly little 15-person brawl police recently stopped at their house.

As Dave slowly cut apples in the Isle's kitchen Saturday night, Gabe drank a beer in the living room. He wore his Super Bowl shirt, the one that has each year's logo and final score. He looked thoughtful, and I saw my chance.

I asked Gabe what his time at the Isle had taught him. Was it a kind of turning point in life, a new beginning, perhaps? Maybe the Isle taught him important lessons about living in society, I thought.

Gabe paused, searching for the right words.

"I learned how to tell the difference between sofas," he said, smiling.

Sofas, I said to myself. The common house couch. There was something to that idea of Gabe's, a nugget of wisdom about where so many of us sit each day. I wondered if the 10 Isle sofas were the beginning of some link I might find between all of the former communemates, graduates of the Isle Broddick.

I began remembering other former Islanders. Jazzy, the strange girl who



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wandered in with Dave one day and made odd hand gestures. Brett, who recently shaved his head and moved to the Twin Cities to work at a Sbarro pizza joint. Angela, who tried to rearrange our furniture and finally moved to Florida. Josh, who now lives under his girlfriend's parents' iron fist. Brian, who sold perfume and skipped town just one step ahead of an arrest warrant.

Did these people have anything in common? And as I ponder leaving the Isle after next semester, do their experiences foretell aspects of my future?

Also in town this weekend was one of the most enigmatic of all the former communemates. If the Isle affected anyone, it was Kevin.

He came to us an angry youth who kept a "hit list" of people who crossed him for the day he could buy a gun named Grumsch. Kevin was on probation, and he drank Spaghetti-Os straight from the can. One of his dreams was to eventually earn degrees in both psychology and sociology so he could rule humanity.

Then one day Kevin collided with Robitussin-DM. The active ingredient, a type of synthetic morphine, was an over-the-counter demon for Kevin. As a collection of empty bottles massed in the basement, Kevin slowly metamorphosed into RoboKevin.

Around last December, other stages of Kevin began to show themselves. He cut his hair off and hung it on the kitchen wall. He spent two days trying to make a coat out of twine and

playing cards after burning books page by page on the front porch. He used odd plants to scare the spirits away from our basement.

Then Kevin began to find his way. He moved out of the Isle and took up religion. He now attends a Bible school and plans on being a missionary someday.

Kevin sat in the Isle living room Saturday, talking about Tunisia and how he wanted to spread his faith. I got the idea Kevin had transcended the sofa stage that enraptured Gabe.

I concluded the Isle is whatever a person wants to make of it. For a few, it was just another place to smoke. For others, it was a revelation.

Only four people live at the Isle nowadays. Four people and one dog, that is. I wonder if I have changed during my stay at the commune, if I have learned anything about couches or creation.

I guess I've learned a lot about bathroom scum. I know how to make a frozen pizza, and I know that Jell-O becomes a brittle solid if it's left out long enough. I've learned more about bugs and police procedure than I ever wanted to know.

Saying my days there have changed my life might be going a bit too far. If I drank a good eight ounces of Robo, I might see things a little differently.

Phelps is a senior news-editorial major, a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter and a columnist.

RICHARD WRIGHT

Nature's majesty overwhelming

The leaves rustled, almost like a soft whistle.

The breeze was slight, almost still at times.

Overhead, a flock of Canadas flew by, looking for a field to stop in for food.

It's a scene repeated time and again for me. It's in my mind like it was the first time I witnessed it. It's something I like to remember every once in a while, especially at this time of the year.

It's a scene that will be repeated this year when I get out to witness the ritual of the migration.

I have been lucky enough to experience the sights, sounds, smells and feels of the outdoors in many ways. To see the wonders of nature is something that means more to me than the things I have seen as a journalist.

Granted, I have been lucky enough to witness some pretty impressive events as a journalist, but the ones I have seen outside leave me in even more wonderment.

They are natural, not man-made. There is no human control over what happens outside.

That's the beauty of it. Man has no control over nature. Just when we think we have a grasp on Mother Nature, she shows us she is in control.

Like this summer, standing outside my house listening to the rumble off in the distance. I thought it was thunder at first, then realized it was the wind on its way.

When it hit, it hit with such a force that this town is still showing scars of the damage. I will never forget the sound of the wind coming my way.

I will never forget the sight of watching a lightning storm south of town. Sitting there in the truck, windows down to catch the breeze, watching the fingers of light dance around the landscape, wondering what it was like at ground zero.

I don't think I have ever heard a more beautiful sound, besides the first sounds my children made at birth,



Even the sound a snake can make as it tries to flee from you is something surprising. Speeding through the grass and leaves, a little hognose snake can make a bit of a racket.

than the sound of a great horned owl, hooting off in the distance on a clear, cold December night.

There have been many other experiences.

The sound of thousands of sandhill cranes, ducks and geese lifting off from the Platte on a March morning is deafening. When my wife and I saw that, we couldn't hear each other speak because of the noise.

Standing out back of our house, looking over the miles of fields north of town, I listen for the sounds to float my way.

A meadowlark singing its distinctive song from the required fence post.

The soft brushing of the wind through the leaves of the pin oaks, maples and cottonwoods that mark the fence line.

All of the sounds combine to make a sort of music that is natural. No rap, no country, no metal.

You could say the tapping of a downy woodpecker is a kind of animal rap, the lonely call of a mourning dove is a kind of animal country song, and the explosion and panicked whoop-whoop-whoop of a ring-necked pheasant bursting from cover is a kind of animal grunge-metal.

If you have never listened to a light rain in the woods while standing under a tree limb trying to stay dry, you've missed a sound I cannot describe.

Or if you have not walked through a snowy field, your footprints the first to mar the pure whiteness of it, you

have missed the loud crunching sound that snow, something so soft, can make.

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Walking through a corn field, eyes and ears open and alert for the sights and sounds of a game bird, I can't help but be humbled by the greatness of nature.

A friend of my summed it up for me with his own experience of walking in a field with his dog, watching a white-tailed deer leap away into the woods, thanking God for allowing him to be able to partake of this world.

There is something happening here that is bigger than all of us.

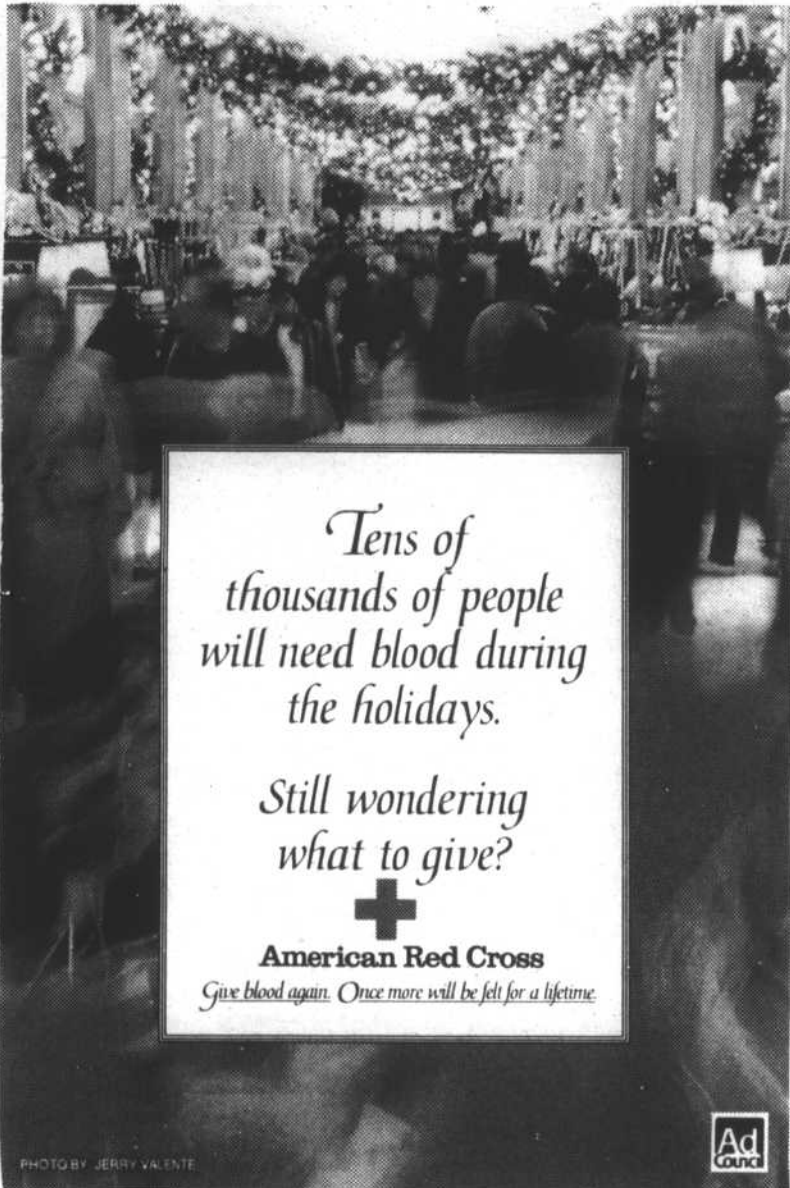
And when walking in either the prairie, woodlands, wetlands or a cornfield, I can get that sense that there is indeed something bigger going on than I can ever imagine.

Experiencing nature, either as a hunter or witness, can be a very meaningful, beautiful and almost spiritual awakening to the power of something we have no control over.

Nature will always have some sort of control on us.

It may be in the form of the breeze through the trees, a hawk soaring through the sky or a river meandering through the landscape, but the control nature has on us is one that cannot be broken.

Wright is a graduate student in journalism and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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