

Don Mankin, A&S '66 (MA), '68 (PhD)

Travels Outside the Comfort Zone

When Don Mankin was a science fiction-obsessed boy growing up in Philadelphia in the 1950s, “adventure travel meant taking the subway to downtown Philly,” he recalls with a chuckle. But after earning his electrical engineering

degree from Drexel University and a PhD in engineering psychology from Johns Hopkins, then securing a teaching position, he ventured farther afield, embracing the burgeoning backpacking culture of the 1960s. “I started to explore the world,” he says. “Every sum-

mer I took trips that were increasingly exotic,” from the lush heat of Thailand to the frigid emptiness of Antarctica.

Still, for decades, he pursued his career as an academic and a business consultant, keeping his love of travel as a hobby—until three and a half years ago, when he gave a friend a copy of his latest organizational psychology tome (he’s written four). “Can I give you some career advice?” the friend asked him. “Stop writing this stuff. You should be writing about your trips.”

“I don’t think it happens very often,” says Mankin, “that a single comment can change your life.”

Earlier this year, the first product of that change appeared in the form of *Riding the Hulabula to the Arctic Ocean: A Guide to 50 Extraordinary Adventures for the Seasoned Traveler*. Published by National Geographic Books, the guide paired Mankin with Shannon Stowell, president of the Adventure Travel Trade Association.



Margaret Guroff, A&S '89 (MA)

Call Me Meg

Before *Jaws*, a larger, even more deadly beast swam the seas, and it still terrorizes high school students to this day. *Moby-Dick*, with more than 200,000 words, is flooded with biblical analogies, Victorian pop-culture references, and long scientific yet poetic descriptions of whale fat.

The epic novel is textbook for what Mark Twain meant when he said, “A classic is a book which people praise and don’t read.” Margaret “Meg” Guroff discovered this last spring when she and a friend agreed to reread *Moby-Dick*.

“I thought I had read it,” Guroff says, recalling a high school English class. “I think I even wrote a paper on it. But as soon as I started reading, I remembered that I had only pretended to read it.”

After a few pages, she turned to the Internet to Google its obscure analogies and seafaring terms. She kept detailed notes, and soon realized she was, for all intents and purposes, annotating *Moby-Dick*.

Though many people wondered why she would undertake such a project, Guroff says she found support from teachers and colleagues from her days in the Writing Seminars. “Hopkins was where I learned to honor people’s creative, or, in this case, quasi-creative efforts,” she says. She also realized the surprise many readers experience when they get past the book’s density and see how emotionally powerful, thought-provoking, yet impressively funny *Moby-Dick* can be. “I mean, it’s full of bawdy humor and fart jokes,” Guroff says.

Thinking others might benefit from her annotation, Guroff and a few Web-savvy friends built www.powermobydick.com, launching the Web site in July. (The Web site inspired the annotations you see here.) In the first month, it

Mankin’s career path already had undergone one turn when he came to Hopkins in 1964 to pursue engineering. “I met Alphonse Chapanis,” Mankin recalls, “and he helped set me on a career path more to my liking.” Chapanis was considered the father of ergonomics, the study of how engineering and design interact with the human form and psyche. Mankin began to study the thought behind building systems more compatible with human operators, and eventually became an expert in organizational management and psychology.

His interest in psychology guides the writing of *Riding the Hulabula*. The titular adventure—rafting on this northwestern Alaska river—was a particularly notable one for Mankin. It was the first strenuous trip he had made since undergoing angioplasty. And, he recalls, “I was waiting for some test results from another medical mystery,” one involving a bone marrow biopsy.

“But after a day or two into the trip, I tried to dredge up some anxiety about it, and I couldn’t,” he says. “It just wasn’t relevant.” The tests came back negative.

That recollection reveals the book’s message about the importance of the travel experience. His guide isn’t just a recitation of sights and sounds from amazing trips, of braving remote deserts and jungles to visit isolated indigenous tribes, or of encounters with endangered wildlife. It’s about the voyages that people make within themselves when faced with real challenges that force them to delve into the unknown.

“I am a psychologist,” says Mankin, now 66. “That’s the way I look at things. I wanted to write about the kind of experiences evoked by places. It is about the transformation, and the power of adventure. When you go to remote places, and get out of your comfort zone, interesting things happen.”

—Geoff Brown

Shelf Life

A Tomb on the Periphery, by John Domini, A&S '75 (Gival Press, 2008)

The novel’s voice is Fabbrizio, a small-time grave robber who on a lark leads a heist at an archaeological dig near Naples. His accomplice-goad enters as a lovely American on the make, whose charms include nearly street-grade Italian. But she is not what she seems. As the sauce thickens, we learn with Fab that she is as Italo as he is. Indeed, all of the characters, introduced on the fly as Fab whizzes by on his Suzuki, take on texture. If there is an uplift in all this, it is that the character development embraces a family of African *clandestini* who barely escape stereotypy to overcome a pair of Napolitano toughs. Part of a trilogy, the novel was nominated for a National Book Award.



The Undercover Philosopher: A Guide to Detecting Shams, Lies and Delusions, by Michael Philips, A&S '72 (PhD) (Oneworld Publications, 2008)

For all the effort of Philips to anoint his vocation with a here-today relevance—stalking ills even beyond the list in the subtitle—what he lays out is a far broader, well, philosophy. His is a call to arms under a banner of cogent analysis: Beware of bias, eyewitness accounts, and certainly one’s memory in weighing tough decisions. See through the self-interest of others but, by the way, cast a cold eye on your own motivations, too. In the course of this, he slays many a personal dragon for baring faulty cogitation, resoundingly among doctors, medical writers, and politicians.

—Low Diuguid, SAIS '63



Moby-Dick: Herman Melville’s 1851 novel chronicling the adventures of Ishmael and his voyage aboard the whaling ship commanded by Captain Ahab.

Meg Guroff: Features editor of *AARP, The Magazine*, in Washington, D.C. Also lectures for the Krieger School’s Advanced Academic Programs in nonfiction writing and plays bass in the Charm Offensive, a rock band.

From chapter one: “For as in this world, head winds are far more prevalent than winds from astern (that is, if you never violate the Pythagorean maxim).” Explains Guroff, “That is, if you never eat beans.”



RON ARA

notched 2,000 visits and more than 5,785 page views, along with praise from users for its simple, straightforward design and the readability of the annotations. “The site has gotten a lot more attention than I expected,” Guroff says. “There are a lot of people out there who either love the book, or, at least, want to be able to read the book.”

Guroff might have even made some academic discoveries of her own, like when she came upon the passage describing Captain Ahab stabbing a knife at a whale “like an Arkansas duelist,” as Melville put it. No one seemed to have annotated this passage, so she hunted down a possible source. “It seemed like this was a reference to the famous fight called the Sandbar Fight, involving Jim Bowie,” Guroff said. “It was a well-known story when Melville was writing, and he may have just dropped it in.”

She doesn’t have any plans to annotate another work, though people often recommend she take on *Ulysses*. Perhaps she’ll travel to the former whaling town of Nantucket, Massachusetts? Or take a long seafaring voyage? “I’d love to, but I don’t think I ever will be able to,” she said. “I get seasick.”

—Robert White

“A charming site worthy of recognition. This online annotated edition of *Moby-Dick* is attractive and amazingly comfortable to read... Simply enjoyable!”
—Kinneret Zmora Dvir, Publishing House (Israel)

Jim Bowie: Adventurer and soldier. After an 1827 duel/brawl on a Mississippi River sandbar, the butcher knife he wielded became known as the Bowie knife.

Ulysses: A novel of around 250,000 words, written by James Joyce and assigned to English majors when *Moby-Dick* isn’t daunting enough.