

David Bissonette

His Poetry Is Paying Off

By CHARLES RANDISI

I want to die
with a red shirt on.
I will not accept
a death handed to me
in a sealed envelope.

(From "The End of Everything," by David Bissonette.)

Dressed in red pants, red hair and goatee, and red sunglasses, but without a red shirt, and eating a can of peaches, he talked about his work and his life at his home on Grand Avenue.

"You have a license to be as eccentric as you want when you're a poet. If you do something weird, people will say, 'That's all right. After all, he's a poet.'"

David Bissonette is a poet. He is also a 1969 graduate of McQuaid Jesuit High School and a 1971 dropout of Niagara University.

He has been writing for six years now and it is beginning to pay off. Esquire, America, and other magazines have carried his works. He has written three books, "Wolf," "Laughing Lion," and "Thin Men Die Happy."

He said he decided to become a poet when "I woke up one morning, looked in the mirror, and said, 'Oh, my God, I'm a poet.' He has been writing regularly ever since.

"I try to turn out a few poems a day," he says, "but it's not easy. Now that I'm writing commercial poetry, I have to please everybody. I'm not writing just for my own personal therapy."

Writing involves a lot of pain. "Rejections are the worst part," he says. It's a hardship that all writers have to go through, especially poets, because there are so many of them.

"Last summer," he continued, "I was sending my poems to Esquire every week. They didn't accept any of them until the very last week of summer. It was an incredible relief. Right now my proportion of rejections to acceptances is about 20 to 1."

It was the acceptance by Es-



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quire that led Bissonette to quit school at Niagara. "The only thing I learned from college is that a lot of people shouldn't be there, and that I was one of them," he says. "School had become a sideline to my poetry, and it shouldn't be that way."

According to Bissonette, there are two ways to write poetry. "One way," he says, "is the old-fashioned way of writing from pure inspiration. You'll be doing something completely unrelated, and all of a sudden it hits you, and you write it down."

But moments of pure inspiration are few for Bissonette. "The other way to write poetry," he says, "is to get up at ten in the morning and say, 'I'm gonna do it,' and then do it."

A poem starts out as a "very small seed," says Bissonette. "I sometimes start from a title, a heavy line, or just a small phrase, and try to work it from there."

He lists folksinger Bob Dylan as a "tremendous influence" on him. He also enjoys the work of contemporary poets Mark Strand and the late Sylvia Plath.

"I don't follow anyone in particular," he says. "I'm so involved with what I'm doing myself, that I don't have the time to read."

What he is doing himself, aside from writing poetry, is publishing. He is his own distributor, through Bissonette Books, Ltd.

"I have to confess," he says, "that I hate to read. There are only two kinds of books that I will read. I read non-fiction; to

learn, and I read poetry so that I can find out what the trends are. Hopefully, I'll be able to set my own trends someday."

Poetry is his life. "Being a poet is more than just a job or a hobby," he says. Poets are a class of people. Saying 'I am a poet' is equivalent to saying, 'I am a Jew.'

"For me," he continued, "poetry is a permanent job. It's all I have. I want to publish my poetry and bring some joy to people. I am a poet forever."

Bissonette considers himself a religious person. Though not a churchgoer, he says that he in a sense has a "rapport with God. What I have is obviously a gift from God, and I feel that what I'm doing is therefore my calling. I do what I know and love best."

One can also receive some fringe benefits from being a poet. "It's a means to an end," Bissonette says. "I see it as a good way to meet people. It's a lot easier to start a conversation with someone if you tell them you're a poet. It's something to talk about."

The mark that his poetry leaves is very important to David Bissonette. "I want to be remembered, especially by my friends," he says. "I want to be remembered, especially by my friends," he says. "Without my friends I don't have much. Poetry is the means by which my friends can remember me."

Schools Back in Business, Enrollment Dip Foreseen

A drop in the total enrollment in parochial schools of the Rochester area is foreseen "on the basis of early returns and past history," Salvatore Musso said last week.

The deputy superintendent of diocesan schools used the figure 800 in talking about the decline, but qualified it with "give or take a hundred or two."

He explained the projection thus: there were 10,932 pupils in the schools during the year ended last June. This total was 552 below the 1970-71 figure, and in the meantime, two city

parishes, St. Theresa and St. Peter and Paul, have closed their schools, for a possible loss of about 300. Some of these pupils may enroll in other Catholic schools.

Fifty-seven of the 69 parishes in the city and its closest suburbs maintain grammar schools. Musso said enrollment projections received from principals indicate that losses are fairly evenly spread. The schools open today, but it will be several weeks before definite enrollment figures are compiled, he added.

Chavez, Catholics Protest U.S. Lettuce 'Ad'

New York (RNS) — Cesar Chavez, director of the United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO, and an agency of the Chicago Roman Catholic archdiocese have protested in separate actions the "promotion" of non-union lettuce by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, it was disclosed here.

Chavez, whose union is conducting a nationwide boycott of iceberg lettuce, said in a protest note to Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz that the U.S. official had become "nothing more than an agent of the growers."

The USDA's Plentiful Foods Program, which produces Spanish-language tapes and issues

them to radio stations across the country, named lettuce as "food of the month" for August.

The UFW learned of the tapes through the Chicago archdiocese's Latin American Committee which uses USDA tapes on its regular program. The archdiocesan committee refused to use the tapes and sent a letter to USDA, stating its support of the lettuce boycott.

Chavez, in his letter to Secretary Butz, protested the "use of the power and influence of the USDA in a deliberate effort to crush the Farm Workers Union and our non-violent boycott of non-union lettuce."

Church Groups Urged To Study Police Plan

The Genesee Ecumenical Ministry's judicial process commission called attention this week to the proposed Unified Police Plan and suggested that parish groups organize study projects while the plan is being debated and modified.

The commission offered to help plan such projects.

The public safety committee of the Monroe County Legisla-

ture will be conducting hearings on the plan during the next year. There will be a referendum in November, 1973.

The police plan, known as Metro, is based on studies by the Rochester Center for Government and Community Research and by a unit of the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

It has "momentous import," the commission pointed out, "for all residents of Monroe County, citizens desiring protection and ordering in community life and as taxpayers financing police services."

The judicial process commission said copies of the plan could be obtained at the library. The commission's office is at First Presbyterian Church, 101 S. Plymouth, telephone 325-7727.

Deaths

Sr. Tecla

Mass of the Resurrection for Sister Tecla Marie Knell, oldest member of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, was celebrated by Father Patrick Logan in the Motherhouse Chapel on Tuesday, Aug. 29.

Concelebrants were Fathers Albert Riesner, Thomas O'Connor and Joseph Reinhart. Also present were Father Frederick Walz and Msgr. Albert Schnecky.

Sister Tecla Marie entered the convent in 1904 from Holy Family parish. She taught in Wayland, St. Joseph's School, from 1905 - 1942, and in Holy Trinity School, Webster, 1942-1960, when she retired.

Courier-Journal

Red Cross Listing Volunteer Nurses

Spurred by this summer's devastating floods, the Red Cross is compiling a list of nurses willing to do volunteer work in emergencies.

Questionnaires have been sent to area nurses. Anyone interested who did not receive a survey card is asked to call the nursing and health care programs department at the Red Cross, 275-9800.

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