THE RON MCLARTY COLLECTION

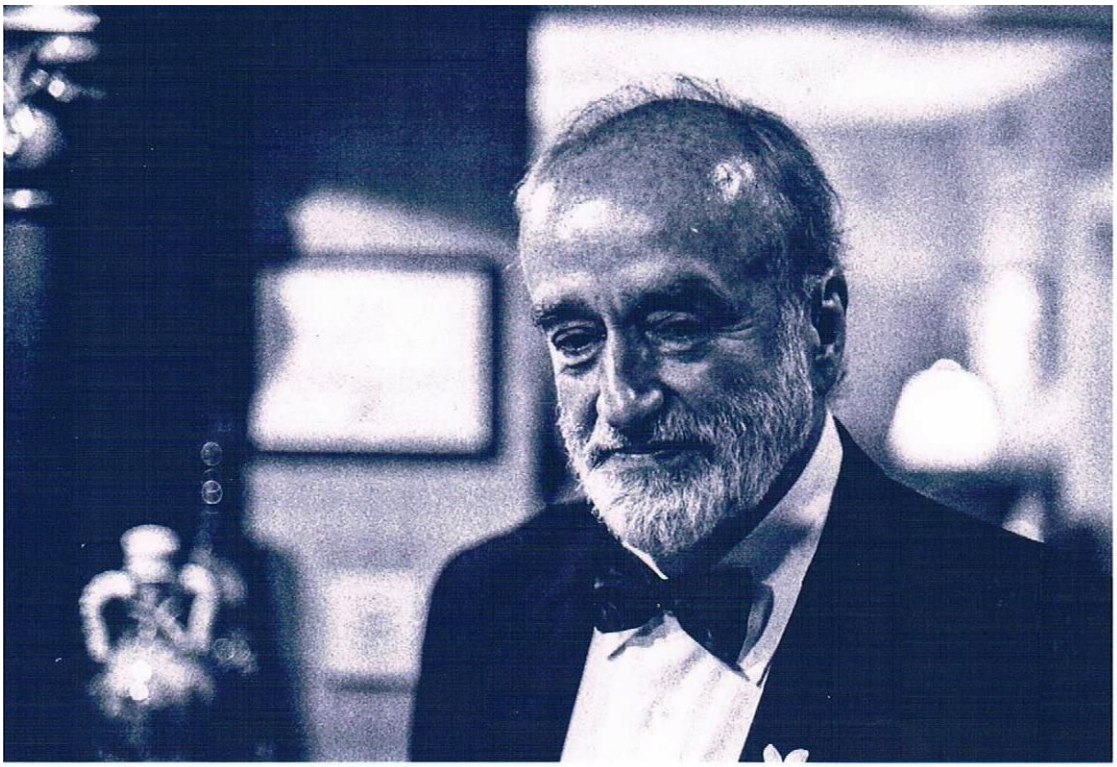

Photo taken in 2012

INTRODUCTION:

The national and global, accomplishments achieved by Ron McLarty are extraordinary and deserve acclamation. His many talents as novelist, award-nominated television successes, theater and film performer, playwright and audio-book narrator place him in rare company among America's artists. Rhode Island College is proud to house the complete

collection of one of its most celebrated graduates: the original manuscripts of his novels, plays and poems, his extensive audio-book narrations, photos, reviews, and biography.

Ron McLarty: writer and artist

Considerable testimony gives ample evidence that Ron McLarty read widely, justifying the view that he exhibited a vigorous intellectual zeal. With the emergence of pop culture, we have become too tolerant of writers and artists who lack any link to the great achievements of Western culture. True genius is comparative. Knowledge of past achievements sets the standards we must equal or surpass. Unfortunately today, we often elevate writers, artists,, and purveyors of pop culture who, too often, lack any familiarity with past accomplishments in literature, philosophy, history, science, and art. Sophisticated judgment is best informed by a disciplined familiarity with past voyagers who transcended conventional boundaries. Shakespeare's stunning verbal accomplishment represents the same sort of cultural leap won by Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms in music, Johannes Kepler and Isaac Newton in science and Michelangelo and Picasso in art. To avoid reinventing the wheel, we must learn to stand upon the shoulders of past genius; otherwise, we risk the danger of celebrating mediocrity. This is not to censure instinctive brilliance. McLarty's creativity springs from a mind capable of breaking out of stale cultural biases, while still giving ample evidence that he valued our rich intellectual and artistic pedigree. From his earliest years, he read avidly. Friends often tell us he spent his high school

years in the East Providence and Providence libraries where he read and wrote incessantly. His growing involvement in theater offered him an introduction to the world's great dramatists, making him familiar with Shakespeare, Ibsen, O'Neill, and Bernard Shaw. As a dual major in theater and English at Rhode Island College, McLarty discovered Ancient Greek playwrights like Sophocles and Euripides, Roman poets and the creative vitality of Elizabethan drama. His desire to write fiction was nurtured by his introduction to giants such as Fielding, Dickens, Austin, Conrad, Joyce, Fitzgerald and Hemingway. This rich sampling of fictional masters permitted him to measure his craft against the very highest literary standards.

By the time the twenty-one year old McLarty entered the Army Special Services, he had read and performed in Christopher Marlow's *The Tragedy of Dr. Faustus,* George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara*, Maxwell Anderson's *Anne of The Thousand Days,* Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae,* and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Hamlet.* Quite an impressive catalogue of major dramatists for any young novice to absorb. Acting requires one not only to memorize lengthy passages of poetry and prose, but also to adopt a verbal discipline, demanding microscopic attention to the nuances of style, cadence, grammatical structure and phrasing unique to each author. McLarty learned to appreciate literary economy, a proficiency he admired in Hemingway's terse but evocative style. He adopted a disciplined respect for literary craftsmanship as the *sine qua non* of writing fiction as well as poetry. He valued literary grace and verbal suitability over the gratuitous sensationalism so characteristic of our current marketplace. Robert Frost said he'd no sooner write free verse

than play tennis without a net. His remark fed McLarty's enthusiasm for exploring the linguistic architecture of prose and poetry. He believed each genre demanded attention to the well-crafted utterance. His last novel, *The Dropper,* showcases his fondness for poetic lyricism. Truman Capote may have best described the kind of language McLarty' lovingly mastered: "To me, the greatest pleasure of writing is not what it's about, but the inner music that words make." Any reader opening the first two pages of *The Dropper* will quickly understand Capote's meaning.

McLarty's tireless lifetime attention to the written word produced ten novels (four of them published), forty four plays (fewer than ten were ever produced), even a small body of poetry. Ever since his participation in the Grace Church Boy's Choir, he had possessed a talent for singing. His high school performance in the musical, *South Pacific,* demonstrated his early melodic flair. McLarty's fictional voice eventually proved a compelling musical instrument acutely attuned to the subtleties of tone, pace, diction, dialects, and speech rhythms. One can experience his lyrical gifts by listening to his extraordinary and sensitive readings of his own novels. His narrations in over one hundred twenty audio performances showcase his patient devotion to vocal subtleties. McLarty was a prose poet who could, as William Butler Yeats' concludes his poem *Sailing to Byzantium*, "sing / to lords and ladies of Byzantium/ Of what is past, or passing, or to come."

Only time will tell if his unpublished works will find publishers eager to endorse McLarty's eloquent voice. Hopefully the presence of the Rhode Island College collection will provide inspiration to undergraduates, graduates, scholars and interested biographers for a broader awakening to

his distinctive command of language as well as his considerable talents as actor and audio-book narrator.

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The Rhode Island Years

Ron McLarty's extraordinary and diverse artistic talents were forged in the caldron of Rhode Island's small town social temperament. Though he would eventually spend the rest of his life living elsewhere, he never really abandoned his Rhode Island roots nor ever deserted the family and friends whom he loved. When he set out on his mission to act and write following his 1969 graduation from Rhode Island College, McLarty fed on his early experiences, eventually transforming them into his theatrical and fictional vision. Unlike many other artists who, suffocating from the provincialism of their childhood environment (as was the case with James Joyce's celebrated break with his Dublin ancestry), McLarty embraced his past as a wellspring of his most fundamental values.

Ronald William McLarty was born in East Providence on April 14, 1947. He grew-up in the 211 Brightridge Avenue family home of his parents Kaye and Robert McLarty with his brother Douglas. McLarty's early life would eventually prove a compelling influence on his artistic life and career. Raised by hard-working, devout Episcopalian

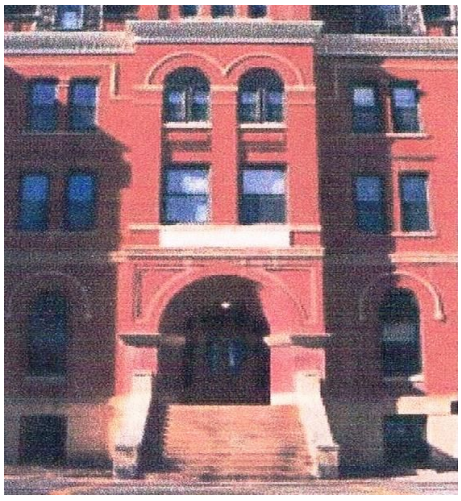
parents, his father was an Air Force veteran employed by the Standard Oil Company, his mother a teacher in the East Providence school system. They lovingly conveyed their moral and social conservatism to both their boys. McLarty sang in the church choir, attended East Providence schools, spent ten years as a Boy Scout rising through its ranks to its highest level as an Eagle Scout and eagerly played several sports for his junior and senior athletic teams. In the nation's smallest state, one noted for its almost small-town stability and working-class values, McLarty's youth was imbued with a love of family, religion, patriotism, a life-long devotion to his friends, respect for his superiors and a burning desire to achieve the promised American Dream of success. Cynics might scoff at such uncomplicated beginnings as a vapid cliché of a storybook ideal.

Photos: Doug and Ron, above left, Selling lemonade, above right, Ron the skeptic,

The boys on the homestead steps

East Providence Central Jr. High graduation* (*top row, third from left)

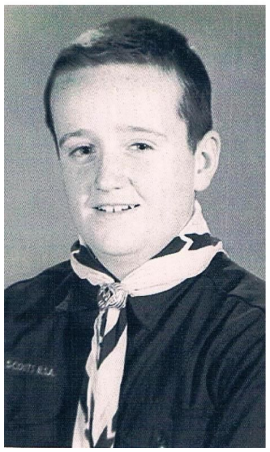
Attending the city's elementary and high schools, McLarty assimilated the surrounding landscape of his youth which appears prominently in his first three novels: *Memory of Running, Traveler* and *Art in America.* Each work reflected experiences which became the foundation of his artistic disposition and emotional temperament. Only the *The Dropper,* his last novel and set in West England*,* departs from his preoccupation with his Rhode Island roots; yet, the tale itself concerns his grandfather's youthful crisis.



The photo ***(right)*** shows The Brightridge Elementary School, located a short walk down the street from the McLarty home. Kaye McLarty worked

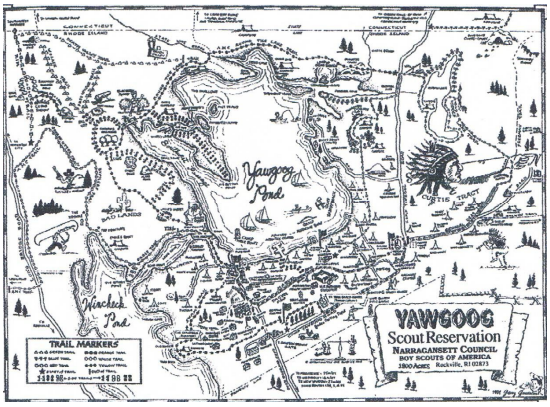
here as a special education teacher and Ron would begin his educational journey there. One can easily imagine him contemplating his dream to become a writer. Here he began his habit, confirmed by his brother and close friends, of jotting down notes which he would later transform into his earliest literary efforts. And it was also here that McLarty displayed his increasing penchant for mimicking. Early evidence of this habit, which prefigures his acting career, occurs when he served as an altar boy and member of The Grace Church Boy's Choir with his close friend Robert Merrill. Doug McLarty tells how he often mimicked the Grace Church choirmaster, a rather gangly and fussy taskmaster, earning McLarty the devoted laughter of his fellow singers. He also earned the approbation of the choirmaster who caught him in one of his performances. Bob Merrill, claims that "Ron practiced singing and acting all the time." McLarty, as many friends would describe him, had a shy and retiring nature that belied his later assertiveness. Eventually he would develop a hearty involvement with friends and school activities by virtue of his wry humor and affability. No shrinking violet content to live a reclusive childhood, McLarty eventually played football and basketball at East Providence Central Junior High ***(photo left, E. Providence Central, 1961)***. Attending East Providence High School McLarty participated in three years of football and three in track and field (shot put and discus). As his

growing commitment to theater increased, he left the football squad to act in school performances.



A long-time member of the Boy Scouts he spent his summers at Camp Yawgoog, today a sprawling 1800 acre Scout facility in Rockville, Rhode Island that serves over 800 members each week in summer. McLarty's commitment to the camp proved no casual involvement. Ultimately, he would employ constant allusions to Yawgoog in both *The Memory of Running* and *Traveler*. Consider Jono Riley's recollection of his camp duties.

> "After the last scheduled scout swim before dinner, I'd have my four lifeguards scrub down the docks and rake our beach while I would recheck the swim-card board and fill out my day report, making a special note of any merit-badge work or swim advancement. A Boy Scout waterfront is ferociously structured, and a system of checking and double-checking is always the order of the day."



The camp virtually became a motif of an early childhood order to which he would devote himself. From 1961 to 1968, McLarty spent ten weeks every summer as a counselor. There he met Donald Driscoll, a Rhode Island teacher, who served as the camp director and ultimately became a good friend to him.

Fred Schultz, a fellow Scout counselor who met McLarty in 1959, vividly remembers McLarty's "outgoing, larger-than-life personality." Surprisingly, even while he pursued his dreams of acting and authorship, McLarty invested considerable time enthusiastically devoted to his duties and obligations. Like so many others close to McLarty, Schultz reinforces an unvarying picture of McLarty's popularity, buoyant laughter, and extraordinary talent that kept other Scouts fascinated by the Saturday night shows staff members produced. "Ron loved comedy and you could tell he had a desire to become a serious actor," recalls Schultz. As a consequence, everyone begged him to mimic, sing, and perform. But Schultz develops another aspect of McLarty's character. "Ron was taller then most of us, looked older and had a great influence on everyone." His apparent maturity and "leadership ability" set him apart from all the other staff members.

McLarty and Schultz shared a mutual zeal for fishing, freshwater trout and saltwater striped bass ***(photo left, Ron left with Doug).*** Many have spoken of McLarty's prowess at fly fishing, but Schultz boasts that he "taught Ron everything he ever knew about casting flies." Together they foraged the freshwater pools in Rhode Island's *Arcadia State Park* seeking brown and rainbow trout while casting dry and wet flies toward the deep and enticing pools of Wood River and Breakheart

Brook. Alternatively, they plied the waters of Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay surf casting on low and high tides for sporty striped bass and bluefish.

Still seeking the big one in 2014

The portrait of McLarty that emerges here does not suggest childhood rebellion against unendurable circumstances, often considered the breeding ground for many artists. Ever since the Romantic Age, a prevailing view has held that artists, poets and novelists emerged out of the trauma of a dysfunctional youth or belligerent rebellion against society's suffocating conventions. Even Sigmund Freud had proclaimed that art was a neurosis or psychosis. Countless tales of anguished artists like Edgar Allen Poe and Vincent Van Gogh dominated the mistaken perception that genius is close to pathology. Lord Byron best symbolized the irreverent and troubled literary personality. He even attributed his character maladies to "bad blood" he inherited from a troubled ancestor-uncle ominously named

"Mad Jack Byron," a reprobate known for his impulsive womanizing and emotional vehemence. Another relative, a British Admiral, was burdened with the moniker, "Foul Weather Byron." for his manic behavior at sea. Romantics wallowed in the spirit of *Weltschmerz* and *angst, world*-weariness and foreboding. The so-called gothic manner emphasized dark horror, unrequited suffering and death. One has only to read Poe's short story *The Tell-tale Heart* to sample the Romantic fascination with pain and grief. McLarty's youth, on the other hand, did not suggest any psychological trauma or a sociopathic inability to adjust to social norms--nor does the rather conventional life of Geoffrey Chaucer or even Shakespeare, for that matter, a writer who enthusiastically embraced social fellowship.

Oddly enough then, McLarty's days and ways resemble an ideal, textbook childhood. His brother, Doug, now a retired Air Force colonel and practicing artist, speaks of their constant admiration and love of their parents: "Thankfully, we told them of our love for them long before they died in the Maine accident." Doug describes their mutual admiration of their father who worked at the Socony/Mobil off-loading facilities in nearby Riverside: "Dad was a good baseball player, physically strong and ruggedly handsome, with the heart of a lamb but no disciplinarian." That function fell to their mother, Kaye, "She was a five foot two inch force of nature," who ran the household with "military efficiency." Doug describes his brother's constant preoccupation with writing which he often submitted to his mother's critical eye. "Kaye [both brothers referred to their mother by her first name] never spared her judgment" often sending Ron into a snit over her professional criticism. Doug explained that his mother would

advise him if he wanted to become a writer, "he should learn to write carefully." Bob Merrill also lovingly confirms McLarty's "mission to be a writer and actor from his earliest days, "constantly practicing, singing and mimicking human manner-isms all the time." Merrill recalls McLarty's "fantastic ability" to improvise songs and lyrics which he would shout-out joyously with "little self-consciousness." Much later in his life, McLarty would often downplay his singing ability; yet, both friends had joined The Grace Church Boy's Choir as eight-year old sopranos, revealing McLarty's early singing training. Later in high school he would became a member of the Crimson Boys Chorus where he would demonstrate his considerable vocal skills which he eventually employed throughout his entire career. ***(Photo above right, McLarty is in the top row, 2nd right)***

Bottom row: C. Marshall, G. Gillooly, D. Moses, R. Oakland—student director, R. Hall, R. D'Aiello, *Second row:* J. Gouvei
D. Rovelto, T. Khouri, D. Donaldson, T. Goude. *Third row:* J. McNulty, R. Merrill, C. Rocha—president, R. McLarty, S. Sar
council representative.

Again and again, those who knew him best--Doug and Linda McLarty, Bob Merrill, Tony Antonian, Fred Schultz, Paul Bourget--all agree he seemed something of a paradox. On the one hand, Doug speaks of his brother's "quiet and in the background" introversion, his slightly overweight physique, his above average height and large head giving one the impression, as Tom Antonian observed, that "Ronnie" [McLarty's childhood nickname] could never be able to play sports. Still, he went on to say how much he admired his determination, giving "110 per cent all the time." Such testimony supports the view that

McLarty did not suffer from Romantic despair expressed by Keats' anguished lines: "Here where men sit and hear each other grown;/Where palsy shakes a few, sad last gray hairs,/ Where youth grows pale, and specter-thin and dies." Never the shallow Babbitt or Pollyanna optimist, McLarty's grounding in a social network of family love, religious counsel, youthful fellowship and his natural appetite for humor eventually permitted him to confront the two great tragedies of his life: the fatal car accident of his parents and the death of his beloved wife, Diane.

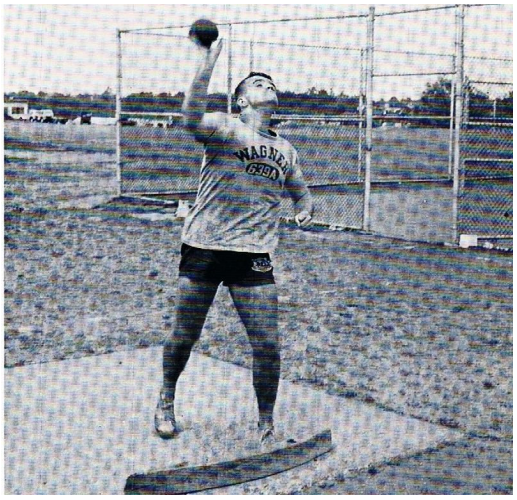
Central Jr. High Football Team

The Central Junior High football team is one of the strongest in years. Members of the team are: 1st row (l-r), T. Antonian, J. McGill, M. Beaubien, R. Carvalho; 2nd row (l-r), P. Souza, R. Brown, A. Tudino, M. Sinkinson, R. Thomson, W. Roe, M. Mello, R. Owens, J. Moniz; 3rd row (-r), E. Camara, H. Hutchinson, J. Lindberg, C. Duquette, R. Machowski, S. Braun, J. Capaldi; 4 row (l--r), J. Dillenback, R. Fiske, R. McLarty, P. Errington, T. Stringfellow, J. Kelly, F. Ouimette; and absent, J. Zinowich.

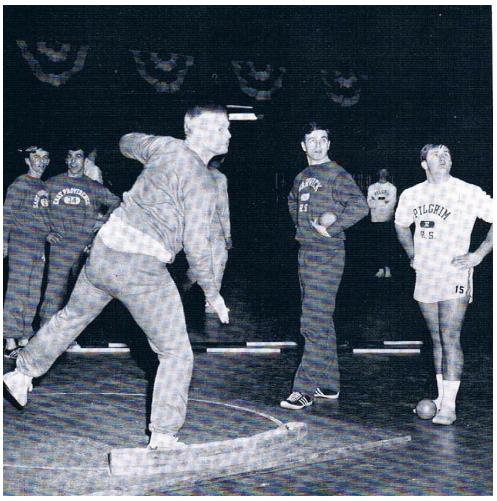
Entering East Providence High School in 1961, McLarty would solidify his promise as an accomplished actor, yet he was determined to balance his activities with the same vigorous commitment to school sports which he made in Junior High. ***McLarty (top row, 3rd from left. His close friend Tom Antonian is front left.)***

Front row, l-r: J. Rezendes, G. David, T. Sampers, L. Brewster, J. Murray, R. Vincent, J. Gama, T. Antonian, C. Butler, J. McGill, S. Britto. *Second row:* R. Bushnell, T. Dwyer, P. Quinn, J. Arnett, P. Grant, J. Sanders, T. Tait, R. Buckley, R. Charves, R. Nelson, R. Brown, R. Texeira, J. Moniz, D. Beaubian, R. Hall. *Third row:* E. Holmes, M. Soderlund, F. Reavy, J. Madden, T. McShane, R. McLarty, J. Keegan, A. Contu, B. Balsifiore, M. Mello, P. Farrell, T. Aspinwall, R. Capello, J. Vinnitti. *Fourth row:* A. Jordan, M. Plante, S. Tortis, B. Chafee, P. McLeod, D. Brady, B. Washington, A. Dalecio, H. Lopes, J. Shaw.

Although he never achieved the athletic success he sought, his true talent as a thespian would quickly earn him countless accolades, McLarty displayed the sort of pluck and determination in sports which Tom Antonian has described. ***(photo above left, East Providence High, McLarty third row #49,1968)***



Heaving the shot put in track



Close friend Bob Merrill launches one

McLarty ultimately "became the drama department," according to Merrill who also played school roles. Merrill playfully describes the night of their senior performance of *South Pacific*. "Ron always looked older than me and most guys in the school, so he was perfect for the lead. He also had a rich baritone voice that even sounded like Ezio Pinza, the Italian guy who sang in the movie." Merrill goes on to tell of his aunt who attended the school performance, thinking it "delightful." But, Merrill adds," She complained that she thought it was very unfair that the school chose to hire a professional actor rather than a student to play the lead role." Significantly, the 1965 class yearbook also reveals that McLarty received a "Tops in the School" award for "Most Comical" ***(photo, below, right)*** an award which harkens back to the abundant commentary by friends regarding his sense of humor, copious laughter, and talent at celebrity impersonation. In fact, McLarty maintained a habit of prankishness all his life that often got him into trouble. Just as he parodied his Grace Church

choirmaster, on a later occasion when the Episcopal bishop of Rhode Island was attending a Grace Church ceremony, the indignant cleric witnessed one of McLarty's impersonations of the bishop himself. More lamentable, but surely worthy of a prank by Harpo Marx, was a practical joke he played on the day of his brother's Philadelphia church wedding in 1968. It seems Kaye McLarty dutifully hand-prepared a map and written directions for the Rhode Island wedding party members which Ron proceeded to rip-up and replace with his own that directed them to The Pocono Mountains. Doug described the "church chaos" that ensued the day of the wedding when all his friends failed to appear. The missing party eventually alarmed the fourteen year old culprit who tearfully confessed his hoax. Outraged at the ruse, Doug attacked Ron and the two fell to the church floor locked in a sibling battle to the death while the outraged minister looked on at the slapstick scene taking place in the sanctity of his church. Eventually a Shakespearean all's well that ends well was brokered when the missing party finally appeared in the nick of time.

McLarty's puckishness, explained his brother, Doug, persisted even when he joined Army Special Services where he was called upon to entertain at a party given by the camp General himself. Apparently, McLarty felt the partygoers were so noisy and indifferent to his

performance that he decided to "fake singing and playing." Remarkably no one noticed his mischievous deception. Constantly, his "quick and hilarious" antics would often erupt at gatherings after he had spent half the night sitting quietly in a corner. Then he became the center of attention while others marveled as he would "act-out countless scenes" from John Wayne or Woody Allen movies to television and political personalities. This instinctive lightheartedness won him his earliest and most devoted audiences. Doug McLarty summed up his brother's "delightful sense of humor" in an insightful observation: "He had the unique ability to grasp often disparate facets of an unfolding situation, observing the drama, tensions, misunderstandings and humor all occurring at the same time and filling his notebook with his take on the scene He had the power and character to both carry you along and provide insights you could not imagine." From these playful beginnings sprang McLarty's eventual arsenal of comic skills.

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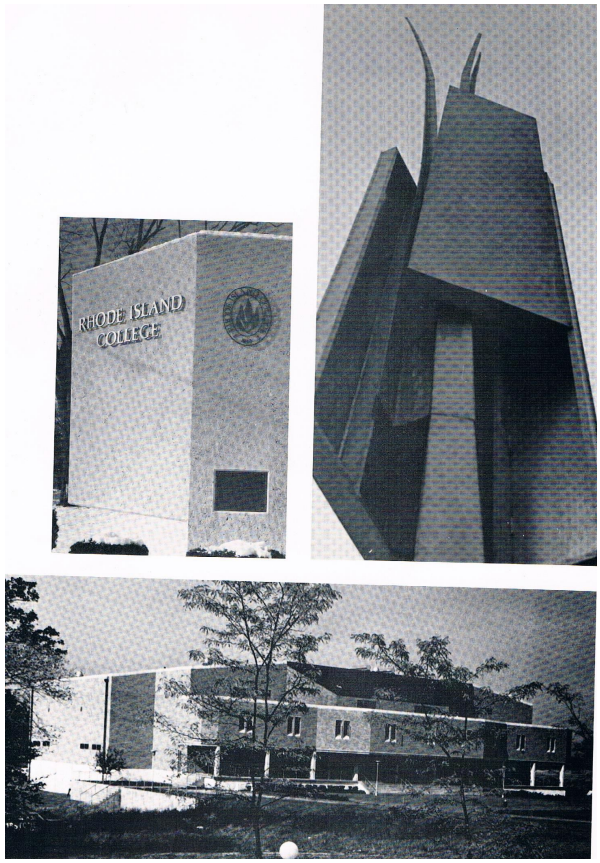


Rhode Island College 1969 yearbook photos

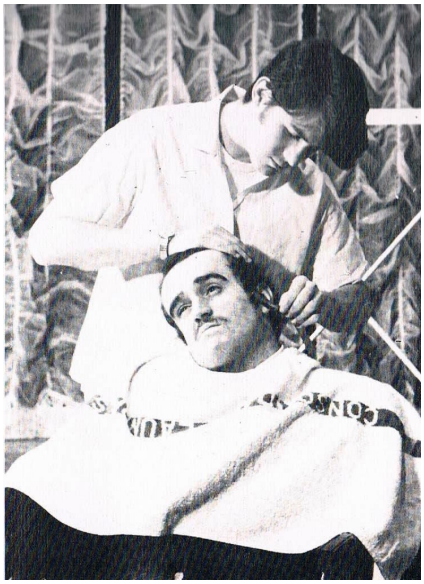
McLarty enrolled at Rhode Island College In September, 1965, concentrating in theater and literature, dual interests that moved him all his life. He made his freshman debut for the Theater Department in its May, 1966 performance of *The Male Animal*, appropriately cast as Joe Ferguson, an ex-football hero looking to re-kindle his campus romance with a married woman. McLarty quickly established a reputation as a compelling stage performer, eventually dominating the college's productions for the next three years. The fall semester of his sophomore year (November, 1967), he tackled Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*, a stylish, so-called Theatre

of Absurd play which echoed the tragic-comic manner of Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee and Eugene Ionesco. McLarty played Davies, a mysterious derelict rescued from a bar fight by two sympathetic brothers. The spring of 1967 finds him chosen for the complex job of playing Henry VIII in *Anne of the Thousand Days,* surely a daunting challenge for any college performer. The play demanded a mature and regal actor who could handle the sophisticated dialogue and depth of characterization. Doubtless, McLarty's adult appearance, often noted by those who knew him, gave him an advantage during casting. Later, the play was made into a 1969 film that starred Richard Burton as Henry. In McLarty's junior year of 1967-68, he managed to land the lead in all three of the Theatre

Department's productions, At this point in his college career, he was beginning to be regarded as a theatrical prodigy capable of professional work.

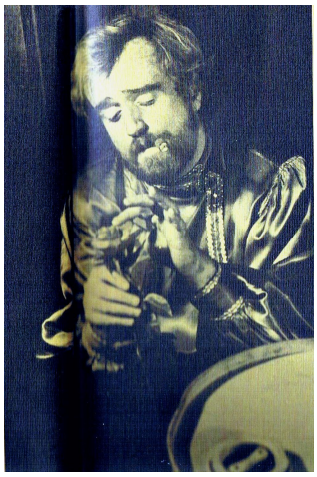
McLarty's opening performance in December justified the high regard he had earned, playing "Big Daddy" Pollitt in Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* ***(photo right)****, a* powerful drama of a Southern family's descent into social disintegration, Again, McLarty assumed an intricate role for a nineteen year old college student. The enormous Broadway success which became a popular film in the late 1950's featured an all-star lineup of actors who set a very demanding standard. Particularly notable was Burl Ives' work in both the stage and film. Pollitt, a cotton magnate of wealth and power, bristles at his family's moral decadence. Denouncing the lies ["mendacity," as Pollitt labels it often in the play], sexual dysfunction, and lusting after his fortune when he dies, Pollitt dominates the play with his fury and energy. The role begged an actor capable of conveying a man's disillusioned rage. McLarty's triumphant performance would anticipate his later success playing older and mature personalities.

Displaying his extraordinary range of characterization and sophisticated comedy, McLarty played the foppish Harry Brock in *Born Yesterday,* a very popular Broadway play that ran for an astounding 1642 performances from February, 1946 to December, 31, 1949. It starred Judy Holliday, who won an Academy Award for her role in the 1950 film, and *Paul* Douglas. Produced in March, 1968, the college's production suited McLarty's penchant for comic burlesque.

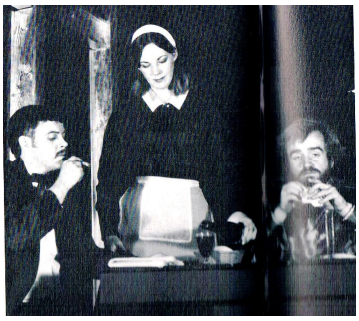


Yearbook photos of McLarty in Born Yesterday

Finally in May, 1968, he had the lead in Max Frisch's dark comedy, *Firebugs*, a lampoon of Nazism's evil, to complete his third leading role in his junior year. As was the case with his polished work in Pinter's *The Caretaker*, McLarty proved well-suited for the demands of post-modern drama.

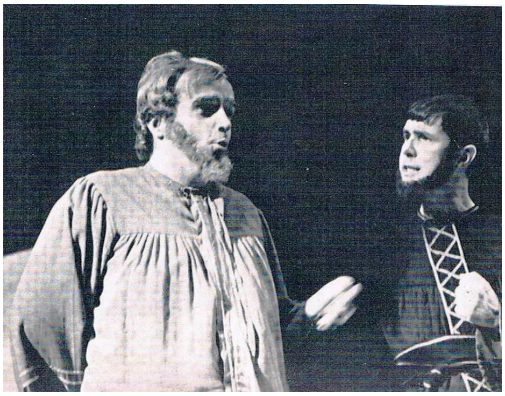


Ron as arsonist Sepp Schmitz



Firebugs scenes

By the fall semester of his senior year, 1968, McLarty won raves for his performance in an ancient Greek parody by Aristophanes, with a comically unpronounceable title called *Thesmophoriazuza.* Directed by Joe Graham, he played Mnesilochus, father-in-law-of the famous Greek tragedian, Euripides. At a festival for the goddess Persephone, Euripides is summoned before the women of Athens for his misogynistic plays, Euripides fears they wish to kill him. Mnesilochus agrees to serve as an advocate for him and spy on the proceedings disguised as a woman. The play develops into a full-fledged satiric romp that examines the battle of the sexes.



Ron as the beleaguered Mnesilochus

Capping off his distinguished college career, and probably his finest work done at the college, was his commanding and highly praised work as Andrew Undershaft in George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* in the spring

of 1969. Always the social critic, Shaw's play highlights the contradictory relationship of *a* cynical munitions owner, Undershaft, and his daughter's idealistic devotion to her Salvation Army work for the poor. Director Bill Hutchinson remembers McLarty's authoritative stage presence which seemed extraordinary for a twenty-one year old actor.

> "From word of mouth and the fall semester production of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriaszusae (*Ladies Day), I soon discovered Ron's superiority as a student actor. He was also testing his acting acumen by auditioning for and being cast in some off-campus theatre productions, especially at the Barker Players on the East Side of Providence. When I held auditions at the College for *Major Barbara,* there was no doubt in my mind that the slightly older-looking and extremely talented Ron was perfect as Barbara's cynical father and munitions-maker, Andrew Undershaft. The remainder of the cast, a combination of freshmen and upperclassmen was extraordinary It was once said that the rehearsal of a student play consists of correcting all the mistakes that were made by the director in casting! Not so in this case. Although somewhat intimidating to a fledgling director, Ron needed little direction."

Astonishingly, Hutchinson's observation presages those of several future directors who were astounded at McLarty's inherent ability to see himself on stage as a director might. It was often said of the great Orson Welles that he had a rare awareness to imagine himself framed by a

proscenium or movie camera. This almost inexplicable talent to achieve a kind of psychic distance from oneself has often been attributed to great actors. Such a theory might explain how instinct heightens artistic performance. Hutchinson continued his view of McLarty's intuitive command of acting.

> "Almost immediately, Ron embodied the physical and vocal characterization--the stature, presence, vocal quality, witty repartee-
> - of the patriarchal Undershaft. As director, all I had to do with Ron (and many other cast members) was to clarify entrances and exits and certain necessary blocking patterns. Through all of the rehearsal process, Ron was courteous, cooperative, and totally professional in his approach to the process."

Hutchinson's observations of McLarty's ability to embody "the physical, and vocal characterization" of Undershaft, looks ahead to his later success narrating audio-books where he excelled in recreating fictional tone, setting and a variety of disparate characters.

McLarty's work at Rhode Island College demonstrated the scope of his ability to adopt both serious and comic roles, a gift he would display in all his later acting career. Nevertheless, it is fascinating to speculate on his early aptitude for mimicry which enabled him to assume a wide assortment of idiosyncratic personalities. His youthful inclination for pranks and laughter anticipates his habit for viewing the world as a human comedy.

Such versatility also prepared him for the countless variety of characters he would masterfully play with a carefree insouciance. And surely, it should not be overlooked that his forceful performances at Rhode Island College ultimately laid the foundation for the college's reputation as one of the best theatre programs in the country. Finally, Hutchinson's commentary looks back to all those family, childhood friends and classmates who marveled at McLarty's playful mirth, mimicry and professionalism. However, Hutchinson insists he always proved responsibly disciplined.

> "Fortunately, once we began to rehearse, he left most of his uncanny and infectious humor at the door of the rehearsal room. His demeanor was always most professional. Ron's performances were superb, and because of his professionalism, the performance level of the rest of the cast was raised considerably."

Hutchinson's remarks mirror, interestingly enough, those of Mary Agnes Langlois (nee Fennessey) who played McLarty's leading lady in *Anne of the Thousand Days* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. (photo right of Ron and Mary Agnes in 1968 with the Adams Library in the background)* She fondly recalled his "deep commitment to his craft. Ron was a perfectionist who

brought everyone in the cast up to his level. He was an overpowering figure and my life was enriched by my association with him." Similarly, Kevin Fennessey, who also graduated with McLarty in 1969, became a close friend and fellow musical performer with him. Fennessey remembers their first meeting as a freshman in 1965. “I was headed for the cafeteria when this guy came out the door singing The Beach Boy’s song, “I’m feeling those good vibrations.” From that moment on Fennessey recognized McLarty’s unique personality, someone born with a streak of mischievous spontaneity. “When you were with Ron, you knew you always had a friend. He had a boisterous love of life and was greatly talented.” he added. Together, McLarty and Fennessey also joined as a guitar duo, playing in local venues. They even appeared is a few television shows produced by the new Rhode Island Public Broadcasting station called *Two Guitars.* They also produced a reader’s theater performance of John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men.* Fennessey speaks of their friendship that engaged in several college pranks. Once they staged a fake fistfight in the student center that smashed up a fraternity enrollment’s tables. When the campus police were summoned, they fled the scene. “Ron had a great sense of humor,” Fennessey continued, “He never liked the exclusiveness of the fraternity system and got up a plan to organize an anti-fraternity fraternity called ‘The Hornets,’ inviting everyone to join.”

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Ron McLarty had the energy of a nuclear bomb; he rarely ceased his perpetual motion and fitness for hard work. Assuming a full load of coursework and time-consuming theatrical obligations never daunted his hunger to read, write and seek activities beyond his college obligations. One commitment he faithfully honored to the end of his senior year was his annual summer commitment to counseling at Camp Yawgoog. Ever since he first took his oath as a scout, seemingly an incongruous activity for someone with stage and literary aspirations, McLarty kept earning merit badges until he made Eagle Scout, the highest achievement in scouting. In the 1960's, an era where thousands of student protesters marched against the Vietnam War, such naïveté was looked upon as fascist or at least pathetically gullible. American pop culture had declared war against traditional values. McLarty, however, never repudiated his elemental values of family, church, friendship and duty, all fundamental scouting principles. It has become fashionable to mock the Scouting oath "to do my best/To do my duty to God and my country." Not McLarty. He unashamedly embraced his beliefs without rancor against those who might denounce him. His moral and ethical "authenticity," a term employed by Jean Paul Sartre, was thoroughly existential.

In the summer of 1967, McLarty was asked to participate at the Emerson College summer program for Performing Arts in Harrison Maine. Bob Merrill remembers how often McLarty constantly looked for theater jobs during his college years, occasionally finding them at community theaters. As his acting reputation at the college grew, he increasingly performed in several theater companies in the Providence area. Particularly

notable was his lead role in *The Barker Players'* production of Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus.* There, he displayed his unfailing aptitude for assuming mature roles like his previous successes in *South Pacific* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. McLarty added to his growing list of theatrical credits with his role as Henry Higgins in Barker's production of *My Fair Lady.* He would later quip to a friend who didn't realize he could sing, "If Rex Harrison can sing, so can I." Subsequently, McLarty later would display his ability to sing in the television series, *Champs,* supporting his youthful boast..

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McLarty's resolve never to limit him to a single artistic ardor explains his binary commitment to literature and acting. His childhood attempts at writing could now be honed and ripened. The classroom enabled him to polish his ability to analyze literature and develop his writing skills. Tom Antonian recalls McLarty's early literary infatuation: "After school, when many of us would hang-out in the neighborhood, Ron was not a usual participant. Years later, we learned that his mom would drop him off at the Providence Public Library where he immersed himself in literature."

McLarty would continue this library habit in Manhattan where, for years, he spent his afternoons reading and writing at The New York Public Library. Years later, in an interview with Elizabeth P. Glixman, he confessed that he "always seemed to have a story to tell whether I knew how to tell it

or not." He realized, nevertheless, that acting would have to serve as his means to make a living: "I sort of fell into an acting career, [but] it became apparent that finding a publisher for [my] manuscripts was more difficult than I ever imagined." Born with a touch of insomnia, he had a habit of waking at 3 or 4 a.m. McLarty made good use of his sleep difficulties by a determination to write. His habit would eventually enable him to write ten novels and over forty-four plays, most of them in the early mornings while he earned his living acting. He could keep faith with his commitment to writing by his pre-dawn routine and still support his wife and children with his increasing work on Broadway and television.

At Rhode Island College, McLarty was enrolled in its Western Literature courses, British and American literature, and modern fiction, even poetry classes, several of them with me. I remember his voracious appetite for reading everything I assigned; and, of course, his commitment to acting prompted him to add countless playwrights, both classical and modern to his growing library of literature. In classroom discussions, he contributed with confidant enthusiasm and energy. As he enjoyed performing, McLarty often delighted in the chance to read passages from novels to his classmates, providing them with a foreshadowing of his later audio-book and voice-over lyricism. I never needed to call upon him for he had little aversion to plunging into lively and spontaneous interpretive riffs on what we read. Always unorthodox in his approach, McLarty never succumbed to the usual scholarly clichés or willingness to parrot lecture opinions. Whatever shyness he had as a youth had completely vanished by the time he first walked into my classes. Always creative, unashamedly

roguish, he playfully articulated his idiosyncratic and inventive analysis with impunity. He habitually expressed his views with an irreverent disregard for formal, academic prose and literary criticism which he considered an unnecessary obfuscation. The so-called professional journals with their prolix efforts to blur and confound the obvious left him cold. He would later confess to me that he had read Neil Postman's lecture delivered to the National Convention for the Teachers of English (NCTE) with the scatological title: *Bullshit and the Art of Crap-Detection.*

> “With a title like this, I think I ought to dispense with the rhetorical amenities and come straight to the point. For those of you who do not know, it may be worth saying that the phrase, 'crap-detecting,' originated with Ernest Hemingway who when asked if there were one quality needed, above all others to be a good writer replied, 'Yes, a built-in, shock-proof, crap detector.'"

Not content with his initial salvo, Postman expanded his assault on pretentions academic language.

> "As I see it, the best things schools can do for kids is to help them learn how to distinguish useful talk from bullshit. I will ask only that you agree that every day in almost every way people are exposed to more bullshit than it is healthy for them to endure, and that if we can help them to recognize this fact, they might turn away from it and toward language that might do them some earthly good."

Here was an appeal that won McLarty's artistic heart. He always favored clear, concise language and textual analysis that avoided the gamesmanship of literary verbal inflation. The texts themselves became his bible, and he admired the uncomplicated purity of Ernest Hemingway's fusion of poetic rhythms and taut diction. McLarty's independent mind also rebelled against the straight-jacket of examination questions. Often, he entirely ignored specific essay instructions, launching himself instead into a sensitive, but highly personal riff that suited his own view. Yet he always textually documented his analysis, writing with a prose entirely devoid of professional murkiness. Consistently, his impertinent departures proved singularly fresh and cleverly expressed. A single photo ***(below, left)*** from his senior yearbook may best prove the wisdom of the cliché "one picture is worth a thousand words." The photo, a candid shot revealing a typical McLarty response, ripples with insight into his youthful persona. It illustrates how quickly he assumed his comic mask. The camera has captured the prankster: a mimicking impersonator's mockery of the pretentious, academic lecturer--a talent he nurtured ever

since his spoof of his church choirmaster. Translated into the simplest language, the photo screams "blah, blah, blah," the silent despair of many undergraduates unfortunate enough to find themselves locked into the nightmare of a tedious professor's classroom. Here is the wisdom of comedy's rebelliousness and McLarty's Petrushka-like behavior (Petrushka was a stock jester of Russian puppetry). His caricature here foreshadows the sort of comic masquerade McLarty would employ brilliantly in an astonishing number of fictional, television, and Broadway roles. Thus, we are invited to appreciate his irreverent talent that unmasks tiresome bores. Adopting the role of jester allowed him the clown's freedom to leap beyond the commonplace, like King Lear's fool, in order to convey truths we fear to acknowledge. As Albert Camus once remarked: "Comedy has a genius for truth."

Paul Bourget, who befriended McLarty during their 1965, freshman registration day, tells of his capacity to "warm up an igloo the moment he entered a room." McLarty, explained Bourget, managed to relieve the considerable boredom of that trying-day's burden through his quick-witticisms and comic imitations until the entire room was filled with hilarity. Apparently, this habit of entertaining his fellow students became a customary feature of lunchtime at Donovan Dining Center. Students would rush to the center hoping to witness one of his many skits. Bourget describes a litany of routines that kept student diners exhausted from laughter. Once he arrived wearing a ten-gallon hat, imitating Horse Cartwright, the gullible, but dim-witted character of the popular television show, *Bonanza.* On another occasion he entered the dining room feigning a

slobbering drunk. He even appeared dressed in female drag using the theatrical attire of the many characters he played in college productions. His most startling entry, according to Bourget, occurred when he arrived as Henry VIII, whom he played in the play *Anne of the Thousand Days.* Goofy classroom entries--pratfalls and slapstick--were never taboo for McLarty either as he once burst into one of his classrooms dressed as a horse. He reveled in the spirit of comic outrage that characterized the pranks of his Chaplinesque tomfoolery.

Outlandishly enough, the yearbook photo simultaneously informs us of McLarty's fervor for literature. If one looks closely at the lower right corner of the paperback he holds, the image of Earnest Hemingway can be identified on the back of a Scribner edition of The *Sun Also Rises,* an author and novel McLarty greatly admired. He particularly loved Hemingway's radiant description of a trout fishing trip in Spain taken by Jake Barnes and Bill Gorton which he enjoyed reading aloud.

> "The gate was up, and I sat on one of the squared timbers and watched the smooth apron of water before the river tumbled into the falls. In the white water at the foot of the dam it was deep. As I baited up, a trout shot up out of the white water into the falls and was carried down. Before I could finish baiting, another trout jumped at the falls, making the same lovely arc and disappearing into the water that was thundering down."

The passage's terse and simple diction appealed to McLarty's

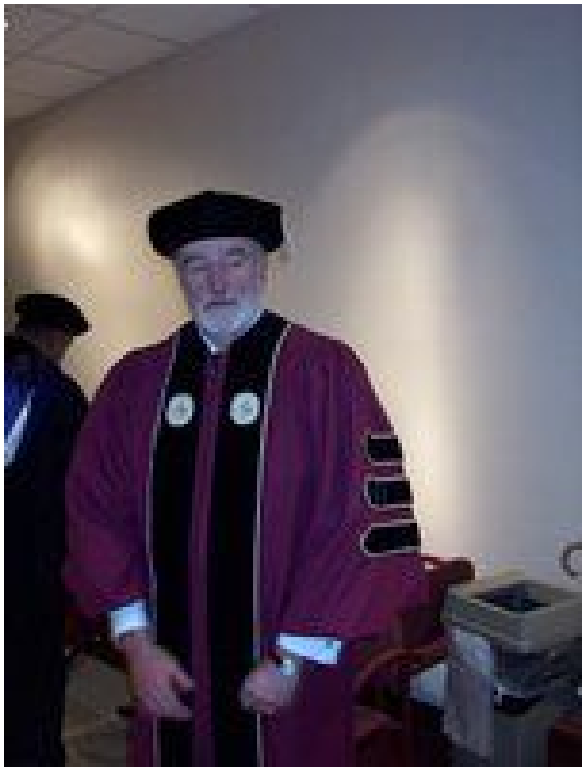
distaste for ostentatious language which he scrupulously avoided in his own fiction. The second chapter of *Memory of Running* offers the reader McLarty's echo of Hemingway's description.

> ". . . I usually took a long eleven miler [bike ride] to Shad Factory in Seekonk, Massachusetts, which is one county over from East Providence, Rhode Island. [Actually it is situated in Rehoboth, Massachusetts].Even in winter, if the roads were clear, I'd ride to Shad. Nobody ever went with me. Nobody ever went to Shad Factory either--that's why it was my favorite. There were no houses or anything. The Palmer River on its way to the Atlantic Ocean formed a lake above the Shad Factory waterfall. The fishing above and falls was terrific. Bass and pickerel above the falls, bluegill, perch, and hornpout below in the keep holes formed by the falling water. It looked perfect for trout, but there was always a little salt, just a bit, that backed in from the ocean, so only the tougher fish lived there. They changed in the brackish water. Bluegills go metally-looking, and the perch's belly got even deeper orange."

Later, Smithy confesses, "I remember lying in my bed reading *The Nick Adams Stories* [actually Hemingway's short stories from *In Our Time*], because Nick could throw a beautiful fly and tied his own." The novel ripples with McLarty's admiration of Hemingway's use of fishing as an art form. Smithy, proud of his own fishing skills, frequently offers advice to others on the proper way to fish. Ever since Izaak Walton popularized the

art of fishing in his iconic 1653 book, *The Compleat Angl*er*,* writers like Hemingway and McLarty have employed fishing as a metaphor for artistic form and control.

The Yearbook's irreverent photo, then, it can be argued, serves to conflate McLarty's dual enthusiasm for acting and literature. Surely the mountains of inscrutable literary analysis that burden the shelves of countless libraries are often far more outrageous than this modest extrapolation of a very illuminating photograph.



In the end, it can be argued that Rhode Island College clearly served as a crucial incubator for McLarty's budding literary and theatrical talent. Grateful for his apprenticeship, he cherished his college years, ultimately relishing the day in 2007, when the college granted him a Doctor of Humanities degree. His graduation address earned him a standing ovation from the hundreds who attended the ceremony, a tribute he has never forgotten. Like his devotion to his family, church, friends, schools and native landscape, McLarty has always recognized the fundamental centrality of his Rhode Island roots to his artistic maturity.

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The Actor:

The 1969 summer following his graduation from Rhode Island College, McLarty set out to pursue his dual dreams of acting and writing with the resolve and fervor of a latter-day Don Quixote doing battle with the challenges of New York's competitive world. He quickly launched his memorable career, but not yet in New York. Rather, he managed a novice's coup by landing two lead roles in *The Colorado Shakespeare Festival. A* performance of *The Taming of the Shrew* prompted one reviewer to extol "Ron McLarty's masterful Petruchio," a judgment that would anticipate his future critical successes. Robert Benedetti, who directed McLarty there, lauded his "consummate professionalism." He noted Ron's uncanny maturity and "fearless inventiveness." McLarty, Benedetti went on to say, was "perfect for the role" and "the sparkplug that ignited all the other actors to rise up to his level of his performance." Benedetti found it amusing that he "never really directed" McLarty, who arrived at the auditions with the confidence of a seasoned Old Vic performer. Benedetti explained, "I worked reactively to his intuitive talent, allowing him total license to weave his magic." He marveled at "Ron's outrageous risk taking," a willingness "to intrude his own unique conception of Petruchio's character." "Fearless and unflappable," he took "theatrical chances naturally" which deepened his performances exponentially; He "was the theatrical sparkplug who raised the level of his fellow actors to his lofty

expectations." Benedetti's characterization of McLarty looks back to his youthful delight in improvisational inventiveness. McLarty followed his triumph as Petruchio, playing a "marvelous Claudius" in the Festival's production of *Hamlet.*

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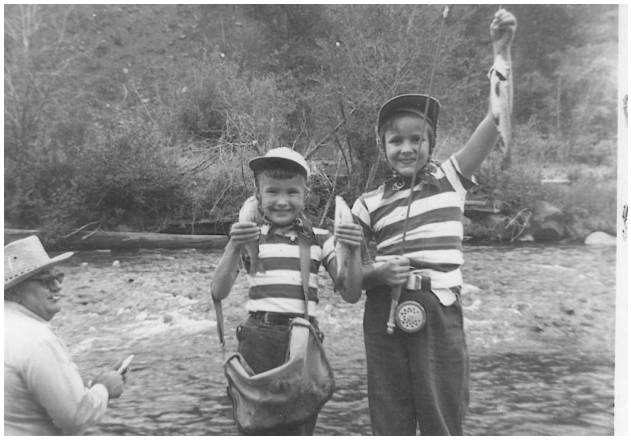
Diane Tesitor

Most significantly, while in residence that summer, McLarty met Diane Tesitor, a young University of Colorado English and theater major who worked for the festival that summer. Their relationship quickly developed into a love at first sight romance. Their instant attraction created some difficulties for McLarty who, at the time, was engaged to a Rhode

Island girl. In fact, the plot thickened when Robert and Kaye McLarty decided to drive to see their son perform in the festival, transporting his Rhode Island fiancée with them. McLarty, smitten with Diane, was forced to break-off the engagement which resulted in a tumultuous drama of tears and rejection by his fiancée. McLarty's unhappy parents had to endure a long, anguished drive from Colorado back to Rhode Island with the distraught girl.

Dorothy Diane Tesitor was born on July 8, 1948, in Walsenburg, Colorado, the second of six children born to her parents Carl and Elsie Lenzini Tesitor--two brothers, Carl and David and three sisters, Nechie, Jeanne and Lisa. ***(photo right shows Diane on right)*** Diane's Italian roots were deep. Her father's ancestors came from Tuscany and her mother's from Palermo, Sicily. Her maternal ancestors arrived 1903, eventually settling in Walsenburg, a rugged mining town with a history of strikes against armed Colorado Fuel & Iron Company strike breakers. Camp guards had killed dozens, including women and children in the famous Ludlow strike of April 20, 1914. Her paternal and maternal grandfathers worked in the Cameron Coal Mine near their home and participated in the miner's strike. Both men, as might be expected, passed on their dedication to hard work and stable values to their descendents. Even today many of Walsenburg's five thousand residents trace their roots back to immigrant beginnings. It appears abundantly clear that Diane's

years in Walsenburg profoundly shaped her steely commitment to her own family and, ultimately, to the family she reared with Ron and her children.



Determined to maintain close ties to her parents, sisters and her birthplace in Colorado, Diane, after her marriage, arranged to make annual summer visits to Creede ***(Diane, left, with Nechie)*** reflecting her desire to build an extended family for her sons just as Ron desired to keep faith with Rhode Island and his parent's summer jaunts to Maine. Family was destiny for both Ron and Diane. Both cherished their stable upbringing, the world of their youth, and both remained faithful to their past heritage. Her brother, Carl, praised her devotion to provide sibling cohesion: "She was always including us in her life . . . and was the genetic glue that kept our family tightly knit." Carl explained how Diane insisted on an annual summer trip to Colorado. Together with Ron and her boys "they spent several weeks every summer at Freeman's Ranch near Creede [the setting for McLarty's third novel, *Art in America].* Our grandparents vacationed there . . . for nearly 60 years and Diane made sure her sons would experience the family tradition."

Diane's hardy birthplace might well have nurtured her spirited reputation for independence

which all her siblings mention. Her sister, Nechie Hall, remembers Diane in glowing terms: "From her early childhood, she was blessed with a vivid imagination, a joyous sense of humor and a rebel's urge to rush at boundaries. She was the natural artist in our family." The product of "loud and droll Italians," Diane had all the early signs of a budding talent. Graduating from St. Mary's High School in Walsenburg, ***(photo above left)*** she earned "straight-A's, "and exhibited an instinctive flair for the dramatic" in her eager determination to make her mark upon the world. Family members speak of her inexhaustible energy and vivid imagination that fed her theatrical dreams. Carl recalls Diane's fondness for practical jokes, a habit, remarkably, she shared with her future husband: "When I was a toddler, I was her prop for practical jokes on our mother. One snowy morning, she and Nechie covered my feet in baby powder and held me up to appear as if I walked up one wall in the living room, across the ceiling and down the opposite wall leaving baby footprints across the room." Both Carl and Nechie speak of Diane's "irrepressible *joie de vivre,* a joyous delight in living." In high school, she quickly embraced a chance to join her high school drama club and was active in many other school activities.

Diane pursued her desire to act by taking a degree in Theater Arts at The University of Colorado. There she joined a singing group, a sorority, and was featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* leading the band as a high-stepping cheerleader. With Hollywood good looks, a gregarious and witty manner, Diane seemed

destined for the stage. Nechie Tesitor, who joined Diane at the University when offers another account of her sister's prankish nature.

> "During the football homecoming my first year, Diane pulled a practical joke using the cheerleading squad. They carried a small casket on their shoulders, whooping and hollering about the death of our poor, defenseless opponents. At the climax of the cheer, our eleven year old brother, Carl, pops out of the casket in an opposing jersey. As they say, the crowd went wild and our brother has never been the same."

Hall stressed Diane's indifference to narrow social prohibitions:" Once, her prom date picked her up at the sorority on a very loud motorcycle shocking some of her sisterhood. Unfazed, the free-spirited Diane strode briskly to her date in a formal prom gown, hopped on the bike and they sped away "to the amazement of her stunned friends." Her talent, beauty and buoyant sense of humor seemed to be a "magnet for her many admirers," added Hall. Little wonder that Diane turned McLarty's head from his Rhode Island fiancée.

After gaining her degree from The University of Colorado, Diane applied and was accepted to work at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival at Boulder. Assigned to work with stage duties, she had the occasion to meet Ron McLarty who had impressed everyone with his promising talent that summer. Almost immediately Kismet shaped their absorbing future in the form of a love-at-first-sight compelling mutual attraction.

Their destinies determined, the year following his Army induction, McLarty married Diane in her Walsenburg, Colorado hometown on November 28, 1970.

Ron, looking a bit stunned

Reception in Walsenburg

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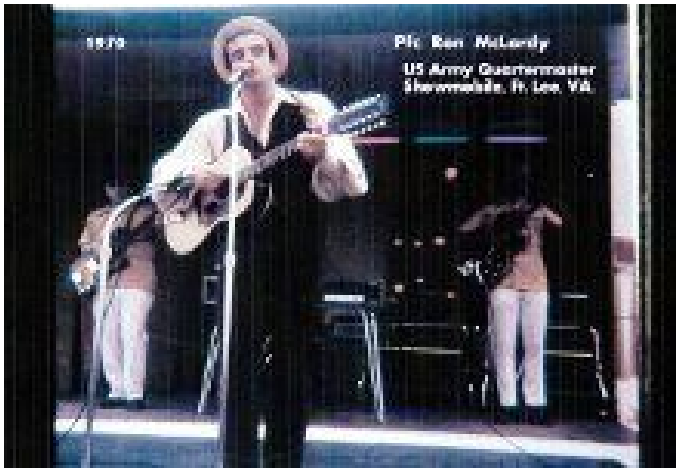
U.S Army Special Services

Drafted into the U. S. Army in September, 1969, McLarty served his basic training in Fort Wood, Missouri, then was assigned to Fort Lewis,



Tacoma, Washington where he was preparing to go to Vietnam. His talents there were discovered, and he was subsequently transferred to Fort Lee, Virginia, slotted to serve in Army Special Services as an "Entertainment Specialist."

McLarty continued to act and write, managing community theatre performances as well as devoting himself to playwriting. He soon found himself receiving invitations to entertain on base as a singer who could accompany himself with his ability to play a guitar. All his army buddies, talented men themselves, agreed he possessed a rare gift. McLarty also entertained at Army hospitals, Army clubs and civic meetings as well as local theatrical productions.

Ron Lundmark, a fellow actor and Special Services entertainer, now a script writer for television and radio commercials produced two musicals in which McLarty played the lead roles: *Sunday in New York* and *Little Mary Sunshine*, a parody of the old Jeanette McDonald movies. Lundmark explained how completely McLarty dominated their shows. Special Services, he argued, recruited only the best talent available from the draft. "It offered the top entertainment program in the army with very talented people, most who went on to successful careers in film and television." Special Services performances had two venues featuring a "musical theatre," permitting more sophisticated lighting, sets and other theatrical

amenities. For travel performances in the field, they sported a "Showmobile," a transportable stage ***(In the photo left, McLarty is fourth from the right in rear).*** "Ron was always terrific; everyone was impressed with his theatrical command," observed Lundmark. "We were a close knit band of performers who were constantly together." Such high praise was supported by Herb Berry, the Assistant Entertainment Director at Fort Lee, Virginia for 16 years. Interestingly, both Lundmark and Berry noted that McLarty's close friend, Larry Shue, also achieved a considerable Broadway reputation until his untimely early death.

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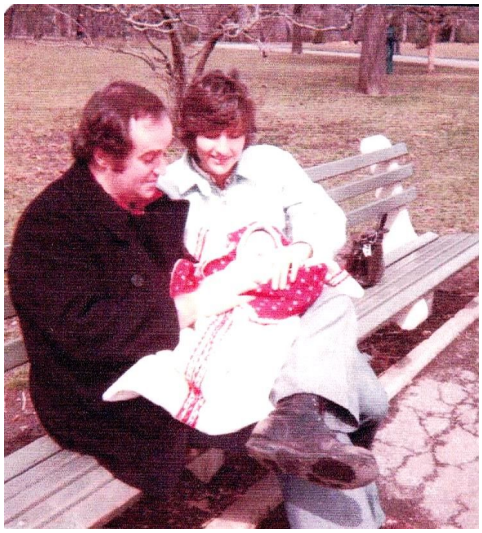
Upon his military discharge in November, 1971, McLarty's appearances in the respected Colorado Festival, his Army Special Service engagements along with his college and high school stage experience, allowed him to return to the very competitive New York theatrical environment with a promising portfolio on which he would successfully trade over several decades. As early as February, 1972, McLarty was accepted to tour Russia, authorized by the U.S. Government, in a production of the play, *Inherit the Wind b*ased on the famous "Monkey Trial" that pitted Clarence Darrow against William Jennings Bryant. McLarty, cashing in on his older appearance, played the creationist Bryant.

When he had free time, together with Diane, the young couple enjoyed a rare visit behind "the iron curtain" Soviet state. According to Luke McLarty (his second son), they used the opportunity to engage in some "American capitalist, profit making." Aware of the global demand for American jeans, which were almost impossible to buy in the Soviet Union, they stuffed a military duffel bag of Ron's full of the precious denims and sold them to augment their family income. They also brought home memorabilia from the communist country few Americans could enter.

That same year McLarty assumed the understudy role of Lucky in *Moonchildren* for the play's American premiere at the Arena Stage in Washington D.C. When the lead actor left the show, McLarty opened the production when it moved to Broadway in 1972. Again in 1972, McLarty was cast in a leading role in the award-winning play *That Championship Season*, replacing Charles Durning who went on to super star status as a film and television actor. As George, McLarty was only twenty-four years old.



New York's expensive living costs and McLarty's early successes, forced Diane to confront the conflict between her own desire for an acting career and Ron's budding career. ***(Above with Zachary in Manhattan)*** According to Nechie Hall, Diane "realized Ron was enormously talented," and needed to commit himself full-time to acting and writing. Because a

theatrical career proved uncertain and living in Manhattan very expensive, she made the decision to abandon her own dream of a career, taking a job as a bank teller to provide them with some financial stability. She made her choice without regret, believing as she did in Ron's obvious professional future. Diane would remain McLarty's "muse and anchor, his touchstone as wife and ardent supporter," recalls Hall. She became an influential force in McLarty's career serving as her husband's manuscript editor for all ten of his novels. Everyone who knew her speaks glowingly of her enormous contribution to McLarty's professional career. It appears she constantly encouraged his efforts to write when, in fact, Ron seemed to lose hope of publishing his fiction. Diane would assail and vilify editors and agents blind to her husband's talent, promptly restoring his sagging confidence. What might be viewed as merely a sister's loving recollection of Diane has a solid foundation in the countless testimony of friends who knew Diane, particularly their three sons, Zachary, Luke and Matthew as well as numerous colleagues and friends.

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Thrilled with his quick successes on Broadway, in 1975, the McLartys, lured by the appeal of Hollywood, left New York for a possible movie opportunity, undertook an adventurous trip to California in July with their infant, first-born son, Zachary. Actually it was Diane, brimming with confidence about her husband's chances of success in the movie industry, who urged him to take on Hollywood's challenge. Peter Maloney, actor,

playwright, producer, who first met McLarty on a New York street in 1974, is a valuable source for Ron and Diane's brief Los Angeles excursion as well as their time in Montclair that stretched to the year of Diane's death. Oddly, Maloney met McLarty again in Los Angeles during their brief stay, while McLarty spent endless hours trying to break into movies. As chance would have it, he and Maloney both rented apartments at a popular residence for young actors named *Havenhurst Lanai*, though they actually met at the *Joe Allen Bar*, a favorite of young professionals. "I think Ron disliked me on sight," laughed Maloney, "because he gave me one of his Army plays, *Order of the Arrow,* and was offended at my criticism." Despite Maloney's analysis, They eventually become close friends and collaborators when they returned to New York..

After numerous attempts to gain employment in the cutthroat Hollywood world, McLarty soon longed to return to New York's more congenial atmosphere. Diane later confessed to her sister, Nechie that "Ron was tied to the east coast and would never be happy in Hollywood." Maloney agreed that "Ron always felt a certain moral ambivalence to west coast living." He recalled having breakfast at the iconic *Schwab's Pharmacy,* a drug-store located at 8024 Sunset Boulevard, a popular hangout for actors and movie industry dealmakers from the 1930s through the 1950s. Maloney remembers McLarty's shocked reaction when a check-out lady "stayed his hand" as he tried to flip through a Hollywood magazine. "He never went back there," observed Maloney who spoke of his sensitivity to her rudeness.

Living in a small apartment with a year-old baby and stressed by his inability to get auditions, Ron and Diane decided to return to New York a few months after their arrival in California. Their decision to leave Hollywood proved auspicious for within a few months McLarty would find ample work. That year was also significant as they decided to buy a home in Montclair, New Jersey to provide Zachary a more wholesome home life than hectic Manhattan. Diane would later give birth to two more boys, Luke and Matthew.

Linda McLarty, Doug's wife, also remembers Diane's remarkable qualities: "She was beautiful, a great social hostess, adored Ron, was completely devoted to her boys and selflessly committed to Ron's career." Like her mother-in-law, Kaye, "Diane was the family's commander in chief." No shrinking violet, she "was always on stage:" monitoring her children, attending to her guests and utterly confident in her own self-esteem. Diane, however, not one to fret over household disarray, adopted a most liberal environment for her children. She provided the boys "freedom to play and the boys loved it. They were liberated from the dread of trashing expensive furniture or household items worthy of a museum. Their home was energized with laughter and abundant noise. I remember once seeing their dog on the dining room table

eating our lunch." Linda McLarty added that their life together seemed something of an idyllic myth for countless friends who regularly visited their home to savor its parties and frequent cookouts presided over by McLarty's skillful grill work. Carl Tesitor seconded this view of Dian's domestic philosophy: "Being the queen of her own castle brought out the best in Diane. She was an extraordinary and devoted mother and the stabilizing force for Ron and his career. She provided him a refuge. Their house was always warm, loud, exuberant and filled with the smells of Italian food."

The most reliable source, of course, for the day to day portrait of life in the McLarty Montclair home rests with the animated testimony provided by the McLarty boys who confirm this Camelot view of their youth. "We had the greatest childhood, one with food, laughter, abundant friends, and endless stories to feed our imaginations," reports Zachary. "It was a wonderful way to grow up," added Luke: "our parents both sacrificed their own interests to make a secure home for us." Diane traded a career and Ron never placed his work before his devotion to his family. "My mother was the glue of our family. Recognizing my father's enormous talent, she was steadfast in her determination to build a home and fight for us." The boys also speak constantly of Diane's unwavering support for Ron's career and conviction that he was destined to be recognized as a great actor and writer. Her certainty made her his most insistent advocate, and he "trusted her

judgment," making his writing a cooperative venture with her. Recognizing Ron's need for a private escape in their noisy and often endless parade of visitors, Diane created an office in the basement of their home labeled, "the dungeon" by the boys. There McLarty would rise early in the morning, usually by 4 a.m., and work without interruption for three or four hours in a relatively silent house. Eventually and without exception, he would submit his efforts to Diane who critiqued his work, editing, advising and ultimately typing all his manuscripts "because she was the only one who could read his bad writing, a sort of scribbled up and down mess. She even purchased an Apple word processor to make her editorial work easier." Much later when McLarty had drafted over ten novel manuscripts, Diane was forced to find a professional typist whom she trained to read his woeful penmanship.

Like his brother, Doug, and early friends, the boys speak of their father's "introverted personality" that belied his life of the party persona. "Ironically, he was a very private man with few close friends." They agreed "he hated formal social functions." Luke recalled his nomination for an Ace ***Award***, given for the best television performance in a series which Diane had to insist that he attend. Luke claims "he never would have got his act together without my mother's encouragement," Reflecting on his father's often diffident behavior, Zachary suggests that "any creative person has insecurities," adding that his mother provided him with unqualified support and encouragement. He remembered the time he was seventeen "and I bragged that I could act as well as most actors." His arrogance offended Diane "who reminded me of my father's hard working dedication to the profession."

As a consequence, their Montclair, New Jersey home flourished under Diane's ceaseless energy and "great cackling laugh." McLarty "encouraged sports" to balance the boys' school work while the children's neighborhood and team friends filled the house with an atmosphere resembling a fraternity. People came in and out of their home, treating it as their own. "Our house was the place to be; we all liked to hang-out with our parents," mused Zachary. After baseball practice, he recalled returning home to a house already occupied with half the team. Obviously, friends enjoyed the energy supplied by McLarty who would perform for the young audience. They also responded to Diane's easy managerial disposition. Unpredictably, McLarty established himself as the chief cook in the family. Zachary tells how he watched the popular cooking shows of James Beard and the inimitable Julia Childs. "My father often played baseball in the backyard," adds his son, which McLarty eagerly joined. Yet, Zachary also remembers several times he would delay until the show ended. "My father was a five-star chef who went to gourmet markets to shop and did ninety percent of the cooking," he beamed.

This McLarty devotion to home and family was clearly evident in the time he devoted to vacations. He often spoke of his annual trips to the Bridgton, Maine resort, *Meades Cottages,* on Highland Lake, and Greenhill Beach, Rhode Island with his grandparents and parents, Mclarty faithfully took time out every year to unplug from his professional duties and free-lance with his loved ones. In fact, so strong was his commitment to a vacation break, he risked losing one of his most important television jobs. As the boys remembered things, their father got a call from the producer of

the show *Spencer For Hire* asking him to report for work sometime during the family vacation. Remarkably, rather than cancel the rest of their vacation, McLarty replied he could not sacrifice their annual jaunt to Maine. His astonishing decision so impressed the producers, they agreed to allow him another week to report for work. That television show began McLarty's five-year performance as Sergeant Belson.

Not selfishly content to recreate only his Rhode Island vacation memories, McLarty also made time for elaborate three-week vacation trips at a dude ranch in Creede, Colorado, near Diane's youthful beginnings. There the family rode horses, fished in a nearby river with a bountiful supply of trout. McLarty's favorite sport was fly-fishing, one where he could display his mastery of its subtle art.

Also significant was his habit of frequently invited several cast members of the *Spencer For Hire Show*--Robert Urich, Avery Brooks and Richard Jaeckel--to join him and his family on several vacations. His co-workers, as a result, became part of his extended family.

Luke McLarty offers a revealing account of the time Diane "hooked the largest brown trout we ever saw there." McLarty was stationed next to Diane with a fishnet because it was so large it

could not be landed by pulling it to shore. ***(photo above right, Diane and Carl)*** As she cautiously nestled the trophy fish to the net, it managed to escape Ron's best effort to land it. The event rose to the level of a family joke: did her husband scheme to deny her the biggest fish bragging rights? Luke claims that the very day his mother died, she and his father talked about that day. Quoting Diane, he said the only thing she would say is "the jury's still out about that event." Apparently, even in the throes of death, Diane could relish a joke. McLarty would eventually elevate that moment into his decision to travel back to that Creede stream where, surrounded by his sons, they would scatter her ashes into the tributary of her finest trout catch.

The family trips to Creede, more than a thousand miles from their home in Montclair, permitted Diane to maintain her familial obligations to her parents, sisters, relatives, and to return to the origins of her youth.

Diane and parents

Diane never missed a family celebration or event. Her life became a moveable feast where she could be close to both Ron's family and hers. ***(David, Lisa, Diane, Jeanne, Nechi and Carl below)***

A 50th wedding anniversary party ***(photo below Ron with beard for the film: The Postman)*** for her parents photo shows the family happily assembled.

Diane eventually, in later life after her boys left home, decided to revisit her theatrical childhood dream. Actually, she experienced some small successes in acting, appearing in local commercials, eventually acting in plays and a few films, including ABC's *Oh Baby Baby* in Hollywood. Yet, despite her decision to sacrifice her potential acting career, Diane drew lifelong emotional nourishment from those she loved.

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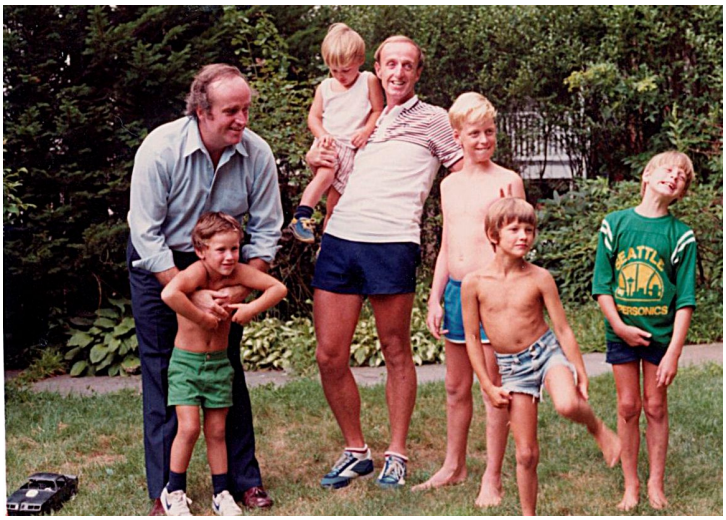
New York and Montclair, New Jersey

McLarty's return from Hollywood permitted him to renew his close friendship with the many actors he had met, enabling him to develop deeper ties with his professional colleagues. In fact, he and Peter Maloney, an actor and producer, began a life-long friendship. "He changed my life," remarked Maloney who confessed McLarty gave him the confidence to overcome a failed first marriage that had thrust him into a hardened cynicism. "Ron always displayed a wonderful sympathy and generosity to actors." Maloney described being sick and depressed after they both returned to New York: "Ron visited me in my tiny Manhattan apartment, bringing a burger and something to drink." More importantly, he confessed that "Ron and Diane eventually helped me become a parent." Because he often sought refuge from New York's tumultuous competitiveness, Maloney made numerous visits to Montclair, even living in their third-story attic for extended periods. "I loved their Montclair home, loved Diane and

the kids," added Maloney. He remembered his time there "was a refuge." Even neighborhood friends enjoyed their hospitality. "One kid whose father was a neglectful CEO of some New York firm, virtually tried to live there," continued Maloney. ***(photo below right shows McLarty and brother Doug enjoying their boys)*** After a three-day stay, McLarty advised him to return home, because his parents, who had never called to determine his whereabouts, would be concerned. McLarty walked the boy to the front door of his home and knocked. When the father appeared, entirely oblivious to his son's absence, McLarty said, "I guess you didn't know Josh was away for three days." Maloney spoke in glowing terms of Ron as "a great father" who would spend an inordinate time with his children. He wanted to please his friends and often cooked his specialty of pork chops and rice. Ultimately, Maloney says, "Ron and Diane helped me take the chance on a second marriage and family." Maloney also understood that McLarty's devotion to his parents and religious upbringing emerged from his essential commitment to middle-class values. They served to keep his moral compass stable. In fact, Maloney speculates that New York values had so changed that McLarty, whose novels essentially depicted America's so-called "silent majority and working class," had no appetite, for New York's intellectual *avant-garde* which increasingly



favored post-modernism and an emergent multi-cultural agenda. It cannot be stressed too strongly that McLarty was fundamentally a morally, grounded individual who respected traditional values.

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The Actor

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McLarty's increasing work as an actor enabled him to make a very good living. In less than two years following his return from Hollywood, McLarty would appear in his first film, *The Sentinel,* a brief cameo as a real estate agent. That same year of 1977, he appeared in the television production, *Johnny,, We Hardly Knew Ye*. For the next three decades, McLarty expanded his impressive acting skills winning leading and character roles on Broadway, Off Broadway, television, films, and countless TV commercials. In one particular Broadway performance on April 8th, 1991, at The Walter Kerr Theater on West 48th Street, McLarty found himself cast in Paul Rudnick's comedy, *I Hate Hamlet,* about a young TV star cast in the title role of a Shakespeare-in-the Park production. The performance featured Nicol Williamson, a well-known Scottish actor who John Osborne called “the greatest actor since Marlon Brando." Williamson was joined by Celeste Holm, a popular Broadway and film star. McLarty, then, sporting a hefty television reputation, was cast to play the role of Hamlet, ironically a role for which Williamson had been praised as the "Hamlet of his generation." McLarty’s aptitude for comic roles proved him a natural for

this spoof of Shakespeare and Broadway's habit of casting fashionable television personalities who often were unsuited for challenging plays. Yet it was McLarty's considerable success with television; and, more importantly, his solid reputation among producers and directors as a gifted character actor that earned him a major role in this sort of parody.

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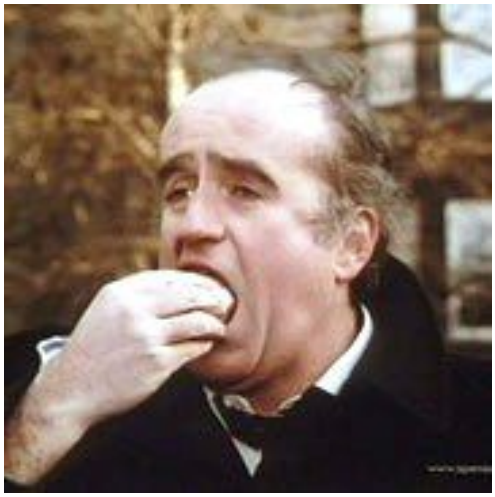
Television



Eventually, McLarty would appear in over one hundred television shows, but his major breakthrough as a series regular came with his five year role on television in *Spencer: For Hire* as the constantly hungry Sergeant Frank Belson ***(photo right)***.

Paired with popular star, Robert Urich and a fine cast including Avery Brooks, Barbara Stock and Richard Jaeckel ***(photo left)***, McLarty enjoyed his first successful major television exposure. The show illustrated McLarty's special talent for playing quirky, but likeable characters, just as he would later create unique personalities in fictional creations like Smithy Ide, Jono Reilly, Ticky Lettgo and Shoe Horn.

Along with *Champs* (**Coach, *left***) and *Cop Rock* (Detective Lieutenant Ralph Ruskin, ***(photo below)***, McLarty would eventually receive the ***Ace Award.*** Because the television *Emmy Awards* were not given for cable shows until the early 1990's, *The Ace Awards* were created to honor all television contributions. McLarty had been previously nominated for the award as best actor in a dramatic or theatrical role for *Tiger Town* in 1984.

He would continue appear in numerous television shows and films such as *The Return of Jezebel James* ***(2008)*** with Parker Posey, Lauren Ambrose, Scott Cohen, and Michael Arden. ***(Photo right),*** and a recurring role as Judge Wright on *Law & Order*.

His most recent appearances include *Person of Interest*, *Rescue Me*, *Sex & The City*, *The Practice*, *Judging Amy* & *Law & Order: SVU* as well as playing Fred Trump, Sr. in the full length television film entitled *Donald Trump: Unauthorized* ***(2005).***.

McLarty as Law and Order's Judge Wright

This sketchy accounting of McLarty's one-hundred plus appearances only touches upon his impressive filmography which can be found in The Appendix.

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Appraisals

McLarty's career television and film career began in 1975 and only ended as recently with his appearance in the movie *St. Vincent* in 2014, starring Bill Murray and Melissa McCarthy. His other recent work includes *James Brook's How Do You Know?* as well as three short films, *I'm Coming*

Over, *The River*, and On *The House*. Though always cast in film supporting roles rather than the leading man, his work always revealed his uncompromising work ethic. Unquestionably, he had greater success in television, yet his work in full-length films should never be undervalued. From his first film performance in *The Sentinel*, he continued to give competent performances with such films as *The Postman*, *Into The Fire*, *Heartburn*, *Two Bits* and *Flamingo Kid* among others. During McLarty's years in films he worked with notable actors such as Jack Nickelson, Kevin Costner, and Bill Murray. He has always summoned high praise from colleagues who worked with him in television and films. Tim Busfield, an actor who co-stared with McLarty in *Champs,* typifies the adulation he has won from so many professionals.

> "Ron McLarty is a world-class pro, a fantastic actor with charm and warmth but a great storyteller. While filming *Champs* in 1996, he gave me a book that he'd written. I was blown away that he was such a fantastic writer. Then when Stephen King jumped on board (no surprise to me) it was so fun to watch my friend and colleague take off into another realm all together. It's a rare, great actor that can be a great writer. To me, he will always be "Coach" from our 1996 short lived sitcom *Champs*. But as fortune would have it in 2002, I ran into Ron on the street in New York. A light bulb went for me, and I cast him on the Tom Cavanaugh series, *ED*. Ron recurred for a few episodes and to no surprise did a great job. A few years ago I had dinner with Ron and was tickled that his new life [with Kate Skinner]

afforded him a new world, a home and security. Once a character actor and now a world class author, actor, narrator, husband and Dad, Ron gave me confidence to never ever quit trying to fulfill my dreams. Perspiration is always better than inspiration. Ron McLarty is a truly great man and I'm lucky to call him a friend."

John Coles who directed and produced McLarty in the full-length television movie *Donald Trump: Unauthorized,* as Trump's demanding father, described McLarty as an "extraordinary actor of great range, enthusiasm and Joy." Coles lauded his ability "to raise the bar for everyone on the set." Coles' testimony re-affirms Robert Benedetti's judgment of McLarty's youthful, but polished work as Petruchio and Claudius back in the Colorado Shakespeare Festival of 1969. Later, Coles would also collaborate with Andre Braugher to write a movie adaptation of *The Memory of Running.* Unfortunately, the project ended when they failed to secure the rights to the novel from Warner Brothers who have shelved their own plans for a movie.

Sam Freed first met McLarty in the 1970's when they both struggled as young actors. Eventually, Freed became a close friend when they worked together in various segments of *Law and Order.* "Ron was an insatiable worker," says Freed, "who loved and trusted actors whom he would often assemble to perform readings of his and other plays. I did a small theater production of one of his plays," continued Freed, "he loved to talk about acting and playwriting, always with a straightforward enthusiasm." Freed notes McLarty's continued eagerness to write. "He was tireless in his efforts

to publish fiction and the many plays he had written," Freed concluded. Peter Maloney also had much to say about McLarty's considerable talents as a writer. Echoing Benedetti's and Coles' view that McLarty's uncanny and flawless acting could not be improved by their direction, Maloney argues that McLarty "wrote plays I could not improve, despite my view that most plays must be re-written for stage performance." Most playwrights "don't know what their plays are about," claims Maloney. "I believed in him as a writer from the very beginning," added Maloney who proffered a Homeric catalogue of superlatives regarding McLarty's literary skills: "a hilarious, funny writer," one who "represents a distinctively American experience." Maloney speaks of McLarty's "unique ability to write plays that are off-center in the best sense of the term." This view, he adds, helps explain the eccentric and idiosyncratic characters who populate McLarty's novels.

An increasing number of acquaintances familiar with McLarty's literary efforts admired his eagerness to write both plays and fiction. In this respect, McLarty joined the rare few who have managed to pursue both acting and writing disciplines.

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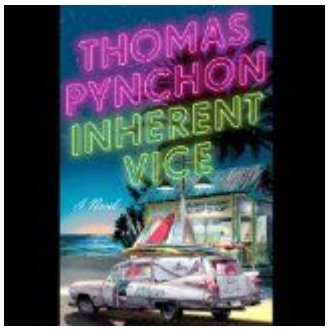
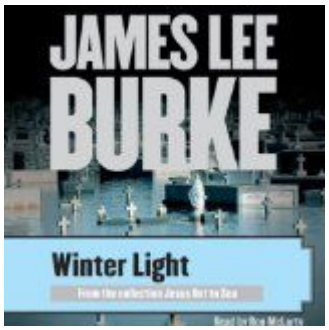
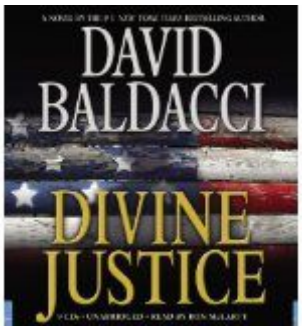
Audio-book Narrator

In August 2015, *The New York Times* applauded McLarty's extensive work as an audio-book narrator. Citing the critical importance of the narrator to fictional print, *The Times review* knighted McLarty as one of America's best practitioners of the craft. With more than a hundred audio-books to his credit, he has narrated the novels of an impressive array of

many distinguished novelists like Thomas Pynchon, Stephen King, Scott Turow, David Baldacci, Clive Cussler, and Danielle Steel.







A Penguin Press review of July 22, 2010, praised his rendition of Thomas Pynchon's novel, *Inherent Vice,* arguing that "Ron McLarty channels Doc's slurred mumble expertly and vividly brings to life the novel's sun-soaked, druggy ambience."

Randy O'Brien's review for *AudioFile Magazine*, an influential source of audiobook narration, spared few superlatives when it awarded McLarty its "Best Voice in Mystery and Suspense" in 2009 as narrator of Baldacci's *Divine Justice*. O'Brien wrote:

> "You might recognize veteran actor Ron McLarty from his more than 100 appearances in movies and television series like *Spenser: For Hire* and his recurring role as Judge Wright on *Law & Order*. Or, as he jokes, you might think you 'went to high school together.' But when he opens his mouth to speak, you'll recognize the mellifluous vocal tone and smooth, deliberate delivery that have made dozens of audiobooks come alive. He says he's a fan of the format and follows

> several fellow narrators' work . . . .' McLarty is more than an actor who reads books aloud--he's also an accomplished playwright and an acclaimed novelist who doesn't have a problem recording his own work. He says there's enough distance between the 'writing artist' and 'performing artist' to make the recording of his novels, *The Memory of Running* and *Art in America*, a separate job."

Rather interestingly, McLarty attributed his narrative success to the need to achieve "enough distance between the writing artist and the performing artist." He adopted John Keats' well-known notion of "negative capability." Both believed that writing demands artistic detachment.

The following year, 2010, *AudioFile* once again bestowed its "Earphones Award Winner" to Mclarty for his narration of Martin Cruz Smith's *Three Stations.*

> "Narrator Ron McLarty is an excellent match for this taut, suspenseful story, featuring Russian detective Arkady Renko, who first appeared in Smith's blockbuster debut, *Gorky Park.* In Moscow's Three Stations district, a seedy area filled with violence and teenage gangs, a young runaway's baby is stolen on a train. The rough but steady tone of McLarty' delivery conveys both the thread of corruption that dominates the novel and the character of the novel's hamstrung detective who has covered some distance and taken more than a few beatings yet remains determined, uncompromising, and incorruptible. McLarty is especially good at picking out the significant

shadings of Smith's understated style, as well as the features of a scene. This fine production will please a broad audience as well as mystery."

McLarty's perceptive understanding of narrative complexities has made him scrupulous in his attention to verbal nuances: "I want to say the words the way I hear them inside my head for my own books, and I want the same thing for Stephen King or Danielle Steel. I want to honor their work, and I take it very seriously. I really prepare a lot, and I want to try and say the words the way that author would want me to." Interestingly, as we have already observed with his early college suspicions of formal literary theory, McLarty rejected the growing influence of the post-modern theory of Deconstruction so popular in our institutions of higher learning. Promoted by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, Deconstruction emphasized he essential instability of language, denying the possibility that a text has a fixed meaning. The theory repudiated the long-held view that literature had a preset meaning embodied in the author's tone and language. McLarty, instead, chose "to honor" the writer's work, not dismantle it. Little wonder that his faithfulness to the text has won him great respect among those authors who admire his audio-book work. David Baldacci, for instance, has long maintained his view that McLarty ranks among the best of the best. Not only has he chosen McLarty for the job of narrating twenty-one of his novels; but he even paid him the supreme compliment of dedicating one of his works to him. Later, Baldacci posted a tribute to McLarty on his website after he became aware of his tragic

struggle with dementia in 2014. It deserves inclusion here as powerful evidence of his high regard for McLarty's vocal flair.

Many of you have had the pleasure of hearing one of my heroes escape a deadly ambush or uncover a conspiracy via the stellar voice talents of the enormously gifted Ron McLarty.

Ron expertly helmed the ship of my audiobook narration, both solo and with a co-narrator, for over a decade. He ably saw us through more than twenty titles, always bringing to my thrillers a fresh, genuine and exciting spirit. To many of us, he is the voice of the Camel Club, Sean King, John Puller, Will Robie, and innumerable other characters dreamed up by me and the other authors he worked with.

Ron didn't simply read the words in front of him, he performed the story for his listeners.

It is with mixed feelings that I wish him the best as he steps back from audiobook narration to focus on a new stage in his life. A sincere and deep thank you, Ron, for interpreting my books so skillfully. I can't count the number of times I have had a fan approach me at an event (or airport, or restaurant) and tell me how much they enjoyed listening to one of my books. Ron certainly set a standard that all my future narrators will have to live up to. Hail to the King, Ron McLarty, who brought his incredible talents to my works, and gave the listeners a whole new way to experience "reading."

David Baldacci
davidbaldacci.com

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Television commercials

It has been said that television commercials provide actors a greater national visibility than films or television shows. If so, Ron McLarty's face, if not his name, has made him a household image familiar to millions. In the early 1970's, McLarty began doing commercials (General Electric, Bic Pens, etc.), because he realized they could help supplement his ability to earn a living in a profession noted for its competition. In 1976, McLarty appeared in a commercial for a General Electric advertisement that ran throughout the summer Olympics that year. He confessed that one job paid handsomely for several years. McLarty's suitability for commercial advertising revealed his life-long ability to portray the so-called literary Everyman figure. After all, how many in the profession could play both

Shakespeare's Petruchio and the "Tidy Bowl Man" commercial. Blessed with the common touch and a range sufficient to play nobles and commoners, he had an uncommon versatility. Much of his acting career, though, was spent as a supporting actor rather than a lead, though he had clearly often demonstrated his ability to perform brilliantly in lead roles as a young man. As a consequence, McLarty could perform in a broad gamut of diverse character roles. It should be no surprise that his novels also feature a Chaucerian array of dissimilar, but compelling, personalities.

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Voice-over narration

Last but hardly least is McLarty's considerable work in what the trade calls "voice-over narration," employment for actors who narrate a wide spectrum of commercial jobs. Actually, audio-book narration represents a form of this sort of work; but the field also extends to film and television productions which employ a narrator. as well as industrial narration for corporate trade shows, training videos, commercials and animation productions. Ever willing to find any acting job that would pay the rent, McLarty worked many years in voice-over employment. Jill Choder-Goldman fondly remembers her fruitful association with McLarty:

> "Ron and I were part of the golden years in the voice-over field during the '80's and '90's. There were a group of us, Ron being the top man in the field, who would see each other almost every day, be wonderful times where we got to play and create voices together. It

wasn't until after he married Kate [Skinner] that I also became friends with Ron and what a pleasure that was as well."

James Naughton who more recently worked with Ron echoes Choder-Goldman's high praise:

"My association with Ron got a late start. I knew him very slightly as an actor I met on auditions for voice-overs, for quite a few years. Then, I believe it was reading his novels and reading, loving them that drew me closer to him. At a party in New York City he suggested I direct a film of *A Memory of Running* or maybe *Traveler.* It didn't happen, or hasn't to date, but it established our friendship. Subsequently, I asked him to join a group of actors to do a staged reading of E.L. Doctorow's *The March,* which Edgar's wife Helen had adapted from the novel. I think if we were able to work together on a play or film or TV show, we'd really enjoy each other's company, but so far it hasn't happened. He is a very talented writer, actor, and reader of audio-books, and a guy I've enjoyed tremendously when we've gotten together socially. I hope to spend more time with him in the future."

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The high praise for Ron McLarty by numerous professionals and reviewers speaks not only to his talent, but also his humanity and decency.

Will Rogers one remarked he never met a man he disliked. It might be said of Ron McLarty, to paraphrase Rogers, that he never met a colleague who disliked him. Persistently, those who worked with him professionally, long-time friends from his Rhode Island past and recent acquaintances as well, seem unanimous in their collective opinion that McLarty was easy to love. This is not to hang a halo on the man, painting him as flawless. Peter Maloney has suggested that McLarty "did not suffer fools gladly" and expected his friends to be bound to very high standards. Yet the reoccurring picture one comes away with from listening to those who knew him documents a man who loved his family, enjoyed the companionship of his fellow actors, proved a generous host and dispensed his infectious, up-beat laughter and good will to everyone. In a profession often characterized as cut-throat and competitively mean-spirited, McLarty seems to have taken a very high, moral road to his association with others, while they seem to have responded to his fundamental decency and hail-fellow well met behavior.

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The Novelist

McLarty's journey into the world of fiction began, in his own words, "ever since I could walk." By the time he graduated from Rhode Island College, he had committed himself to mastering the craft of fiction. Nevertheless, he realized, as we have learned, his acting would have to

support his first love: "When it became clear to me that the road to publication was bumpy to say the least, I became an actor to support the writing habit." McLarty had managed to build a surprising reputation as an actor for someone committed to another vocation. From 1969 to 2014, his reputation grew in stature for his many Broadway, television, audio-book, voice-over and film performances. By the time he published his first novel, McLarty had become a familiar face to most Americans. Still, for all his professional success, he never abandoned his true love, even though it took a small miracle of happenstance to finally end his publishing drought. For over thirty years, he labored, finishing ten unpublished novels that revealed the earnestness of his literary devotion: "I took my work underground, showing it to a small group of friends who wouldn't (I hoped) think it was pathetic for someone to complete ten novels without publication." His existential pledge was clear: if you want to write, go ahead and write even if the world remains indifferent to your work. His venture into the business of playwriting resembled his passion for writing fiction. Undaunted by rejections, he would eventually write over forty plays, only a few were performed and in small community theaters. Nevertheless, his disciplined fidelity to a childhood dream of becoming a writer reveals much about the man. In an interview he confessed the essential bifurcation separating the actor from the writer:" I have a very pronounced solitary part of me that always seems at odds with the performer. While I love acting and, of course, am very, very thankful for all the opportunities I've been given, the introspective side had always searched for a personal expression." McLarty goes on to explain this opposition:

"Writing, especially novel writing, isn't a communal act unless you're part of a TV team and unlike being an actor--which is how I made my always find some time during my daily auditions and occasional jobs to spend a few hours with my pencil and paper at The New York Public Library."

The nineteenth-century poet, William Blake, once wrote: "Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence," McLarty found a way to reconcile his outer and inner personalities, a psychological symbiosis many writers and performers often fail to achieve. Similarly, McLarty also achieved a rather successful compartmentalization of his professional and marital lives, no doubt one owed in part to Diane's marital devotion. The artistic world is full of gifted talents whose marriages fail to withstand the pressure of living in the high-octane universe of pop culture. Her unfailing encouragement sustained him when he often lapsed into despair over his failure to publish. His sons have insisted their mother "was the engine of his career." Diane's selfless commitment to his career and their devotion to each other offered McLarty safe harbor from the storms that wreck many celebrity marriages. Later we will witness a similar pattern emerge with McLarty's second marriage to Kate Skinner whose love and support of his work proved a salutary influence on him.

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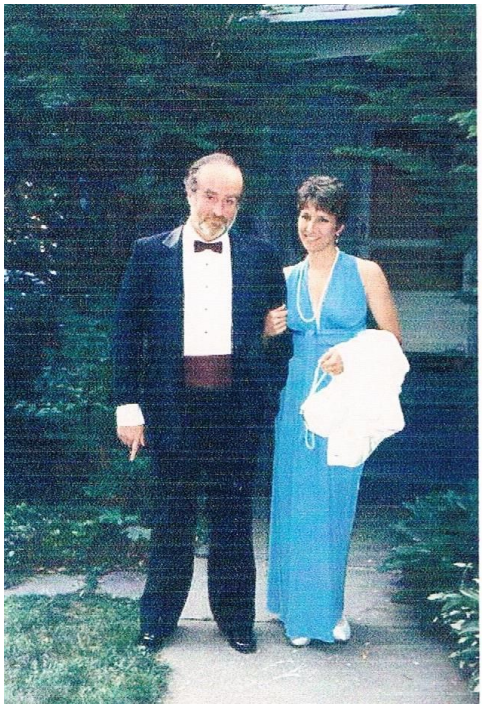
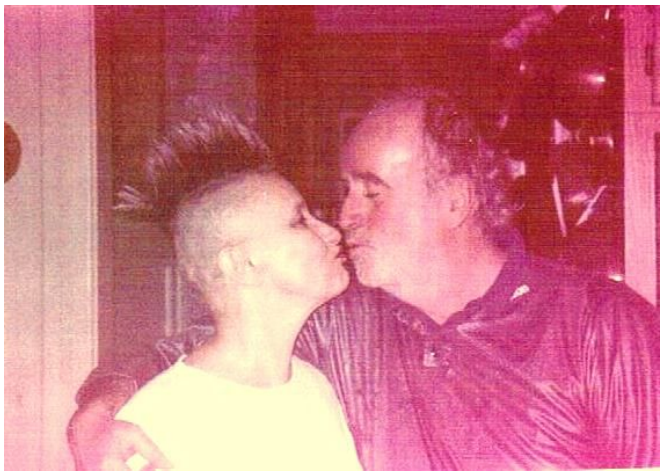
Diane's Death



In her later years, after the boys had left their Montclair home, Diane wished to return to Hollywood a few years before she developed cancer, convinced the two of them could find work. McLarty remained opposed to the idea; but Diane did manage to resume her interest in theater and painting. She had sacrificed her own career for the man she adored while managing a most successful marriage in an entertainment culture where divorce has been the rule rather than the exception. Now that the Montclair nest was empty, Diane felt justified in pursuing her theatrical longings. Even in her fifties as countless people have testified, she remained a beautiful and talented woman. who had every right to expect she might yet establish a modest professional career.

However, by the year 2001, Diane became seriously ill and endured considerable pain until she died of stage-four, lung cancer. McLarty, "devastated by her infirmity," had quit work to nurse her. Diane's brother, Carlos Tesitor, recalls her refusal "to face the reality of her death," though McLarty had little hope of her recovery. Her brother described her determination “to face her final months with stoic control." In a poignant demonstration of her unassailable optimism, Diane, rapidly losing her hair

to the nefarious effects of chemotherapy, decided to surprise McLarty by getting a Iroquois haircut. Nechie Hall recalls that "months before she died, she jumped the gun by getting rid of her hair and surprised Ron with this style." Diane's playful decision revealed her penchant for stoical courage and mischievous nature. However, such behavior often caused her to ignore reality, Her brother, Carl, observed that, "Diane never even told our family the seriousness of her condition to the extent that a week before she died she tried to convince me not to visit her, because she was fine. I ignored her optimism and spent the last two days of her life at her bedside with my sister, Nechie, Ron and the boys." Diane and Ron's loving union would last nearly 33 years until her death. Her obituary acknowledges Diane's artistic talents:



> "Diane Tesitor McLarty, July 11, 1948 - July 8, 2002, a mother and artist, was born in Walsenburg. After graduation in theater arts from the University of Colorado, she pursued acting in plays and films including ABC's *Oh Baby Baby* in Hollywood, but left the stage to raise her three children. During that time her paintings were exhibited around New Jersey. Recently she returned to her theatrical roots as a director and was scheduled to direct Luna

Stage's last of the 2002- 2003 season. Surviving are husband, Ron; sons, Zachary, Lucas and Matthew; her parents, Carl and Elsie Lenzini Tesitor; two brothers, Carlos and David Tesitor; and three sisters, Nechie Hall, Jeanne Candler and Lisa Ingoldby. Following services in Walsenburg, a memorial service is planned in Montclair."

Later McLarty and his sons drove to Creede, Colorado where the family had so often spent their summer vacations at a working dude ranch. They spread Diane's ashes over a favorite trout stream they often fished.

In the aftermath of her death, McLarty, as Nechie Hall explains, "went into a dark emotional tailspin so serious that Zachary decided to move back into the Montclair home to support his depressed father." McLarty had spent one year nursing his wife full-time after he quit working. As was the case with his parents' untimely death, he would be forced to endure the sudden and early loss of another loved one. Luke and Zachary,

also paint a somber picture of her death's terrible impact on their father. He had already experienced emotional trauma when his parents died in the Maine auto accident. Diane's death represented a second loss of a loved one. Carl Tesitor noted the absolute despair that characterized McLarty's condition. He explained how Diane had protected Ron's career by assuming complete control over the business of his everyday living. In his judgment, Ron was not prepared for her death: "She had made it her mission to permit him full-time attention to his writing and acting, and Diane attended to his day to day needs." Her death left McLarty emotionally isolated.

Eventually, however, McLarty, reflecting on his disjointed emotional state in an article he wrote for *The Virginia Quarterly Review* [Summer, 2005], revealed his determination to face his new reality.

> "My wife took routine with her. I'm told this happens; in fact, I was told this would happen . . . What I mean is, we go on; we don't necessarily know how we do, but we do. This not to say there wasn't some order to things. The celebration of a life [Diane's funeral] offers escape for awhile. The duties, the responsibilities, the comforting that eventually turns back onto you until the ceremonies of memorial put the period to it."

Central to his emotional resurgence arrived with his discovery that he had abandoned his lifelong commitment to writing.

> "I hadn't sat down to write for five months. I hadn't done the one activity that I have essentially based my silly life on. Every daily event that confused me, every person that eluded me was explained and somehow appreciated by that selfish act of words for thirty years. In other words if I didn't write it, I didn't get it. A compulsion by any other name. *I began to write again and began to feel better.*[my emphasis] This time out, working a corner of the basement my boys had dubbed the 'pit of despair. I finished a play . . . got halfway into another and began another novel. I no longer crawled up the cellar stairs crying, 'somebody stop me.' I was thankful to be lost in my self-centered reverie, joyful to be lining things up again."

McLarty had eventually realized he needed to return to life, to writing, so he could rediscover the "routine" Diane had provided him. Albert Camus, the great French novelist, once wrote that art is a "rectification of reality," the means by which we may understand ourselves and the world about us. McLarty would return to the very craft which would help him re-order his new life.

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Kate Skinner

Kate Skinner as Blanche Dubois in A Streetcar Named Desire

By the time McLarty first met Kate Skinner, she had herself built a 8substantial reputation as a Broadway actress and familiar television performer. Her seemingly endless resume of seventy-eight Broadway, Off-

Broadway performances, including theatrical appearances in countless major cities across The United States (Washington D.C. Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angelis, Seattle, Santa Cruz, Cleveland, Denver, Philadelphia and almost every Shakespeare festival in the country), provides us with an insight into her appetite for exhausting work. Skinner also worked in summer theatres and community playhouses. She embodies the meaning of the phrase, "theatrical trouper." Her numerous television appearances, several with McLarty in *Law and Order*, and five films round-out a most impressive career that continues to this day. Undaunted by her busy theatrical work, Skinner still found time to engage in teaching classes at colleges and universities (view her complete resume in the Appendix).

Skinner's notable theatrical career is exhausting, one she continues with distinction. She starred on Broadway in *The Graduate* (including a national tour), Chekov's *Uncle Vanya* with Tom Courtenay, *Lend Me a Tenor* and numerous Off-Broadway performances. She earned a special reputation for "classical" performances due to her frequent roles in the plays of Shakespeare and the great dramatists of the next three centuries.

Stacy Keach as Falstaff, Matthew Amendt as Prince Hal, Jude Sandy as Poins, and Kate Skinner as Mistress Quickly in the Shakespeare Theatre Company production of *Henry IV, Part I*, directed by Michael Kahn. Photo by Scott Suchman.

Photos above show Kate as Mistress Quickly and popular stage and screen star, Stacy Keach as Falstaff in Henry IV, Part I

Her many roles as Shakespearean women represent a unique aspect of her impressive range: Regan, and Goneril, (*King Lear);* Olivia, (*Twelfth Night) ; Eleanor and Elizabeth, (Henry VI); Elizabeth,* Kate and Tranio, (*The Taming of the Shrew);* Emilia, (*Othello);* Lady Macbeth, (*Macbeth);* Mariana, (*Measure for Measure);* Beatrice, (*Measure for Measure)*; Adriana, (*Comedy of Errors);* Titania, (*A Midsummer Night's Dream);* Anne Page, (*The Merry Wives of Windsor);* and Lady Anne, *Richard III* ***(photo right)***.

Skinner also tackled the giants of Western drama: Sophocles, Moliere, Ibsen, Chekov, O'Neill and modern writers like Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee. Her work continues to impress

critics to this day. Recent performances indicate she has neither abandoned

her taste for hard work or challenging roles. Playing Doll, a devious con-artist in Ben Johnson's *The Alchemist* ***(photo left)***, Skinner displayed her talent for classical comedy in a 2012 performance at the Arena theater, in Washing-ton D.C. In Edward Albee's, *Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf?,* she won raves and superlatives in a review by *The San Francisco Chronicle* for her feisty rendition of the rapacious Martha:

> "Edwards [the director] has assembled a pitch-perfect cast that captures every exchange of wit, lies and bile in all its perverse glory. Skinner delivers a *titanic* performance as the ravenous Martha. Stifled by a society that left no outlet for her ambition, she pinned all her hopes on her husband then loathed him for it. Their macabre mind games resonate with myriad shades of intimacy. Husband and wife circle each other like tigers, but their ferocity is tinged with tenderness as well as blood lust. That mingled sense of love and hate casts the show's comic thrust into high relief and lends the ending a nearly optimistic air."

Kate as Martha in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf"

Another reviewer joined the chorus of high praise for Skinner's Broadway performance in Edward Albee's taut examination of a marriage near collapse:

> "Kate Skinner's Martha is nothing short of magnificent. In the opening act, she is the blowsy woman who savors taunting her husband and seems in complete control of her milieu. Her disintegration is a marvel of acting. Her voice drops an octave as she realizes the cherished secret of George and herself is about to be revealed, and the change in tone signals her realization that nothing is ever going to be the same once it comes out."

Skinner also has appeared in several films, most recently in *Down the Shore,* with Games Gandolfini (star of the HBO *Sopranos)*, Famke Jensson and Julia Roberts. It would be no exaggeration to say that her diverse

theatrical bibliography represents an achievement few other actresses can match.

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Kate Skinner was born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona of parents who were both teachers and eventually received their doctorates in Education. Her parents were the first members of their respective families to attend college. Skinner was the middle child of an older sister and a younger brother. ***(Skinner above on left in photo, 1961)***

She attended the Bob Barker Free School, alternative high school in Vancouver for her 9th grade. Barker was a protégé of A.S. Neill of "Summerhill," a popular experimental school theorist of the 1960's. For her remaining high school years, Skinner spent a dizzying tour of Coronado and Scottsdale, Arizona schools in her 10th grade; then University High at Western Kentucky University for her junior year; and, finally graduated from Hoover High School in Fresno California after the completion of her senior year. Her high school years found her active in school plays, notably, *The Merchant of Venice, The Diary of Anne Frank, The Madwoman of Chaillot, In White America,* and *You Can't Take It With You.*

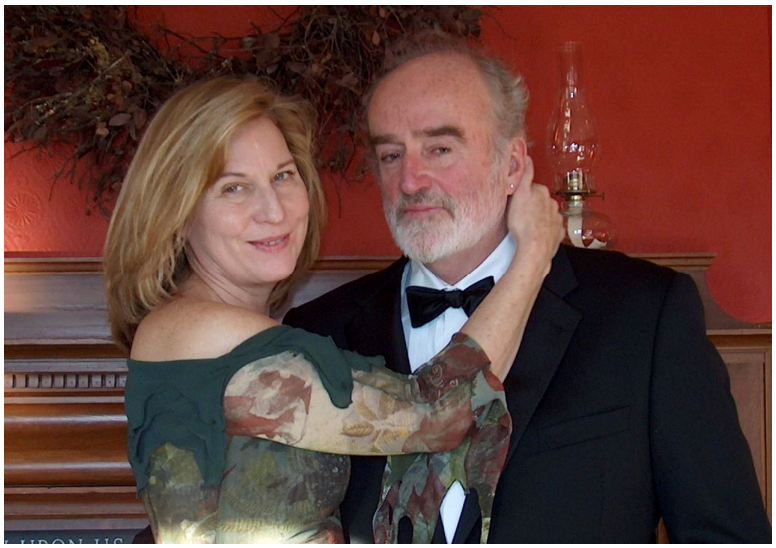
Moving on to college, Skinner earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts, and was elected to the *Phi kappa Phi* National Honors Society at

Fresno State University. Duplicating her busy high school activity in drama, ***(photo left)*** Skinner appeared in the University's productions of *As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing, Butterflies Are Free, Vivat Regina, Play It Again Sam* and *The Maids.* She went on to earn her MFA in Acting at UCLA where she played in *The Crockett Match, The Big Knife, The Would-Be Gentleman* and *Transgressor.* After a few years in Los Angeles from 1981 to 1984, Skinner moved to New York in the spring of 1984, and has lived there establishing her impressive acting career to the present day.

As chance would have it, McLarty and Skinner first met one another accidentally. Kate tells the circumstances of their association:

> "In 1998, I did an episode of *Law and Order*, it was my first. . . Ron was playing Judge Wright . . . I didn't know his name, but I definitely knew his face." While McLarty chatted with my former roommate, "Ron didn't acknowledge me, and I am pretty sure didn't even say hello. . . . Though we had four days of shooting in the courtroom; I never was in proximity of Ron. When I wrapped the show, I still didn't know his name."

Later, in late October of 2002, while she was playing Olive Braddock, in the Broadway production of *The Graduate* (also starring Kathleen Turner and Victor Slezak), Skinner "went to Liz Lewis Casting for a voice-over call. Sitting in the corner was Ron, who I didn't notice until he spoke. We chatted, and later he called me and we met for coffee with him doing most of the talking about his sons." It wasn't until December 31st that she "called Ron to wish him a Happy New Year." McLarty had avoided her after they had met a second time in the casting office in early December. "And to my great surprise he got on the phone (his son, Matt had answered) and said, 'I'm so glad you called.'" McLarty asked if he could see her and they agreed to have lunch on New Year's Day. "He showed up at 2 p.m. on January 1, 2003 . . . then we went out to dinner. And that was that. Our romance began and flourished over the coming year."



(Wedding photo, 2004)

Obviously, Skinner had helped McLarty begin a new chapter in his life. As a fellow thespian, she could share a common vocational world with him, even a mutual love of trout fishing. Their relationship blossomed, and they married 2 p. m. on New Year's Day, 2004, at an Inn on Pemaquid Point, Maine.

As McLarty was fond of pointing out, Kate Skinner, his "classical actress," had built an impressive theatrical reputation, particularly as an actress brimming with sufficient talent to perform in many of the foremost dramatic works. Her deep involvement in a theatrical life provided them with a strong measure of shared compatibility. Her energy and background enabled him to return to his love of acting and writing in New York City. In fact, Kate also urged McLarty to renew his efforts to publish his novels. He had virtually given up hope that he might find a sympathetic publisher, but Kate persuaded him he could solicit help from the many authors whose works he had narrated. Eventually, her prescient encouragement and faith in his talent anticipated his eventual literary success. Sandra Jennings probably reflects the marriage of Ron and Kate best in a recent note to Kate:

> "I have a very specific memory. One I never shared with you. Harold and I had come to your apartment for dinner. Ron and I were downstairs in his study area where he wrote, and we were talking about writing. It is all about his confession to me that all would have stayed buried in a trunk, abandoned and given up on had it not been for your nurturing, loving guidance and encouragement, traveling with him step by step through the difficulty of putting pen to paper, and then the daunting task of finding an agent, publisher, etc. He said he would never have taken a step down that road without you, and would never have had the inspired rush of joy and accomplishment had it not been for your moving heaven and earth to show him the light at the end of the tunnel. He said he owed his writing career to

you. Your love and devotion gave him the courage to go back into works he had written, and believe in the ones to come."

Numerous others like long-time friend of Ron's, Frankie Faison, an old neighbor of McLarty's Montclair days remarked, “I have seen them grow in their marriage relationship over the years to the point of being seen by me as not Ron and Kate as two individuals, but as Ron and Kate as ONE. Their love and friendship and support they give to each other is very moving." Dilys Burke, another old Montclair friend explained that Kate brought him "joy and happiness." In a very telling observation of Kate's transformative impact on McLarty, Lance Guest spoke of his visit to the McLarty's Manhattan apartment shortly after their marriage. He reveals a man who has been born again:

"WHAT A TOAD!" He exclaims gleefully upon seeing my 7 year old. I may have met Ron briefly about ten years prior, but he treats me and my family as if we were his own. We enter our dear friend Kate's apartment with her new husband, who is a six foot cross between George Carlin and Santa Claus with a hundred watt twinkle in his eye minus the poundage. Forever seeming like Scrooge in the final chapter of *A Christmas Carol,* he engulfs the room with giddy spirit and silly jokes. His writing, on the other hand, is brilliantly dense, scary, heartbreaking and hilarious. 'Toad' is apparently his all-purpose term of affection directed primarily at youngsters, and my son, Jack, is made to feel very special indeed."

The comment portrays a thoroughly hearty and joyful McLarty as who exhibits the sort of gusto and enthusiasm characteristic of his entire life. His marriage to Kate restored his passion to write again and, more importantly, to live again.

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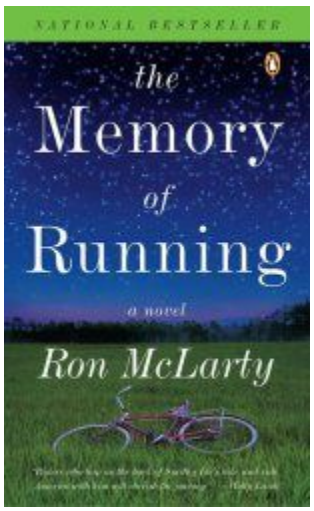

The Memory of Running:

Unfortunately, it took until the 2004 publication of *The Memory of Running* for the general public to finally savor the wit and literary dexterity of a man who had already written forty-four plays and ten novels. Part of the reason for this neglect rests with the emergent publishing business which has radically changed since the heyday of America's great literary Renaissance of the 19th and 20th centuries. Gone are the owners and

editors of our principal publishing houses who valued literary excellence over today's corporate obsession with profit and shallow celebrity. Publishers like Charles Scribner and Alfred Knopf demanded quality fiction and drama. Maxwell Perkins nurtured writers like Hemingway Fitzgerald and Thomas Wolfe. Bennett Cerf courageously brought a suit to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1933, in which Judge Woolsey declared James Joyce's *Ulysses* was literature rather than pornography as it had been labeled. These editors, committed to promoting literary merit, have too often been replaced by corporate number-crunchers more interested in serving their stockholders rather than the advancement of our literary heritage. It seems arguable that given the abundance of high praise for McLarty's literary talent, he might have flourished in times more sympathetic to mature fiction rather than the glut of formula writing and sensationalism holding sway today. McLarty, himself, felt victimized by the many publishers who filled his office with rejection slips. Peter Maloney, who confessed he had stopped submitting new manuscripts himself, documents McLarty's doggedness in submitting samples of his novels and plays only to receive curt responses from agents insisting he send no new manuscripts. He did have some small success with several of his plays which were produced and shown in off-Broadway venues. Yet, these modest successes hardly met his expectations to publish the body of his fiction and dramatic works. Were it not for Stephen King's support for him, he might have remained entirely unknown to the reading public.

The circumstances of his good luck might appear more appropriate for a Horatio Alger novel than reality. McLarty's bountiful work in audio-

book narration prompted him to make an arrangement with his agent, Claudia Howard, who helped build the fledgling company *Recorded Books* in the early 1980's. It was Howard who provided the first professional recognition of McLarty's literary talent. Having read numerous novels for her company, McLarty asked Howard if she would read *The Memory of Running* as a possible addition to her growing list of audio-books if he would forego his audio-book fee for his next contract. McLarty explains in his *Virginia Quarterly Review article*, "Pinch Me; or, How Stephen King Changed My Life,"

> "Several years earlier I had shown Claudia a copy of my third novel, *The Memory of Running.* She was new to the small list of poor souls who get shown a nonstop unpublished stream of material from McLarty. Usually I inform these dear people that another masterpiece is on the way, and God bless them and keep them, they never chop me down, even if they're tempted to put me out of my misery, or at least take a hammer and break my writing fingers."

Ultimately, Howard was enchanted with his tale of Smithy Ide, astounded that no publisher seemed interested in it. The deal was struck, and McLarty added his novel manuscript to her list of audio-books. Rather quickly Dame Fortune would alter McLarty's life. Within two years of Diane's death, McLarty would emerge from his despondency to marry again and finally sign a very lucrative book contract, one ironically that Diane had longed for in her thirty-two year marriage to her husband.

Author Stephen King played a crucial role in McLarty's change of fortune. In 1999, King, had been struck by an automobile while walking on the side of Route 5, in Lovell, Maine. Hospitalized with serious injuries to his eyes, lungs, hip, and a fractured right leg that doctors considered amputating. King spent the next several years struggling to regain his health. When grave eye complications ensued, King seriously considered ending his writing career. Forced to rely on audio-books to feed his appetite for reading, King eventually happened upon McLarty's *Recorded Books* narration of *The Memory of Running* only by virtue of his misfortune. Like Claudia Howard, King found *The Memory of Running* remarkable and dramatically expressed his passionate admiration for both the novel's charm and McLarty's skillful narration. "It knocked me out," wrote King who chastened the publishing world for its indifference to such a worthy novel with his now well-known accolade in April, 2003: "*The Memory of Running is the best novel you won't* read this year. But you can experience it, and I'm all but positive that you'll thank me for the tip if you do." Sparing no limit to his tribute in his column "The Pop of King" for *Entertainment Weekly,* King called Smithy "an American original, worthy of a place on the shelf just below your Hucks, your Holdens, and your Yossarians." A neglected manuscript, suddenly got elevated to the level of Twain's *Huckleberry Finn, Catcher in the Rye,* and *Catch-22.* King's exalted praise ignited a firestorm of interest by publishers. Suddenly a bidding war for the manuscript ensued among seven book publishers. Jeff Kleinman, McLarty's agent at *Graybill and English* in Washington D.C., skillfully negotiated the bidding until Viking Press won the contest with a million-dollar offer for the novel's rights. The

sum of these improbable events eventually produced a film contract with Warner Brothers, another million for McLarty's film scenario, the future publication rights for three more of McLarty's manuscripts, world-wide publication in eighteen different countries, a whirlwind spate of bookstore appearances to promote his works and McLarty's invitation to be the commencement speaker in 2007, at Rhode Island College where he received an Honorary Doctorate in the Humanities. Ron McLarty had finally achieved the dream of every child: he became the local boy who made good.

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The Memory of Running, originally written by McLarty as a play on the occasion of his parents' auto accident in 1990, has its roots in a familiar literary *genre*, the so-called *bildungsroman* or novel of moral, psychological growth and maturity. Its roots go back to Fielding's *Tom Jones,* Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* and, most significantly in the modern age, James Joyce's *A Portrait of a Young Man.* Hefty company for a lad from East Providence. McLarty's forty-three year old fat, drunk protagonist, Smithson Ide, may appear an unlikely candidate to bear the portentous weight and seriousness of the genre; yet, Smithy (an allusion to Joyce's "in the smithy of my soul"?) arguably rises to the level of all those other discoverers in the *apprentice* tradition. Smithy, as Stephen King believes, joins the company of novice journeyers like Mark Twain's Huck Finn, J. D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield, and Joe Heller's Captain John Yossarian. Like those authors,

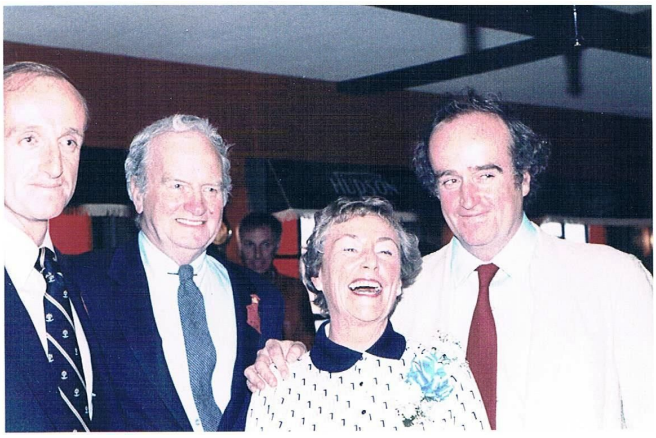
McLarty has taken liberty with the convention. His is a flawed comic hero who hearkens back to Fielding's rakish and blemished hero. In the end Smithy proves a journeyer, a searcher of truth, someone who arrives at a central discovery in the midst of his blundering ways. For all his obvious imperfections, he quixotically peddles across America idealistically driven by love and moral decency. His devotion to his dead sister, Bethany, and his love of Norma Mulvey, his paralyzed childhood friend, allows him to encounter a world that is better off because he lived in it. At a significant moment in one of their many phone conversations while Smithy peddles his unsure way across the country on his bicycle, he asks: "Why am I on the bike, Norma?" Her answer to him establishes the central and archetypal journey motif: "I think you're on a quest." Smithy's quest, of course, is no more outlandish than Don Quixote's and no less admirable than Huck Finn's. They may be comic travelers, but in good company with numerous other ungainly comic caricatures in fiction. In fact, Smithy has much in common with Voltaire's innocent, but outrageously naive Candide. Both spend much of their encounter with life's cruelty trying to reconcile their fundamental virtuousness with the hard knocks that plague them.

So we find Smithson Ide repeatedly forced to endure the slings and arrows of several bike crashes near Wood River or when a farmer runs over his Raleigh. In Creede, Colorado he is shot and beaten, ironically because he saved the life of a young boy lost in a snowstorm. Most ignominiously, Bethany's deluded psychiatrist, Dr. Georgina Glass, accuses him of brutality and incest. Like Voltaire's beleaguered Candide, for all his innocent decency, Smithy is often mistreated and misunderstood; though he

simultaneously discovers numerous instances of kindness from several people who help him recover from hunger and near disaster. Smithy also meets Philip Wolsey, the truck driver who relates a grim tale of his gifted, but unfortunate brother, Walter, a heroin addict who tragically kills their father. Wolsey's moving story enables Smithy to measure his difficulties against those much more terrible than his. *The Memory of Running* eventually moves toward the redemptive power of Smithy's love for Bethany and Norma. Both sustain him throughout his cross-country trek. At first he is driven by his imaginings of Bethany that urge him toward Los Angeles. Slowly Smithy understands and accepts Norma's unqualified love which permits him to accept Bethany's death and commit himself to a new life with her. Norma is Smithy's rescuer who calls him back to life from the despondency he feels over the death of his parents and Bethany:

> "'I just love you, Hook. I love you more than anything in the whole world. Even when I'm crazy, I think good things about you and hope good things happen to you. Remember how you'd look for me? Remember how you found me once under the water tower and you let me ride the bike back and you ran beside? That's why I'm afraid. I'm afraid you've stopped running, and I don't want you to. I want you to stay a runner. I want you to remember running.' Norma's blinds opened, and suddenly she was there, sitting tall in a red flannel nightie. Bethany waved to her and blew her a big kiss, and then they were both crying, and then the rain fell."

The setting and design of *The Memory of Running* stresses McLarty's



preoccupation with his childhood roots. The book, like his next novel, *Traveler,* has a deep Rhode Island lineage. Not only does it begin in the State, it reflects McLarty's artistic beginnings and communal experiences: East Providence, his family and friends, Grace Church where he worshiped, the schools he attended, his membership in Scouting, Wood River his fishing paradise, and Shad Factory in Rehoboth, Massachusetts where Smithy often visits on his Raleigh bike. McLarty's atlas of the streets and places he traveled recalls James Joyce's obsession with Dublin. **(photo above left: Doug, Bob, Kaye, and Ron at their retirement party)** Both novelists offer the reader a map of their origins. The opening pages concern the accidental death of his parents, Robert and Kaye McLarty. They had spent a vacation at their favorite destination with Ron and Doug. Robert McLarty died soon after the accident, but Kaye lingered for weeks. McLarty remained faithful to the end with her. The accident would linger as an embedded crisis in McLarty's entire life, surfacing as a continuing psychological trauma as well as a frequent motif in his fiction. McLarty tells us:

> "My parents had a car accident while visiting me at a vacation spot in Maine. I stayed at a motel between my mother's trauma center

> and my father's neurological hospital. Between visits, I wrote *The Memory of Running* as a play. After their deaths, I expanded it into novel form. Like in all of my work, I try to explain the world and its affect on me. I have always felt that writing is a deeply personal thing and not a road to wealth and happiness."

The "deeply personal" allusions to McLarty's life are everywhere in Smithy's narration. He lives on Brightridge Avenue, McLarty's birthplace, vacations in Maine and uses all the personal landmarks familiar to the author. The catalogue includes references to Diane's birthplace in Walsenburg, Colorado, and Creede where Diane and his family spent summers. Present as well are moments experienced by Smithy that recall McLarty's bedside vigil with his mother. In one of Smithy's phone talks with Norma, Smithy, apologizes for a lie he has told his dying mother. Much later McLarty would confess, "I will always be sorry I didn't tell the truth about my pop when he was in the hospital." Doug McLarty also remembers their difficulty in telling their mother that her husband had died: "We stood over her bed: she could only communicate with her eyes, telling her our father was fine." Doug attributed their action to emotional immaturity: "We were like fourteen year old kids, unable to face the truth." he added that Kaye was not fooled by their evasion: "When we looked at her eyes, we both knew she was being lied to."

McLarty's habit of building his fictional universe out of his own experiences does not, however, make *The Memory of Running* simple autobiography. As we have seen, like countless other writers, he transforms

his past memories into an artistic order. In this way, Smithy's final visit to Bethany, where she lies on a cold gurney in the basement of The Cheng Ho Funeral Home, becomes a transforming and purgative moment where Smithy achieves emotional closure.

> "I put my face down close to hers, then laid my cheek against hers. She smelled like Mom's lilac soap. I was crying into her pillow, and it was a good cry, and it was for Mom and Pop and Norma, too."

Smithy gains an emancipating freedom from self-pity. His tears are for those he loved and for the joyful discovery of his love for Norma. The novel's conclusion celebrates Smithy's epiphany. Norma shouts to him:

> "'I . . . love . . . you,' she said.
> I knelt on the bike road between Venice and Santa Monica, and I was not going to be sorry anymore. I turned her face to me and kissed her lips.
> 'I . . . love . . . you . . . too,' I said.
> And I said it again. And I did."

The Memory of Running ultimately proved a global success, having been published in no less than twenty different countries. It became a main selection for the *Book of the Month* Club and nominated for Italy's prestigious literary award, *The Bancarella Prize.* Warner Brothers Studio purchased the film rights and McLarty wrote the film scenario. The *Reading*

Across Rhode Island Committee chose the novel for its 2004 selection for fiction, hosting an honorary dinner at Rhodes on the Pawtuxet that drew hundreds of admirers who came to honor their hometown author. In a similar fashion all his later novels, *Traveler, Art in America* and *The Dropper,* reflect McLarty's revisiting his roots, yet artistically transforming them into a narrative ordering.

The Memory of Running is structured according to a pattern of alternating chapters that toggle back and forth from Smithy's past and present, permitting McLarty a convenient method of handling a narrator whose past is fundamental to his current emotional crisis. Like Hemingway, he employs recurring motifs of food and fishing; and his taut diction is faithful to Hemingway's preference for a pithy and economical phrasing. Yet his world view is more affirmative than Hemingway's dark view of man's condition. Surprisingly, McLarty's diction has a scatological frankness to it. Frequently he uses profanity which, however, never seems wanton or gratuitous. His language is always determined by the need to create character authenticity. In fact, compared to the abundant vulgarity of today's films and television shows, McLarty's diction can, arguably, be considered modest. Any test of good literature must always recognize the relationship between form and content. Does the language effectively serve the content and themes, or does it appear solely used for gratuitous political, propagandistic, venal or prurient motives? Ron McLarty regarded language an art form in the spirit of Hamlet's wise observation:

> "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature:

for any thing so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (*Hamlet, Act 3, scene 2)*

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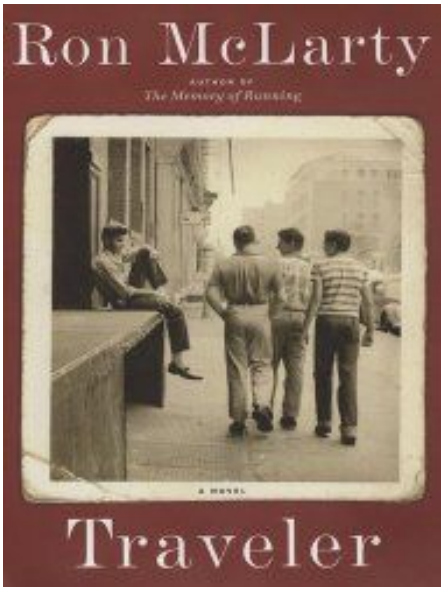

Traveler

With his second novel, *Traveler,*(an alternate selection for the influential *Book of the Month Club*), Ron McLarty employs a middle-age, Van Dyke bearded and pony-tailed anti-hero. As expected, McLarty alters the typical youthful apprentice so prevalent in the genre. Jono Riley, a fifty-

one year old struggling actor whose career has foundered in his most recent effort, a one act off-Broadway play, also works as a bartender in a New York bar named, "Lambs." The novel opens with a letter written by Cubby D'Agostino, an old Rhode Island friend. He informs Jono that his sister, a girl Jono loved in his youth, has died from a bullet wound she received when she was eighteen. The letter prompts Jono to undertake a return to his birthplace, East Providence, Rhode Island. He hopes to unscramble the conflicted emotions he has harbored for the past forty years since he witnessed the suspicious random shooting of Marie in 1961.

Like *The Memory of Running, Traveler* rests upon a platform of McLarty's past. Abundant auto-biographical elements shape characters and events. The novel continually alludes to Brightridge Avenue, Grace Church, Camp Yawgoog, East Providence High School, Rhodes on the Pawtuxet, and McLarty's personal experiences: acting, Boy Scout activities, the death of his parents, fishing, and his love of food. Similar too are the motifs of journey and redemption. McLarty even offers a short riff on the little known history of East Providence's link to an Indian leader, Massasoit, who saved Plymouth Pilgrims in the so-called King Phillip war. Significant as well is McLarty's use of Jono's father's death, a circumstance similar to Smithy's parents' auto accident. In some respects all these recurring elements make McLarty's four novels something of a Rhode Island saga inasmuch as they employ similar elements. But fiction is never fully autobiography. Albert Camus once commented: "Art is the symbolic rectification of reality." So, despite his constant use of his own past, one which Rhode Islanders will

find engaging, McLarty converts his youthful experiences into compelling characters, landscape painting, "petite details" that poetically illuminate, and a mystery that propels the narrative of *Traveler. The Boston Globe* called the book "unforgettable" and written with "a great voice, a great plot, great suspense, a great evocation of time and place." The review identifies how the novel's unique voice, plot and setting "rectify" reality rather than merely lean on fictional clichés and mind-numbing formulas.. The Globe review reminds us how events, people and places actually become transformed into literature. The plot then, alternates between present and past events of 40 years ago, engaging the reader in Jono Riley's discovery quest, one that ripples with poignancy and pathos.

Jono's return unleashes a Proustian flood of memories and circumstances leading him to a re-awakening of a past he has repressed. His reunion with Cubby D'Agostino, Bobby Fontes, Billy Fontanelli and the his nemesis opponents, the Ponserelli and Crosby families, allow him to revive the fundamental values of love, friendship and life's fundamental uncertainty. Just as Smithy Ide struggles with low self-esteem, so also does Jono begin in uncertainty and ambiguous resolve. As he tells the reader early in the novel, "I live, but I rarely learn." Yet his determination to endure threats by the hoodlums, Petey Maloney and Ponserelli, eventually alter his tendency to avoid commitment into a mature acceptance the human need to engage life's contingencies. Bobby's tragic revelations cause a profound transformation in Jono. He learns that living cannot be as antiseptic as he would wish.

> "It's surprising how clean and orderly things appear from a distance. The warehouses and apartments on the far bank all seemed shiny, sanitary. This kind of view is necessary, I think. It's important for people to fool themselves into believing that order is possible, even if we know it isn't."

What emerges from his discovery that “I rarely learn," one might call Jono's epiphany, the central moment of discovery essential to all apprentice fiction. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle had defined "recognition" as the moment of heroism. So much of Jono's past had been a futile attempt to escape reality. Forced to confront the truth of Marie's death and the impossibility of changing the past, Jono accepts Thomas Wolfe's warning that you can't go home again. You can cherish it, yet you can never change it. Jono offers similar advice to Bobby Fontes whose life has foundered on brutality. Jono learns we can, nevertheless, gain nourishment from the past. Such a transforming moment occurs when Jono recalls a brief, but significant, conversation with his father following a spring, sandlot baseball workout.

> "I got into the front with Cubby, and Marie sat in back between Bobby and Billy. Right before he fired up our Ford, my old man sniffed and looked at me.
>
> 'What's that smell Juno?'
>
> "What?"
>
> 'That smell. What is it?'

I caught my Marie D'Agostino's exquisite eyes in the rearview mirror, and she smiled the smile I can still savor decades after the fact. She looked serious for as second, then smiled again.

Roses, Pop," I said, my eyes still on her. "That smell is roses.'"

McLarty's flawed narrator, like Joyce's Gabriel Conroy in *The Dead* is awakened to the recognition that his lost past has enabled him to recognize life's mutability.

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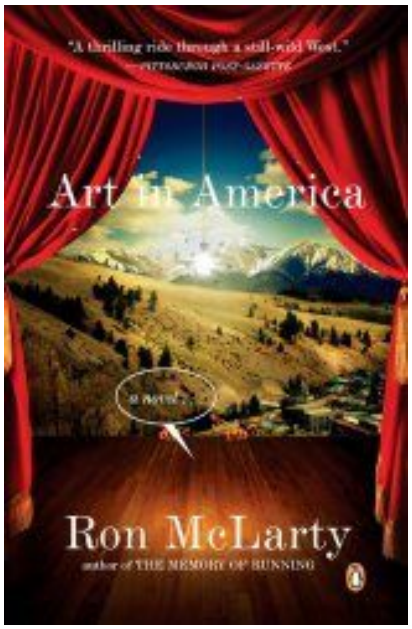

Art in America:

Ron McLarty's *The Memory of Running* and *Traveler* both provide ample evidence of his penchant for humor. In fact it might be argued that

comedy suits the human condition far better than tragedy. Comedy, or at least a comic tone, has a redemptive view of humans which avoids the desolation of tragedy. The great English Romantic poet, Byron, quips in his *Don Juan,* "If I laugh at any mortal thing, dear reader, 'tis that I may not weep." The comic, at times absurdist, point-of-view recognizes the human condition of suffering, injustice and tragedy; yet, its voice permits us to confront misfortune without capitulating to a paralyzing despondency over the world's blundering. With his third novel, *Art in America*, McLarty embraces the paradoxical elements of what William Saroyan called *The Human Comedy*. His tale explores human conflict, loneliness, hatreds that breed violence, as well as the universal longing for love and acceptance. However, McLarty approaches these momentous social problems with a wry point-of-view that unleashes a frenzied, comic romp, altering the world's ailments into a riotous, yet redemptive journey. His Chaplinesque view of our troubled world permits us to recognize our considerable limitations with a simultaneous opportunity to smile at our inept foolishness.

McLarty's narrator, Steven Kearney, is a seriously blemished protagonist. We are confronted with a failed novelist, playwright, actor and star-crossed loser in love. Asked once why he seems to write about dysfunctional protagonists more in the manner of the fictional anti-hero, McLarty responded: "My characters are, for the most part, composites of a variety of people I knew growing up, and I've always felt a particular affinity for those folks on the margin of things." He went on to say that people like

Smithy, who "lost himself to alcohol" and Steven Kearney who "tried to put all his faith in his concept of Art" eventually "realize that joy begins and ends with other people." So *Art in America* returns us to Mclarty's preoccupation with the quest or journey into discovery by a loser whose involvement with a wild assemblage of atypical characters enables him to discover "the possibility of love and romance in the middle of a range war." McLarty's diverse and idiosyncratic Creedemore denizens have been compared to Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Everyone has an antic, even lunatic demeanor. We meet Sheriff Petey Meyers, "an ex-Boston cop who talks to his dead police partner, Reedy," and is accused of murdering two killers who tried to murder him. Not to be overlooked is Ticky Lettgo, Creedemore's beloved but cantankerous ninety-six year old gun-toting cowboy who shoots holes in rapid-rafting tourists' boats because they floated over his share of the river that runs through his property. Then we are offered Cowboy Bob Parnassus, an ostentatious poet who, without prompting, spouts outrageous and banal doggerel, about his hero, Kit Carson, to whoever will listen. Then there is Bill Clinings, a college professor, specializing in unintelligible courses and the pursuit of bedding as many campus coeds as possible. And few readers will ever forget the inimitable Mountain Man, a wannabe entrepreneur, cowboy biker and owner of the rafting company that inaugurates the fateful swift-water trip for terrified members of Zion Bible Institute group whose rafts are shot out from under them by Ticky Lettgo. Early in the novel we meet Awky Rand, an *avant-garde* playwright who presents a production of "Bottom Dwellers" sporting a setting consisting of an "enormous papier-mâché buttocks

serving as the play's background." We also meet Creedemore's "humanist--soulist--without portfolio" minister, the Reverend Eliphalet Nott, who decries any belief in God. Finally, there is Sandy Fiddler, the novel's chief villain, who opens an "Anti-Christian Reading Room" because she once got kicked out of a Christian Science Reading Room. An agnostic with bi-polar instability and psychotic urge for revolutionary violence, she has written a pamphlet, "Guide to Bomb-making: fertilizing the revolution." Sandy Fiddler plans to blow up the Creedemore dam.

Charting McLarty's fictional canvass is as treacherous as trying to pick-up spilled mercury from a shag rug. His Homeric catalogue of odd misfits reminds one of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland.* The novel launches one down a rabbit hole of an upside-down universe of illogic and burlesque. McLarty wastes little time establishing his employment of comic hyperbole and absurdity. Parody and burlesque govern and propel the narrative. "The Prologue" introduces the reader to "The Selected Works of Steven Kearney," an unwieldy bibliography of authorial inflation:

> "THE BUDDAH OF WOMEN
>
> A novel
> 1,962 pages
>
> The story of a man who knew everything you could possibly know about women. A man nearly religious in the pursuit of knowledge regarding the feminine human being. Along the way in his world

travels, Cagey Larson meets a woman traveling a coextensive route. She knows everything about men. The fun begins when they meet an old man and an old woman who show them they don't have to know everything and who help them forget, so that they can be a couple.

copyright, 1978

Currently without a publisher"

Can McLarty be blamed for not warning his readers? The hyperbolic bibliography unleashes the ensuing comic lunacy. Kearney's furious verbal outpouring of rejected prose mocks McLarty's own struggle to publish, and the novel abounds with all the benchmarks and allusions to McLarty's life. The fictional Creedemore plays upon the working ranch in Creede, Colorado, the old mining town where his family spent numerous summer vacations. Creede is, of course, near Walsenburg, Diane Tesitor McLarty's childhood home. McLarty's habit of using his past as fodder for his craft erupts into comic self-ridicule. *Art in America* mocks McLarty's lifelong preoccupation with artistic creation, in the shape of a robust spoof of goofy artistic outrage. The novel is hilarious self-parody.

Not far below all the mayhem and chaos resides a potential range war, cultural animosities, even a bomb plot. The plot moves us toward Wilma Kirk's plan for a "Creedemore Retrospective" which will culminate in Kearney's overwrought, epical and absurd dramaic summation of Creede's pre-history to the present. His play, suffused with a measure of Dali-like surrealism, abounds with talking trees and rocks, walking fish and lizards, a

revisionist history of Kit Carson's slaughter of the Ute Indians and ample doses of Cowboy Bob's formless free verse. Yet out of the novel's many accounts of animosities, hatreds, conflicts and possible extinction by Sandy Fiddler's menacing "Operation Bernadette," McLarty produces a happy dénouement as traditional as the conclusion of Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well.* Aided by Mountain Man's reformation and assistance, an in-the-knick-of-time resolution saves the day. Petey arrests Sandy; Mountain Man, Mel Prophets and sons become reconciled to Jude McCormick; The Liberty Society march on the Retrospective play is aborted; Steven proposes to Molly and savors his first produced play. All this mayhem ultimately gets efficiently reduced to only 291 pages. If art can be regarded an ordering principle, then the chaos of Creede's antagonisms has been resolved by the alchemical power of McLarty's comic artistry.

Art in America has all the aspects of Max Sennett's slapstick romps or the engaging disorder of a Marx Brothers film. As McLarty confessed that he wrote *The Memory of Running* "for comfort after my folks were killed in an auto accident," *Art in America* gives ample evidence of McLarty's use of Byron's conflation of tragedy and comedy. We laugh that we may not weep. It is the human comedy that propels McLarty's narrative. Aristotle once defined tragedy as a movement from good fortune to bad and comedy the reverse. *Art in America*' satisfies as classic comedy, though McLarty never offers his reader a Pollyanna escape from reality, or even an unqualified, happy ending. His goofy travelers do, nevertheless, achieve kind of limited victory that defines their embrace of humanity and love.

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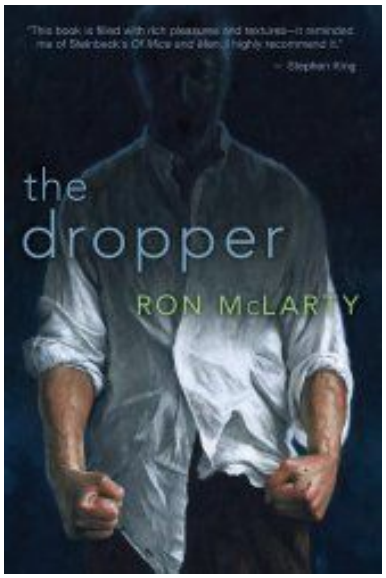

The Dropper

Though he struggled to find a major publisher for his fourth novel, *The Dropper***,** McLarty always regarded it his best fictional achievement. It took a small, almost unknown, Baltimore publisher, *Cemetery Dance Publications*, to risk accepting this unconventional, yet poetically crafted, work. McLarty's previous publisher, Random House, and several other major firms mulishly balked at its lack of car crashes, titillating graphic sex details or planetary violence. Instead, McLarty's *The Dropper* offers the reader a marvelous jewel of literary craftsmanship. Stephen King, himself, comments on the state of publishing today and the novel's many virtues.

> ”Recent publishing history is full of worthy novels that were published only by the skin of their teeth, J.K. Rowling's maiden Harry Potter voyage was one. Then there's the sad case of John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces,* published only after the despairing author had killed himself. (It then reached the best-seller list, which may or may not have been some comfort to his surviving relatives.) The moral? It's a jungle out there, baby, and in a world where the corporate bottom line is god (or maybe the word I'm searching for is Mammon), the strong survive but the worthy often do not."

Thankfully *The Dropper's* elegant language finally found the light of day, but the larger reading public has yet to savor its splendid verbal artistry. Yet, Stephen King has summoned his enthusiasm for McLarty's fictional talent, writing of his unqualified praise for the novel:

> "Ron McLarty, who has proved himself a terrific storyteller in such books as *The Memory of Running* and *Traveler*, has outdone himself with *The Dropper*, a story where beauty and brutality mingle in a yarn I just couldn't put down. Not that I wanted to, this book is filled with rich pleasures and textures. The highest praise I can give? it reminded me of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. As in his previous novels, *The Dropper* avoids sentimentality, but not sentiment; Shoe and his brother Bobby live and breathe. Most highly recommended."

The novel's compelling opening paragraph showcases McLarty's stylish and lyrical conflation of prose and poetry.

> "My brother, Bobby Horn, has lived in my dreams for seventy years. He stands bouncing his ball in the shadow of the special school for special people, staring out at a world he cannot understand. He is fifteen and his sweet, beautiful round face perches on that tall skinny body like a new moon. He sways and jerks his hands and shoulders but keeps his eyes on some distant mystery. I stand facing him, night after night, year after year, decade after decade, and while Bobby Horn remains unchanged, I have shriveled into an eighty-seven year old man slowly disappearing from this earth like smoke from a cigarette.
>
> For some years now, when I wake from this dream, I must lie still in my bed until whoever I might be returns and fills me. Each morning I stare at the ceiling wondering if today I will not come back but linger inside my dream to face my brother forever with shame and sorrow. I catch my name and say it for one more day.
>
> 'Shoe Horn, Shoe Horn. Me.'
>
> I struggle from bed into a chair by the window and look out over the Irish Sea. Yes. I remember now that I have come back. Back to familiar smells and murky skies. I light a cigarette, my eighty year habit, and gasp between puffs.
>
> 'Shoe Horn,' I say to the sea.

> Three days ago I closed my shop door and left East Providence, Rhode Island, for England. For Barrow-in-Furnace and the life I must call upon and be sure of. This day I will walk through the places and people of that life again and let my old bones do the remembering. I'll begin at St Mark's Church. Yes. That minister. How can I remember what he said as if it was only yesterday and I was seventeen once more.
>
> 'Some say it's Death, some say it's darkness.
>
> I say it's a game of light.'"

Speaking with a voice as lyrical as F. Scott Fitzgerald's, McLarty's tone rises to the level of elegy. His language reminds us how much our current prosaic literary taste has often devolved into both sensationalism and banality. Reviewing the novel, Dr. Salvatore Allosso (who received an M.A. degree from Rhode Island College in 1976), Professor *Emeritus* of literature at *The University of California, Davis*, wrote: "What an exceptional piece of writing! Bobby Horn made me think of Whitman's line, 'no man is made possessor beyond the sane and beautiful necessities of the simple body and the simple soul.' Ron McLarty has captured the 'between extremities' that Yeats wrote about, and he's done it with convincing dialogue and characters that I recognize immediately." Allosso admires McLarty's "compressed allusiveness" and conflation of the paranormal and the real. The novel's stylistic density, in fact, reminds one of Dilsey's line to her daughter Frony near the end of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*: "I seed

de beginnin, en now I sees de endin.” Eliot's opening to his poem *Burnt Norton* also hints at the novel's essential compression of time and space*:*

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future
> And time future contained in time past.
> If all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable.

Albert "Shoe" Horn, now an eighty-seven year old man, dreams back to his seventeenth year to his place of origin, Barrow-in-Furnace, England. There he revisits the traumatic events of his brutal and entrapped life. McLarty explained the source of his tale is rooted in his paternal grandfather's experience:

> "When my grandfather was in his nineties, he finally revealed to me his own remarkable story: of growing up in Barrow-in-Furness, his home on the coast of England, of his only friend—a giant who left passersby trembling and speechless. And of his beloved younger brother, a boy whose mind would never move beyond that of a child, a boy it was his soul’s calling and assignation to protect from their harsh surroundings and their drunken, abusive father, a boy he would ultimately leave behind when he found passage on a boat to America. This abandonment devoured him in later life and took firm

root in my mind and imagination, resulting, eventually, in *The Dropper*, my most personal work to date."

Shoe has tended to his dying mother who leaves him with an alcoholic father who beats him. He also cares for an angelic, fifteen year old brother, Bobby, who looks out at a troubled world with the simplicity of a mentally challenged mind. Shoe's love for Bobby ripples with pathos and life-affirming joy. He grows aware that his caretaking efforts will inevitably prove insufficient as Bobby grows into manhood. The novel essentially moves the reader toward Shoe's agonizing decision to place Bobby in a home that can address his needs. Shoe ultimately will shed his life as a prize fighter and plumber to seek the great American dream of a better life. The "extremities" that haunt Shoe are given expression by language loaded with the motif of light and darkness, a literary metaphor that hearkens back to the oldest notions of the Manichean conflict of good and evil. McLarty introduces the motif through a comment made by Bobby, a kind of Blakean innocent whose sensibility craves happiness in a world about him that is filled with hostility. Bobby responds to the world with empathy and a child's demand for everyone to be happy. Hearing talk about the funeral for Phil Gogarty (who has died after a fight with Shoe) and where Father Costello spoke of a world of death and darkness, Bobby, shouts his protest, to Shoe, "I say it's a game of light." Bobby's view, announced at the novel's opening, introduces McLarty's employment of a dominant light image, Yet the novel is also steeped in ominous allusions to fog, darkness, human enmity, sexual longing and Shoe's childhood fear of "the great Bitch," a

mysterious midwife who once dropped a baby and gets associated with a kind of metaphysical principle of death. At the wake for Phil Gogarty, Shoe feels the malevolent presence of "The Dropper" who seems to threaten his psychic stability:

> "I cannot turn. I cannot speak. 'The Great Bitch' has crawled across her bridge. Close enough now that I feel her terrible breath burn into the back of my head as she speaks. It steps in closer. Dear Christ her filthy black dress crackles against me. Still, I cannot move my legs. Her claw brushes now, across Mrs. Gogarty's forehead. The thick grey hair runs through its long nails."

This preternatural moment launches the novel's trajectory from the ordinary into a gothic aura of panic, even menacing terror. One is reminded of Coleridge's intention to elevate the natural world to the supernatural. So it is no fictional accident that McLarty plays with the unmistakable elements of the gothic. Kevin Lucia, a contributing editor for *Shroud Magazine,* notes the presence of a "Haunting and melancholic" tone with a slight touch of the paranormal, though he balks at calling *The Dropper* "a ghost story." Nevertheless, it is unmistakable that Mclarty makes use of Bobby's fear of The Dropper, an ominous and mysterious midwife treated as a figure of darkness and murder, the presence of Phil Gogerty's ghost, the physical brutality of Shoe's father and the violence of shoe's adversaries--all rudiments of the gothic fascination with the preternatural. McLarty, then, infuses the novel with a metaphysical contour. His imagery,

allusions, tone and setting even suggest an allegorical, manipulation of language to advance his plot, characters and themes. These Manichean forces arrayed against Shoe and Bobby have the distinct hue of a biblical struggle between the sons of light and darkness. Even McLarty's treatment of McAvy, the much feared giant, is dualistic. He is presented as a grotesque similar to Mary Shelley's monster, even though he is actually a harmless Quasimodo whose fundamental decency ultimately reshapes Shoe's life. McAvy's brother, Donald, contributes to McAvy's other-worldly nature when he tells Shoe that "McAvy was born with all the hair he has now, rolling and curling like a bear, and he would tell he had paws instead of hands." Like "The Dropper," McAvy is a puzzling and alienated figure. Even Shoe repeatedly asks "Are you real, McAvy?" Yet it is McAvy who first suggests escape from the slough of Barrow-in-Furnace, "America would like me," he tells Shoe. McAvy hates prize-fighting, though he will be forced into a bout with Shoe by Shoe's Machiavellian father who seeks to profit from the contest. Oddly enough, both Shoe and McAvy hate the brutality of fighting, but agree to fight in order to finance their trip to America. McAvy, an outsider like Shoe tells him: "I fit better in the fog." Ultimately he will choose to remain in England to support his mother. Still, he becomes the agent of Shoe’s emancipating flight to America. At their last meeting in a Pub, McAvy promises to visit Bobby every "fortnight." Shoe muses on McAvy's gift to him, “I look at my only friend. He knows I'm looking but keeps his gaze out toward the Irish Sea and Boston. I'm thinking I'll walk out of Boston into America and I'm thinking I'll walk out for him too."

McLarty also makes use of two young women who arouse Shoe's budding sexual consciousness. Addy Augarde and Molly Reilly provide Shoe with juxtaposed representations of sexual desire. Addy evokes romantic escape from moribund Barrow-in-Furnace, "dreaming of the actresses on postcards with flowers and combs." Addy prompts Shoe's repressed sexual stirring as he spies her with "a red flower in her hair. A paper flower with a comb in it and I wonder who she's kidding. It's 1922 and she's still back there dreaming of the actresses on postcards with flowers and combs." Despite Shoe's mockery of her futile wistfulness, he notices "her "soft and round" knees. Addy's wanderlust antiticipates Shoe's increasing discomfort with his young life. Molly, by contrast, exhibits aggressive sexuality that shocks the hesitant Shoe.

> "' You know what I'd like, Shoe Horn?"
> Her fingers make loops and feel wet.
> 'What Molly Reilly?'
> 'I'd like to take this into my mouth.'
> My eyes fall to her fingers. I can only imagine how dull my face must look. But in my mind can see nothing else. There in her round wee mouth."

This carnal reverie occurs just before Bobby shouts, "Shoe! My kite! Oh. . . oh no!" Bobby has lost control of his kite that floats meanderingly high into the sky. He had just asked Shoe, "Do you think Mummy's there and looking down?" Shoe assures him, "She is lad." The scene contrasts

Shoe's growing sense of sexual maturity and Bobby's fixed innocence. By the novel's conclusion Bobby will have lost both mother and brother to the inevitability of Shoe's budding adulthood. Opposites then dominate in McLarty's marriage of heaven and hell. The novel produces a struggle of light and dark, innocence and experience, dreamers and realists, entrapment and escape, as well as the exploitive cruelty of Shoe's father and McAvy's unselfishness.

Inevitably, Shoe cannot resolve his conflicts in Barrow except to flee. Yet before he leaves his birthplace, and supported by his phantom partner Phil Gogarty, Shoe encounters The Dropper, mindful of his mother's tale of seeing her "swoop over houses, a giant black bird, waiting." Shoe, however, is reconciled to The Dropper, a mid-wife who has delivered hundreds of Barrow-in-Furness babies. Her story of her ostracized life because it was believed she was a baby murderer, permits Shoe to end his fear she might kill Bobby. In a moment of emancipation, he realizes her essential suffering and humanity.

> "She stands tall and Straight. She doesn't bury her face in her long white fingers or close her eyes but looks into mine and weeps. I reach for her hand and she steps back. Is The Dropper afraid of me?
>
> 'I know that lies and rumors where told about Mary Corony [a supposed victim of The Dropper],' I say as softly as a hard plumber can.
>
> She watches me and waits her breathing stuttering and hard.

I know that we were afraid and I was afraid and the crazy stupid words made something that wasn't there.

'The Dropper,' she sobs and now her hands do fly to her face.' I reach again. This time she don't back away or flinch.

'I'm seventeen,' I say, surprising myself.

'I know. I remember every single one. Thousands of you.' She looks beyond me, out to sea and smiles like a girl."

Here Shoe's voyage of discovery emerges when he is able to see the innocent girl, Mary Conory. The Dropper no longer seems the ogre who haunts and terrorizes just as he accepts the necessity to leave Bobby. Shoe's traumatic emigration to America is McLarty's exploration of the mythic quest, and contains echoes of the poignant conclusion of Scott Fitzgerald's The *Great Gatsby.*

"And as I sat there, brooding on the old unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night."

McLarty tells us his grandfather's escape to America eventually "devoured him." Just as Gatsby's quest ended in his disillusionment and

death, so also does McLarty's narrator "linger inside the dream to face my brother forever with shame and sorrow." The fictional trope of looking back on one's lost youth, as in James Joyce's narrator in his short story, *Araby,* has ample expression in modern literature. In the final chapter, when Shoe returns to Bobby's grave, McLarty steps back from total despair however in the spirit of Wordsworth's poem, "Ode on Intimations of Immortality:"

". . . What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight.
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind. . ."

Gazing at the gravestone, an aged Shoe kneels, "The birds and trees watch me go to my hands, then spread myself onto the cool mossy grass, so I can hold him and feel him once again inside my tired old bones. "Bobby," I puff to the moss and pebbles, "My Bobby Horn." Shoe has become Yeats' "aged man . . . A tattered coat upon a stick,/ unless / Soul clap its hands and sing/ For every tatter in its mortal dress . . . ." In the face of death, Shoe affirms Bobby's redemptive embrace of light.

*

Ron McLarty published only four of his ten novels. It is to be hoped the other six will find the light of day, for he has demonstrated an artful and venturesome literary skill that abounds with nuance and a compelling flourish. As already observed, the present time has not been kind to writers who seek to free themselves from the current popularity of formula fiction. Rather than offering his reader weary fictional clichés, McLarty's offers us a visceral world rather than stick-figures and stereotypical events. He remained faithful to Hamlet's injunction concerning literature as an art form that can disclose the most secret truths of human experience.

McLarty's mirror always proved a blend of pathos and comedy. At times he struggles with life's cruelty and absurdity. Always, he keeps his reader focused on authentic and absorbing characters who experience universal human fears, pain, love and anxiety in a world they seek to understand. Part of his achievement rests with his authentic decency and sympathy for people whom he shapes with a supple prose. As his close friend and colleague, Stephen Brougher has remarked, "Ron McLarty was the real thing." We are fortunate to have his novels that divulge his generous spirit.

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Afterword

In the spring of 2014, Ron McLarty was diagnosed as having early stages of dementia. Since that time he has ceased any active participation in writing or acting. Only sixty eight years old and enjoying his renewed

commitment to his profession, he once again suffered a cruel blow of fate which would again alter his life. In *The Memory of Running* Smithy recalls a moment when his sister Bethany's troubling behavior forced his father to hospitalize her: "My Pop wasn't a profound man in the way he talked, but I remember once right after Bethany was brought home by Winnie Prisco and she had been saying she'd kill herself and stuff. I remember Pop sitting at the kitchen table with Mom, putting his arm around her and saying, 'Life expects a lot more out of some people than it does out of others.'" Smithy's poignant observation surely describes the absorbing events of McLarty's days and ways. His life has oscillated between joy and tragedy. From his earliest beginnings he exhibited his many promising talents, and basked in the security of his parents' love and Rhode Island's nourishing small-town roots. Then the tragic accident that killed his parents traumatized his adolescent safe haven, rippling unrelentingly throughout the remainder of his personal and artistic life. Having found love with Diane Tesitor and commercial success in his profession, he again fell victim to the capriciousness of Dame Fortune when his marriage of thirty two years ended with her death. Yet he would rise up from the misfortune of her death by a new and transforming experience: he met and fell in love with Kate Skinner. There can be little doubt that his marriage to both women came on the wings of a love-at-first-sight experience, a story book notion much in dispute today among the cynically disposed. Nevertheless, both his marriages had a romantic tinge. McLarty's unexpected meeting with Diane at The Colorado Shakespeare Festival caused in him a sudden change of mind that resulted in a marriage that gave him stability and love. Years later

McLarty, a second time, experienced the sudden healing power of love with Kate Skinner. One is tempted to look back to that East Providence High School performance of *South Pacific* where McLarty sang the signature song, "Some Enchanted Evening," featuring the line, "you will see a stranger across a crowded room." Did that moment presage his initial meetings with his two wives? To employ a remark by Jake Barnes to Brett Ashley at the end of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* "Isn't it pretty to think so?"

Whatever conclusions we may draw about Mclarty's relationships with Diane and Kate, it remains incontestable that he deeply loved both women who returned that love--one for over thirty two years, the other still faithfully at his side in a relationship that, as was the case with his first marriage, has been admired and praised by those who know them. Writing to Kate, Doug McLarty commented: "Yes, he was blessed to meet you . . . and fortunate. You changed the trajectory of his life. You gave him a reason to keep moving forward and to love again. **(left, Kate and Ron in Manhattan, 2015)** Thank goodness he was fortunate enough to meet and fall in love with you. On many occas-

ions he expressed just that sentiment to me. He married you because he loved you and needed you."

William Martin, a close friend of the Montclair years, recently told Kate,

> "When we were younger, with young kids, erratic careers *et. al., we* would yell at or with each other and drink, but neither of us ever relaxed, just relaxed. When you married [to Kate] and stopped at our place in Massachusetts, Ron was easy. As though he was home. He couldn't have found a better partner. One life struggle is to form a lasting partnership. And you did it. He was lucky in love, as they say."

Close friend Jill Eikenberry wrote recently to Kate, "I think you are the best thing that ever happened to Ron."

As for their own intimate exchanges to one another, a veritable cornucopia of letters, birthday cards, and poetic comments exists of their devotion to each other. One letter by McLarty to Kate illustrates his unqualified love for her.

> "He wasn't a thing without her [Kate]. He knew this. Even when strangers admired him or praise came in some anonymity. He knew the truth. It was that truth that drove him and made him feel powerful in the new life. But it was the knowledge of the truth that sometimes, sometimes made him feel small and hollow and

always just a little unacceptable as if he had been mislaid a second time and he was a baby again.

Kate, I love you

Ronald William"

After McLarty was diagnosed with dementia, Kate expressed her love and grief in a bittersweet, unpublished collection of poems entitled, *I Miss You Already: A Chronicle by Kate Skinner.* One poem of Kate's, written after McLarty began his decline into the shadows of dementia, addresses her heartache.

LEAVING

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THAT?

Me, all my life leaving

Am I being punished for leaving

By being now left

You are leaving

I know you don't want to

But you are going nonetheless

My dear sweet man

Wandering off to

Where?

I wish I knew

I would join you there

I miss you already

Semanticist, author and former Senator S. I. Hayakawa once spoke of our human indebtedness to others: "The cultural accomplishment of the ages comes to us as *free gifts from the dead.* These gifts, which none of us has done anything to earn, offer us not only the opportunity for a richer life than our forebears enjoyed but also the opportunity to add to the sum total of human achievement by our own contributions, however small they may be." It would appear undeniable that Ronald William McLarty amply repaid his debt to those who loved him.

After caring for Ron the past three and a half years, his worsening condition forced Kate to make the painful decision to institutionalize him. She continues to live in their Elizaville, New York home, devoting much of her time to visiting and comforting him.

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