This is not my first job, or even my fifth. I have lived many past lives. I imagine them listed on the jacket of my first novel:

As a Peace Corps volunteer (Palau/Micronesia), I taught English under coconut palms that raised gleaming fronds toward a blue sky. Dark-haired women in Gauguin dresses balanced washtubs of wet laundry on their heads. Children walked barefoot on white sand edging a turquoise lagoon where their fathers went spearfishing by moonlight.

As a fire lookout (Flagstaff), I spent Arizona's summer monsoon season tracking lightning strikes in the Coconino National Forest. The metal tower was five stories tall, and I marked smokes on a big map using colored pushpins. I enjoyed the calm order of the forest service, manned by Hopi and Navajo staff, and the friendly radio exchanges with other lookouts.

As a university instructor (Missoula, Mt.), I corrected stacks of essays during a deadly cold winter. The streets shone with glare ice and the local sawmill darkened the air as the Clark Fork River froze over. In Glacier Park the grizzlies slept.

As a writer/editor (Boulder, Colo.), I reviewed journal papers on atmospheric science. Behind the center where I worked, the Eastern Rockies angled down into the jutting pink Flatirons. My co-workers helped share my workload when a family illness took me away from the office one day a week.

And now I work at Cal Poly in what used to be an old dorm. From my window I can see the hills east of San Luis Obispo. The lawn in front stays green all year — it's mowed on Tuesdays, releasing the clean scent of cut grass — and cars drive quickly down the one-way streets. The Amtrak passenger train passes by around 3:30, its trumpeting call interrupting phone and hallway conversations.

The thing that stays with me in each of these experiences is not the work itself. It's the feel of a place, and the people I meet.

The best job from the past — as memory recalls it, probably revised by time — was my fire tower post. Shortly after I arrived for duty in April, it snowed. I took a walk alone through the perfect white stillness. The pines were bent low. I saw the tracks of a deer in the crust of a deep drift. I stopped and closed my eyes. Remember this, I thought, breathing in the cold sweet air.

And I always have.

Vicki Hanson
Editor

I just received my first issue of Cal Poly Magazine and reviewed it from cover to cover. Thank you very much! I have been out of touch for quite some time . . . . My last trip to San Luis Obispo was for the last annual Poly Royal. I had hoped to return the following year, but that was not to be. Keep up the great work and I will be looking forward to my next issue of Cal Poly Magazine.

Sincerely,
— Robert W. Kempel (AERO '60)

From Our Readers continued on page 2

ON THE COVER

In an era when university presidencies average five years, 1999 marks the 20th anniversary of service to Cal Poly by President Warren J. Baker and his wife, Carly (shown here in front of the Performing Arts Center, San Luis Obispo).

The Bakers' special talent has been coalition-building. They have worked with representatives from the California State University System, the community, industry, and state, national, and international legislative groups to spearhead a variety of programs and projects together and individually (see story on pages 6-15).

We dedicate this issue of Cal Poly Magazine to President and Mrs. Baker as a special thank you for their stewardship over the years.

(Photo by Karen McLain)
From Our Readers continued from inside front cover

Those fortunate to have known Maurice Wilks [professor emeritus of the College of Architecture and Environmental design] were greatly saddened to have learned of his passing. Mauri was uncompromising in his professional standards: he always presumed that we were at Cal Poly to do our best, and he inspired us to live up to his — and our own — expectations. I will miss him as a friend as well as a colleague. Our world will be diminished by his absence.

— Chris Hungerland (CM ‘76)

Cal Poly Alumni Board Member Don Morris (PE ‘53, M.S. 59) wrote to send along a photo of Ena Marston he had snapped in a local restaurant (below). Marston taught English and art from 1946 to 1970 and worked for both President McPhee and President Kennedy. She taught English to Morris in 1950. “She was a great teacher and one of the few women teachers on the campus at that time,” says Morris.

According to Morris, Ms. Marston started the popular series “Books at High Noon,” and was in charge of the program for 10 years. At 92, she attends quarterly meetings of the Retired Faculty and Staff Club, is also active in the Central Coast Weavers, and serves on the board of directors of the San Luis Obispo Historical Society.

“The Alumni Association [c/o Alumni Relations Office, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407] would like to hear from anyone who knows of other faculty members from Cal Poly’s past,” writes Morris.