

Tom Aims: wily cherub, bard

Editor's note: This is the fourth in a series of weekly articles which profile University students selected at random.

By RICHARD DYMOND
Collegian Staff Writer

Four scenes in the life of Thomas William Aims: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: It is sometime in 1961. A ten-year-old blond boy has just received a gift from his parents; the Gilbert Science Kit is added to a bedroom already filled with Golden Books, rock collections, cameras and lenses, microscopes and chemicals. The boy's father, a field service engineer, sits in the living room watching. He decides his son will go to MIT.

Lackland Airforce Base near St. Antonio, Texas: It is May of 1970, and a blond airman with a crew-cut walks into the office of his squadron sergeant without knocking or announcing himself. He looks at the sergeant. "I want out," he says. The Sergeant looks at him and says, "I'll make sure you're in here until you die." The blond boy leaves the Sergeant's quarters and plans to have a friend catch him when he faints on the stairs.

Eden, North Carolina: It is fall of 1971. A boy and a girl, both with long blond hair, are standing in the office of the town's Justice of the Peace. Outside, townfolk are sitting on orange crates in the noon sun. The minister, a Southern Baptist, looks at their hand-crafted silver rings (bought in a head shop up North for \$1.50) and the girl's flowers (picked right there in Eden in a field behind the Hardy's restaurant) shakes his head and begins the service.

State College, Pa.: It is February 1972. A young man with ear-length blond hair sits on a wicker chair in his upstairs apartment on West College Ave. It is 12:25 a.m. His wife is sleeping in the bedroom. The dog, Sam, sleeps on the floor beside her bed. The curtains are open. The first snow of the night begins falling past the bedroom window. He rises and goes to the kitchen, pours some orange tea into a cup and adds some whiskey. Back in his chair he begins to smell the fragrance of tea and whisky. He turns to write lines of verse on a sheet of paper.

Thomas Aims (4th-education, soon to be American

"Louise is my equal, she is not some woman who I command around like a slave and I am not her puppet."

studies) is alive and well and still living in State College in summer 1973. He works for the State Theatre and also in the Kern print shop. His wife, the former Louise Wunder, keeps house, cooks fabulously (she's Pennsylvania Dutch), applies her skills to woodworking, sewing and macramé. She keeps company for Sam, and generally makes life bearable for Thomas while he is under the strain of writing poetry. Louise is away visiting her sister in California this week, so Tom is eating canned corn and cold chicken.

"She's been gone a week now, and I'm beginning to realize just how much of a team we are. We never needed a marriage license to prove that. Our lives together are equal to our lives as individuals, Louise is my equal. She is not some woman I command like a slave, and I am not her puppet. Overall, marriage is a fine thing if you are going to try and make it out there. If we weren't trying to make it I could have seen not getting married, but I wanted to start worrying about bills for the first time in my life."

Out there has always been Tom's battle. In high school he gave up prepping for his MIT future and became his high school's first hippie radical freak with long blond hair and the credo: "I am committed to being different, to living out what we're supposed to be able to live out in this country. To having a good time." He was kicked out of school three days before graduation because of a riot he had nothing to do with.

"I was writing poetry at that time, infatuated with little ideas, reading F. Scott Fitzgerald and Hemingway and even Nevil Shute's 'On the Beach' which really stands out in my mind because I was stoned and a friend gave it to me because I had been such a science nut."

After high school, Tom went to Cincinnati with his parents, but in December of 1969 he had some problems — his parents decided to break up, and Tom could see no life for him in Cincinnati. He came back to Pittsburgh, "where I found all my friends were changing from what I was changing into."

He remained in Pittsburgh for a few months, then joined the Air Force in May 1970. But after three days he found the whole idea of marching and learning weaponry disgusting. He applied for a discharge on the basis of a knee problem (which the drilling had really aggravated). He was refused and later teamed with a friend to get out.

"After I fell they rushed me to the hospital in an ambulance. The sergeant came over and said, 'If you're faking this — you're dead.' They put me on a medical hold, but I found out that once you're on M.H. they have to discharge you if you haven't been in for six weeks. I floated the information around that I knew this and soon I got my papers."

After the Air Force, Tom went back to Pittsburgh and to a professional job placement service.

He worked a month, then moved to State College to live with his sister.

"I lived in seclusion for five months — just writing and thinking. Finally I decided to go back to school as an adjunct in December — got a job in the theater and met some people living in a co-op. There I met my wife Louise and we began living together. We went back to Pittsburgh to look for a job but didn't find anything. One night, we just decided to get married. We left and drove through foggy mountains in Virginia to a little town called Eden, N.C. and at noon we arrived."

"I remember the ceremony was about to begin when I walk these two young people and an older lady. The guy looked about 17 and the girl about 21 and six months gone. They sat and watched us get married. The kid looked scared shitless. The pastor wanted to ignore them, but he was real fascinated with us — our rings and Louise's long blond hair and the sheath of poems by John Donne that I wanted him to read for us."

The living room we sit in has a ceiling that slopes down on each side like a tent roof but is made to seem roomier by the placement of round photographs and paintings that go all around like stars in a planetarium. The room is anchored by three or four finely made antique pieces including a pigeon-holed writer's desk with a glass cylinder door over the book shelf inside, a pair of hundred-year-old tapestries of George Washington that a relative brought back from England after World War II, and an old silvertone gramophone with a metal crank set outside the pegged box. The mechanism no longer works, but the piece still has a quiet dignity.

"The antiques give us the feeling of getting back, of the infusion of many elements of the past that we still hold to be worthwhile, like craftsmanship and style. Take the chair you're sitting in. It came from my grandmother-in-law's house. We took it apart and re-upholstered it, re-tied the strings and re-did the seat. Louise learned woodcraft from a book. She's the real craftsman."

"I think we're 'getting back' in a lot of ways today. We're beginning to pull classic form into our music. We have rock operas like 'Tommy,' plays like 'Godspell' and 'Hair,' jazz and blues, and even people like Zappa who are doing a bit of everything. So our antiques are simply a form of that process."

Tom sits in this sanctuary and writes poems. He published in Focus, in spring 1973 a little poem called "Scarecrow" and has a few of his compositions picked for a student anthology called Spectrum (Idlewild Press), to be published soon. He loves to say the names of writers. He pronounces each carefully, paying each proper respect.

"I want to go into American studies because I'm interested in the American culture. The exciting thing about it is that we might read John Steinbeck writing about the Depression compared to Kesey writing about movements in the 60's. Then there's Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut. I enrolled in American studies 403 last spring, then I realized you had to be tenth term to take it. Professor Daniel Walden was teaching. He's a very impressive man — very well-read. I'm looking forward to him."

"In poetry, you're working with an image of what the work presents. You're suggesting — leaving a shadowy film. I like the way that poetry acts as a dual subjective — what I subject into it and what the reader subjects into it."

"So there's a middle ground never established?"

"Right, but everybody is going across it. That middle ground is where fiction is, telling you character A did this and Character B did that. What poetry is saying is that there is something over there, yet the reader over here is feeling that, but not actually ever having it told to him, just suggested."

"One of the main reasons I write is to bridge some kind of gap, because human beings are lonely and because they build



Photos by Ed Golomb

up these walls around themselves. I want to have my poems crawl over walls and say there's another person that feels the same way you do."

This sudden talk of loneliness has Tom looking around at his living room, at the things that he and Louise have collected patiently in the last years.

"Everything I have in this room is fantastic to me, but is it really worth anything and is it going to matter what I did? You can't take anything with you. All these things are to make this life comfortable until you pass into that life. But what if you don't want to pass into that life?"

"I want to make enough money to get a farm and live away from people on top of a mountain somewhere. I'd really like to move to Montana now because I hear it's the least populated state. Yes, I'd really like to move to Montana... or New England. How I would love to be there."

"Why is New England such an appeal?"
"I think it's because you're getting back to where you originally started from. And you're near the ocean and people are so fascinated with the sea. I'm afraid of it. We went to Atlantic City and walked on the boardwalk on a stormy night when the waves were crashing around us. I just thought how, if you fell off, you'd never be able to survive. And yet you go in during the day and have fun. I guess it's that whole idea of playing with death."

"Like Kafka?"
"Yeah, there's a beautiful example. Think how he wrote himself fully onto the paper... Wow, do you think if you do that you're actually going to start determining your own fate?"



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UNIVERSITY CALENDAR
Friday-Monday, July 27-30, 1973

SPECIAL EVENTS

Friday, July 27 — BOC band chorus concert, 8 p.m., Schwab. No admission charge.
Friday-Sunday, July 26-29 — Festival of American Theatre, "Little Murders," 8 p.m., Pavilion. (Sunday curtain, 7:30 p.m.)
Friday, July 27 — Commonsplace Coffeehouse, 8-11 p.m., Room 102 Kern.
Sunday, July 29 — Black Worship Service, 11 a.m., Walnut.

FILMS

Friday, July 27 — HUB Summer Series, 8:45 p.m., HUB lawn. "The Golden Fish," Jacques-Yves Cousteau, (rain, HUB ballroom), followed by "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," with Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn.
Saturday-Sunday — Student SF films, 7 and 9 p.m., HUB assembly room. "High Noon," Gary Cooper, Grace Kelly.

OFFICIAL

Saturday, July 28 — Written French and Spanish language examinations for advanced degree candidates.

LECTURES

Friday, July 27 — The College of Education Faculty Lecture Series, 12:30 p.m., Room 112 Kern. Stanley O. Ikenberry, professor of education, on "The Confidence Crisis."

RECREATION

Sunday, July 29 — Intertown Folk Dancers, 7:30-10 p.m., HUB ballroom.
Monday, July 30 — Bridge, 6:45 p.m., HUB ground floor lobby. Duplicate play.

EXHIBITS

Museum of Art — Gallery A, Prints and Drawings by Penn State Faculty. Gallery C, Permanent Collection. Gallery B, Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts Crafts, until July 29.
Kern Gallery — Warren Hullo and Isabel Parks, pottery. Sandy and Philip Jurus, jewelry. Ann Demairas, prints. Louis Marotta, paintings and drawings.
Chambers Gallery — William D. Davis, assistant director University Art Museum, recent drawings "Woven Art," works by Barbara Hodik, Linnea Martin, David Van Dommelen, Kent Sissel, Kathryn Mills, Nancy Harrison, Steve Grout, Annette Hobbs.
Zoller Gallery, Visual Arts — Paintings, drawings and sculpture by Jim Finnegan and David Bushman, until August 3.

