

## 'Always The Rebel'

Sara Rath is 42. She was born in Manawa, Wis., and raised in Waupaca. ("Joe McCarthy graduated from my high school, the Senator. He was a friend of my father.") She has published three collections of poetry: *Whatever Happened To Fats Domino & Other Poems* in 1971, *The Cosmic Virgin* in 1973, and the newly released *Remembering The Wilderness*. Other writing credits include *Pioneer Photo-*

*grapher: Wisconsin's H.H. Bennett, a biography, and Views Of A Cameraman, a film based on the Bennett book. She edited Bubbling Over, an anthology of children's poetry based on her four years in the Poets in Schools program. She writes now for public television and is poetry editor for the Feminist Connection.*

"I was always the rebel, the black sheep in



Sara Rath. Photo by Brent Nicastro

my family. I spoke my mind. I never felt my parents didn't love me, but I embarrassed them. I had to fight to come down here to the university because it had 'Communist influences.'

"I dropped out of school—at the age of 20—to get married, and I didn't go back to finish until 1973, 11 years later.

"For those years, I was married to a young lawyer who was intent on building an image. He didn't want his wife to have a job outside the home. Part of my writing was done to express the frustration I felt in being a housewife. I really loved being a mother, but I hated the housework. I also found out that I don't write a lot of poetry when I'm happy and things are going well.

"The first poem I ever published was in

1962, in August Derleth's little magazine *Hawk & Whippoorwill*. He accepted it and right then became very supportive of my writing. He encouraged me. In 1963 I met August in person, and he became my mentor.

"He told me that he was the sort of person who didn't waste his time with people—with writers—who wouldn't take criticism. His criticism was very harsh, but I learned by accepting it. My ego got toughened by that. August said a writer wasn't going to succeed if you got caught up in 'the illusion of genius,' the illusion that every word you write is pure gold. He taught me to be a good editor of my work, to be able to cut my words and not treat them gently.

"I guess I didn't realize I was a feminist until about 1966. The women's liberation movement came in and told us it was okay not to like scouring toilets and doing dirty dishes. My first husband was very much of the old school. He told me: 'This is your job. You are my wife.'



## Listening In with George Vukelich

"We lived on 60 acres near Boscobel. The kids were in school. I was isolated. I couldn't see year after year of that existence, just being the village lawyer's wife. I needed to be me, and I needed to finish my schooling before I could be me.

"We divorced, but we're still good friends. We just grew up in different directions. We were just so young when we married. That's why it makes me angry to see these young kids on TV saying: 'I'm going to enlist. I'm going to defend our country against Communism.' I want to say, 'Shit! You don't know anything. You're too young. It's not time yet. You should be in the sandbox.'

"I don't write every day, but I do keep a journal—actually, two journals. One is a kind of diary, and the other is so personal it will never see the light of day. If there's a common thread to *Remembering The Wilderness*, it's about that, in this poem called "The Woman Named Yesterday." It's here on page 31:

*"She has kept a journal all these years  
a catalog of fears and wishes going back to  
the list of  
boys she kissed and why.*

*Strange sister, where are you now?  
Submerged within  
this person whose shifting names are your  
disguise?*

*Wrinkles are webbing that fragile mask  
near your eyes  
and you are not plucking the gray  
hairs anymore. But then  
your face is not the  
smooth unplaned map of the idiot.  
You have  
screamed your chimeric way to forty  
and you are finally free  
to write your own  
tomorrow.*

"I've been through two marriages and I'm only 42. My personal life has not been real smooth. I've had to make changes, and the changes have been painful. But I've learned that I'm able to take more pain than I thought possible."