



- KRISHNA WINSTON ON THE BREAKDOWN OF ORDER
- A BIOLOGIST FINDS SELF-MEDICATING CATERPILLARS
- MAJORA CARTER '88 IS A GENIUS GRANT WINNER
- A LETTER HOME FROM A REFUGEE CAMP IN THAILAND
- THE NORTHWESTERN LANDSCAPE INSPIRES A NOVEL

No Need for Quiet

If students wonder why they should go to the library when so much is on the Web, University Librarian Barbara Jones has an answer.

If Wesleyan's librarian sees her vision fulfilled, the quiet hush of the reference area will soon give way to a bustling area in which students clutch coffee mugs and talk with each other in comfortable furniture that encourages collaborative work.

The first step toward that vision took place in September with the opening of the Information Commons. It is the first phase of a plan that promises to transform the way students use library services and to give real meaning to "information literacy," which Wesleyan has deemed an essential capability for today's students who must judge the relevance and reliability of information sources.

The concept of an information commons is sweeping through the world of academic libraries as information technology has diminished the need for students to set foot in the physical library, says University Librarian Barbara Jones. "We are hoping to re-people the library. It's going to be lively and we want that. We want to breathe life into this building."

Her desire for more foot traffic in the stately Olin Library says a lot about how students in the born-with-a-chip generation work and about how libraries are changing to meet

their needs. Twenty years ago, Jones notes, many academic administrators thought the heyday of big institutional libraries had passed. Students would use library resources from their dorm rooms without ever getting out of their pajamas.

why Borders and Barnes & Noble are so successful."

The info commons responds to the social aspect of learning, as well as the enormous impact of the Web and phenomena such as instant messaging on the way students learn and communicate. In the info commons, students can connect to the Web wirelessly or through ports; they can print in color or use map-sized scanners; they can turn to an information technology specialist or a reference librarian—both of whom are in their midst. Individuals from a

cites two discontinuities that became apparent in the 1990s:

"Students everywhere were increasingly working in collaborative study groups of their own making, to engage more strongly and often more adventurously with their coursework. Recognizing the power of this mode of learning, many faculty members built experiential and problem solving materials into their courses and shaped assignments around the expectations of collaborative study.

"The second fundamental change, a revolution in information technology, was not at all quiet and was even more pervasive. Complementary changes in teaching and learning were not slow to follow..."

The concept of a library, he argues, is changing from that of a site for storage and organization of information to a site for "supporting collaborative learning by which students turn information into knowledge and sometimes into wisdom."

Or, as a feature story in the *New York Times* put it: "The campus library has become an intellectual gathering place. Think of Europe's philosophical cafés where writers and thinkers met to exchange ideas rather than the wan and lonely graduate student holed up in a study carrel."

This revolution in the concept of a library has led to changes in library design across the country, according to the *Times*.

Wesleyan plans to test and evaluate its design with the help of an ethnographer. Librarians want to know what

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They were partly right. Students can tap into huge electronic resources in the comfort of their pj's. But just because students are able to work in isolation doesn't mean they always want to.

"Thanks to the bookstores, we found out that students don't like to sit in their dorm rooms alone," says Jones. "They would rather go where there are food, coffee, and a lot of people. That's

host of other academic support services, conveniently rolled into the acronym SARN for Student Academic Resources Network, also will be available. In short, it's an environment that seeks to combine the best in technology with one-on-one support.

A whirlwind of change has caught librarians. In a report titled "Libraries *Designed for Learning*," Scott Bennett, Yale University Librarian Emeritus,


sorts of work occupy students in the info commons. Are they instant messaging friends or searching databases, browsing the library catalog or learning how to use new software? To what extent are they working collaboratively versus socializing? Furniture can be moved, and the librarians want to know what physical arrangements of

furniture and equipment are most helpful to students.

"We have models from other institutions," Jones says. "At Indiana University students bring in food for the microwave, and you can smell cuisines from all over the world, curry to spaghetti. It does raise the question: how much at home do you want people to get?"

Jones has no plans for microwaves, but she is eyeing the possibility of serving coffee and tea along the Borders model, as a complement to the social and intellectual culture of the library. She is working on additional group study areas on different floors, a high-tech classroom, fundraising to complete the info commons, computers

and perhaps a flat screen television to expand periodicals research, and more.

In the midst of this transformation, some students still want a place for contemplation, away from the decibel count of dorm life. Olin will continue to offer quiet places, she says, where students can sit surrounded by books, not computers. 

NICK RUSSEL '08



Barbara Jones, Wesleyan's Caleb T. Winchester University Librarian, hopes that the new Information Commons will become crowded with students seeking a friendly atmosphere and good support services for their work.

PICK OF THE SYLLABUS

The New Germany as the Wild East

Krishna Winston, Professor of German Studies, selects

Willenbrock by Christoph Hein, translated by Philip Boehm '80



The course known today as German 260 appears in the 1968–69 *University Bulletin*. I happen to have in my office as German 160, Twentieth-Century Novel. The readings included works by Mann, Kafka, Hesse, Broch, Musil, and Grass. Today the course bears the less workaday title *Giants of German Prose*, but we still read Mann, Kafka, Hesse, and Grass. I have added works by Max Frisch, Heinrich Böll, and Peter Handke for greater representation of the post-WWII period. The absence of women from the list of German-language writers with ready name-recognition in the United States remains troubling, as does the dearth of exciting works by younger Austrian, German, and Swiss writers available in good translations. But one work by a not-so-young writer affords us a glimpse of post-Wall Germany that the reader will not soon forget.

The Wall that had separated West Berlin from East Berlin since 1961 was breached on Nov. 9, 1989. Eleven years later, Christoph Hein published his novel *Willenbrock*, which then appeared (2003) in a splendidly idiomatic English translation by Philip Boehm '80.

The protagonist is Bernd Willenbrock, an East German engineer who has adapted to the collapse of the old state-owned industries by retooling himself: he has become a used-car salesman, or, as he prefers to be called, a dealer in “previously owned” vehicles. Although he often grumbles about the high taxes he must pay, Willenbrock has done very well for himself; he owns a house in a spanking new subdivision on the outskirts of East Berlin and an old farmhouse with outbuildings about two hours north of the city in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. He has set up his wife in a clothing boutique, to give her something with which to occupy herself, and plans to build a showroom, once the land he has been leasing becomes available for purchase. Willenbrock's chief customer is Krylov, a sinister Russian businessman who buys cars in batches of three or more for immediate resale in Eastern Europe. Krylov shares political and philosophical observations with Willenbrock that reveal the profound cynicism of an intelligent man determined to turn the breakdown of totalitarian order to his own advantage.

Hein's Willenbrock is not a particularly likeable character. An inveterate skirt-chaser, he returns to his wife after afternoon trysts with his libido recharged. He takes no interest in politics and shuns introspection. His relationships with members of his family, his handball team, and his indispensable Polish auto mechanic remain superficial at best. Yet Hein tells the story from the protagonist's perspective and draws the reader into Willenbrock's state of mind as things begin to happen that undermine his smugness and sense of control.


The first crack in Willenbrock's confidence appears when he receives a phone call from a former colleague, who reveals to Willenbrock that another colleague regularly filed reports on him and others with the company management. Unlike many East Germans, Willenbrock has never shown any curiosity as to what files were kept on him, and he at first dismisses this information, irritated that his former colleague has reminded him of the past.

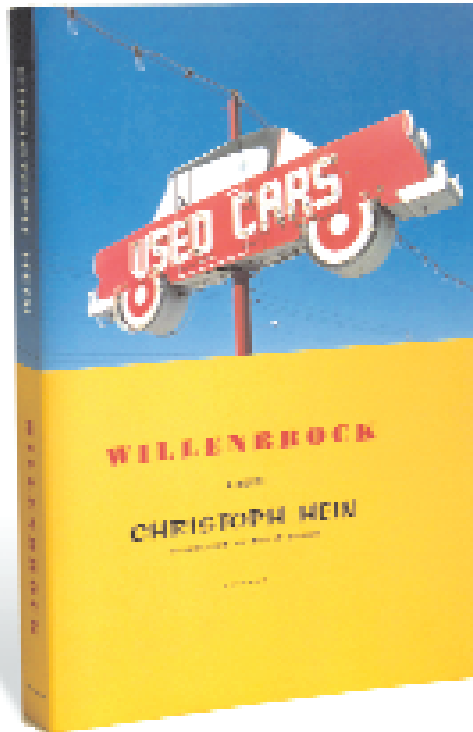
Then comes a nocturnal break-in at the used-car lot. Some cars are stolen, others damaged. The police respond with indifference, hinting that they suspect insurance fraud. Instead of renewing his insurance, Willenbrock hires an out-of-work mechanic as a night watchman. A member of Willenbrock's handball team who does business in Russia tells stories about being robbed in a locked hotel room at night and in a girlfriend's apartment. Then comes an attack on Willenbrock's night watchman and the killing of the man's beloved dog, and finally a terrifying break-in at Willenbrock's country home while he and his wife are there asleep.

Hein shows Willenbrock entangling himself in lies as he tries to shield his wife from further anxiety and conceal his own rising panic. As Willenbrock installs one security device after the other and finds himself both appalled at and tempted by the forms of help Krylov solicitously offers his “German friend,” his will is gradually broken (as his name indicates). Every night he and his wife wake up at ten past two, the time of the break-in. Yet when Willenbrock's mechanic Jurek worries about his son back in Poland, who becomes first a “hooligan,” then a gang member, then a criminal, Willenbrock makes light of Jurek's despair.

Hein's deadpan narrative produces a growing sense of foreboding in the reader. Hein recounts

events in simple declarative sentences and conveys Willenbrock's feelings without commentary. But when Willenbrock is asked by the police to identify one of the brothers from Moscow suspected of the home invasion, Willenbrock sees a human being: “. . . he seemed helpless and in need of protection, slight as he was, shabbily dressed in cheap pants and a thin shirt.”

The failure of Communism in Eastern Europe has left social, political, economic, and environmental devastation. Yet in the capitalist free-for-all that has taken its place, poor devils like the brothers from Moscow and slick operators like Krylov threaten the sleep of the would-be bourgeois. To Americans, accustomed to murder and mayhem on the 11 o'clock news, this portrait of the Wild East should seem not unfamiliar. To those blinded by the bright lights of reunited Berlin, Christoph Hein points out what lurks in the shadows. 

LEVERAGING FACULTY WORK
LEARNING-OBJECTS PROJECT
WINS AWARD

Peter Gottschalk can't give students in his introductory religion class tickets for a flight to India to observe interactions between Hindus and Muslims, but they have the next best thing.

Gottschalk, associate professor of religion, has assembled a Web site that enables his students to take a self-guided tour through the village of Arampur. They experience the streets much as a visitor might, with the ability to look around them in a full circle, listen to interviews with villagers, and examine objects in shops.

Whether they know it or not, his students are working with a learning object—a relatively new term coined to describe multimedia Web sites that provide a way to learn that is unlike any other educational experience.

In Gottschalk's case, the learning object provides the visual experience of walking through the village; the audio of interviews in Hindi, Urdu, and Bhojpuri (with translation); and numerous textual sources.

The learning object, created with collaborator Matthew Schmalz at the College of The Holy Cross, is “a deep ethnographic text” that requires a minimum three-hour visit by students, Gottschalk says. He asks his students to share their experiences of what they saw and whom they met. In the process, they become active learners rather than passive recipients.

Assembling a learning object is a complicated task that requires the assistance of information technologies staff, headed by Mike Roy, director of academic computing services and digital library projects. He and colleagues at other institutions have established a repository for learning objects (www.lolaexchange.org) to make them available to scholars and teachers worldwide.

Wesleyan's work in pioneering the development of learning objects earned it a 2005 Center of Excellence Award from the New Media Consortium, an

international association of colleges, universities, and museums. It is the highest honor bestowed by the organization.

“Learning objects,” says Roy, “reveal the potential of the Internet to deliver a radically different kind of learning experience to students. Already we've shown that these objects create deep and subtle explorations outside the classroom. By collecting them in a repository, we are enabling faculty to leverage the value of their work. I hope that the learning objects the Wesleyan faculty are building will become an extensive national resource of interest to faculty everywhere, allowing Wesleyan to share the important work taking place on campus with a broad audience.”

The learning-objects project is still in its infancy, but the pace of production has picked up from two or three per semester to about 10 as word spreads and the development staff gains experience in creating them. Faculty members who have created them say they hear from colleagues nationwide who are interested in using them.

Other learning objects created at Wesleyan include explorations of the Mayan ruins of Palenque, the migration of indentured labor from the Indian subcontinent, tides in Long Island Sound, musculoskeletal development, protein synthesis, and music of the Afghan North. A full list can be found on the learning objects site at learningobjects.wesleyan.edu/.

The learning-objects project has spurred at least one curious non-academic use. Roy says that a U.S. army colonel used the Afghan learning object to help train soldiers heading to Afghanistan.

AIDED BY NATURE'S PHARMACY
SELF-MEDICATING CATERPILLAR

When the tiger moth caterpillar becomes infected with potentially lethal parasites, it heads for a natural pharmacy.

Remarkably, the caterpillar develops a stronger taste for chemicals specifically found in plants that will cure its infection, according to Michael Singer,



Wesleyan biologist Michael Singer shows a tiger moth caterpillar that kills parasites by prescribing its own natural pharmaceuticals.

assistant professor of biology, who co-authored a paper in the July 28 issue of *Nature* with Elizabeth Bernays at the University of Arizona.

No one has ever observed a species that changes the behavior of its taste buds, known as its gustatory cells, in response to an infection, say the authors.

When the caterpillars are attacked by parasites common to southern Arizona, the fuzzy black and orange creatures start eating the threadleaf groundsel, a shrubby member of the sunflower family that contains parasite-killing chemical compounds called pyrrolizidine alkaloids, or PAs. These alkaloids can inflict fatal liver damage on a human, but the caterpillar is able to sequester the toxins in a harmless

form in its blood, ready to revert to the toxic form if consumed by a parasite.

Singer and Bernays determined that receptors on the caterpillar's taste buds fire much more rapidly in the presence of PAs when the caterpillar is infected compared to uninfected caterpillars.

Singer told the *Hartford Courant*, which published a page-one story about the research, that the caterpillar behavior is clearly not learned. “Even among insects, they are not that bright,” he said. “They are essentially a big gut. There is not a lot of room for brain power.”

Other animals, such as chimpanzees, are capable of learning that certain plants in their environments have medicinal value.



“GENIUS” GRANT WINNER

Wesleyan trustee Melissa Woods '94, an attorney with the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (left) congratulates Majora Carter '88, recipient of a 2005 MacArthur “genius” grant. Carter is the executive director of Sustainable South Bronx and is framed by SSB's newest initiative: the New Roof Demonstration Project designed to explore technology that can reduce the need for power and water treatment facilities.

STUDENT VIEW HELP FOR TSUNAMI VICTIMS

[Editor's Note: After the devastation of the tsunami in Indonesia, the Freeman Foundation, which sponsors the Freeman Asian Scholars Program at Wesleyan, challenged both students and alumni from the area to recommend an agency worthy of \$1 million in aid. The Foundation considered several proposals and accepted one from an alumnus advocating an organization with a diversified, educationally oriented mission. Although their proposal wasn't the winner, students gained a lot from the process, as Eliza Handayani '05 relates.]

Talking to my friends in universities back home in Indonesia, I was stunned to find out that faculty were running all the tsunami relief programs there. In one university, students resorted to starting a small relief program of their own.

“We are very lucky that the Freeman Foundation and Wesleyan let us take part in this,” I said to fellow Indonesian students in a mid-March meeting. We

were there to select organizations we would recommend to the Foundation to receive a \$1 million grant for tsunami relief efforts in Indonesia.

From outside, the windows reflected snow; from inside, our tired faces. Aussie held on to his coffee; Tia rested her chin on sociology books; Umay leaned casually against the wall; Mira wiped her face to keep awake. Yet everyone's eyes showed sparks—for we did feel thankful to be included in a project that could really help.

We had been working since January researching organizations in Indonesia. Being Indonesians, we knew our foremost criteria: the organization had to be free from corruption. It also had to be non-discriminatory, have long-term plans, and allow us to audit their use of the fund. We decided to cooperate with student organizations or with organizations that had people we knew and trusted.

At first, the job proved harder than we imagined.

“I sent 20 e-mails and letters—and no response,” I said in our next meet-

ing. “Perhaps I should put in the subject line: ‘Free money! Free money!’”

“But then they'll go like, ‘Spam! Delete!’” said Aldo, punching an imaginary button, prompting our laughter.

Soon after we got responses. One was from Medicare, short for “Medical students of University of Indonesia Care,” which planned to sponsor medical students in Aceh. Another was from the Institute of Technology of Bandung (ITB), which planned to rebuild Aceh's infrastructure.

We were passionate to support ITB, but then its faculty took over and left students with little role. “Now it's hard to get information on the program's progress,” said Ifan, my contact at ITB. Regretfully, as transparency was a main concern, we had to drop ITB from our list.

Medicare, on the other hand, showed promise. Its organization was student-run; its project was well planned. Also, its students were eager to work with us.

Like us, they, too, stole time between exams to help: gather aid, round up vol-

unteers, and actually go to Aceh to give free medical check-ups. As fellow students, we really wanted to support them.

So much that when they gave us a proposal 31 pages long and in Indonesian, we decided not to trouble them by asking for a translation.

With *gotong royong*, or cooperation, we translated it ourselves. Selina, Aussie, and I translated several pages each. Rangga converted the figures from Indonesian rupiah to American dollars. Then we submitted the proposal to the Freeman Foundation.

In the end, the Freeman Foundation chose to channel the fund to the Sampoerna Foundation, recommended by alumnus Felix Aristo Ardian '03. Although the Foundation picked another agency, we felt that the Freemans had listened to our concerns about qualifications. Along the way, we made new friends in Indonesia, learned a lot about networking, and found people who have not despaired amid corruption but still believe that they can help.

Aldo was present at the presentation

of the grant from the Freeman Foundation to Sampoerna, which had been working to improve education in Indonesia since before the tsunami, and now they planned to build schools, provide books, sponsor teacher training, and carry out other educational programs.

In September, we sat down on the grass in front of the Campus Center, reminiscing about our work.

“I was touched,” Bella said. “Here we are far from home, yet the Freemans made us feel like we could really do something to help.”

Looking back, our work did seem small. But Aldo reminded me that even though no individual effort seemed significant enough, those who suffered needed every care they could get. And it was hard enough to find people who cared.

—Eliza Handayani '05

For more information see: www.sampoernafoundation.org/.

JIM DRESSER '63 NAMED AS BOARD CHAIR

The Board of Trustees has elected James van B. Dresser '63 as its new chair, succeeding Alan Dachs '70, who concluded eight years of service as chair this summer.

Dresser retired eight years ago as senior vice president and chief administrative officer of The Boston Consulting Group, where he had been associated since 1970. He had led the London, San Francisco, and Los Angeles offices of BCG.

In addition to his service on the Board of Trustees, where he has chaired both the University Relations and the Finance committees, Dresser has held temporary appointments in the Wesleyan administration. He became interim vice president for university relations in 1998 and later was interim vice president and treasurer.

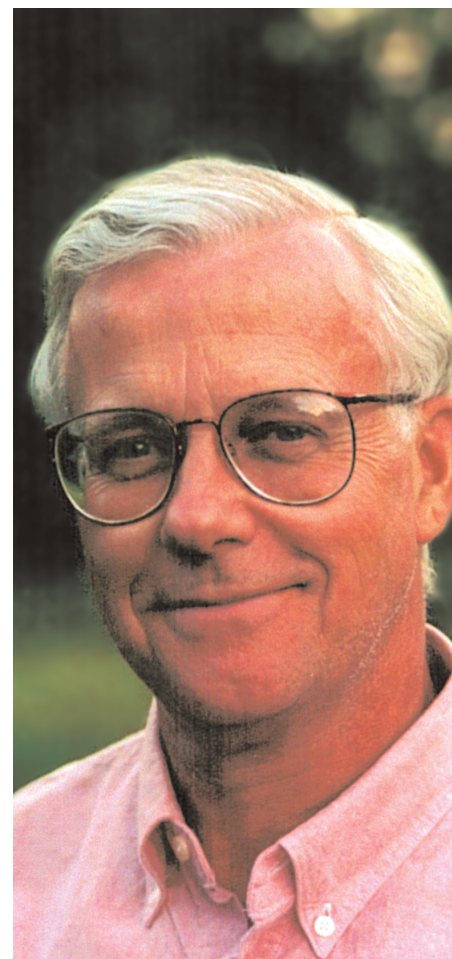
Dresser is a recipient of Wesleyan's Outstanding Service Award (1993), chaired the Wesleyan Annual Fund

(1984–87), and was chair of the Alumni Association (1989–90).

His military service included four years as a captain with U.S. Air Force Intelligence in Japan and Vietnam.

He also serves on the board of Merrimack Pharmaceuticals.

After his retirement, Dresser moved back to Salisbury, Conn., where he had grown up, and began to participate in the life of the town. He has been vice chair of the Salisbury School board of trustees and currently serves on the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Land Trust, and the Volunteer Ambulance Service. He won election to Selectman in November. His wife, Evan, is an avid artist. He also enjoys carpentry, chain-sawing, playing with his tractor and backhoe, a variety of sports, and, especially, spending time with his 5-year-old granddaughter, Ellie.



CELESTIAL MYSTERY SOLVED THE WINKING STAR

The winking star created a sensation when Professor of Astronomy William Herbst and Catrina Hamilton-Drager Ph.D. '04 introduced it at an astronomy conference three years ago.

The two reported that the star was fading in and out in an unprecedented manner and suggested that a nascent planetary cloud might be responsible.

The findings, which attracted substantial media coverage, set astronomers worldwide to working on explanations for the behavior of KH 15D, approximately 2,400 light years away.

Now, some 30 scientific papers later, the mystery has been solved. Researchers at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics and at the University of California, Berkeley, reported solutions within a day of each other. In August, the *New York Times* carried a feature story about the star in its Connecticut section.

The story quoted Joshua Winn, a post-doctoral student at Harvard who helped solve the mystery: “One of the most beautiful things out of this story is that it was triggered by a small telescope on an East Coast campus, which is supposed to have terrible weather and be terrible for astronomy.”

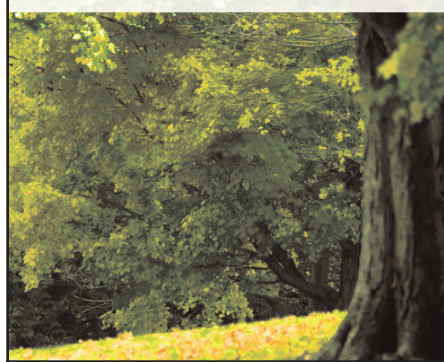
Winn suggested that the winking could be explained by the presence of two stars orbiting each other in an eccentric fashion, with one star out of sight and a wobbling screen of gas and dust in front of them.

Sure enough, Hamilton-Drager, who now teaches physics at the University of Minnesota, went back through old Wesleyan data and found that in 1995 the second star had shown itself just when the theory said it should appear.

Herbst said the star continues to pose mysteries that he and others are pursuing.

The *Times* also quoted Herbst reflecting on his motivation for doing this research: “We're not doing this for money. Some people are doing it for the esteem of their colleagues, which is very hard to get. Basically, I'm doing it for fun because it's just extraordinarily fun to make these discoveries. It's pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

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