WORD WAYS: MAKING THE ALPHABET DANCE (PART ONE)

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When I was a boy, wordplay took two forms: solving puzzles created by other people, and solving puzzles proposed by Nature (for example, searching for all words having a specified property). I was attracted to both of these, but more strongly to the latter; this chapter describes the particular forms these enthusiasms took. My first game with Nature was brought to my attention by my father. What (he asked me) is the longest word that spelled the same both forwards and backwards? I rather easily found such words as ROTOR, LEVEL and MADAM, as well as the six-letter proper name HANNAH. The best I could do were the seven-letter REPAPER, REVIVER, ROTATOR and DEIFIED; my father claimed to know an eight-letter example but he had forgotten it. I also recognized the wordplay in a neon sign for Ewart’s Restaurant in downtown Washington which selectively illuminated various letters to spell out the message EAT AT EWART’S.

When recovering from scarlet fever in the hospital at Camp Lee in the spring of 1946, I had much time on my hands. I observed that EERIE and QUEUE were two five-letter words with four vowels, that STRENGTH was the longest one-syllable word, and that the five vowels were present in MATE-METE-MITE-MOTE-MUTE.

On a December evening in 1949, Faith and I sat in the Managers Parlors trying to see how many sets we could discover with three words spelled differently but pronounced the same. We came up with

right, rite, write  to, too, two  sight, site, cite
sear, sere, seer  aye, eye, I  pear, pare, pair
four, for, fore  rapt, rapped, wrapped  knew, knew, gnu
air, ere, heir  rays, raze, raise  or, oar, ore
meat, mete, meet  flu, flue, flew  buy, by, bye
cent, scent, sent  soul, sole, sol  there, their, they’re
due, do, dew  aisle, isle, I’ll

Later I noticed that WRIGHT could be added to the first set, and in 1970 Stefan Burr of Bell Telephone Laboratories showed me PRAYS, PREYS, PRAISE, PRASE. I liked the two-syllable examples best:

idol, idyll, idle  sensor, censor, censer  pallet, palate, palette
faro, pharaoh, farrow  carrot, carat, caret  burro, burrow, borough

At the Analytical Research Group in Princeton, Forman Acton intrigued me by asking what combination of initials had the smallest ambiguity—that is, from what set of initials could a person’s full name be predicted with the greatest confidence? The answer was F.X.O’B, Francis Xavier O’Brien. After Princeton, my interest in wordplay oddities continued at a low level. I discovered that SEQUOIA was the shortest word in the English language with all five vowels (in French, OISEAOU is even shorter). Another interesting discovery was the fact that Job, Polish and Tangier were three words which changed their pronunciations when the initial letters were capitalized. And the various pronunciations of the letters OUGH in bough, cough, trough, ought,
hiccup, through, though and enough fascinated me. Later I noted that OMB terminating a word could have three different pronunciations, as in bomb, comb and tomb.

The words BIBLE, ATLAS, GOOSE and THIGH are used as a mnemonic in a card trick. These four words consist of ten pairs of letters, each of which can be identified by specifying the word or words in which the pair appears. For example, G is the only letter appearing in both GOOSE and THIGH, and A the only letter appearing twice in ATLAS. I devised a corresponding mnemonic for fifteen pairs of letters in October 1964: LIVELY, RHYTHM, MUFFIN, SUPPER, SAVANT. I sent this to Martin Gardner, the Mathematical Puzzles editor of Scientific American magazine, and was gratified to receive a postcard in reply: "I knew the Bible, Atlas, Goose, Thigh set; but your Lively, Rhythm, etc. is new & very good. Many Thanks. Perhaps I can work this into one of my columns sometime."

My first word-related research project of any magnitude was the compilation of a type-collection of words containing different trigrams (three consecutive letters in a word). For several years I had idly considered the trigram EBU, believing that the only words containing it were zebu, rebus and ebullient. In 1962 or 1963 Marvin Epstein, a co-worker at Bell Telephone Laboratories, pointed out that camouflage and genuflect were the only two words in the English language with the trigram UFL.

On February 12 1964 I purchased Fletcher Pratt’s Secret and Urgent (1942) in a second-hand bookstore on Fourth Avenue in New York. In an appendix he listed the number of times each of 2510 different trigrams had occurred in a sample of 28834 trigrams in English prose. Much intrigued, I decided to find a word illustrating each of Pratt’s rare trigrams. I started this project on February 29 1964 and with Faith’s aid worked on it in the evenings for several months that spring, and again in the late fall. By December 15 we had gone once through the alphabet. In late January and early February of 1965 I typed up the dictionary which ran to 57 pages and 5840 trigrams, more than twice Pratt’s number.

It was clear that my list would never be complete; by April 1966 my trigram count stood at 6064. In addition, I found commoner words for existing examples, such as figure instead of iguana for IGU, and straight for aiglet for AIG. At the end of 1965 I filled in words for the 500 or so commonest trigrams which I had previously ignored. Faith gave me many trigrams, and others helped as well: Lois with taXIIng, eYEIng, beAUIng, harveSTTime and IaMPPost, Peggy with taCTFul, Mary Lois with rUrEScent, my father with BAMboozle, and Marvin Epstein with scuLPTor and sovereiGNTy.

There were 24 trigrams listed in Pratt for which I had no word: ACF, AHY, BAJ, BLL, DLL, DRT, EBC, ECW, EDV, EWJ, EWV, EYV, GYO, HSC, KUT, NIW, NLS, NTV, PPM, PPT, SFC, SNP, WJE and WYO. Clearly he had allowed proper names such as Leahy and Wyoming, and abbreviations for Parts Per Thousand and Parts Per Million. It also looked as if he had omitted the intervening space in New Jersey. Why did EWJ appear four times and WJE but once?

In late 1965 I applied mathematics to wordplay for the first time: I became interested in the problem of estimating how many random trigrams one would have to sample in English prose before finding N different ones. I used two mathematical models, a simple one of my own, and a more complex one borrowed from the Ph.D. thesis of John W. McCloskey, whom I had interviewed for Bell Labs employment while on a recruiting trip to Michigan State University in December 1964. My model used Pratt’s statistics to predict that 417 new trigrams were typically
found each time the sample size was doubled—to find 6680 different trigrams 30 million trigrams would have to be examined! (McCloskey’s model, however, suggested that only 15 million would be needed.)

In 1967 I combed the 5th and 7th editions of Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary for additional trigrams, and found several hundred, raising the count to more than 6500. I wrote a three-page descriptive introduction and submitted this with a sample trigram page to McGraw-Hill for possible publication. They turned me down, suggesting university presses or a government publication. In December 1968 I wrote the Follett Publishing Company who had issued a pocket dictionary of anagrams a few years earlier, but they weren’t interested either. It looked as if my project would never see wider dissemination.

What use was all this? I found the major justification of my many hours of work in the creative act itself, and in the convenience of quickly checking whether or not I had a trigram which I ran across in my reading. It seemed possible that the book would appeal to logophiles, cryptographers and crossword puzzle fans, to say nothing of Super-Ghost players. I reckoned that I had the largest trigram collection in the world outside the secret files of the National Security Agency.

It was also in the 1960s that I developed an interest for wordplay involving personal names. In July 1969 Lois observed that my first two names sounded like the word albatross. Quickly picking up on this, I observed that my full name was Albatross Heckler, obviously a synonym for an iconoclast or a ridiculer of sacred cows. Some years later, Philip Cohen found a better soundalike, Raw Szekler, the latter word defined in Funk & Wagnalls Unabridged as a “Maygar mountaineer of Transylvania”. In September 1966 I tried anagramming my name, but the best I could come up with for Albert Ross Eckler was LACK ERRORLESS BET. In January 1971 I discovered that my most plausible anagram to another name was ROBERT CASS KELLER; I often wondered if this anagrammatic twin existed. Noting that I had sixteen letters to play with, I tried without success to make a four-by-four double word square. The best I could do was get six out of eight words into it, or alternatively imbed it in a larger crossword puzzle using eleven extra letters. The second square had the intriguing property that the letters of ROSS were permuted along the main diagonal, the letters of ALBERT were all above the diagonal, and the letters of ECKLER, below.

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B
F A M
O B L L
R A K E
E R R S
S E C T
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At Bell Telephone Laboratories I amused myself by anagramming the name of the guest of honor at occasions celebrating marriage, retirement or transfer. When Bob Piotrowski married Audrey Johnson in February 1966 I produced from their surnames HOW KISS? JOIN PRONTO, which gained added significance when she produced a baby about six months later. When Naomi Bograd Robbins left the Labs in January 1967 to have her first child, I imitated Ogden Nash:

Some Advice Concerning the Demeanor of the Guest of Honor at a Farewell Luncheon,
And the Optimum Number of Guests to be Invited
Grin, or sob;
I'd ban a mob.

I imbedded name anagrams in doggerel verse when Ed Krauth retired in February 1970, again when Alexis Lundstrom retired in April, and finally for Jack Nadler's departure to AT&T in June:

In 46 years of Labs work
No task did ED KRAUTH ever shirk
   A career yet finer
       Exists in Asia Minor
For there he could aim for HEAD TURK.

As a canoeist, Ed never gets wet;
Out skiing, he's seldom upset.
   With mechanical cunning
He keeps ancient cars running
And when playing violin--HARK! DUET.

In 46 years of Labs work
No task did ED KRAUTH ever shirk
   A career yet finer
       Exists in Asia Minor
For there he could aim for HEAD TURK.

Have you watched ten ice-cream sodas
    Made by a busy drugstore clerk?
When Jack's processing AT&T data
    We all say: this LAD CAN JERK!

Waving aloft the broken bottle,
Jack cried "I LACK JAR END!"
With such a lethal weapon
Can one a JACKAL REND?

A Telstar Fable:
One MUST END AXIS ROLL by plugging the hole;
   SMALL ROUND EXITS are bad (too expensive to pad);
    By budgets I'm vexed; I SUM DOLLARS NEXT.

Much later I revived this talent. In the 1996 dedication to Dmitri Borgmann in Making the Alphabet Dance, I anagrammed his name four ways in a doggerel verse. When Susan married Jerry Kerns on October 16 1999, I embedded seventeen words containing the letters ECKLER-KERNS in an Epithalmial Ode, in the form of a soliloquy by Jerry the girl-watcher about Susan the statistician:

I KEN the SCENE: her NECK I SEEK.
   What ELSE is SEEN? her KNEES so SLEEK (don't LEER!).
A CLERK SERENE, she KNEELS by CREEK.
   Her job so KEEN? Counts ELK that REEK (don't SNEER!).

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I volunteered to recite this as part of a toast at the reception, but wiser heads prevailed and more conventional toasts were offered by Jerry's and Susan's older sisters instead. My only other linguistic joke about sons-in-laws involved the observation that my daughters hadn't married any Tom, Dick and Harry, but instead (in the same order) Tom, Rick and Jerry.

In the Mathematical Games section of the December 1967 Scientific American magazine, I read that a quarterly journal devoted to recreational linguistics called Word Ways was to be launched by Greenwood Periodicals in 1968. The editor was Dmitri Borgmann, already well-known to me through his two books Language on Vacation (1965), a large collection of word oddities such as palindromes, reversals, transpositions, anagrams, word squares, words with curious letter patterns and so forth, and Beyond Language (1967), a mixed bag of 119 problems based on wordplay, geography, history and esoterica. In addition, he resurrected the obsolete word LOGOLOGY from the Oxford English Dictionary, proposing it as a synonym for wordplay, and coined the word LOGOLOGIST to describe one who studies the letter-patterns and sound-patterns of words.
Although impressed by Dmitri’s exhaustive and scholarly research, my initial reaction to his work was that he was much too ready to admit obscure words or proper names as illustrative examples. Sometimes, too, I felt that his examples of logology had been stretched to the limit. For example, Problem 49 asked what common property was shared by MEDUSA, EUCLID and HERALD but by few other words. I looked in vain for some letter-property that could be deduced by logical thought, and finally had Faith check the answer. It turned out these were acronyms for pieces of electronic hardware, a finding of little logological significance.

Still, the idea of a magazine devoted to wordplay intrigued me, and I promptly sent in my $9 subscription. Within a month or so, it dawned on me that here was an outlet for logological research. Why couldn’t I write up word problems which interested me and submit them to Word Ways for publication? During most of March 1968 I worked hard on an article which I titled “Word Groups With Mathematical Structure”. This article was inspired by Problem 122 in Beyond Language which exhibited the word set ADO BAR ORE BOY YEA BED DRY, using seven different letters repeated three times apiece, to form seven words with two interesting properties: every pair of words share exactly one letter, and each possible pair of different letters appears in exactly one word. I discovered that word sets such as this were closely related to Balanced Incomplete Block Designs used by statisticians for assigning different treatments to experimental material (I had, in fact, given a tutorial on this topic when I was in graduate school at Princeton). By not requiring that both properties be simultaneously present, I discovered many additional such word sets. The following two suffice to show the flavor of the investigation: in YEA PER YET PAY PRY TAP ARE RAT TRY PET, each possible pair of the six different letters AEPRTY appears in exactly two words, and in OGLED GRAPE POISE GRIDS PLAID SOLAR every pair of words share exactly two letters.

Problem 26 in Beyond Language placed OLARECIN in a circle and constructed words out of each set of four adjacent letters: ORAL REAL CARE RICE NICE COIN LION LOAN. I demonstrated that this could be achieved for many other letter sets and word lengths, up to ten six-letter words. In fact, when the word length is only one less than the number of letters around the circle, one has a special case of the word sets previously discussed. (later I learned that this had been known for over half a century, and was called a Baltimore Transdeletion). My example exhibiting ten nine-letter words: STERCOLIN RELATIONS CONTRAILS CONSERTAL CREATIONS SECTORIAL LARCENIST SECTIONAL CROTALINE CENSORIAL. Finally, I included the LIVELY MUFFIN RHYTHM SUPPER SAVANT word pattern I had sent Martin Gardner a few years earlier.

I sent this article to Dmitri Borgmann, along with a one-pager on the Francis Xavier O’Brien problem. I was gratified by his prompt reply “Both of [these articles] are eminently suitable for publication, and written in excellent English...you may expect to see your contributions in future issues of Word Ways.” The article appeared in the November 1968 issue of Word Ways.

My eye was caught by the article “Dudeney’s Switch Puzzle” in the first issue of Word Ways. Consider a horizontal trough which has room for exactly twelve square wooden blocks. At the position of the tenth block, this trough is intersected by a vertical trough of the same length. If the wooden blocks are placed in the vertical trough, the tenth block is again at the intersection. Suppose that a twelve-letter word is written on the blocks in the horizontal trough; how many moves does it take to transfer the word to the vertical one? (A “move” is defined as the sliding of one block any distance within the troughs, including turning the corner.) Dudeney noted that the minimum number of moves (obviously 12) was achieved by INTERPRETING. Dmitri found that if the intersection-point were shifted to the eleventh block in both troughs, the words
Maria had a little sheep,  
As pale as rime its hair,  
And all the places Maria came  
The sheep did tail her there.  

In Maria’s class it came at last,  
A sheep can’t enter there;  
It made the children clap their hands,  
A sheep in class, that’s rare!

To my surprise, Howard even accepted for publication the trigram dictionary, running most of it in the August and November 1969 issues. As a result of this article I learned that Philip Cohen, a Cornell student, was embarking on a similar project but allowing almost any words, including proper names.

Faith soon became interested in my logological activity. When in April 1969 I acquired from Ed Gilbert of Bell Labs a computer-generated list of all tetragrams known to be in Webster’s Second Edition, she quickly discovered that there were at least four words in Webster’s with three consecutive identical letters: -OSSSH-, -ESSSH-, -ALLLE-, -CEEER-. I soon discovered headmistreSSShip and waLLLess, but the other two baffled us, and were later proven to be the hyphenated form boSS-Ship and the misspelled whencEVER. This was published in the November 1969 issue with the catchy title “On Searching For Three-L Lamas”, alluding to Ogden Nash’s doggerel verse.

I was amazed by the explosive growth of my interest in logological research. Howard’s letters and the articles in Word Ways stimulated me to investigate new subjects almost every month. My latent interest in wordplay had been awakened, and I foresaw a long and pleasant career generating logological articles for Word Ways. To aid in my work, I purchased my first unabridged dictionary, a second-hand copy of Webster’s Second Edition from a Portsmouth, Maine dealer for $75 on July 5 1969. (A year later I bought a battered copy of Webster’s First Edition at the New Vernon firemen’s auction for only 50 cents!)

In early August 1969 I was dismayed to receive a letter from Howard saying that Greenwood had reluctantly decided to cease publishing Word Ways at the end of the year because of financial losses—about $30,000 over a two-year span. This deficit could be erased only by a 50 per cent increase in the subscription price, which Greenwood felt would lose many of its readers. The real surprise came in Howard’s August 29 letter:

Would you be interested in publishing and editing a journal of logology? I myself am in absolutely no position to attempt such a thing, but possibly you could put it over. Greenwood doesn’t have anything to sell, so far as I can see, except the name Word Ways and the subscribers list which is between 4- and 5-hundred. You could change the name and not pay them a dime. I could send you the piles of scripts that have been sent to me. As to the subscribers list, well, I have a copy of it, which is a very lucky thing, and I would gladly send you this. Please let me know if you like this thought or consider it feasible for you. If not, I plan to ask, one by one, a number of other contributors. Someone might just do it. I ask you first at least partly because it seems to me that there is an advantage in the fact that you and your wife could reinforce each other in the undertaking. I’ll hold off approaching anyone else until I hear from you.

My first reaction was—me, editor and publisher of a journal? You’ve got to be kidding! But the more I thought about it during the following week, the more attractive it became. The financial burden could be considerably lightened if I prepared camera-ready copy using an IBM Executive typewriter with proportional spacing, which I was on the verge of purchasing second-hand for $240 in order to prepare the Eckler genealogy during the coming winter. A hasty conference with
SENSUOUSNESS and LEVITATIVELY (his coinage) were also minimum-move. Howard Bergerson analyzed the problem for different word-lengths and switch positions, discovering that a minimum-move word must have a pattern consisting of an arbitrary letter sequence, a palindrome, the same letter sequence, and (optionally) a second palindrome. I found that the pattern of a palindrome, a letter sequence, and the same sequence repeated would also work. I introduced a notation for specifying all possibilities. For example, there were 44 switch word patterns of length 12, four of which switched on the tenth letter, satisfying Dudeney’s original puzzle. Try as I might I was unable to find any other twelve-letter switch words. To assess the difficulty of the task I looked for examples of all possible shorter switch words. I found all 8 of the five-letter patterns, ROTOR ONION DEEDS BELLE AMASS CEDED CACAO LLAMA, but only 7 of the 11 six-letter patterns, or 11 of the 20 eight-letter ones. My analysis appeared as a letter to the editor in February 1969.

I was flattered when Dmitri asked me in 1968 to contribute to his third book, Curious Crosswords. I sent him three, one numerical and two logological, but my euphoria turned to annoyance and chagrin when none of them appeared in his book, issued in 1970. In early 1969 Dmitri tried to enlist my help to analyze the combinatorial aspects of a tie-breaker contest puzzle, involving the selection of words from a list so that a specified number of As, Bs, etc. were included. I replied that he was dealing with an allocation problem best approached using a computer. He proposed that we form a team to share the profits from solving contest puzzles, but I demurred, pointing out that I was not a computer programmer and furthermore could not “borrow” time on Bell Labs computers for frivolous investigations. For several weeks Dmitri bombarded me with letters urgently requesting improvements to his proposed solutions, but I perhaps cured him of this tactic when I telephoned him collect with a suggested solution.

I was quite surprised when a letter from Howard Bergerson in November 1968 revealed that he had replaced Dmitri as Word Ways editor; Dmitri had said nothing about this in his many letters to me. Months later, I learned from Howard that Dmitri resigned when Greenwood Periodicals refused to pay him an editorial salary of $5000 per year. When Howard, recruited by Joseph Madachy, the editor of another Greenwood journal, agreed to be editor without salary, Dmitri angrily wrote him to say that he considered Howard’s action “extremely hostile and downright treacherous” and would never hear from him again. (I later learned that Dmitri had resigned in a huff a few years earlier from the National Puzzlers’ League when they didn’t accept his various suggestions for change.) Apparently he was a prickly personality with an exaggerated sense of his own importance.

Howard asked me about my logological interests, and suggested possible topics for me to research and write up for Word Ways. I worked on a dictionary of word-pairs differing in a single letter (for example, VALVE and VALUE); with help from Dmitri I found Websterian examples for all 325 possible pairs. Again aided by Dmitri, I prepared an article listing uncapsulated words containing various arrangements of the vowels AEIOU, such as EuPhOrIa, fAcEtIOUs, bEhAvIOUr. I first became aware of Darryl Francis, a British college student and ardent logophile, when Howard sent him my manuscript and he came up with numerous words Dmitri and I had overlooked. Eventually, after a computer search of a tape containing Webster’s Second Edition, 109 of the possible 120 arrangements were found.

I indulged my lipogrammatic interest by paraphrasing the poem “Mary Had a Little Lamb”, omitting in turn the letters, A,E,T,H and S, and finally eliminating half the alphabet:

Mary Had a Lipogram
Compton Press revealed that they would print 200 copies of a 64-page journal, 7 by 10 inches in size, for $312, with additional 100s costing $30. Second-class postage would come to 14 cents per issue. I decided that I would have to reduce the price somewhat because the journal would have a less-professional format (no right-justified lines, and a single typeface); tentatively I decided on $6 per year. Allowing 50 extra copies for future orders, it appeared that I could break even if I had a subscription list of 250, half of Greenwood’s.

I feared that if I said no that no other word-buff would attempt the task, and I would always wonder whether I had evaded a challenging and interesting opportunity. It would be a shame to see all the work in setting up the magazine, finding subscribers and authors, go to waste. More importantly, I believed strongly that the existence of Word Ways as a forum for the exchange of logological information was of vital importance. Without it, logologists would work in a vacuum and be far less stimulated to carry on investigations.

I wondered, of course, how much time it would take. Obviously, leisure time formerly devoted to genealogy could be diverted to logology after I had finished typing the Eckler genealogy, a task that, with effort, would be done by the end of 1969. Word Ways would offer a plausible excuse for resigning my National Speleological Society membership committee job, one that held little interest for me. Fortunately, the work could be conveniently divided, with Faith handling the subscriptions and mailings, and I the editorial correspondence and the typing of articles. The latter would not take too long, but I wondered whether I would be able to answer all the letters I received. Further, I wondered whether there would be enough material flowing in--would I end up writing Word Ways as I had written Speleo-Themes five years before? It was painfully evident that most of the first year of Word Ways had been written by Dmitri, and a significant amount of the second year by Howard.

One thing appealed to me very strongly—the concept of being at the center of an information web, of knowing the latest logological researches sooner than anyone else. More significantly, I regarded Word Ways as a potential psychological life preserver. In contrast to the murky ambiguities of my department head work at Bell Telephone Laboratories, I viewed the editorship as a chance to contribute directly to the advancement of knowledge and to the mental stimulation and entertainment of at least a small part of society.

I would have preferred to try my hand at editing a logological journal during my retirement, when I would have much more free time. Yet, opportunity was knocking now, not fifteen or twenty years hence, and I could not ask it to wait. At the end of a week, I said yes—and was launched into a new and higher level of activity in this absorbing pastime.

At once I had an important decision to make: should I start a new journal, perhaps called the Journal of Recreational Logology, using Howard’s 1968 Word Ways subscriber list, or should I purchase the name and the current list from Greenwood? Despite Howard’s advice to have as little as possible to do with Greenwood, I finally decided upon the latter as the lesser risk. I feared that Greenwood might discover that I was using their old subscriber list, and I felt that subscribers, especially libraries, would be much more likely to continue with a journal they had already elected to buy, than start afresh with a privately-issued journal of uncertain pedigree.

Before making this decision, I wrote Greenwood on September 21 asking whether it would be possible for me to insert a notice in their final Word Ways issue advertising a new journal. Director Christopher Price replied on September 25 that this could be arranged, but, anxious to salvage something from the wreckage, strongly urged that I purchase Word Ways instead. A
telephone conversation revealed that he thought $600 a fair price for the name, cover plates and subscriber list, but not the stock of back issues. I countered with an offer of $500 which he immediately accepted.

I naively assumed that Greenwood would fade out of my life as soon as the subscriber list and cover plates had been transferred. How wrong I was! To begin with, Greenwood was so slow in delivery (mid-January 1970) that Word Ways was much delayed in notifying subscribers of the new price. Greenwood was also very slow in forwarding Word Ways correspondence. Once they sent a package of 20 or more inquiries, checks, address changes and the like up to five months old! Sometimes they forgot to endorse checks over to Word Ways; when the checks were sent back for signature, they were never returned to me. Finally, Word Ways had to ask the affected subscribers to reissue checks to us instead. In September 1970 Greenwood decided that the 1968-69 Word Ways inventory was using up valuable warehouse space, and invited me to make an offer for it. After some dickering, I purchased 240 copies of each of the eight issues for $350, about 18 cents apiece. Although I mailed the check on September 29 1970, it wasn’t until mid-February 1971, after many letters and telephone calls, that the final box arrived.

I decided that I would raise the price of the journal to $7, still $2 less than Greenwood charged, in order to cover these additional expenses. It was well that I did so, for I soon learned that the vast majority of library subscribers did not deal with a publisher directly, but through a subscription agency which charged a 10 per cent middleman fee for handling their many magazine renewals. Thus, I would not receive $7 but $6.30 for many subscriptions. Furthermore, a later visit to Compton Press revealed the unpleasant fact that a more accurate estimate of costs was $450 for printing 500 copies, with additional 100s for $39 each.

Howard assured me that there would be no problem with contributions, and backed this up by sending me a number of unpublished manuscripts, the best being a set of twelve from Darryl Francis who had previously never had an article published in Word Ways. Dave Silverman, whose recently introduced Kickshaws column I much admired, wrote to offer support:

...who needs these big city Philistines, who probably couldn’t care less about philomania, I beg your pardon, logophilia. All we need is an iron man to continue it under the old title or otherwise. That’s why I was particularly pleased to know that you are at least considering taking on the burden of editorship. If any support from me is needed consider it an axiom that I will help to lighten the burden in any way I can ... Hell, I don’t have to flatter you, old boy; you know that your contribs have been the best part of the issues in which they have appeared ... It would be lovely if we could make a success of Word Ways on our own. And I believe we can do it. Especially if you don’t permit anyone to ride his hobbyhorse from issue to issue to the point of ennui ...

I was delighted to have Dave continue as Kickshaws editor, for he had a knack for selecting a variety of interesting topics and a graceful narrative style that I wished I could emulate. His one sin was that of procrastination; more than once, I had to send him an anxious letter asking where Kickshaws was as the deadline approached. I was dismayed when, in 1975, he asked for a sabbatical as Kickshaws editor. To fill the gap starting February 1976, I asked other authors to contribute a guest column until I could identify a worthy successor. One never came along, however, and eventually I decided that the guest column was a good idea worth keeping. I visited Dave in his bachelor home in West Los Angeles in February 1973. On a later trip in April 1976, I telephoned him from my hotel room in Westwood, three miles away, hinting that it would be nice to get together again. To my puzzlement, he evaded this proposal but spent four or five hours on
the phone chattering enthusiastically on a variety of logological subjects. Something was amiss, but I didn’t realize that it was manic-depressive psychosis until I heard from Mary Hazard on a Los Angeles visit of Dave’s suicide by gunshot in February 1978.

At the time of his death Dave left a large file of logological material which he once had intended to use in Kickshaws:

The backlog of K material I have is staggering ... If I took 3 days vac. & pulled all the phones out of their jacks, I could retire to my home office, where I can’t hear the doorbell when my tape deck is playing, & get off 80 pages of unpadded K contribs ... if I add my own stuff more than 800 pages. I have boxes and legal size letter fileboxes crammed full of notes on K.

How was I to get my hands on this treasure-trove? I wrote his mother, offering a home for his logological material, but she never answered, and by discreet inquiries some years later among Dave’s Los Angeles friends I learned that it had apparently been destroyed by his distraught and grief-stricken family.

I used guest Kickshaws editors for thirteen years. In 1988 I asked Dave Morice to become permanent Kickshaws editor, and he assumed this job with the February 1989 issue. He had discovered Word Ways in 1985 after purchasing a copy of Word Recreations, and was captivated by the magazine. Almost immediately he expressed interest in contributing to Kickshaws, and I tried him out as guest editor in August 1986. An illustrator, poet and editor of small literary magazines, Dave had led a somewhat hand-to-mouth existence since his graduation from St. Louis University in 1969. Much interested in promoting awareness of poetry to the layman, he conducted Poetry Marathons at public arts festivals, including such stunts as 1000 poems in twelve hours, a mile-long poem, and a poem stretching across the Delaware River. He conducted workshops which encouraged senior citizens to write poetry, and in 1981 generated Poetry Comics, classic poems illustrated by cartoon drawings. In 1988 he sent blank wooden nickels to a wide variety of celebrities, inviting them to create a drawing or pithy saying. Since I approached logology with the mindset of a mathematician, I felt it important to complement this with logology viewed through the eyes of a humanist. Dave was interested in all aspects of logology, and made sure that tidbits from readers were included in Kickshaws. His one fault was procrastination--Kickshaws material would usually arrive the last day or two before my deadline to send copy to the printer.

To promote reader response to Word Ways articles, I inaugurated the column Colloquy in the February 1970 issue. Any reader wishing to correct or add to an article in one issue could send in his comments up to a month before the next issue was sent to the printer, and be sure that it would appear in this column. Generally I typed Colloquy a day or two before copy went to Compton Press. I hoped that this rapid response would be one of the more attractive features of the new journal, in sharp contrast with the lengthy publishing delays under Greenwood (my reply to Dudeny’s Switch Word Puzzle took a year to appear). To further promote the interchange of ideas, I introduced Query, a page-filler at the end of an article, asking readers if they knew the answer to an unsolved logological problem. However this never caught on, and I dropped it after writing most of the queries myself. In 1971 I introduced a column devoted to competitive word games which I called Logomachy. In the first column, Darryl Francis contributed a Scrabble problem, and Mary Hazard promoted Correspondence Crash. In this game, the object is to determine your opponent’s five-letter target word by firing five-letter shot words at it. Each time you fire a shot word, you are informed by your opponent the number of times the shot word has
the same letter in the same position as the target word (for example, the shot word cRueT scores three against the target word tRUeST). Logomachy ran from February 1971 to February 1973, by which time I was the Correspondence Crash champion and new games had been added such as Uncrash, where the object was to be the last person to add a word to a list that did not crash with any of the earlier words. A longer-lived feature was the Poet’s Corner, begun in May 1974 and repeated whenever I had a sufficient number of logopoetic tidbits to warrant a reappearance.

Acting on a suggestion by Dmitri, I began in November 1973 to insert logological fillers at the ends of articles. Eventually these were mostly used for book reviews (I received free copies from many publishers, notably the expensive reference books of Gale Research Company) and for a Buy, Sell, Trade column where I offered second-hand copies of books I had picked up cheaply in old bookstores.

Dmitri Borgmann was easily the most important contributor of articles to Word Ways from 1970 to 1985. When I took over the magazine, I felt it was essential that Dmitri, the best-known name in logology, be a contributor once more (he had, of course, sent in nothing during Howard’s term as editor). I proposed that he be an editorial collaborator with the responsibility of preparing a regular column of his own choosing, for example a survey of logological literature, but he was unwilling to tie himself down. However, he was willing to write articles.

Dmitri’s articles were generated in fits and starts. He sent in seven at once, which I was able to use during the first year of my editorship. In November 1972 he sent in a flood of articles, and in July 1973 about 30 more, including a number under pseudonyms such as Merlin X. Houdini IV, Jezebel Q Xixx and Ramona Quincunx so that I could publish more at one time. In 1978 he became enamored of the problem of compiling a set of transpositions for the chemical element names, and bombarded me with letters updating his researches for several months. I then heard very little from him until the summer of 1984, when another torrent of articles arrived—so many, in fact, that I decided the only way to handle them was run an all-Dmitri issue in February 1985.

In the field of logology Dmitri was a unique phenomenon, producing well-written articles across the entire field of logology—there were no others combining his breadth of research and writing skills. He knew he was good, and did not hesitate to remind the reader of this fact. I learned that my best strategy as editor was to cater to his monumental ego by praising the quality and quantity of his submissions. As a consequence, he redoubled his efforts to produce articles for Word Ways. Most Word Ways readers seemed to like his material, though a few, such as Philip Cohen and Mary Hazard, complained about his Muhammad Ali posturings and his outrageous criteria for allowable “words”.

Was it all a pose, designed to enliven logology? I thought if I could meet him face to face I could decide whether it was a put-on, but Dmitri was a very reclusive man. When I wrote him in early 1979 that I would be visiting Pacific Northwest logologists that summer, he wrote back “That excludes me—I am not a logologist”. I took this as an oblique invitation to stay away, and did so. Much later, I heard of Prince Djoli Kansil’s experience along the same lines: he had arranged by phone to meet Dmitri in Oak Park, Illinois at a certain hour, but when he arrived at Dmitri’s house no one was there. In fact, the only Word Ways subscriber who ever met him in person was David McCord, who came to purchase Dmitri’s collection of geographical reference books.

It was hard to believe that Dmitri was joking about his logological omnipotence, for most of his humor was rather ponderous. He sent in an article on the word LITE, twitting Word Ways for
using a word not sanctioned by any dictionary (even though this was what he habitually did). For several years his letters were sent under a variety of weird letterheads having nothing to do with him, and were adorned with Mad-Magazine-like gummed labels. One of his most scholarly articles, a three-part one on the Sator square and the history of palindromes, came to me under the name of David Russell Williams, a National Puzzlers’ League member recently mentioned in Word Ways. In another letter he parodied the note on Fermat’s Last Theorem: “I have found a rather marvelous collection of 600 additional such names, but this margin is too small to hold it.” His most startling attempt at humor was somewhat macabre:

March 27 1978 Since today is my last day, I am making a point of getting this letter off to you before the impenetrable mists of eternity engulf me forever.
April 24 1978 I have returned from the dead—but only briefly...
May 26 1978 With certain death from radiation poisoning staring me grimly in the face, I doggedly plod on toward my approaching doom.
May 27 1978 Curious notes found in the effects of one who sacrificed his life in the cause of advancing logology.

This culminated in a notice saying “Your putative correspondent was, by order of this Court, executed on March 27 1978, at 12:00 Midnight, for the crime of murder in the first degree. As provided by Montana law, he was hung. Accordingly, you could not have received any communications from him subsequent to the specified date.”

Once I attempted to refute one of Dmitri’s grandiose claims in the pages of Word Ways, but he refused to accept the outcome. In November 1973, writing under the Jezebel Q. Xixx pseudonym, Dmitri claimed that nowhere near 1169 really good anagrams (the number cited in Howard Bergerson’s book, *Palindromes and Anagrams*) had ever been created. In a letter he further asserted that he could create a dozen superb anagrams per day indefinitely, all having the quality so conspicuously absent in published examples. I invited Dmitri to submit a set of ten anagrams of such quality, and obtained ten others from recent issues of the Enigma, the National Puzzlers’ League monthly newsletter. His were

INFERNOS non-fires TANGERINES satin-green
SEXUAL INTERCOURSE relax, ensure coitus ARGUMENTS must anger
CHRISTIANITY ‘tis in charity STREET SHOES hose testers
BEHEADMENTS deathsmen be WEIRD NIGHTMARES withering dreams
MURMURING WINOS rum? rum is now gin YE SMEARS are messy

The Enigma ones were

MS. STEINEM smites men GLACIERED large-iced
WOMEN’S LIBERATION men rib as we toil on PRIMATE trim ape
VERSATILITY variety list DIPLOMACY mad policy
PUGILIST tip: I slug LEMONADE demon ale
REFURBISH I rub fresh ARMAGEDDON mad god near

Mixing these examples, I asked nine male Ph.D.s at Bell Labs, nine secretaries at Bell Labs, and seven female Filipinos living in the United States to rank them in order of appositeness (how well the rearranged letters captured the thought of the original). Dmitri’s anagrams ranked below the Enigma ones, so much so that there was only a six per cent chance that a result this extreme would have occurred if the two sets of anagrams were of equal quality. Not surprisingly, Dmitri
assailed the results on the grounds that the panel was ill informed to judge anagram quality. Would he have questioned their competence had his anagrams come out on top?

I had heard rumors as early as 1979 from Howard Bergerson, who occasionally talked with Dmitri’s wife, Iris, on the phone, that Dmitri was grossly overweight and suffered from some type of heart condition which had caused him to pass out. Still, I was unprepared for Kyle Corbin’s phone call in early January 1986 that Dmitri had died of a heart attack on December 7 1985. I had been planning a second all-Dmitri issue for February, but quickly converted this to a memorial instead. Fortunately, I had enough articles on file, including two complete sets of Kickshaws, to plan two more all-Dmitri issues for February 1987 and February 1988, the latter date the twentieth anniversary of the founding of Word Ways. The Father of Logology was gone! A certain vibrancy was gone from logology as well.

I did not realize just how strange Dmitri really was until Faith and I visited his widow and son in Dayton, Washington in the summer of 1988, ostensibly to see whether or not she had any unpublished logological material of his. We discovered that Dmitri valued his privacy highly—most of the windows in his house were boarded up or the shades pulled down so that no one could look in. He refused to have the grass mowed because this, too, increased his seclusion. Even the glass in the doors between rooms within the house was covered with boards or drapes, so that one could not see from room to room. He carried on a long feud with a nearby church, threatening legal action because the pealing of its bells intruded on his privacy.

Iris told us that Dmitri would not permit mirrors in his home, and avoided looking in them on the rare occasions when he was outside the house because he feared the persona that he believed was staring back at him from the other side of the glass. Once, a few months before his death, he inadvertently caught sight of himself and stood transfixed, moaning “I’m old--I’m incredibly old.” (He was then 57.)

Dmitri’s desire for privacy extended to his work in progress. When his son Keith would ask him what he was working on, Dmitri would reply “Go away, don’t bother me. You wouldn’t understand.” After he had exhausted the supply of typists in Dayton—27 in succession were either fired or quit--Iris did his typing.

Although Dmitri came across as having a colossal ego in his correspondence, Iris believed that in reality he had an enormous inferiority complex. He refused to learn how to drive a car because he believed himself incapable of coordinating hands and feet. Despite his training as an actuary, he was “terrified” of numbers. (I had often encountered his contempt for mathematics in our correspondence.) He was wildly jealous of anyone having a higher IQ than his (155, according to Iris).

Iris believed that Dmitri’s paranoia was traceable to boyhood experiences. Born in Hitler’s Germany to a Lutheran father and a Jewish mother, he was raised as a nominal Christian and came with his parents to the US in the mid-1930s. His mother, severely crippled, was subject to ridicule by neighborhood children.

Dmitri had been in poor health for a number of years, suffering from obesity and a form of angina pectoris. Yet he refused to follow his doctor’s instructions or take his prescribed medication. His great passion was candy bars, which he would sneak down to the corner store to purchase; after his death Iris and Keith found boxes of empty candy wrappers in his room. (He hoarded other things as well--cases of soda, job lots of hair shampoo, and the like.) He opposed
any attempt to straighten out the household clutter, and even the routine noises of housekeeping such as a vacuum cleaner were an aggravation. After awhile, Iris abandoned any attempt at house cleaning; she intimated that his embarrassment over the deteriorated condition of the house was the real reason Dmitri had refused to see me in 1979.

Toward the end of his life Dmitri didn’t come downstairs very often, and rarely shaved or dressed. He ate and slept when it suited him, working feverishly and secretly on his logological research. Keith reported that often weeks went by when he never saw his father.

A couple of hundred books from his library were stored in the living room, mostly specialized dictionaries. We were curious about the patches of duct tape placed on the spines and on the title pages of many reference books. It turned out that Dmitri had shamelessly stolen these books from libraries, the duct tape concealing the library identification. This was confirmed by David McCord who found that a number of the references he bought from Dmitri were the property of various libraries.

One of Dmitri’s more curious undertakings was setting himself up as the chief guru of the Divine Immortality Church. He awarded himself a bogus doctorate in theology, had stationery printed up, and advertised in various magazines offering theological degrees and a cabalistic drawing for a substantial price. Keith estimated that perhaps 100 people signed on. Was this some sort of tax dodge? Keith believed that his father was sincerely trying to come to terms with life’s great questions—yet Dmitri encouraged magazines such as Hustler to omit the first T from the church name in his ads!

No other Word Ways author, save perhaps Darryl Francis and Ralph Beaman in the early 1970s, Leonard Gordon in the early 1990s, and Mike Keith in the late 1990s, approached Dmitri Borgmann in breadth and fecundity. Far commoner was the author who had a single logological interest reiterated in the material he submitted: Walter Shedlofsky’s anachattles, David Stephens’ ever-longer palindromes, John Ogden’s phrasal anagrams (be the case = beteaches), Kyle Corbin’s Scrabble game records, Leonard Ashley’s quizzes, John Candelaria’s large-number nomenclature, Paul Maxim’s analysis of Mallarmé for historical allusions, Bob Levinson’s Jotto sets (five-five-letter words containing 25 different letters), Bill Webster’s stories replacing each word by a transposal (bye nickled tumbrels = they clinked tumblers), Jerry Farrell’s word games based on graph-theoretical and combinatorial models from mathematics. All these had to be metered out in small doses in Word Ways, lest I violate Dave Silverman’s cautionary advice. Some authors were really off the wall: Henry Burger’s privately-published Word Tree tried to reduce all verbs to various mixtures of some 30 basic concepts, and John Weigart’s Language of Space attempted much the same thing with nouns. My philosophy was to encourage new authors, even those with a single interest, in the hope that they would eventually branch out as did Jeff Grant, who was originally interested in palindromes alone.

Occasionally I found it necessary to extensively rewrite a contribution with a good idea clumsily expressed, such as Leslie Card’s article on geographical place names or Murray Greenblatt’s article on the sequence TO, ThE, FaI,R, FluK,E, ... mimicking the integers TwO, ThreE, FouR, FivE ... However, I gradually realized that the diversity of author styles was one of the charming features of Word Ways; I didn’t want a homogenized publication such as Reader’s Digest or Scientific American in which all articles were written in much the same style. Most authors didn’t mind my editing, and some even thanked me for a job well done. Dmitri was, of course, the exception, writing such blasts as “Not acceptable. Kill the rejoinder entirely!! My texts are published unchanged or not at all!” or “Any article on the subject which chose to omit
the enclosed list—in its entirety, unaltered—would be so far removed from the spirit in which the project was undertaken that it would have to show the editor’s name as its SOLE author!!! “Confronted by messages like these, most editors would have probably told Dmitri to go jump in the lake, but I obediently published the items in question, reasoning that I wanted to keep the pipeline open for future articles.

I did not have the money to spend on typographical niceties like Greenwood. The IBM Executive Typewriter served me adequately for a number of years, even though I found the task of threading a new one-time ribbon somewhat exacting. The quality of the print gradually deteriorated (small r was especially poor), so I purchased an Olivetti ET 221 electronic typewriter for $1500 which gave me the choice of fonts on daisy-wheels (I selected Venezia) and right justification of lines. The first issue in the new format was May, 1983. When I bought my first computer from Tom Day’s brother John in 1989, I should have converted to computer operation, but I resisted change and didn’t make the switch until the Olivetti itself was becoming increasingly unreliable and expensive to maintain. The first computer-generated issue was August 1995; and all articles from that date onward were stored on the hard disk in my computer.

Article titles were typed on a large-type Remington used by the Security Department of Bell Labs at Whippany for the preparation of employee badges. This typewriter was eventually retired to a back room where it was its sole user. Later it was returned to the office machines pool for reassignment, but no one wanted an ancient manual typewriter anymore. I left a note on it asking that I be contacted first if they ever disposed of it. When I learned that unwanted machines were distributed free to charitable organizations, I arranged through Faith to have the Richmond Fellowship and St. Peter’s Church ask for it. However, these requests were never honored. I couldn’t purchase the machine because Bell Labs rules prohibited the sale of surplus equipment to employees. In 1991 a department head in the office machines area signed a slip of paper at last enabling me to carry the machine away, but it was shortly superseded by a Brother P-Touch labeler Faith gave me. This in turn was retired when I went to computer preparation.

One problem I was never entirely able to solve was that of proofreading the camera-ready copy. No matter how often I looked at it, misprints slipped through. Even after my electronic typewriter enabled me to review a line on the display screen before committing it to the typewriter, I could not get rid of all of them. Spell checkers were tedious to use because Word Ways had many words not in their dictionaries. Few people seemed bothered, although Kyle Corbin, Jeff Grant and Dmitri Borgmann usually sent me errata lists for their articles.

I continued to use Compton Press for printing until it suddenly went bankrupt in 1991. After an abortive attempt to have a small firm at the intersection of Route 46 and 287 take over, I transferred the printing to Bookmasters, a firm in Ashland Ohio which was so much cheaper than Compton that I could afford the added cost of having the finished product shipped to Morristown.

When I first took over Word Ways, I guessed that there might be ten thousand people willing to subscribe to the magazine, if they could only be told about its existence. There seemed no easy way to reach them, however. In the spring of 1970 I tried small classified ads in the Saturday Review and the Atlantic Monthly, which barely paid for themselves. A brief notice in the newly-established British magazine Games & Puzzles in 1972 was equally worthless. Would a larger ad be better? We learned that the English Journal, published monthly by the National Council of Teachers of English for high-school teachers, would run a full-page ad for $190. In the late
summer of 1972 we took this plunge, but the result was a disaster—only three or four people subscribed.

The best publicity for Word Ways has always been mention in newspapers, magazines and books. Although the first two are ephemeral, the third can generate a small steady flow of inquiries for many years. The first mention of Word Ways, a major one, occurred in Howard Bergerson's *Palindromees and Anagrams*, published by Dover in 1973. Word Ways' address was given in the Introduction, and my collaboration with Howard on Vocabularylept Poetry (the construction of a new poem out of the alphabetized word-list of an existing poem) was described in considerable detail in one chapter.

In the May 1972 Word Ways I reviewed Willard Espy’s new book, *The Game of Words*, and sent him a copy of the issue in the hope he might subscribe. I heard nothing until a few days before Christmas when Faith received a telephone call from his wife, Louise, in New York City asking if we could send her the entire set of back issues as a Christmas present! He mined these assiduously for material for a future wordplay book, and on June 16 1973 he and his wife came out to Morristown for dinner so he could show us his manuscript. My principal criticism of it was that it was a mixture of two incompatible themes, examples of wordplay from many published sources, and reminiscences of his ancestral home in Oysterville, Washington. The latter was later excised from the book and expanded into a genealogical memoir, *Oysterville: Roads to Grandpa’s Village*. I was delighted with the many references to Word Ways scattered through the manuscript, culminating with an encomium and subscription information in the August 3 entry. The book, *An Almanac of Words at Play*, was published in 1975 and sold more than 100,000 copies; over the years dozens of Word Ways subscriptions resulted from it. He followed up with *Another Almanac of Words at Play* in 1980 which didn’t repeat Word Ways’ address but used material from 32 different Word Ways authors on 37 different days. He always asked for permission beforehand and I was delighted to give it to him—it pleased Word Ways authors by giving them wider exposure, as well as keeping the name of the magazine before the public. In 1982 he created another spinoff, *A Children’s Almanac of Words at Play*, again with Word Ways references. In 1983 he dedicated *Word Puzzles* to us:

The Eckers let words know who is boss. That is why I dedicate this book to Faith and Ross Eckler, editors of Word Ways, with abiding admiration.

The book consisted of rhymed word puzzles based on word ladders (love-lave-late-hate) and transdeletions (a-at-tag-gate-stage-grates-stagger).

We visited the Espys twice at Oysterville, in the summers of 1979 and 1988 while on vacation trips out west, and occasionally in New York as well. The last time I saw him was in November 1998, after attending a ballet performance at City Center; by then he was largely confined to bed but could still carry on an animated conversation. He died at the age of 88 on February 20 1999, only a few months before the Almanacs were reissued in a combined volume, *The Best of An Almanac of Words at Play*, which once again gave subscription information.

Willard Espy introduced Word Ways to Gyles Brandreth, who wrote *The Joy of Lex* in 1980 and *More Joy of Lex* in 1982. He acknowledged his debt to that “endlessly instructive and entertaining journal” in both books. Much of the material in the second book was supplied by Darryl Francis. Brandreth was especially charmed by my lipogrammatic rewrite of “Mary Had a Little Lamb”, a work also reprinted in Herbert Kohl’s *A Book of Puzzlements* in 1981 and Tony
Augarde’s *The Oxford Guide to Word Games* in 1984. All but Augarde included subscription information as well.

In January 1982 Paul Dickson, alerted by Maledicta editor Reinhold Aman, wrote to ask me for a list of synonyms for “intoxicated” in Word Ways. Dickson explained that he was assembling the world’s largest collection of such synonyms, one of the chapters in his forthcoming book, *Words*. I sent him a list of six names Faith had published from The Boozer’s Diary in the February 1979 Kickshaws: been elephants, brained, one-over-the-eight, banjaxed, miffy, newted. Later he sent me the full list of 2231 words and phrases. I believe this was eventually recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records. As for his book, Paul thoughtfully included the address of Word Ways at the end of his bibliography, and this, too, was a source of subscription inquiries.

Tom Pulliam, an occasional Word Ways contributor, joined with Gordon Carruth to compile *The Complete Word Game Dictionary* published in 1984. The Preface contained the address of Word Ways together with the flattering comment

> Perhaps you are a true logophile—one whose interest in words extends well beyond the confines of any single word game. You and others like you are blessed with a quarterly publication of specialized appeal, Word Ways ... It is subscribed to, and read voraciously, by many who relish the appearance, spelling, derivation, sound, use, and peculiarities of words and word forms.

The book was earlier published in 1977 under the title *The Complete Scrabble Dictionary*. However, Selchow and Righter successfully prosecuted the publisher for wrongfully appropriating the Scrabble name, and succeeded in having the book destroyed before it was distributed. Tom Pulliam sent me one of the few surviving copies, so that this represents one of the rarest books in my collection.

In a sense Martin Gardner was the founder of Word Ways, for he suggested the idea of such a magazine to Greenwood and proposed Dmitri Borgmann as its first editor (Dmitri had earlier supplied Martin with much material for the appendix to the Dover reprint of Bombaugh’s *Oddities and Curiosities of Words and Literature* published in 1961). During the years that he wrote the Mathematical Games column in Scientific American magazine, he was a staunch friend of Word Ways, endeavoring to give subscription information about us every couple of years. I can recall at least four: November 1970 (a cryptographic problem by Walter Penney), April 1974 (a Lewis Carroll whimsy), February 1977 (a discussion of OuLiPo, the French group devoted to literary writing under constraint), and February 1979 (the first verse of Poe’s “The Raven” written automnoragographically, homoliterally, and heteroliterally). The first of these mentions resulted in a surge of 30 subscriptions. Later ones had less impact, perhaps because there were few Martin Gardner readers who had not seen the earlier one. As Faith pointed out more than once, one of the difficulties with the publicity that Martin generated for us was the fact that the wordplay being illustrated was not a central part of Word Ways. This was especially true in the case of the Lewis Carroll item, as most of the people who subscribed dropped out a year later.

In October 1984 Faith and I visited Martin Gardner in Hendersonville, North Carolina, when we were considering that area as a possible retirement locale. A friendly and unassuming man despite his towering reputation in many fields—magic, pseudo-science, philosophy, mathematical recreations—he took us out to dinner and spent a couple of days driving us around the area. (Afterwards, Faith carried on a lively correspondence with him about his religious beliefs.) In
1993 his many friends and colleagues instituted the invitation-only “Gathering for Gardner” in Atlanta, consisting of three-day meetings at which people presented papers relating to Martin’s interests and exchanged handouts. I was invited to the Second in 1995 and the Third in 1998, but did not actually attend one until the Fourth Gathering in February 2000, when I presented a paper on “Coincidences” and issued a handout challenging the others to identify 18 different constrained versions of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” (two people sent me partial solutions).

In 2006 Martin Gardner began working on a wordplay book based on material from many sources (including readers) collected over the decades, but the Colossal Book of Word Play was not published until four years later, shortly after his death on May 22 2010 at the age of 95. Jerry Farrell reported that the book was to be dedicated to me, and indeed it was!

To Ross Eckler, for his books on advanced wordplay and for his distinguished career as the editor of Word Ways, the world’s leading journal of recreational linguistics

Like Willard Espy and Martin Gardner, Richard Lederer has been a staunch friend of Word Ways. He first discovered us in 1976, while an English teacher at the prestigious St. Paul’s School in Concord New Hampshire. He soon became a regular contributor of articles, mostly related to puns or language use. Seeking wider horizons for his logological interests, in 1981 he began writing a weekly column on words for a Concord newspaper. This led to other newspapers, radio appearances, and in 1987 Anguished English, the first of a series of popular books on language misuse, puns, and the like. In 1997 his website said that his books had collectively sold more than one million copies.

As Rich’s fame grew, he added lecture tours to his repertoire. In 1989 he resigned from his teaching post at St. Paul’s to devote full time to recreational linguistics. I saw him in action in June 1995 when he invited me to a lecture in Maplewood. A spellbinding lecturer, he captivated his audience, who afterwards purchased copies of his books which he had brought along with him. In June 1996, we visited him at his Concord home in conjunction with a visit by Dave Morice and his son Danny. His first book devoted to letterplay was The Word Circus, published by Merriam-Webster in 1998. Dave Morice was the illustrator, and, to my surprise and delight, the book was dedicated to us:

To Ross and Faith Eckler, for teaching the world the ways of words and making the alphabet dance

Scot Morris, a senior editor of Omni magazine who wrote a games and puzzles column for them, invited me to lunch in New York on December 10 1981 to discuss a forthcoming column, The World’s Hardest Word Quiz. This appeared in the February 1982 Omni along with subscription information, but few inquiries came in.

I wondered whether publicity showing the full breadth of Word Ways would be better for attracting subscriptions. This theory was put to the test in the May/June 1981 issue of Games Magazine, when editor Will Shortz devoted two pages of his Pencilwise column as “A Salute To Word Ways”:

Hidden Opposites (“shun poet” becomes open-shut)  
Geographical Link-O-Grams (identify the city Los Angeles from the clue --SANG----),  
Contronyms (to trim means both “to cut off” and “to embellish”)  
Reversible Word Ladders (spas-seas-sews-saws-saps)
The Word Watcher’s Test (what is unusual about words like dermatoglyphics? verisimilitude? cookbook?)

Fl-Flavored Words (words beginning fl- having the meaning of “light” or “downy”)
Transdeletion (anticeremonialist, nonmaterialistic, recitationalism, reclamationist, remastication, cremationist, creationism, remication, manticore, reaction, certain, retain, train, rant, tan, at, a)

I was very pleased with the variety of examples and waited for subscriptions to roll in from the 600,000 readers, but I was disappointed, for there was no subscription surge in the three weeks or so after the magazine appeared. The May 1986 Games Magazine featured a colorful two-page spread on “The Games Book of Word Records” for which I was paid $600. With Will Shortz’s help, I selected extreme examples of wordplay involving the largest word-square (Jeff Grant’s 10-square), longest lipogram, longest isogram, longest anagram, highest-scoring Scrabble moves and games, shortest pangram, longest list of non-crashing five-letter words, and longest palindrome (David Stephens’ 58795-letter “Satire: Veritas”). Again there was little response, perhaps five to ten subscriptions and a letter offering an improvement to the pan-crashing word set.

For a couple of years Games Magazine published a monthly spinoff, The Four-Star Puzzler aimed at the word puzzler. The September 1982 issue listed Word Ways subscription information along with several other magazines, and the February 1983 issue featured Faith and me in the ongoing “Who’s Who in Puzzledom” series, together with an article I wrote on eight constrained versions of “Mary Had a Little Lamb”.

When Will Shortz became the co-host of a Sunday morning program on National Public Radio, he occasionally proposed listener competitions of a wordplay nature. For several of these he passed along all the entries sent in by readers which I sorted out and made into Word Ways articles. The four I remember most clearly were: write a sentence using only two different consonants, write a word-unit palindrome, write a sentence with as many consecutive identical words as possible in it, and construct an apt mini-review of a movie title. I believe that he also mentioned the existence of Word Ways on these programs. In November 1993 Will Shortz was appointed Crossword Puzzle Editor of the New York Times.

For the sake of completeness I mention one other circulation-building device which Word Ways tried. In late 1973 or early 1974 I obtained a copy of the membership list of a professional society of linguists. I sent 100 names on this list Word Ways advertising flyers, and another 100 names sample back issues in excess supply in inventory, to see which method was more effective. Neither one worked well; we received only three or four subscriptions from either method.

What were the results of this long struggle for new subscribers? When we started in 1970, we had approximately 310 subscriptions, split more or less evenly between libraries and individuals. After we obtained a second-class mailing permit in 1974 we were required to report subscription information each year. The following data show a steady erosion in subscriptions after 1978:

1974-79: 359,341,375,496,513,469
2000-06: 206,187,182,165,158,150,134
In addition we sent out about five issues by first-class mail to impatient overseas subscribers.

As circulation manager Faith worried about several things. She reminded me that should Word Ways drop below 200 paid subscriptions our second-class mailing permit could be revoked, which would force us to send copies by first class mail, adding four or five dollars per year to the subscription rate (however, this never happened). She also worried about the increasing cost of a complete set of back issues of Word Ways, which by the year 2006 had grown to some $400, a price she felt was out of the range of most people. I was worried about the gradual buildup of back issues in the basement. These were first stored in cardboard cartons on the floor, but this eventually became unwieldy to access, and about 1990 Susan’s boy-friend John Hornyk built a rack to hold these boxes along the garage wall from floor to ceiling, and also along the stairs. By the year 2000 we still had all back issues in print although several had fewer than 50 copies and one was down to 17. However, the total inventory was rather overwhelming at more than 10,000 copies!

Not surprisingly, rising costs of printing and postage forced us to raise the subscription rates frequently: $8 in 1975, $9 in 1980, $12 in 1982, $14 in 1985, $15 in 1988, $17 in 1990, $20 in 1995, $25 in 1997 and $30 in 2003. The 1997 increase was due to a 25 per cent increase in the number of pages per issue starting with August 1996, from 64 to 80. Still, the subscription increases failed to compensate for the loss of subscribers, and for the last few years of Word Ways it was necessary to subsidize it with a couple thousand dollars each year.

I soon realized that Word Ways was never likely to grow much larger than 500 subscribers as long as it occupied the niche I had originally defined for it: a forum for the exchange of ideas among those trying to advance logological knowledge. If I wished to act less like a scholarly journal and more like a mass-entertainment magazine such as the Four Star Puzzler, I could undoubtedly boost circulation, but then I would be editing Word Ways not for fun but for money. If the articles published in Word Ways did not overlap my own logological research interests, what point was there in editing it? Why chair a dialogue that didn’t include my work?

Was I falling into the trap of most scholarly journals, that of becoming more specialized and less readable as time went by? My father certainly thought so, as he claimed that he could understand few of the articles any more, mine being especially obscure. I found more disquieting Tom Kurtz’s note in his 1984 Christmas card “The word articles are getting obscurer and obscurer ... Maybe I’m slowing down!” (He later let his subscription lapse.)

Starting in 1980 Word Ways experimented with the publication of monographs in addition to the regular magazine. During the 1970s Word Ways published a number of palindromic poems by David Stephens, a North Carolina physician. In June 1977 he sent me a giant palindrome 5000 words long entitled “Satire: Veritas” purporting to be a sampling of manuscripts on the desk of Giles Selig Hales, the editor of an avant-garde literary journal, ready for mailing to a friend named Eton Harrison. While this palindrome, like all long ones, had little overall coherence, it did contain a great number of puns and other wordplay, and managed to introduce much typographic variety. During the next several years he added to it until it eventually totaled more than ten thousand words (more precisely, 58,795 letters). I found the palindrome much too long to consider publishing in Word Ways, and could not interest Dover Publications. In March 1980 he offered $500 to help defray the cost of printing the palindrome. I decided to offer it as a Word Ways Monograph, soliciting advance orders on the back cover of the May 1980 issue and a classified ad in Verbatim magazine; Will Shortz mentioned it in the July/August 1980 issue of Games as well. The advance orders were so few (19) that I decided to print only 100 copies for
$433 and set the price at $5. I delivered 20 of these to David Stephens when Faith and I visited him in October 1980, along with the receipts for 29 copies sold through Word Ways. Over a decade or so the copies were eventually sold.

We didn't try the Monograph series again for a decade. In 1991, I used my recently-acquired computer to assemble a set of 8876 anagrams and antigrams drawn from “Anagrammasia,” a collection drawn from early puzzle publications by Newton B. Lovejoy of the National Puzzlers’ League in 1926, augmented by the best ones in the Enigma since that time. Each anagram occupied a single line on the page, of the format (two digits = year of later publication), as in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>falsities</th>
<th>fit, as lies 68</th>
<th>Damonomad</th>
<th>Feb 1934</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>piano bench, the</td>
<td>beneath Chopin</td>
<td>Manx</td>
<td>Sep 1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solitary confinement</td>
<td>felons cry “no mate in it”</td>
<td>DCVer</td>
<td>Jul 1931</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The monograph “The New Anagrammasia” was offered at $12.50 for advance orders and $15 afterwards, with ten per cent of the receipts going to the National Puzzlers’ League. I felt that we had a guaranteed audience in the NPL for the sale of the monograph, and in fact it did sell out in a relatively short time. The following year, 1992, we issued two more monographs in a 100-copy edition, Jeff Grant’s “The Palindromicon” a collection of more than 2000 palindromic words, phrases and proper names taken from many languages, and Stephen Chism’s 173-page “From A to Zotamorf”, a dictionary of all known palindromic phrases. This was offered in softcover for $18, with a limited number of copies bound by the University of Arkansas library (where he worked) and sold for $35. When the first set sold out Stephen printed a second set of 100 himself, but we still processed the orders and received at least some of the profits. This long-distance collaboration didn't work very well, for he was dilatory in sending out books. Furthermore, the quality control of the library was not very good and many hardbound copies were returned defective. Although it was Word Ways' most profitable venture--Faith estimated we made $1200 from it--she wasn’t sorry to quit when Stephen suggested he’d had enough.

Although Word Ways’ main role, in my view, was to serve as a forum for exchange of ideas among logologists, and to advance the field of logology, it had another purpose as well. For many years my dream was to write an encyclopedia of logology, summarizing what was known in this chaotic field and bringing some sort of logical order to it. Material from Word Ways was to serve as a source of ideas and examples for this work. In the shorter run, I saw Word Ways as a source of material for logology talks, word-related columns in other magazines, and anthologies (“the best of Word Ways”).

In the spring of 1975 Leonard Ashley, a professor of English at the Brooklyn College branch of the City College of New York who had been regularly been contributing word quizzes to Word Ways, suggested that I might be interested in attending the annual Names Institute, a one-day regional meeting of the American Names Society held at Fairleigh Dickinson University on the first Saturday of May. Remembering my difficulties in understanding papers presented at meetings in the field of statistics, I feared that I would get nothing out of papers on linguistics, a field in which I had no academic training. On the other hand there was always the possibility that I might be able to spread the word (and sample copies) of Word Ways. So Faith and I went to the meeting on May 3 1975. I was surprised by two aspects of the meeting: attendance was so small, about 25 people in all, that nearly everyone there was either a speaker or a session moderator, and the papers, although scholarly, weren't particularly hard to understand. I found it somewhat appalling that many speakers made no attempt to give a lively talk, merely reading their paper verbatim from the lectern. Because the group was so small, people did make an attempt to be
friendly with newcomers, and we even got a couple of Word Ways nibbles. I continued to attend Names Institute meetings, at first every other year. And I gave talks:

1977: A Logologist Looks at Onomastics, Or Whatever Happened to President Smith?
1979: From Hair to Eternity: An Onomastic Tour of American Beauty Parlors and Barber Shops
1980: Superultramegalosquipedalia (the 3640-letter name for bovine glutamate dehydrogenase)
1982: Single-Letter Surnames in the United States
1983: What’s Your Nom? Pseudonyms in the National Puzzlers’ League
1984: Henry to Harold to Donald to Michael: Changing Fashions in Male Names, 1870-1960
1986: Clothes Encounters: An Onomastic Tour of Boutiques and Haberdasheries

My talks were generally welcomed as leavening for some of the deadly serious ones presented on obscure onomastic topics (Faith especially detested talks on Lope de Vega, an author from Spanish literature). The 1979 talk was videotaped and made available to other regional meetings of the American Names Society, and also featured in a Newark Star-Ledger article on May 13 1979. The Names Institute was single-handedly run by Wallace McMullen, a professor in the English Department at Fairleigh Dickinson. After he resigned from this task and the meeting was transferred to New York City, I ceased attending.

I gave one other academic talk, “The Superiority of English as a Vehicle for Wordplay” at New York University on April 20 1985, as part of the 20th anniversary celebration of the American Society of Geolinguistics. I argued for English on several grounds: its extremely large stock of words, its polyglot nature, its statistical structure (not well understood, but manifested by such facts as the greater difficulty of constructing crossword puzzles in Italian), and its syntax (Petr Beckmann’s view of language as an error-detecting and error-correcting code). I facetiously suggested the title “English: Best For(e)play With Words”, but no doubt this was deemed too frivolous for an academic audience.

Faith and I were asked by Gloria Rosenthal to be one of the speakers at the December 7-9 1984 seminar “The Wonderful World of Words” held annually on the premises of the Mohonk House in the Shawangunk Mountains west of New Paltz, New York. Although the orientation of this seminar was more toward word-puzzle competition than logological research, much like the National Puzzlers’ League, still I thought this might offer an opportunity to find additional Word Ways subscribers. (The preceding year, we had sent up a box of surplus Word Ways inventory for distribution to the participants, but without much result as far as subscriptions were concerned.) Speakers were given no honorarium other than free room and board, but this was no deterrent. The Mohonk House is, perhaps, the last of the old-time mountain-top hotels of the Catskills which flourished in the last century, an immense Victorian pile set in a stunning landscape of lakes and rocky crags. We had sampled the pleasures of its views and its network of hiking trails (mostly old carriage roads) twice before, in August 1974 and August 1979, upon the 50th and 55th wedding anniversaries of my parents. We arrived there just at sunset on Friday evening, the day after an ice storm. The flash and glitter of ice on the bare tree branches and a coating of snow on the ground made it look like fairyland.

We knew only one of the more than one hundred participants that weekend, Miriam Raphael of the National Puzzlers’ League. Among the speakers, we were well acquainted with both Will Shortz and Willard Espy, and looked forward to meeting Paul Dickson, mentioned earlier as the collector of synonyms for “intoxicated” and the author of Words.