

Confidentiality and You

By Adam Levesque

I realize that people may not understand the importance of keeping information about Papyrus confidential. I thought I'd write this month about why it is important, and some rules to follow.

Why is confidentiality so important?

Well, there are many reasons why it is important. I'll use the most recent incident as an example. Someone at Papyrus told a Beta tester we were going to see "Real Sports," the developer of the "IRL Road to Indy" game. The tester actually thought we were going to see "ABC Interactive," the publisher of the title. Well, as it turns out, this tester was talking to ABC about a job, and consequently mentioned that Papyrus was coming to see them (ABC obviously figured out that it was "Real Sports" we were going to see). So, ABC called Real Sports and told them exactly what they could and couldn't show us re: the IRL game.

The whole upshot of this is that they couldn't show us very much of the product, so we didn't get a fair assessment of the game. This obviously makes it more difficult to decide if we want to do a product with them.

That's just one example. Another situation which can occur is that word of a product gets out before licensing is all wrapped up, so, a competitor with deep pockets (say, I don't know, Microsoft) comes in and "steals" the license from us.

Some rules to follow

Basically, the most important rule is not to tell anyone outside the company anything about what we are doing here unless it is previously released information or you are given explicit permission from the Producer of the product or Erica Kohnke, the PR manager. We are going to get "party lines" for each project and for the company so everyone will know what can and can't be said. Hopefully, we'll get this done soon.

Now, if you are working with someone outside the company on a project (this includes outside Beta Testers), a good rule of thumb is to only give information that person actually needs to do the job.

If you encounter any other "special" situations in which you are not sure what to do, please talk to your manager, or come see me.

I realize this may seem a little harsh to some, but it is crucial for us to effectively conduct business.

HR News

By Jill Dolan

Earlier this month my supervisor in the Bellevue, WA office decided to leave the company to pursue other interests (start her own business). Extensive interviewing went on and Ayesha Tidwell, formerly of the Legal Dept. at Sierra was offered and accepted the job of HR Director. Ayesha will handle all strategic planning for all of the divisions of Sierra. I will be traveling to Bellevue on July 14th to meet with Ayesha and all of the other divisional HR people. Ayesha also plans on making a trip out here to meet all of you. This will occur sometime in August.

The Computer Purchase Plan will not be reinstated at any divisions of the company. Too many people who left (at other divisions) defaulted on their loans. Unfortunately this hurts the company as a whole, therefore the program has been permanently discontinued.

As of October 1st we will be rolling onto a new 401K Plan. I will have more details after I go out to Bellevue. We may be upgrading our dental plan. If this does occur it will happen effective October 1st. I will keep you all posted on details as I get them.

I wanted to also mention that with both health plans (HMO Blue and Blue Choice) if you go to the hospital you must call your Primary Care Physician the next business day.

Our Life Insurance looks like it will be increasing to 2X annual salary instead of a flat \$25,000. I do not have any other details aside from the fact that this too will probably occur in early October.

Papyrus' Annual Summer Outing will be held at Mt. Wachusett in Princeton, MA on August 15, 1997 from 11AM-4PM. For those who have families, they are welcome to bring them and join in on the fun. All other employees are more than welcome to bring a guest. Softball (please bring mits/bats/balls), volleyball, hiking, bar-b-q/cash bar (non-alcoholic bev. are free) etc., and a ride on a lift to the top of the mountain are all parts of the fun. Mountain bikes/street bikes are not allowed on the hiking trails, but are allowed on the road that goes up the mountain. This is really a beautiful ride up the mountain and lots of bikes make the tre up. We will have the whole facility to ourselves. It should be a great day!

I would like to welcome all of our new employees:
Alen Yen – working in the Art Dept. (contracting)
Charlie Cleveland – working on Tools (contracting)
Eric Tran – working in the Art Dept.
Erica Kohnke – PR Manager
Leslie Sanders – Licensing Director

On December 7th we will be having our Holiday Party at the Museum of Science. There will be dinner, a jazz band, dancing (if you dance), and an Omni show "The Living Sea." We may also have a lazer show, but that is under negotiation right now. More details to come as the date gets closer. Please mark your calendars.





What are you currently working on inside Papyrus?

Michelle Balkan – Presently I am working on laying out the screens for Nascar Manager. I have been working collaboratively with Ken Driskell on the engineering side. Up to this point I have been developing the conceptual work, as well as learning to overcome the boundaries of the grey world of Microsoft Visual Basic. Over the past couple of weeks it has been undergoing a metamorphosis of sorts. I have been defining the underlying structure. It has been somewhat of an adjustment for me adapting to this type of design, coming from a print design background. I have been trying to uncover what aspects of print design are appropriate to game design, and which are not. What is most exciting about what I am doing to me is that I am getting to see my designs come to life. And I am getting to work among so many talented people.

Charley Bandes – I'm the producer for Reno Racer. Right now we're finalizing the design for the game, and working on getting the graphics engine up and running.

Hannah Burr – South Boston track.

Lou Catanzaro – I am working on Nashville Speedway USA for the Expansion pack, an end screen for SODA, the Sales Video, and conceptualizing a shared vision of NASCAR3.

Bill Claff – Soon I will be making the transition to spending more and more time on NASCAR3, which is the reason I came to Papyrus. My original feasibility study to prove that NASCAR3 could be a Windows95 application triggered the shift from DOS to Windows for GPL. I also worked on the Windows95 specific portion of the tasking system for the core. Since then I guess you'd say I'm trying to revolutionize the way we document our upcoming, ongoing, and past work. Recently I've been on an "archaeological dig," finding documents pertaining to ongoing and past work. Now I'm working on making this more accessible and on the infrastructure required to make it easy for everyone at Papyrus to participate in the future.

Charles Cleveland – Ok, I'm working on tools with Evelyn. Specifically, improving makemip, SGE and SFE. Also hope to bring about some higher-level changes to the whole tools area.

Kasson Crooker – Nascar Manager, GPL, Nascar3.

Tom Faiano – Busch Track Pack. Busch Track Pack. Busch Track Pack.

Joanna Gardy – What's been taking up most of my time the last two weeks is the packaging for SODA Off-Road Racing and the Grand National Series Expansion Pack. This mostly means working with Creative Services (Sierra's pseudo "art department") and the producers on box copy, images for the box, and working with Leslie Sanders to make sure everything is kosher with NASCAR and SODA from a licensing aspect. InterAction magazine is also circulating its next crop of articles for the Fall issue, in which SODA and Grand National Series will be featured. So, I've been working with them to make sure the articles are accurate, etc. Not to mention a slew of other smaller projects. :)

Isabelle Garbani – I am still working on the Busch track pack: finishing up cars and continuing with the California Speedway.

Morgan Hastings – I'm working on the Gateway track for the trackpack. We don't have a lot of time for it, so in the immortal words of Au Bon Pain, "Good food served quickly."

Mike Lescault – I'm producing/designing NASCAR Manager. The team and I are currently working towards a late winter/early spring release. I am also the Product Manager on NROS, helping to coordinate the overall business and online strategy. NROS is due out... um... well, when it's out. In my spare time I'm producing CART World Series, which will be a re-release of IndyCar II, scheduled for this fall. More importantly, I am one of the founding members of the growing Australian Rules Asteriods League. ARAL members do it with their thrusters on. Anything else is just arcade mode....

Brian Mahony – Lead Senior artist on GPL. I'm currently working on refining the cars, design and layout of the interface, box art mockups, story-boarding the intro sequence, and helping out the marketing department.

Matt Marsala – Producer - GNS Expansion Pack.

Dave Matson – Working on NROS competition, design, and operations.

Dan Roeger – I'm designing the track "Hickory" for the Busch Track Pack. I also have the "Eagle" F1 car to finish.

John Scott – NROS (sun replay and bugs).

Matt Sentell – I'm the Producer of GPL. For those of you (and I'm sure there are many) wondering just what a Producer does: We have direct responsibility for product development (which combines engineering, art and QA), and we work with Marketing, PR and Licensing as relates to our specific product(s).

Ryan Smart – Engineering for Grand National Expansion Track Pack (most people know it as Busch Track Pack), thinking ahead to multiplayer tradeshow and N3.

John Spadafora – NROS forever. N2 someday RSN.

Julie Sparks – I'm working on track textures for the Milwaukee Mile, and agonizing over dirt and grass. In my spare time I'm thinking about how to fascillitate communication within the company further via the up-n-coming Papyrus Intranet (internally-based web pages just for the company), and taking care of the newsletter.

Ken Swan – Currently, I'm working on the testing of NROS. I've been working with Jane on improving and documenting Testing requirements, procedures, and techniques. Also, I'm assisting Jane in interviewing consultant testers for SODA. I've been working with Joel creating additional Lotus Notes databases for the Testing Dept. (main work focus, project bug report databases), Tony Johns' Papyrus Web Service Requests database (currently under construction), the HR Workspace Improvement Database and Discussion Database, and improving the use of Lotus Notes features in the company's databases. I've been working with Priscilla on getting the licensing together for the Grand National Track Pack. Inadvertantly, I started working on a crude licensing database. :) (I know, yet another database.) Once, when I was talking with Priscilla about what information I had, I displayed the information in this crude database. Priscilla was so happy that I had done this. She mentioned to me that it would be really helpful for the Licensing Dept. to keep track of the vast information that is contained in our Licensing Agreements in some kind of database. As I worked more with the licensing, I realized that they have a virtual mountain of information that is required for each product that we do. Oh my!! Now, I will be working on getting this information together and placed in this database for the Licensing Dept. It's currently in its early stages, but with Leslie and Priscilla's help, I hope it will become a valuable tool for them to use in the future. Phew!!!

Eric Tran – I am currently working on the Busch track pack for Nascar 2.

Steve Travers – Producer - SODA Off-Road Racing.





What is your personal web page address (if you have one)?

Michelle Balkan – I don't have one. (Not yet anyway.)

Bill Claff – www.tiac.net/users/bclaff. Not an award-winning site but the content covers a wide range of interests from old computer articles written for the Boston Computer Society to underwater photographs, artwork, and cartoons.

Charles Cleveland – Here are two: <http://k2.scl.cwru.edu/~gaunt> and <http://rhombus.net/~reindeer>.

Kasson Crooker – This is not my own personal, but the one for my band... <http://cvb.drawbridge.com/splashdown/index.html>.

Tom Faiano – Don't have one. Won't have one.

Isabelle Garbani – I used to have a web address in the old days of HTML 1.... The background was grey, tables did not exist back then, and school was uphill both ways.

Morgan Hastings – Come visit "The H files" for some cool iconoclastic diatribe: <http://www1.shore.net/~dhsu/morgan/hfiles>. If you've seen Notes' alt.flame then you've seen some of it. Soon to be added is "Allie Fox's guide to our Calendar."

Mike Lescault – Someday... maybe.

Dave Matson – I refuse. And I won't get one of those newfangled so-called 'microwave' ovens, either.

Dan Roeger – Currently I don't have a web page. I am, however, researching and designing my page which will probably be up in a couple of weeks. It will feature many of my 2D and 3D illustrations along with numerous animations I have created.

Matt Sentell – My what?

Ryan Smart – www.ultranet.com/~smart (It's very unfinished.)

Julie Sparks – www.obscure.org/~dew is my own personal page, although it is in serious need of revamping now that I know how to do TABLES! www.tiac.net/users/feathers is my cross-stitching page which I am currently working on.

Ken Swan – My web page (currently under HEAVY construction) - <http://www1.usa1.com/kjswan/mypage.htm>. I just started so don't expect too much. :)



What is one of your favorite places on the web?

Michelle Balkan – I don't have one. I must confess I haven't explored the internet very much at all. I have been meaning to get hooked up at home. But haven't as of yet.

Charley Bandes – I'm pretty much sick of the web by now, but my favorite sites are Salon - <http://www.salonmagazine.com>, and Stim - <http://www.stim.com>.

Hannah Burr – I'm not a big internet type, but I did enjoy the New Kids on the Block or "NKOTB" fan sites.

Lou Catanzaro – NASCAR ONLINE. You knew I would say that. www.nascar.com.

Bill Claff – I do a great deal of browsing for specific topics using various search engines, but don't have a single favorite place I visit. That said, some of the most interesting material I have found has been by following links from www.nasa.gov.

Kasson Crooker – <http://www.cmj.com> - This is a company that tracks music played on college radio. Each day they feature 2 new bands with info and streaming audio. You can also go back and browse previous picks of the day. It's a really good site to keep up on new music, bands, and music industry news.

Charles Cleveland – (This one isn't too surprising.) Veggies Unite! :) Lots of veg recipes, resources, newsgroups, movements and more. Wow. <http://www.vegweb.com>.

Tom Faiano – Well, obviously it's www.nascar.com!!! How silly of you to ask!!!

Isabelle Garbani – www.smokingvideos.com. That's all I need to say.

Morgan Hastings – Jesus' homepage. Anyone who tries to imitate this web page should be stoned. <http://members.aol.com/jesus316>.

Mike Lescault – www.Altavista.digital.com. Pretty lame, eh? I like www.internetweather.com as well, if only so I can see whose routers are blowing up on any given night.

Matt Marsala – <http://www.colby.edu/personal/jhbrown/main.html> - It is the "unofficial essential New Kids on the Block page." This is where I get all of my updates on Danny, Donnie, Joey, Jordan, and Jonathan - for example, Donnie's favorite TV show is Sesame Street and his words of advice are "Peace out" and "Just say no to drugs!", Jordan was recently chased out of a store by a man with a gun because he was mistaken for writing graffiti on the walls of the store... and more!

Dave Matson – They are often as guilty of bloated self-parody as the topics they cover, but I can't help but be amused by the faux/geek hipsters at www.suck.com. I just wish I was sure that they were in on the joke.

Alex Orlovsky – My favorite place on the web is X:\BCLAFF\GPLLINKS.HTM. Check it out!

John Scott – I'm boring; I don't have a favorite place... :-)

Matt Sentell – Online Gaming Review (www.ogr.com). The most timely computer gaming news I know of, with multiple daily updates. Mike Lescault claims that he started it as a printed magazine just before joining Impressions but I'm not convinced yet.

Ryan Smart – My web favorites are too mercurial to lock down one. By the time this gets printed, I'll be sick of it. But I usually stick around the Lurker's Guide to Babylon 5 (at <http://www.midwinter.com/lurk/lurker.html>). I love this TV show.

John Spadafora – www.ten.net OR www.anchordesk.com OR www.windows95.com. Anchordesk is a Ziff Davis highlight page and Windows95 is a good site for Win95 drivers and software.

Julie Sparks – <http://www.bio.bris.ac.uk/research/crocs/wongs.htm> - Wong's Green Iguana Heaven.
<http://www.clark.net/pub/innanen/stephanie> - Stephanie's Thoughtful Spot. (A pretty cool Winnie the Pooh page.) <http://dau.physics.sunysb.edu/~ming/sos/index.shtml> - The Save Our Sailors Campaign Headquarters. (All the latest info on Sailor Moon!)

Steve Travers – www.atomicbooks.com - "Literary Finds for Mutated Minds" - Alternative Books, Comics and Fanzines.

Ken Swan – ESPN - espnet.sportszone.com. Pepsi - www.pepsi.com. Cool Java Site!!!! NASCAR Online - www.nascar.com. USA Today - www.usatoday.com.

FEATURED

ARTIST

Isabelle Garbani



Nude Sketches



Art Direction and the Department of Art

By Sandro Carella

What follows is an excerpt of a longer discussion about the Department of Art (DOA) that I gave for producers and managers some time ago. It is part of an evolving documentation and structure of our department and how it works. I thought that someone might find it of interest. Keep in mind they are notes and not prose, but the points should come across anyhow. I hope that this is of interest to Julie's newsletter.

This section will focus on the Art Department and describe the roles that people in the Department play, and how it comes together. A description of my own vision for my job as the Art Director is central to the discussion.

Intro: What does the Art Director Do?

I think that many people wonder what exactly my job is. A brief history is probably in order. I started at Papyrus answering phones when IndyCar Racing shipped in 1993. My first actual assignment was to find an Art Director. I suppose I failed at this task, because I never got around to it. I began to interview and hire Artists for NASCAR Racing and I haven't stopped since.

My background is in the Arts and Music. Despite an Economics degree (it only required 6 full courses), most of my studies were in fine arts, drawing, painting, graphic design and music. Architecture has always been a fascination for me, the idea of designing and building spaces. I spent 2 years at the MIT Department of Architecture coordinating admissions and handling hundreds of portfolios, and at the Media Laboratory (which had just been dedicated). There I collaborated with a group of grad students in the Center for Advanced Visual Studies to produce a multimedia production called Urban Viscera, a primal documentary of the evolution of human life from the Big Bang. This was what one might call real time multimedia, in that we had to play instruments, cue reels of video, move lights around and pull paintings up on ropes in a big interactive theater space. It was as exhausting as it was creative.

I write and compose my own music and had actually left college for 3 years to play in a rock band in the early 80's called "Crosstown." Other boring career pursuits include 2 years of managing Steve's Ice Cream stores, MIS Management, street music in NYC, building and construction in NY and PA, architecture design studios, and a brief stint in Arizona and Las Vegas working as a short order cook in a Swensen's Restaurant. Don't even ask.

Vision of our products

The first thing I try to do is establish a clear vision of what our products should look like. What are their salient characteristics, what level of realism are we trying to achieve? What is the saturation level of color, what is the

visual vocabulary of the world we are trying to represent? What are the methods that we will have to employ and the tools that we have at our disposal to do this?

Setting them Apart

Thinking about what they should look like is part 1. I later consider what are the types of things that will set them apart from other products. For instance, can the interface be different from the traditional – bold, fresh new and exciting. NASCAR 2 is a case in point.

I am not a game player, and I spend as much time as I need to examining other real time products to get a sense of the state of the art in visuals, but prefer not to dwell on other products. Anyone who believes that to excel in this business one needs to be a gamer need only ask Dave Kaemmer how many games he plays.

Hire and Staff to the Vision

Once a clear vision is in place, I look for people who can produce artwork that is consistent with that vision. This may be the single most important part of the job, before the artist arrives. It is easy to digress at this point, so I should ask people how much they want to hear. The process of maintaining the vision begins after the group is on board.

Support the Artists

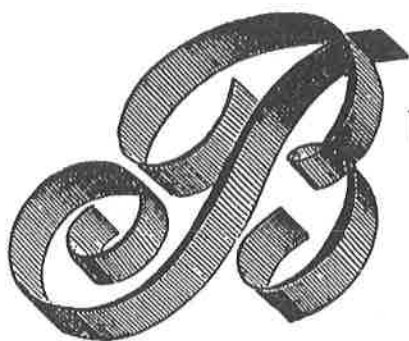
Creating an environment where artists may grow is critical to the success of the group and goes to the core of what we are about. The process of regular and thorough employee reviews, consistent feedback, interaction and cooperation create an atmosphere where we can realize the full potential of all the individuals, while learning from each other. The group is encouraged to care about each other, and to help each other out when a project is in trouble. Many of you have witnessed this dedication first hand. This is the single most important part of directing the DOA after the artists arrive.

Communicate Vision to Senior Staff

Clearly, the Senior level artists must share a common notion of excellence, so that our benchmarks for product quality are the highest possible. Regular discussions with the Senior staff are essential to bringing about this result.

Lastly, I should say that my philosophy of direction is basically non-direction, and letting naturally the talent of the group guide itself. The less I intervene, it seems, the better we do.





Buck Baker Racing School

— Up Close and Personal

By Tony Johns

INTRO

A few weeks ago, I was notified that Rick Baker, Dave Matson, Kasson Crooker, and I would attend the Buck Baker Racing School at Rockingham, NC. For those of you who don't know, the Buck Baker school is a NASCAR Winston Cup training program that has seen the likes of Jeff Gordon, John Force, Johnny Benson, Ward and Jeff Burton, and many many others. It is held over three days at one of three race tracks — North Carolina Motor Speedway (aka Rockingham), Richmond, VA, and Atlanta, GA. The track we were to attend is widely known as one of the most demanding tracks on the Winston Cup circuit — which is why it is known as "The Rock."

To say I was excited goes too far into understatement to describe. I have been a racing fan all my life, and I am particularly obsessive about NASCAR. In fact, I moved my family 2500 miles to Boston just to work here, just because Papyrus does racing simulations. I thought that was as close as I'd ever come to really racing. Now I had the chance to really do it!

We left Papyrus on Thursday July 10th and flew into Raleigh. After picking up our rental Monte Carlo (ask Rick how well it drove, then duck), we headed off on I-40 to US 1, aiming for Southern Pines and the Hampton Inn. For those of you who like golf, that area hosts the Pinehurst links, as well as about a hundred other courses. On our way down, we got a great view of classic Southern Americana (remember, I'm a Yankee tried and true) — lots of trucker motels, churches, a few tobacco farms, and even a barn boasting a whole wall of hubcaps. I never knew there were "Biscuitville" restaurants. And I'll never forget seeing the exit to "Colon Road" with a construction sign saying "Two Way Traffic."

We got in kind of late to Southern Pines. The Hampton Inn is situated just as you get into the Southern Pines shopping area, right next to a Winn-Dixie (which was heaven for a Mark Martin fan like me... more on that later). We grabbed a pizza after checking in at the hotel, then went to Food Lion to stock up on water and Gatorade for the next day. As we put the styrofoam cooler into the trunk, we accidentally crunched off part of one side and cracked it all the way down the side. D'oh! Secretly, we all believed it was the fault of the black dog-thing (a singularly hideous sight that can only be described as... "WHAT THE HECK WAS THAT THING!").

DAY ONE

We woke up at 7:15am on Friday. Most of us were insomniacs due to our excitement and nerves, so we didn't have to do much waking up at all. After scouring the town, we finally decided on "Mac's Breakfast Anytime" (which, ironically, is only open from 5am to 2pm). One word — GREASE! We were to find that most restaurants served things much greasier than we were used to, we being Yankees and all. After loading up on some malted waffles and eggs, we headed out to Rockingham.

Rockingham is about 15-20 miles south of Southern Pines on US 1. It rises up all of a sudden on the horizon — first thing you see is a big yellow Prestone billboard on top of a big bank of grass. As you round the corner to the right, Rockingham is on your left, and the Rockingham Dragway is on your right. We pulled into the parking lot and, after about five minutes of searching, found the access tunnel to the infield. We piled out of the car and took a few pictures of the track. It seemed smaller than I imagined it. From a distance the turns don't seem very banked or very wide. But I knew from hearsay that images like that are deceptive, so I reserved judgment for later. Our first meeting was in the infield cafeteria, so we headed there.

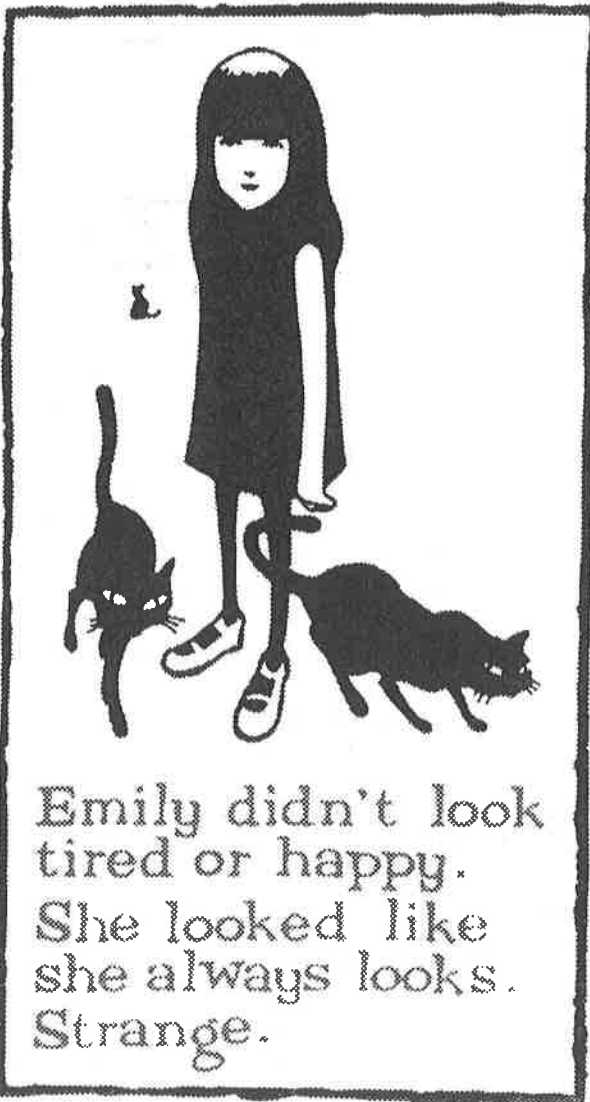
At 9am we met Dick Emerick, our "den mother" for the weekend, and Joe Poindexter, one of our instructors. Joe gave us a quick introduction, and then dove into a "what we'll be doing" speech. All of us were pretty sober as he told us all the ways we could screw up. "This is not a driving 'experience,'" he said. "This is a racing school. You are here to learn to do what the pros do. Some of you will go on to the advanced course and eventually make it to the big time. There will be a million ways to get yourself hurt out there — we're not going to coddle you. So be patient, start slow, and get to know your limits."

After the speech, we went around the room and introduced ourselves. We were the only real Yankees besides Alex and his business manager, and we quickly got nicknamed "The Boston Racing Team." Among the group was a Japanese fellow called Hiro who was there to get ready for the NASCAR exhibition in Suzuka in November, and Alex Padilla from the Indy Lights racing series, who is considering trying to make the Fontana Busch race this fall. Not to mention the two building contractors from Florida with the pre-fabricated wives. I'm telling you, those two women had more enhancements than the Bionic Woman. Dave called them the "Implant

Chicks." Add to the mix a surly kid named Michael Benson, who seemed to hate everyone and let his dad/grandpa/relative do the talking for him; a thirty-year-old mother of two named Cynthia from Kansas; and a dirt tracker from Tennessee named Jerry whose spray bottle/electric fan kept us cool for two days.

Following introductions, we went out and walked the track to get the feel for the racing line. The banking up close was INCREDIBLE! Standing on the apron, the asphalt is like a black wall that reaches up about three or four stories. Turns one and two are banked at 22 degrees, and three and four are 25 degrees. But it sure looks like more when you're standing on it trying not to fall over. Joe gave us all a lot of information that went in one ear and out the other — it was hard to really capture what he was talking about just by walking the track. Made for some good video footage, though.

Once we got back from that, we went for a drive in a minivan with Joe to get a driver's feel of the line. Going into the turns at 60mph in that van was unsettling. The van is top-heavy and doesn't like being at that angle. But it gave us a good reference for when we eventually got out there on our own. Following that we had a quick overview of the cars — harness system, water and oil temperature, oil pressure, tach, and ignition/starter systems. It went pretty well, except for me — I bashed my arms on the roof and window ledge trying to get in. Next, we got fitted for driving suits and helmets, and then it was time for the instructors to take us around the track. We had heard the cars out on the track getting warmed up and we couldn't wait to get in there and try it on for size.





I was the first one to go out. I won't lie — I was scared out of my mind. Joe was my driver and we were going out in a replica of the Mark Martin Valvoline car. Even the thought of driving in my favorite driver's stock car didn't make me feel any less nervous. I wedged myself into the right-hand seat of the car and fastened my five-point Simpson harness. The car smelled like high-octane gas, exhaust, and rubber — a very sweet combination. I noticed my seat didn't have rib protection; Joe told me to wrap my arm around the center rollcage cross-bar for support. He took me out for a five lap run, starting out at 3000 rpm which is roughly 60-70mph. It was much different from the van — the car stuck like glue to the track and you could feel the G-forces pulling stronger in the turns. The first two laps around were slow so I could get the hang of the line and the cockpit procedure — exit turn, check mirror, check a gauge (water 180-200, oil

pressure 60-80), set up for turn. Then Joe put the spurs to it, and instantly my brain flew out my ears and my stomach fell to the floor of the car. We dived into the turns and I felt like I was in a NASA centrifuge. Joe was motioning for me to watch his hands on the wheel ("Steady, no movement — just smooth"), but I could barely hold on. After the fifth lap we dropped low on the backstretch (there were two other cars out there at the time), Joe waved his arm and tested the brakes, and then we dropped off the banking and into the pits. I was sweating getting out of the car, but I was PUMPED! It had to have been the most exciting thing I'd ever done. I asked Joe later how fast we were going. Since our reference was tachometer readings, he told me we hit about 6800rpm at the end of the backstraight. To give you perspective, Winston Cup drivers hit 8-9000rpm (depending on gearing). Incredible!

Joe and I switched places after everyone had had their rides, and I went around for about 5 laps (driving the 6 car! YES!). The car was still running, but I was afraid I'd stall it going out of the pits. Not to worry — I slid out of the stall like I had done it for years. During my run I had a death grip on the wheel and only went 3000rpm, mostly out of fear that I would do something wrong. Joe would reach over and adjust my line with the wheel as I went around to give me an idea of where to lift and where to accelerate. Afterwards, he said I was "very tense," but that I "seemed to know where I was going." That gave me a confidence boost, and I hoped for better things during the two solo sessions later in the day.

After lunch at Wendy's in Rockingham (which, by the way, is like a NASCAR shrine), it was time to start the driving in earnest. At Buck Baker, they kick you out of the nest VERY quickly. Your first solo is with five other students on the track at a time — talk about getting kicked out of the nest! I learned to my joy that I was assigned the 6 car for Friday and Saturday, so I climbed in and strapped in. After the instructor mounted the steering wheel on the column, I flipped the ignition switch to on and flicked up the starter switch. The motor roared to life, and I must tell you it was the most heart-stoppingly adrenalizingly cool sound I'd ever heard. The instructor pointed at me, and off I went. It was a different experience this time. I felt completely at home in the car by myself, and I hit every mark on my line. I made it up to about 3500rpm during the first 10 lap run. Thanks to a cloudy day and a good breeze, it was only about 100 degrees in the car — it was quite comfortable. I couldn't believe I was at the wheel of a Winston Cup stock car, but it was happening and I felt wonderful. The car seemed to have limitless power and would go anywhere I put it on the track. The car actually felt *better* at higher speeds.

My second 10-lapper was a bit more intense. Kasson was ahead of me in the #87 Olds, a Hutcherson-Pagan car that was Cale Yarborough's last Winston Cup ride. I was coming up on him in turn three, and I was hoping to set up a pass on the front stretch. I had shifted from first to fourth coming out of the pits on this run, so I wanted to make up for it by having a technically good session. Kasson went into turn three too low — he forgot to check a gauge on the backstretch and tried to do it quickly in the turn. He clipped the apron of the track with his left front, which got the car way out of shape. About four car lengths behind him I was sighting my marks in turn three. I looked up to see Kasson shoot up the banking and shuffle along the wall. I didn't have time to be startled — I rolled gently out of the throttle, chucked the shifter into neutral, and dove down pit road to avoid him, just as Joe waved the yellow to bring everyone in. Kasson was okay — he just took some

paint off of the right side of the car. But he left a big black tire mark on the wall — all of us looked at that the rest of the weekend to remind ourselves that it only took a little bit to get in over your head.

Although I was pretty shaken at having a near miss on my first day, I was elated at the progress I had made. My best lap was a 45 second lap. Sure, it was 20 seconds slower than the qualifying record, but it felt fast to me. All of us were eager to get on with some faster laps the next day.

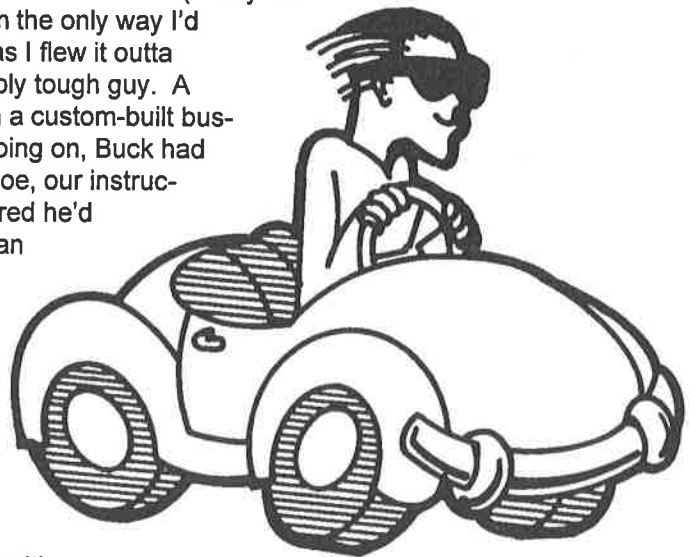
DAY TWO

Day two was basically a two-driver session for the Boston Racing Team. Kasson was still hesitant to leap back into the car, so he decided to take a day to think about it. Dave had been reacquainting himself with his dinner from the previous evening all night, and at lunch we took him back to the hotel to sleep it off. So it was basically Rick and me for most of the day.

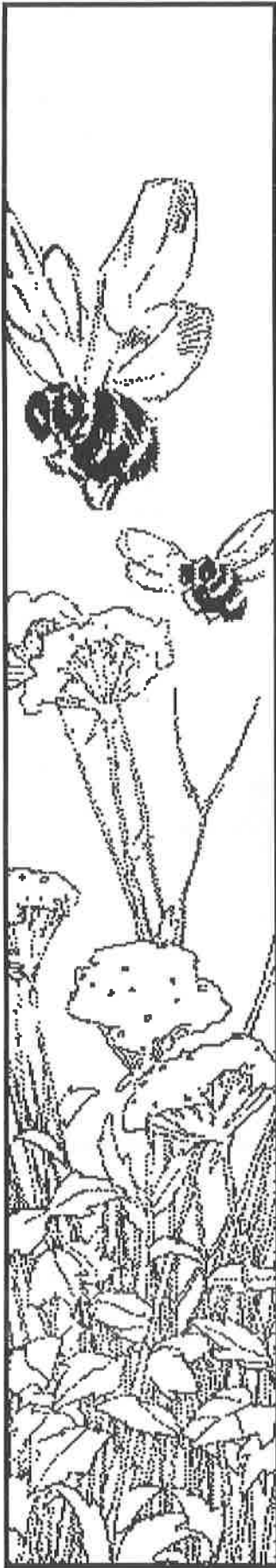
While waiting for our first runs, the Papyrus group talked a lot with Alex Padilla. He and his business manager, John Morgan, were very open and friendly, and soon took to spending a lot of time with us at the track. They were big fans of NASCAR 2 and IndyCar 2, and when Alex was not driving they would hang around with us and do the cock'n'bull. Alex has raced with a lot of notables (Buzz Calkins, Gualter Salles, Jerry Nadeau, and others) and we had a great time schmoozing with him. We told him about GPL, and when we mentioned it he got a gleam in his eye and told us he'd be by the office to try it out soon. He was VERY cool, incredibly laid back and just a great all-around guy. Not to mention a fast driver — he consistently had the best session times and was signed up for the advanced course, which was one-on-one with Randy Baker (Buck's son) on the track.

Buck wasn't feeling well on the first day, but on Saturday he was fit as a fiddle. He regaled us with stories of racing the Southern 500 with a pair of vise grips as his steering wheel, of landing an airplane in the Rockingham infield because he was late for the race ("They told me to disassemble it to get it out of there. I told them the only way I'd disassemble the sumbitch was on the turn two wall as I flew it outta there."), and a million other stories. He is an incredibly tough guy. A couple years back someone came to the school with a custom-built bus-style motor home. Before anyone knew what was going on, Buck had the bus on the banks and was running laps with it. Joe, our instructor, was with him, and he told us it was the most scared he'd ever been in his life. But ol' Buck at 78 is tougher than anyone I've ever met.

To illustrate — during one of the sessions Buck climbed into a Craftsman Truck that Randy had been testing that morning. Buck shuffles along very slowly when he walks and spends most of the day in the air-conditioned van instead of walking around. But once his helmet is on — LOOK OUT! Before the poor students on the track knew it, Buck was passing them high, passing them low, and with one poor fellow who was getting a reputation for ignoring his mirrors even trading paint in turn three! He was driving like a wild man out there, but you never questioned if he had control or not. After he slowly exited the truck, he had a big ol' grin on his face. I could only pity the guys that were on the track and privately thank my lucky stars that I wasn't out there during that session. At class pictures, Buck put up an "OK" sign but told us, "This don't mean you're okay, it means you're a bunch of assholes." Everyone was a "sumbitch" or an "asshole," but somehow you would take it as a compliment. What a guy!



I built my speed up steadily during the four runs I had on Saturday. Although I had a problem of entering turn one late, the instructors told me that I had a solid and consistent line. I told them I'd *better* have a consistent line after doing lap files! Someone was timing the laps and told me that I had worked down from 45 seconds to about 38 seconds. I was running in the region of 4500-5000 rpm in the straights. Not a blistering pace, but



faster than I'd ever hoped to go in my life. I could tell that I was going markedly faster — the G-forces were starting to pull on me in the turns. But the car was still rock solid and I still felt completely at ease.

During my second session, I had another scare. On the backstretch a piece of sand flew into my left eye and blinded me. I was at a point where I couldn't slow down to pit, so I was forced to hold my line through the turn with only one eye available. On the frontstretch I went low and waved the cars behind me on by, but I couldn't clear the sand out of my eye. Somehow I made it back to pit road without incident. How Ernie Irvan did it at race speeds wearing a patch is beyond me — I had a handful at 4000rpm.

After class was over, Alex told us that Buck had invited him to dinner, and he asked us if we wanted to come along. Well, we couldn't turn that down for anything. We went to the Lob Steer Inn, a favorite hangout for NASCAR drivers when they're in Rockingham. Buck and Joe sat us down and Buck called the cook to the table. Buck told him, "Give these sumbitches whatever they want to eat." After the cook left, Buck said, "Sometimes I let that boy come out to the track and run so's I can get good food here. The sumbitch can't drive worth a shit, but he sure can cook." Buck only stayed through about half of dinner, but he spent the whole time telling us stories about Joe Weatherly, Curtis Turner, Tim Flock, and some famous drivers who had been through his school. He told us that John Force "could drive 500mph on the straights, but when a turn came up he didn't know what the hell to do." He also said that ARCA is the best inroad to Winston Cup, not Busch — I found that particular tidbit interesting.

After Buck and Joe left, Alex picked up the tab and suggested we head over to Mini-Pines, a mini-golf/kart track nearby. We got lost, and on our way back Alex got pulled over for speeding. I guess the cop didn't believe Alex's story about being an Indy Lights driver, so Alex has to go back in August for a court date. Alex, of course, plans to appeal. We ran one lapping session at the kart track. We got whistled at a lot by the "officials" for rough driving, but we had a heck of a time and swapped a lot of paint. None of us could believe how genuinely friendly Alex and John were. Definitely a guy to root for come race day.

I went to bed happy with my progress but still wanting some more speed. I had the line down and was comfortable in the car, but I wasn't really pushing myself because I was more concerned with technique. Rick, on the other hand, was a rocket-driver and was one of the fastest cars on the track. Day three was shaping up to be an intense final session.

DAY THREE

Our final day at Buck Baker saw us doing some different things. Alex and Randy were picking up their speeds a lot. They were running 6500rpms about a foot away from each other out there. We were all very impressed that our friend and classmate was doing so well coming from open-wheeled racing. The advanced exercises Randy was putting Alex through took our breath away. It really highlighted the chasm between professionals and amateurs.

Dave was feeling better, and Kasson decided that it was time to get back into the driver's seat, so the Boston Racing Team was at full strength. Most of the one- and two-day students had gone home, so it was us and about 8 other people left to run lapping sessions. Joe promised us that today we'd do something a bit different from just hotlapping — we didn't care. We just wanted to be in the cars as much as possible.

Our first of four sessions was a pitting practice. We were to run a normal 10 lap run, but when we came into the pits Pineapple (another instructor — he grew up in Hawaii in case you were curious) would be holding a pit sign. We'd have to hit our marks in the pit stall and tap the left front fender of the car on the pit board to get it done right. I had switched cars from the 6 car to Kasson's #87 Olds, which had only gotten paint damage. It fit me a whole lot better than the 6 car but it had a very sensitive throttle and steering. My whole 10 lap run was trying to get a handle on the car. When I got the white flag from the flagstand (and yes, you can see things VERY clearly from the car) I pulled low and dove for the pits. Once on the apron I threw it in neutral and coasted down pit road. There were about four cars in the pits and Pineapple was holding the sign between two cars. ACK! I made it into the pits without crashing, though, so I was happy.

The next new item was passing practice. Until now we had been passing only on the outside on the straight-aways — the slower car would move down low and wave the faster car past. Now we were instructed to go out in pairs, four cars at a time, and make passes on the low side of the track. I was paired with Rick, who was wicked fast out on the track. For this session, I was put into yet another car, a Lumina, while Rick took his normal ride, which was the #23 Smokin' Joes car. I could never get comfortable in the Lumina — there was a dead spot in the steering wheel and the throttle didn't seem to want to roll out smoothly in the turns, so I had a handful for the whole session. Not to mention the fact that Rick had me outclassed in the speed department! He had agreed to take it easy so we could get used to passing, but immediately I found that I could never catch him on the straights in time to make a safe, clean pass. The first couple of times I tried a late pass, but I would enter the turn WAY too hot, and the second time I tried it I smelled burning rubber as I whipped up the banking. So I decided I'd only pass if I had position on him, which turned out to be a total of four times in ten laps. After the session, Rick very generously told me that he was sorry I couldn't catch up — I was too humiliated to really answer intelligently.

During our normal sessions, we were all very gratified to see Kasson get back into the car. He took it really easy, and none of us blamed him. But we didn't care — he was back in the seat and out on the track and that was all that mattered. We could tell Kasson was pretty happy with it too.

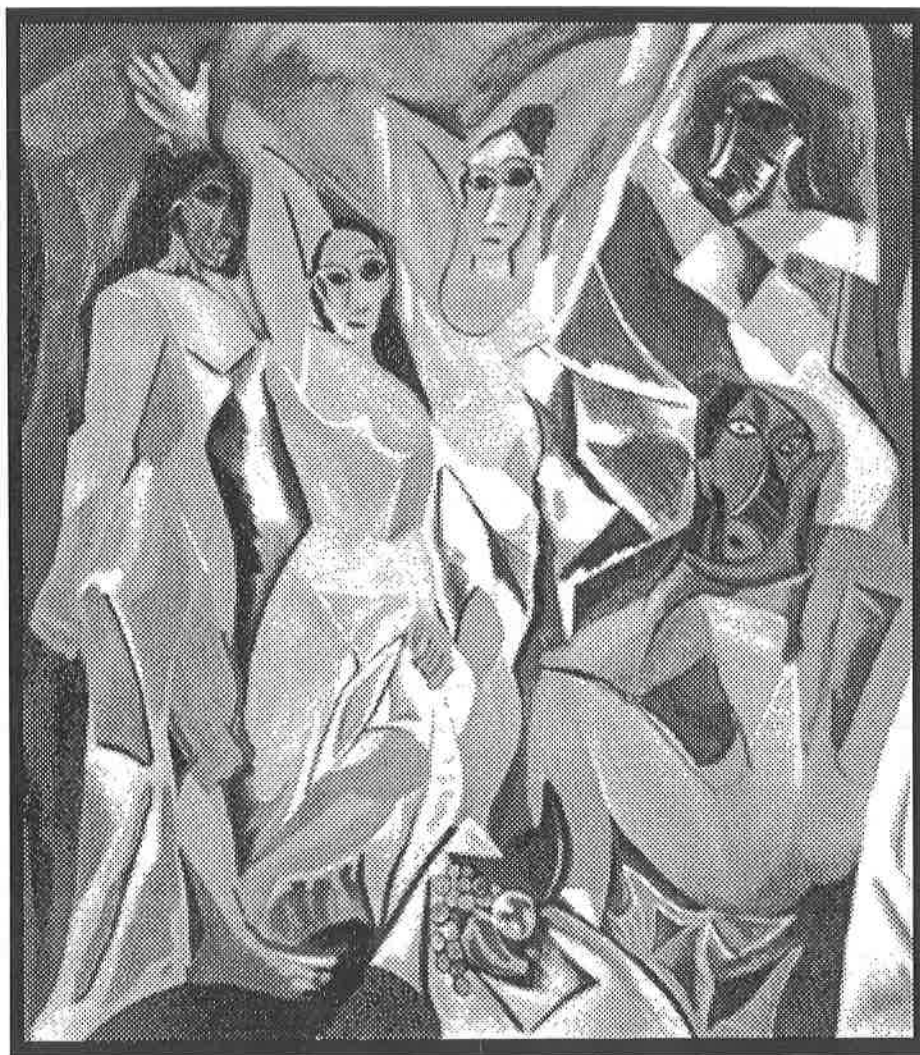
Our final session of the school was a fifteen lap run. Joe warned us that even five extra laps would be a lot, and if we got tired we should park it immediately. I wasn't about to do that — this was my chance to really show myself what I could do. Thankfully, I was back in the 87, and by the second lap I had gotten the revs up to 5500rpm at the end of the straights. One of my problems throughout the weekend was the frontstretch; Rockingham is a "D" shaped track, and the frontstretch curves around in inconsistent sections of wall. So if you try to "chase" the wall, you'll end up in it really quick. On the other hand, if you take the stretch too low, you end up at the entrance of turn one in a very bad position that forces you to wrench the wheel over and dive into the turn hot. The way to get through it is to sight on a section of wall out of turn four, and then straddle a seam in the asphalt that runs the length of the straightaway. If you do it right, you can hold the wheel motionless at 10 and 2 and the car will drive itself in the perfect line all the way down, with the stagger and setup doing the arc for you. I had never hit it exactly right all weekend — only one or two others had, really. I was always too low, probably because I didn't trust the wall. On my fourth lap of the session, I suddenly hit it — I swung out of four solidly on the seam and forced myself to hold the car there. The wall came up on the right side of the car, and then dropped away. The car did just what the instructors said — it walked itself right down the front stretch and plopped me in the perfect turn one entry line. It was GREAT! After that, I started pushing a little harder. At one point on the backstretch I looked at the tach and it read 6000rpm. The G-forces were really yanking on me by now, but the car stuck wonderfully on the track. All too soon the white flag was waving and I had to come down pit road. It was 94 degrees outside, and before my run I had sat for 15 minutes baking in the car. After the run the in-car temperature was easily 130 degrees. And after I pulled the Nomex suit off, I found I had burned my right leg slightly on the bell housing. But I could have run a thousand more laps — I wasn't even tired, and I was putting down my best laps of the weekend. I timed Rick's laps and he was running 32 second laps — I'd guesstimate my best lap at around a 33 or 34 second lap.

All too soon it was over. The instructors thanked us, invited us to come back, and then we were headed to the parking lot. We got pictures of us with Alex and John, took some photos by "The Rock," and then we headed back to the hotel. We stopped for dinner at the Lob Steer again and then camped out in our rooms, already homesick for the track. To console myself I went to Winn-Dixie and bought 20 bucks of Mark Martin memorabilia, including a Chek Cola can and some Cheez Bits with Mark's picture on them (the cola and crackers cost me 54 cents).

The school was over far too early for our tastes. In those three days we had gotten closer to Winston Cup racing than most people will ever get. We were in the driver's seat at one of the toughest tracks in NASCAR and we acquitted ourselves admirably. The school fulfilled a dream I never thought I'd realize — racing a Winston Cup car. I gained a whole new perspective on NASCAR racing — those of you who haven't experienced it just can't comprehend how difficult it is to just keep the car on the track, much less do it in heavy traffic at those speeds. I think all of us pretty much agree that Buck Baker's school was the coolest thing we'd ever done.

FEATURED ARTIST

Isabelle Garbani



Reproduction of Picasso's Les demoiselles d'Avignon for Steve Martin's "Picasso at the Lapin Agile", produced by A.R.T. in Cambridge.