"THE BULL WILL KILL YOU"

AND OTHER TRUTHS FROM THE LIFE OF PROFESSOR FRANK BRYAN
Frank Bryan faces the classroom squarely, feet planted, his black tie strains over muscles pumped by hard labor in a health-club iron. Bryan's voice punctuates the air several decibels louder than necessary. His eyes lock on a student in the front row, and the effect is intimidating, even priggish. She shrinks in her seat, no doubt abandoning a weak hope that the blow will land on the guy behind her.

He bursts the initial question and says with the student, drawing out information, subtly encouraging until she finds the courage to offer an opinion. "Good," he says, his eyes conveying a rare second's pleasure, his voice softening. "What did you learn that I'm impressed." Surprised, gratitude, palpable relaxation define the early-day classroom tension: The braver has a heart.

Bryan, an associate professor of political science, and by many reckonings, a star in UVM's and Vermont's firmament, has been clutching chills, motivating students, koşuring and writing, and, above all, carting-outload, for a long time. Genes may generate some of his trademark energy, but Bryan the action figure also draws power from Bryan the believer. His life and work are based on four tenets: people are fundamentally benign and humane; they behave better in small rather than large groups; the good ones finish first; and town meeting is "the country's most glorious expression of human interaction."

Bryan's private response to the occasional dismissal of his ideas as naive is a fervent hope that his faith proves a worthy master. He has served it well — researching town meetings since 1968, debating his ideas publicly and writing about them fearlessly.

A Vermonter who cannot claim citizenship ("Conceived in Newbury," but birthed at a New Hampshire hospital fifty miles away), Bryan has become for many the touchstone of what a real Vermonter is. Asked to name Bryan's outstanding quality, co-author John McLaughly, president of the Ethran Allen Insitute, replies without hesitation, "Authenticity. He's a real Vermonter and a real American. He understands how real people live, think, and work. He has kept his roots."

One of these children whose parents divorced when he was young, Bryan was brought up in Newbury by his mom, who had conversed herself and the children to Catholicism and who was one of only two Ocmonas in town — the other being young Frank's soulful inheritance of his mother's Depression-era love of Roosevelt and FDR. Bryan's second conversion came on the eve of the Kennedy-Nixon election, appropriately, at the hands of his soon-to-be-priest brother, David, who had early convictions of the evils of big government. He convinced Frank that the Democrats harbored a "grand centralist design," which they would deploy "in the name of secular humanism."

Bryan, who "loves to argue," couldn't refute his brother's logic: he's been a Republican ever since but describes himself as "kind of a lefty."

Along with hunting, fishing, arguing, and trouble-making, the youthful Bryan's interests ran to writing; he entertained briefly that most romantic of career fantasies — of being a journalist who writes novels. Teaching wasn't part of the initial equation until his first "real job" after earning bachelor's and master's degrees at St. Michael's College and UVM respectively. He calls his posting to a high school in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom in the mid-60s "a defining moment" and one of his best teaching experiences. The $4,500 salary didn't seem too bad at the time, even to a husband with an expanding family (Bryan, who has seven children, calls kids "the cheap-
Vermonters don’t comprehend mechniatics, exact change lines, catching rays, superannuiation, starter houses, 10K runs, to-call beer.

Vermonters Don’t Milk Cows

Vermont modeling the way. In The Vermont Papers, he and co-author McClaughry propose a system of abies, communities larger than towns, smaller than counties, with a town-meeting-style governance known as a mast, in which veces represent the abies’s residents. In the Bryan-McCloughry vision, state and national governments would focus on “doing much less, much better,” primarily in overseeing areas such as environmental protection, civil rights and liberties, and foreign trade. Bryan lives the vision he espouses. His Starbuck-bred homestead is a personal statement, a retreat protected from invasive flaubotans and others by fifty billy acres, where Bryan, his wife, Lee, son, Frank, Jr., and daughters, Rachel, pay homage to husbandry through Stewart oak and conservative consumption. With a mile-or-goody woodpile ever in mind, “you don’t stay under that hot shower too long.” He says. Their house is rustic and, like Bryan’s magazine on town meeting, a work in progress. The lack deck needs just the final handrail, the kids’ bedrooms still need a little work, and of course, there’s a small animal kingdom to care for—a new beagle pup a Chesapeake-Black Lab who lives to retrieve from the sizable pond emptying the property, a sheep herd, and several cats. The sheep: incapable, however, are Seth and Saul, oven whose beautiful faces reflect their one-quarter Jersey heritage.

Bryan voices the pain to skip logos from his tapped recite what isn’t needed to haul away and the house is sold to a neighbor who hauls it to the millyard. “Real Vermonters would probably laugh at the for not using a tractor,” he says. “It might even be cheaper to buy the wood.”

Although the work is dangerous and increasingly harder for Bryan, who recently turned 55, there seems little doubt that he will continue to push physical and mental boundaries. One sometimes feeds the other. Bryan explains, describing his experience riding. Beefman in Montana rodeos. “You have very little fear the first time you ride,” he says, “but the second takes real courage. I’ve never known fear like that second time.” He holds up his hand and announces: “Important insight, the bull will kill you, but he has nothing against you that’s what’s scary. As a boxer, you can fall on your knee and beg, and your opponent will stop. But, (dramatic pause, slight smile) . . . the bull will kill you.”