

La LOUISIANE

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A Long Day's Journey

Spend time with one of
USL's distinguished
professors



A LONG DAY'S JOURNEY

By
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Photography by Philip Gould

DARRELL BOURQUE looks like a cross between a '60s hippie and a cowboy. There is the now-graying ponytail, the neatly clipped mustache and wire-frame glasses. Jeans and boots give him a rugged look. And he has a cool

ride, a 1984 white convertible Cadillac, one of those big ones that could probably tow a horse trailer from here to Montana on one tank of gas.

But Bourque is an English professor, a poet and coordinator of USL's Interdisciplinary Humanities program.

He's the only recipient of both the Outstanding Teacher and Distinguished Professor Awards presented every year by the USL Foundation. He received them in 1996 and 1997, respectively.

Bourque's workday starts at 4 a.m., when he brews a cup of coffee to sip while reading students' assignments and preparing for his classes. By 5:30 a.m., he's at Red Lerille's to work out and by 8, he's in his office in Griffin Hall.

His days are often hectic. There are lectures to give, meetings with other faculty, and conferences with students. There are telephone calls and paperwork and a jillion details to remember.

And when he leaves campus at the end of the day, his work isn't over. For instance, he often visits Acadiana CARES, an AIDS awareness and support group, where he conducts an ongoing writing project as a community service.

Later, after unwinding a bit and having dinner at home, Bourque usually picks up another book to read.

And, as a poet, he is always writing, not with a pen, but subconsciously in his head, playing with words, sifting through images and emotions before crystallizing them into concise pieces of art.

Teaching is not just something he does. Teaching defines, in large part, who he is.

On Thursday, Sept. 18, 1997, *La Louisiane* spent the day with Darrell Bourque. The following pages reflect the life he has chosen.





BOURQUE exercises religiously at Red Lerille's early each morning to maintain the physical and mental stamina his work requires and to try to manage stress. "When I retire, I'm giving up my membership," he confides. "Don't tell Mr. Red."



"My work is a pleasure and a privilege. It is not primarily about information gathering. It is not primarily about task completion. It is about seeing the classroom or the learning space as a laboratory, or a refuge even. It is about exploration with absolute freedom."

THE ONE-ON-ONE work, particularly with graduate students, is one of the most rewarding things I do. I really care. I really care about these people's careers."



IN THEORY, Bourque should teach undergraduate and graduate courses, direct five graduate students' projects, coordinate the university's Interdisciplinary Humanities Program, conduct research and write poetry during the work week. But the poetry and research never get done at the office; his time is swallowed up by the other chores.

Although he enjoys his profession, he is sometimes frustrated by the amount of time he must spend on administrative duties. "When do the poems get written? When do the books get written?" he asks, rhetorically.

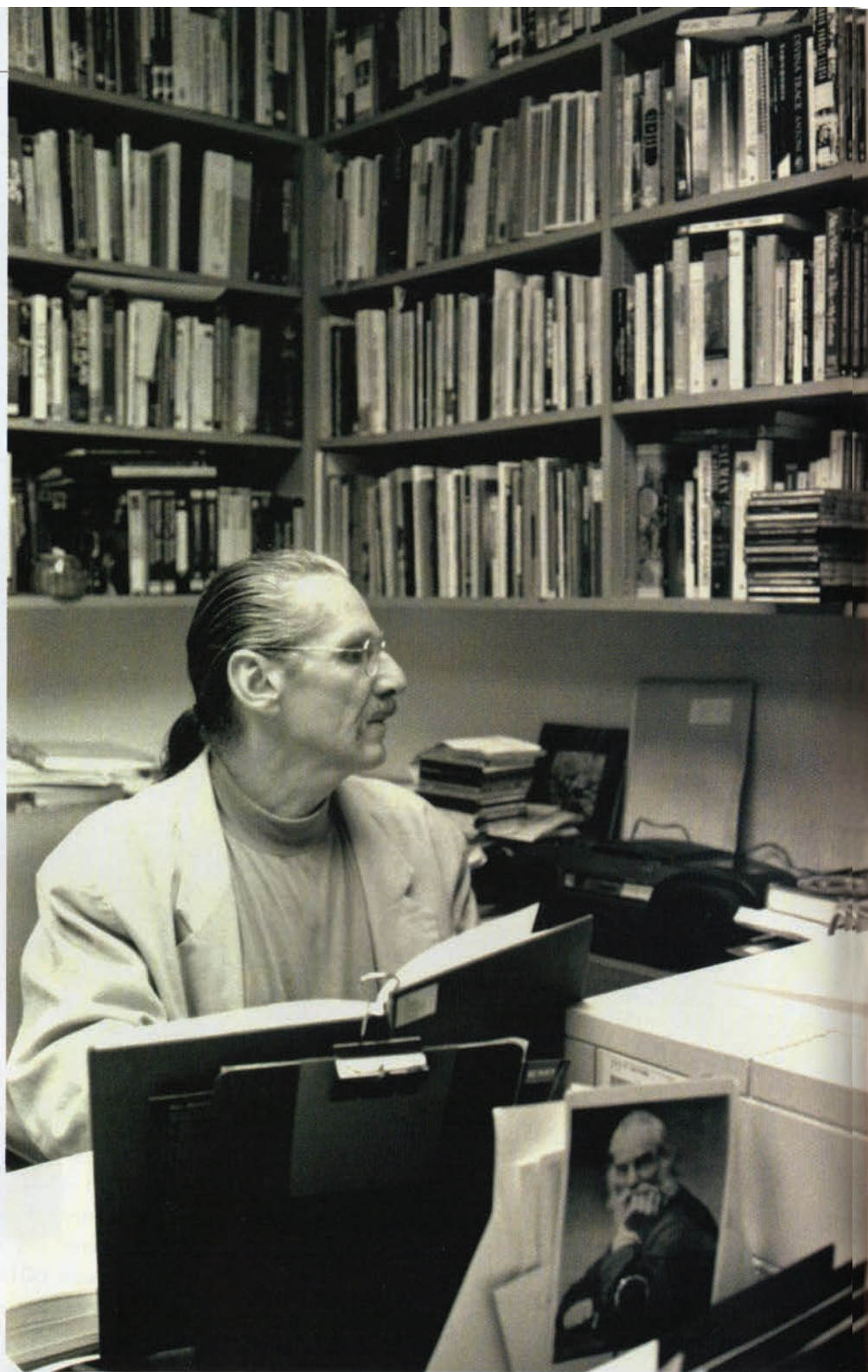
On this day, he took a few minutes to type some poems he had composed the previous weekend during a writing workshop in Mississippi.



"Teaching's goal is always in the direction of the uncharted, the undocumented. Its work is with the imagination and its end is imagination. If these statements seem ungrounded, I would remind that I teach—in poetry classes, in literature classes, in interdisciplinary humanities classes—the human imagination as it articulates itself in writing, in art, in music, in space and building design."

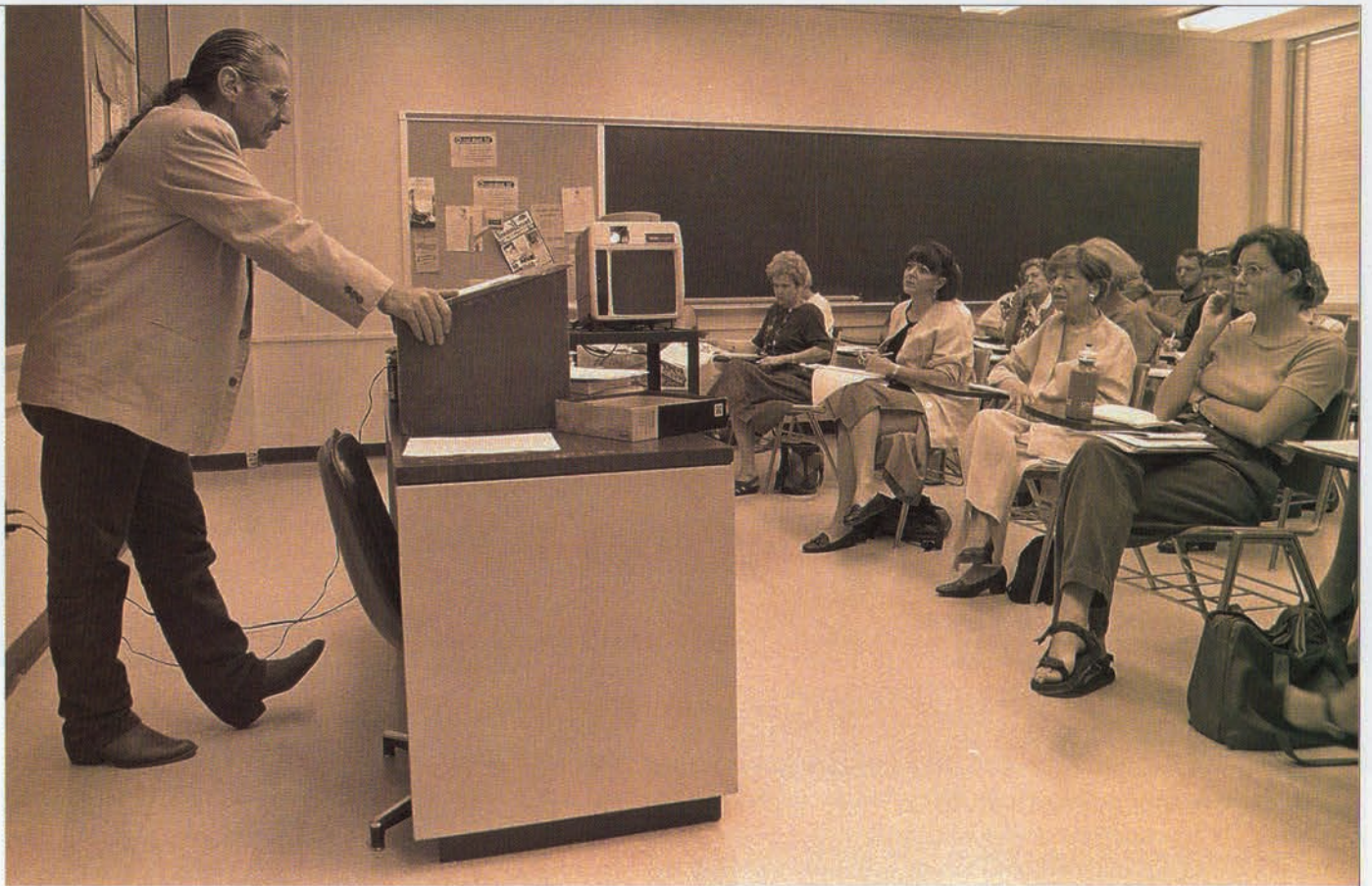
"I teach people to empower themselves through expression and to believe in the value and the authenticity of their own being."

"I have never viewed that work as tiresome or tedious, and I have always considered it a sacred thing that we do in the classroom."



BOURQUE became a teacher on the advice of his mother. "She said, 'Cher, you'll always be able to get a job.'"





BOURQUE stays a while after class is over. "I love when a group of students pulls me into a discussion or there is a person waiting to ask a question, when the class won't end."

HIS FIRST class of the day, a graduate humanities course, begins two or three minutes early and he lectures non-stop. "I take all my time, even though that upsets some people."

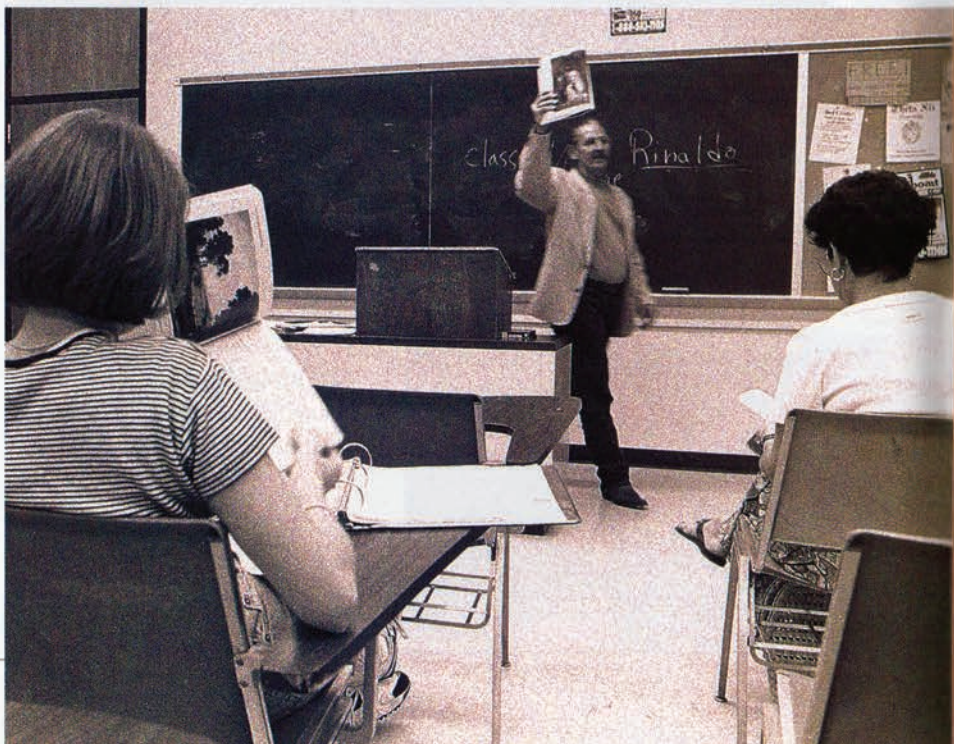
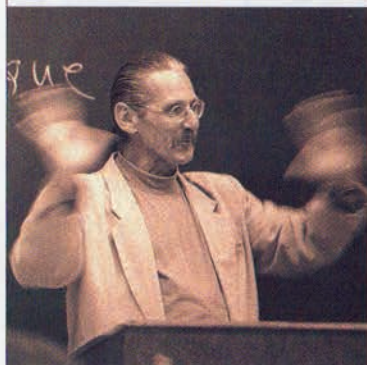




AFTER CLASS, Bourque reviews slides with Leslie Schilling, a Humanities resource aide. By 11:20 a.m., he's back in his office. He glances at his calendar, only to discover he has forgotten about a meeting with some other faculty members. "I'm late!" he exclaims, rushing out the door and down the hall to a conference room. He slips into a chair and, without skipping a beat, joins a discussion about which classes they'll teach next semester.

At noon, Bourque goes to the faculty lounge in Griffin Hall for a brown bag lunch, where he listens to a presentation by a colleague. He eats some leftover biscuits from Red's.

It's soon time to teach an undergraduate humanities course. Bourque makes an extra effort to be energetic when he walks into the classroom. "It's 2 p.m. They're tired, I'm tired," he explains. So, he shows slides, plays music and questions students to keep them engaged. They discuss King Louis XIV's strong influence on the arts in the 17th century. "He was a great dancer. But did the king get down? I don't think so," Bourque tells them.





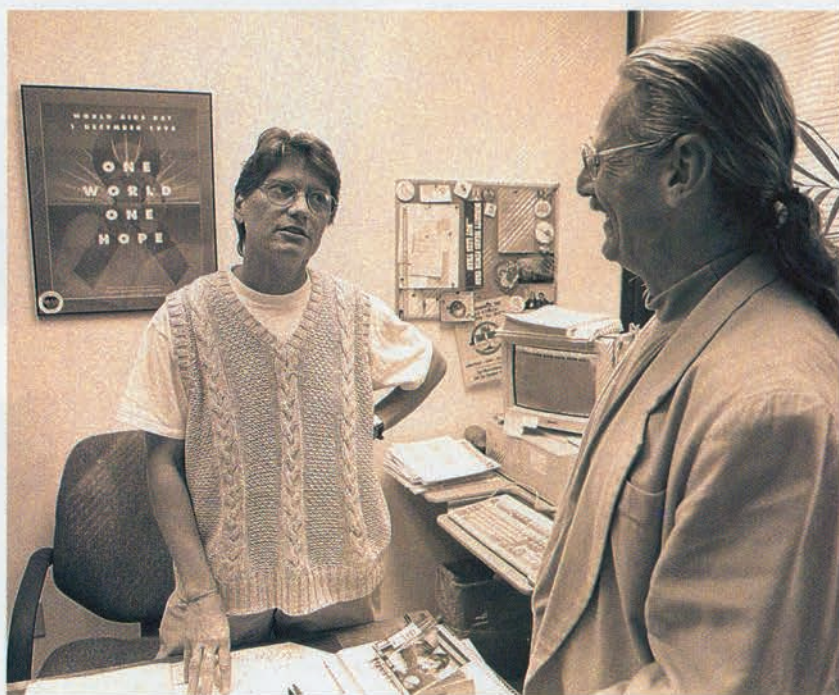
AS HE IS ABOUT to head home, Bourque bumps into long-time friend Barry Ancelet, a professor of modern languages, outside Griffin Hall. They speak for a few minutes, lapsing into French. Soon, it's time to go. " 'Bye, cher," he tells Ancelet. Driving away, he says: "That's my hero. He is so good. He does a lot of good work that people don't even know about. He's just such a wonderful teacher."

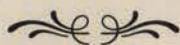
BEFORE he offered to conduct a writing project at Acadiana CARES, a support organization for people who are HIV positive, Bourque was warned it might take some time to gain their trust. That proved to be true. He spent an hour in the Acadiana CARES office every Thursday afternoon—for a year and a half—before any client would talk with him.

On this day, he dropped by the office on his way home and met with Mel Jolet, volunteer coordinator.

Although he is the teacher, Bourque said he learns from members of the writing project.

"They teach me something about being human. They teach me something almost monthly, about courage, about honor. And about dignity."

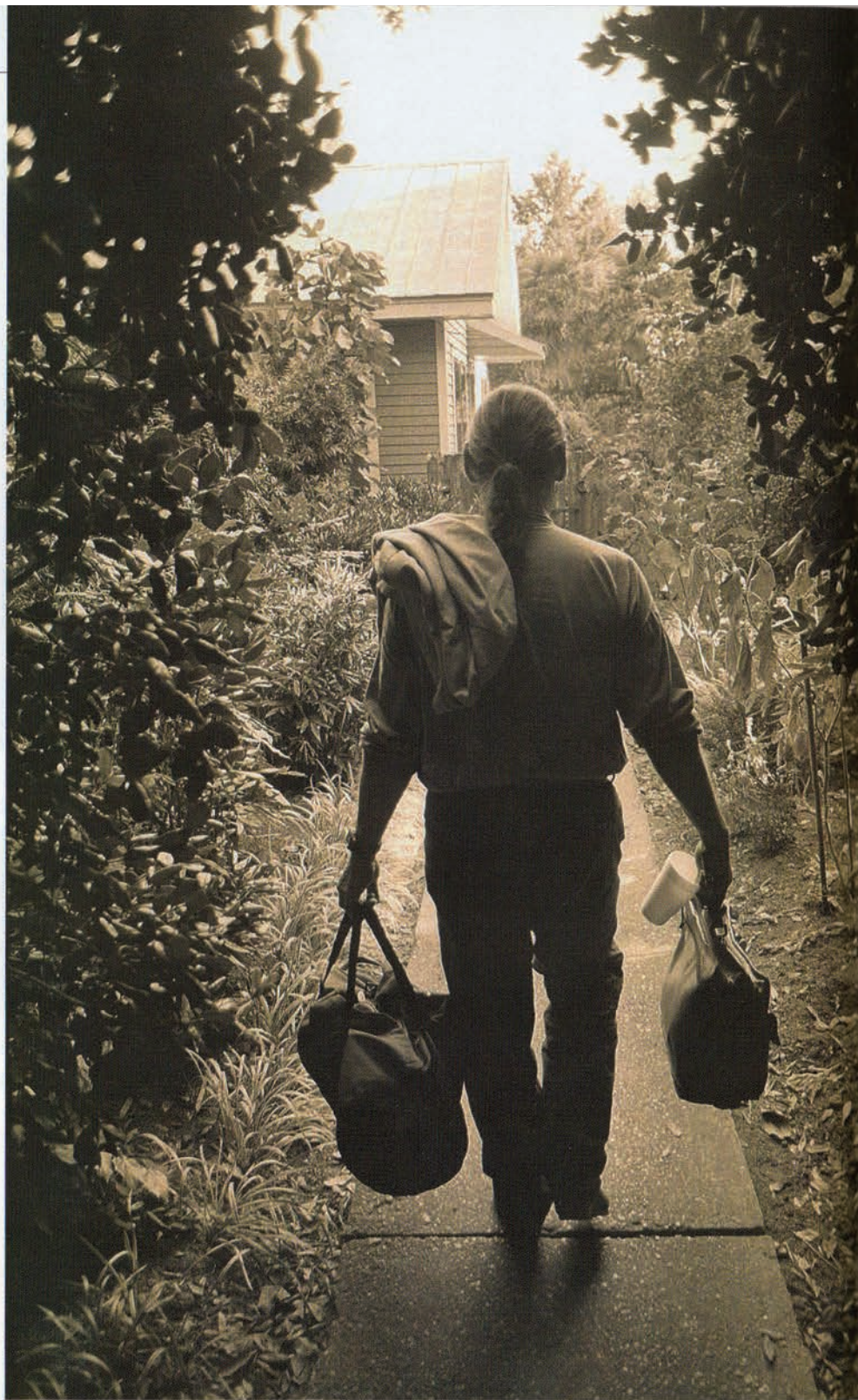




LE COURIR DE MARDI GRAS

By Darrell Bourque

Early in the morning all the men
of the grand courir line up
behind our leader, dressed in passion's
red. In cone and cape, looking like
a lost marauder of another time,
he takes us through the countryside
where we dismount at every house,
raising clouds of dust. Beating out
the tune. It is all triangle ring
and squeeze box strain. Sometimes,
even early in the day, we take our
brothers in our arms as we sing and
dance, forgetting we wear masks.
We get caught up in the act. We are
fire and air. We will not remember
until tomorrow our separateness,
and that we are also earth.



BOURQUE lives in the house he grew up in, between Sunset and Church Point. It is secluded, hidden from the road by trees and bushes. Sculptures by Acadiana artists Dennis Paul Williams and William Lewis grace the beautifully landscaped grounds.

"It takes me about half an hour or 45 minutes to get home. That's enough time to unwind. Unless I stop and see my mother and she gets me wound up again."





"As I move into the final phases of my career, I will remain open for whatever my work brings before me. If I can see my way to invitations to change, I will change."

*"These are the things I do not see changing: I will read vigorously in many areas, I will continue to support students, I will continue to believe in students, I will continue to work to show my students that I believe that their work, and ideas, and efforts are not only valued and worthwhile, but that their work is necessary for the well-being of those things that we value when we use the words *communitas, humanitas.*"*

THERE'S a pack of wild cats that he feeds every evening. He speaks of the moral dilemma he faces: They're not tame enough to catch so they can be spayed or neutered. But if he stops feeding them, they will leave, only to get killed on the highway or starve to death. So, he keeps providing cat food until he can find a solution.



MOST of the year, he relaxes after work by doing gardening chores. There is a large rose garden that must be tended and it's a never-ending battle to keep weeds at bay.

He has dinner with his wife Karen before settling into a favorite chair to read before catching some sleep.

It has been a long day and another is waiting for him.

