

# K I T E THE DRACHEN FOUNDATION J O U R N A L



## *The Magic of Underwater Kite Flying*

*Tom Jeckel uses scuba gear to photograph kites flying in the world of water. Here he looks upward and records a swimmer, kite and air hose bubbles off Lebanon. Water being thicker than air, the kite slows down. There is a timeless feeling. The kite may behave oddly as currents move it about. "I'm interested in doing the unusual, in odd relationships, in unspoken communications," says Jeckel. For a portfolio of offbeat photographs by this creative German, turn to Page 8.*

# Kite-Herding Dog

*If you're a kiteflier with a border collie that likes to herd, what do you do? Answer: build a highly maneuverable stunt kite, paint a sheep on it, and give the dog a real workout when it desires.*

*The kiteflier is Jim Batten, of Epworth, North Lincolnshire, England, and his dog is J.D.----“agile, smart, faster than a greyhound for a short distance, born with a strong herding instinct,” says Batten. “J.D.” stands for Junior Dog. (Senior Dog is long since deceased.)*

*“J.D. trained herself to chase and herd the kite,” says Batten. “She’ll mouth the kite when she catches up with it, but she’ll never bite it. That’s why other kitefliers permit her on the field.”*

*J.D., 10, doesn’t require a lead when being walked. “She stops at the curb, crosses only when I give her the okay,” says Batten. “The only thing I ever trained her to do was to come, go and stay.”*

As testimony to J.D.’s love of her kite, she’ll stand guard over it when instructed by Batten, alertly and endlessly it seems----at the ready for more flying time fun.



*J.D. guards her kite and awaits further action.*

## **The Drachen Foundation:** Kite Archives, Science and Culture

The Drachen Foundation is devoted to the increase and diffusion of knowledge about kites worldwide. A 501(c)(3) private nonprofit corporation, Drachen views kites from the standpoint of art, culture, science and history. It uses an integrated program of exhibitions, education, research, collections management, and publications to promote learning about kites. The archive it maintains is freely open to the public for research.

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‘Jack in-the-box’ Draws Raves

## Anke Sauer Invents Ingenious Kite; A Question: Is It Unique, a Generic?

By Ben Ruhe

Connoisseurs agree Anke Sauer’s “Jack-in-the-box” foldup kite is one of the most exciting new kites of the last few years, but as to its generic category there is no consensus as yet.

For those who have not seen the creation-----Anke had made just 13 of them by early summer 2003-----it’s easy enough to describe. Anke, from near Aachen, Germany, takes stiff paper, bends the paper into either a four- or six-sided pyramid with bases facing outward at the bottom of each side, glues the bases together until a rectangle of pyramids is formed, attaches bridle lines to the tip of each pyramid, and *voila*-----she has herself a kite ready to fly.

She calls it “Jack-in-the-box” because the kite folds up on itself, accordion-style, and can be carried in a small box.

Requiring a strong wind, the kite is flown upright against the wind, like a Japanese Edo, rather than on top of the wind, like a Delta. Since each pyramid has its own bridle line, the kite is quite strong.

Because she can vary the colors of the pyramid sides, and because she can omit pyramids here and there and can also make the creation asymmetrical, viz. not rectangular, it is quite a lovely kite to view in the air. The kite requires no tail; rather, the bottom portion, particularly if it has omitted sections, acts as an effective tail.

So how to categorize this invention of some two years? “Because it’s made of paper but is rigid,” notes Scott Skinner, president of the Drachen Foundation and an expert in the field of kites and kiting, “it’s almost a cross between a Tetrahedral variation and a Parafoil variation. It’s certainly not a Sled because it has no real rigid members. And it’s not an actual soft Parafoil because it doesn’t turn into an airfoil by inflation.

“It’s closer to a Cellular kite, a Boxkite, than anything else. I think that’s where I’d put it as to kite category. Although it resembles an inflatable kite, it’s not an effective one. It actually flies more like a billboard. The Flying Billboard, I’d call it.”

It is worth noting that the kite needs constant wind pressure to fly. Denied that, it collapses and tumbles into a ball.

Skinner makes an interesting point: “It’s unique to its material, paper. It almost certainly cannot be made of fabric, which can never be stiff enough unless it becomes impossibly heavy. I like that about the kite.

“As to its foldup ability, this is a wonderful piece of elegance. If it didn’t have this property, the kite would be almost un-portable, sort of like the boat that gets built in the basement and then proves too big to move out.”



*Anke Sauer*

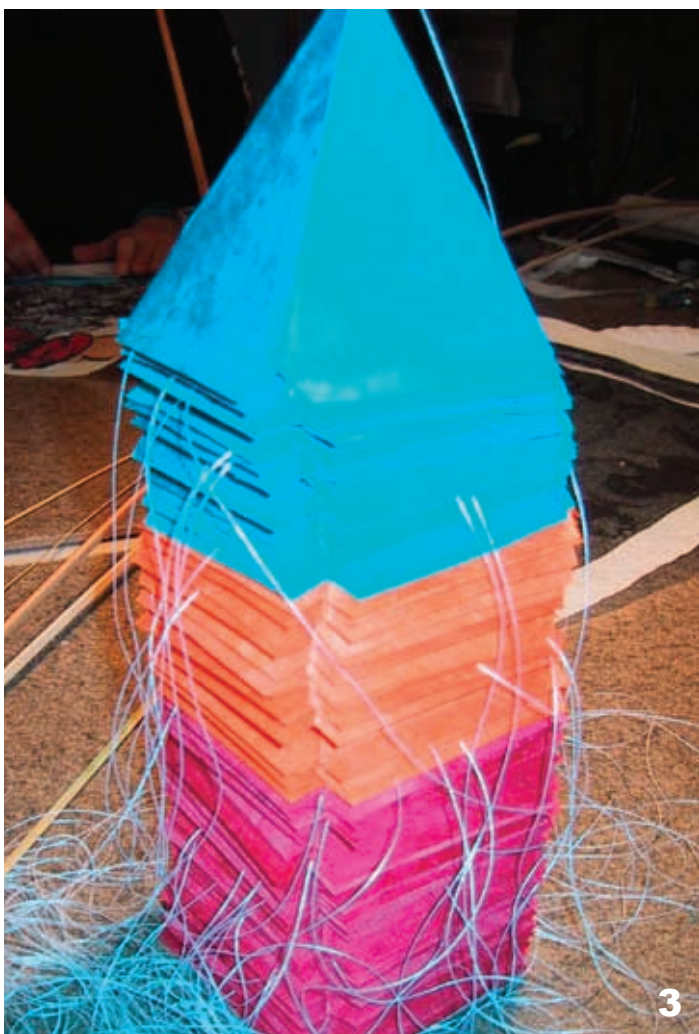


*....flying a foldup kite*





1



3

1. A partially folded pyramid kite by Anke Sauer.  
2. The foldup fits conveniently into a box for transportation and security. 3. Stacked pyramids with bridle lines attached await assembly into colorful flying kites.



2

Renowned “Legs” kite designer Martin Lester, of England, joins Skinner in praising the kite. “It’s the perfect summation of structure,” he says. “The bridle is both a physical and intrinsically esthetic part of the kite. The kite is minimal. The bridle holds the kite in shape as well as in position.”

“It’s not a soft kite, and it’s not a flat kite,” he notes, “because the load is transmitted down the edges of the pyramids. I have to think about how to categorize it.”

Because of its paper construction, Lester points out there is a limit to the size the kite can be made. The larger the kite, the stiffer the paper required-----until some weight limit is reached. “It’s the first kite I’ve seen in a long time that really gets me excited. I really want to have a go at making one myself.”



*Because the panels of the individual pyramids can vary in color, depending on the inspiration of the maker, “Jack-in-the-box” kites are often quite beautiful.*

How did this invention occur? Anke, noted for her innovative, beautiful kites, is a bit vague. “It was a stupid, rainy weekend,” she recalls. “I had paper and some white glue and I made a pyramid. Maybe I had an ancient Egyptian pyramid in mind. I made more pyramids and glued them together. ‘Oh, it looks very nice,’ said my sister Kisa, ‘but you’ll have a transportation problem with it.’ I discovered though that when pushed together the pyramids contracted into a small volume, and that’s when I named it “Jack-in-the-box.”

If four-sided pyramids are built, the kite contracts in a corkscrew manner, if six-sided it contracts like an accordion.

“I’ve discussed patenting the idea with friends, but decided against it,” she says. “It’s an idea that should be open to everyone, and anyway, they’re hard to make. It took me two days to construct one with 80 pyramids, plus another half-day to bridle it.”

Anke passes on whether the kite is a unique or generic model (Flat, Malay Diamond, Sled, Boxkite, Parafoil, Flexifoil, etc.), or fits into a kite category. She does point out it may have some relationship to new airplanes with rippled skin.

Innovation, rather than theory, she makes clear, is her big thing.

Attending a miniature paper kite workshop and contest held by the Drachen Foundation and a Japanese paper company in Seattle last spring, Anke won first prize with one of her pyramid kites. Unwilling to sell any of them, Anke finally parted with three when tempted by a very expensive guitar she coveted. She subsequently donated another “Jack-in-the-box” to a kite festival auction in Sunderland, England. Kite experts there confirmed the interest in her creation. The small kite drew a large winning bid of \$500.



# ‘A Great Hobby’ for Richard Dermer

## Restaurant Serves as Kite Showplace

When Richard Dermer’s kite collection became too large to fit on the walls of his restaurant in Stillwater, Oklahoma, he solved the problem by buying the building next door and expanding. Since the structure he moved into had been a movie theater, his space doubled. Happy happy collector, happy kite collection.

The large, affable, bearded Dermer will concede the story is a little more complex than that but what’s objective truth when a kite passion is involved?

Dermer got into the restaurant business as a student working his way through Oklahoma State University. While an undergraduate, he decided he could run the pizza place that employed him better than the owner was running it and bought it on credit. He was just 20. He added many more toppings to the pizzas and his food costs doubled, Sales tripled, however. He was off and running.

By treating his all college student staff fairly-----free food, half-cost beer, loans on request, flexible scheduling, lots of parties, prompt payment of wages, equal sharing of tips by the whole staff-----he won loyalty and efficiency. Patrons liked the happy atmosphere and tasty food. He once figured out his employees stay with him an average of 31 months, a long time in the restaurant business. Having been a restaurateur now for 46 years, he has employees who are children of his early workers. He expects soon to get grandchildren-----third generation-----workers.

The Hideaway, as the place was called, lost its lease and in 1980 moved a block from campus, right across the street. “It was a scary time, being in debt more than a third of a million dollars.” But the place boomed and long since has been considered a local institution. It now seats 350 with a staff of 100. For old times’ sake, Oklahoma State alumni when gathered elsewhere around the nation sometimes ordered a Big Kahuna pizza shipped frozen so they could summon up happy school days as they chowed down. The monster 30-inch creation feeds up to 20 people.

For recreation, Dermer and his charming wife Marti tried tournament chess (Richard playing, with Marti kibitzing), sailing (both wanted to take the wheel), but finally found their joint sport with kiting. Dermer initially took a look at the sport in the late 1970s when his son bought a six-pack of Rainbow stunters. “I was unimpressed,” he says. Some years later he got a chance to test a competition Skynasaur “that could handle a strong Oklahoma wind and flew like a tank. That got my attention.” Soon he had a team and the members took first, second, third



*Richard Dermer*



*Marti Dermer*

and fifth in a regional competition. Anxious to test their skills further, they decided to try their hand at the 1986 American Kitefliers Association convention in Nashville, where they bombed in light breezes. “We were heavy wind guys,” he says.

But Dermer did meet a lot of nice people in kiting and as a 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary present to his wife took her on the famous annual trek to Weifang, China, led by Dave Checkley. “Being self-employed, I could take off three weeks,” he notes. Soon Dermer found himself elected a regional director of the American Kitefliers Association, a post he filled for nine years. He then served as president from 1997-99. “It was close to a full-time, unpaid job, but there were more members and more money in the till after I left than when I started,” he observes. “And Marti and I did get some nice trips representing the association.” In addition to China, the Dermers have made kite-related visits to Japan, India, New Zealand, England, France, Denmark and a fair segment of North America.

The Dermers began by accumulating kites. “Pretty soon you collect a lot of them,” he says. What to do with them? Naturally, he hung them on the walls and from the ceiling of his restaurant. One wall had stunts, another international kites, a third wall productions by Dave Young of Tulsa, a fourth miniatures in homemade display cases. When he expanded his restaurant again last year, he filled five skylight wells with cellular kites.

With their two sons raised and gone from home, the restaurant humming along under a full-time manager and the concept franchised by ex-employees so there are now seven similar establishments elsewhere in Oklahoma, Richard and Marti turned to spreading the word about kites. They gave many school workshops and observed that a major need of workshop presenters was something very simple-----kite string. Dermer received a commitment from the big wholesaler Gayla to sell him winders with 100 feet of string on them, offered them at pennies over his cost to pay for handling, put the word out on availability in a kite magazine, and sold the winders as a public service to the sport all across the country. “Years later Gayla still sells them to me at the old price and I order 50 cases of winders several times a year,” says Dermer. “I must have disposed of 150,000 of them by now.” He also sells materials for building Sled kites to teachers for a modest 50 cents per kite, but doesn’t advertise this. “It’s a lot of work cutting out thousands of plastic sails and bamboo spars,” he says.

Dermer does recall one slipup when lecturing at a school. He was flying a miniature and a pupil asked, “Where did you get that telescopic stick you use to fly the kite?” “Oh,” said Dermer, saying the first thing that occurred to him, “the parking lots are full of them.”

Dermer sums up about kites and kiting. “It’s a great hobby that Marti and I have shared. Kites are basically toys and people who like them are happy, fun-loving individuals, people we enjoy being around. What’s in the future for us? More kites, more trips.”

### *A Mysterious Case*

*What is going on? When Rick Miller, of Silver City, New Mexico, flies a light-colored, 15-inch Chinese swallow kite at twilight he bought from master Chinese builder Chen Zhao Ji, he draws literally two dozen cliff swallows. They fly around the kite twittering and apparently feeding on insects. They do not attack the kite. The noise and motion of the live birds attract strollers who stand and watch. When Rick takes the kite down, the birds disperse. Now the puzzle. Rick bought another type of swallow kite from Mr. Chen, this one smaller and with black wings. It fails to attract a single live swallow. What is the difference? Rick can't figure it out-----is it color, size, flight pattern, or what? Ha Yi Qi, of Beijing, one of China's renowned kitemakers specializing in swallows, throws up his hands literally when asked about this attraction phenomenon. Could be anyone of several reasons, he says. “Maybe dozens,” he adds.*

# ‘I Want Provocation,’ Says Tom Jeckel

## Kites as Carriers of Unspoken Words

By Ben Ruhe

Being placed on Thomas Jeckel’s Websites is sort of like praying for rain and receiving a downpour that washes out the valley. Delightful at first, his postings start to overload your screen, or at least your nervous system. Yet the thought of erasure never occurs. Amid the oddities and incoherencies, there are wonderful postings----- weekly, daily, hourly.

As his many Websites and frequent postings from around the globe imply, the tall, robust 44-year-old Jeckel (who signs himself Tom, Tomm, or Tomas as the spirit moves him) is energetic, even manic. He is usually in an elated state, and is distinctly work-ridden and self-promoting but in a charming way. Because of his racing thoughts and grand schemes, he is alien to the systematic approach. He leaves that to others.

In an interview in Bangkok, where he fetched up on the way home from an underwater kite photography project in the south of Thailand, the Aachen resident explained what makes him tick.



*Tom Jeckel*

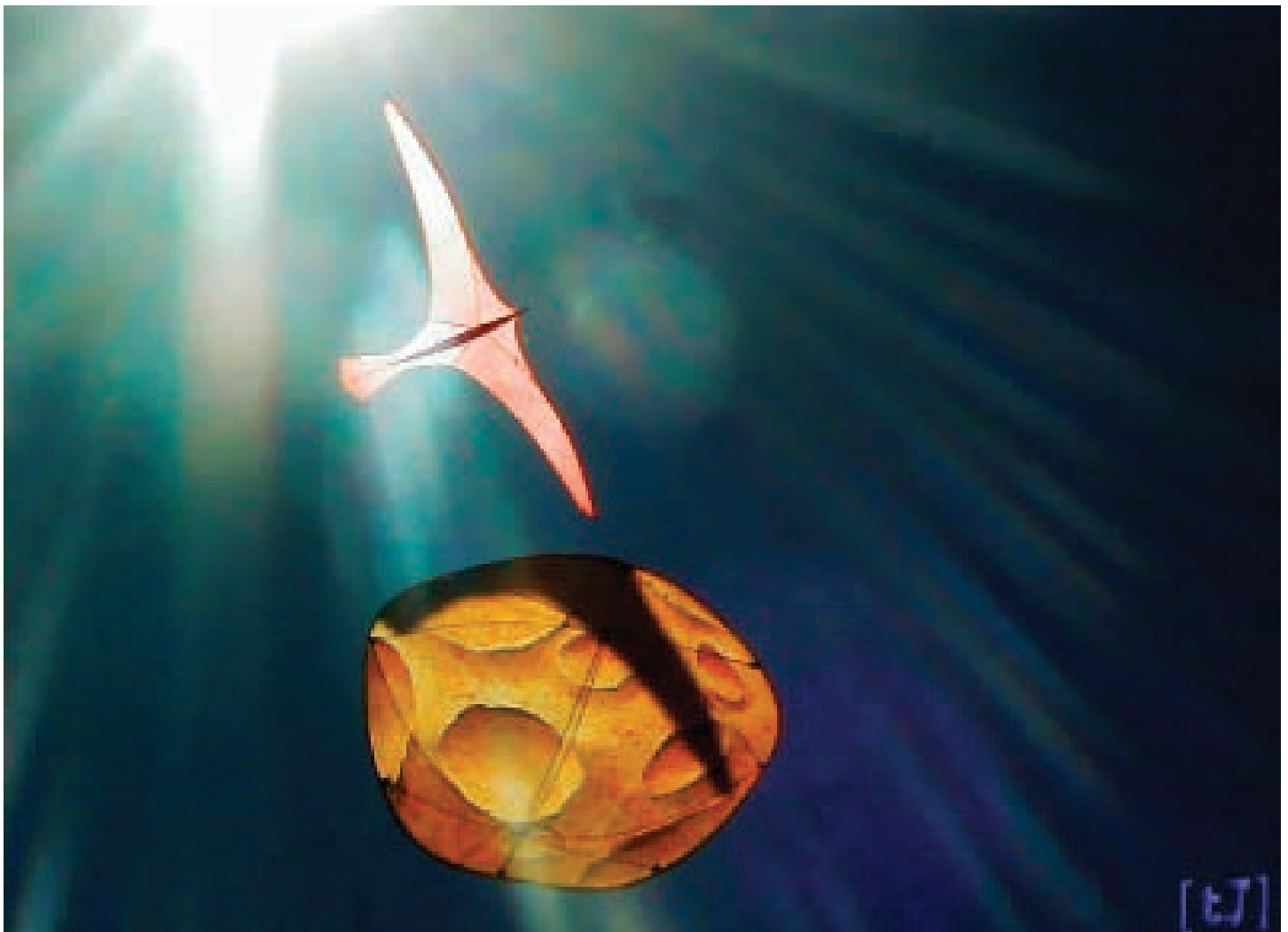
Grandson of a World War 1 pilot and son of a World War 11 Luftwaffe flier (later, an engineer), he was early on tagged for the military. Instead, he went the polar opposite and has pursued a steady anti-war, overtly pacific stance for three decades now.

In this connection he has a wonderful story about buying a kite during an anti-nuclear demonstration and flying it to try and thwart hovering police helicopters. One of them stopped to examine the kite, then flew up and over it and used its rotor wash to force the kite down to the ground. With that Tom ran, with the ‘copter in pursuit. He says the huge antiwar crowd and the pilot undoubtedly killed themselves laughing at the spectacle. For himself, he says he was terrified as he thought of a prison sentence and only stopped running from exhaustion. “I knew if I was caught it wouldn’t be symbolic, I’d get two years in jail.”

Tales like this spill out of him.

With high energy level and low boredom factor, Tom calculates he spent 12 years as a university student, both matriculated and just hanging around, auditing courses. The audits were the best, of course, since he was studying what really interested him, under professors who could actually teach. His range of knowledge became extensive. Tom calculates he has had 12-----twelve!-----professions thus far. He has been professional photographer, journalist, carpenter, cabinetmaker, kite maker, demonstration kite flier, welder, surveyor, computer professional, taxi driver, and landscaper. He had a stint as a musician too. Finally, his interviewer said he’d nominate him as a professional creative thinker and philosopher; Jeckel agreed this was fair. Thirteen!





*Looking upward toward the sun, Tom Jeckel records this remarkable aerial view of a bird kite by Ramlal Tien casting its shadow on a moon kite by Kisa Sauer.*



*A setting sun in Colombia, South America, combines with a Kisa Sauer moon kite to create striking halo effects.*



*Photographer Tom Jeckel loves to be surprised. "Doing a portrait of a policeman and kite in the rain in Taiwan," he says, "suddenly girls from a dance group jumped into place, positioned themselves perfectly, and I pressed the camera button."*



*Jeckel and others mounted an exhibition of kites in a hotel in Beirut and this lovely photograph documented the transitory event.*



*One of the photographer's pet photographic themes has him adding a kite to a quite traditional landscape. Here he photographs a red kite floating over a field of yellow oilseed rape blossoms.*





*Flying kites, music, artificial light, fireworks-----these are potions Jeckel uses in the nighttime magic show he calls "illuminations."*



*A flying kite provides a surprise counterpoint to a partial eclipse of the sun.*



*At a night time promenade at a kite festival, the photographer lights up a flying kite. It's a strange, compelling sight.*

At this point in his life, Jeckel was seriously pursuing adventure-----big-time competitive fencing, survival training, difficult trekking, motorcycles. Exciting but financially draining.

Regarding kites as something for kids, he was quickly disabused when a friend handed him a kite line with five Peter Powell stunts at the end of it. "Wow, I said to myself, this is not a toy." He soon became thoroughly hooked on kiting, read his Hart and Pelham, and has since earned a living making and flying kites. Half a living, that is. He devotes part of his time to business, an equal portion to his myriad pursuits. He makes it a point to keep kites and his other activities quite separate. At one point the owner of a fairly large kite operation, he nearly went bankrupt with it. Now scaled way down, his operation supports him and permits him freedom of travel. He recently received an order from United Nations peacekeepers for 10,000 Sled kites to be delivered to Kabul for distribution to Afghan children. He not only met the order on schedule but discovered an exciting Central Asian culture-----duly documented of course on one of his Websites.

About his computer activities. After some thought, he outlines the main threads of his various sites; they are either projects he conceived or ones he allied himself with (and often took over).

Themes include underwater photography using scuba gear to document kiteflying in the depths; adding an image of a kite to a traditional landscape format (viz., flying a red kite over a brilliant yellow rapeseed field); screening 360 degree kite site images on the computer that the viewer can move around at will-----up and down, in and out.

Attending kite festivals around the world, he gives night-time “illumination” programs using artificial light, fire, and music, while projecting photographic images onto a screen flapping in the wind. It can be mysterious and mesmerizing.

His most ambitious project to date, one that can never be completed, he calls “kite planet matrix.” In this work, he is documenting, country by country, starting with all the members of the United Nations, everything that is known about each country’s kites-----history, names, types, uses, construction, materials, shapes, people involved, and so forth. “This is a work in progress,” he says dryly.

The list goes on and on.

Why kites? The question could be asked another way. What if it had not been kites? What if it had been evangelical religion? Or politics? With Tom’s energy and global sweep, he’d have made a substantial impact by now.

Since 1995, Tom has been associated with Kirsten (Kisa) Sauer, a maker of theatrical props and an imaginative kitemaker. He met her when he was at a festival and saw some interesting kites flying. “I wanted to see who had made them and walked over to introduce myself.” Together, they make a formidable team, aided by Kisa’s younger sister Anke, herself an innovative kitemaker.

Anke comments: “Tom’s very intelligent but not egotistical. He has a tremendous memory, almost total recall. His clownishness conceals his wide knowledge. Instead of showing off his knowledge, he asks questions.”

Kisa chimes in: “I like his viewpoint. He doesn’t look at the surface, the documentation, he looks at the relationships. He likes when people come together to do something, even something stupid. He makes it into a personal view. Sometimes it’s just color and lighting, like a wild painting. He likes to play around with pictures, other languages.

“He’s never done a regular exhibition, a video, a book; his Websites are his exhibitions. Websites are cheap, open, good exhibitions spaces.

“He particularly likes scuba diving. He’s interested in doing the unusual. He’s been underwater 200 times. He makes photographs and films. Underwater, you can’t hear, you can’t speak, it’s slow. Water is thicker than air, so it slows a kite down like a slow motion film. The kite behaves oddly. The wings may open and close, like a butterfly. There is a timeless feeling. Tom is interested in the relationship of the kite to the water.”

Jeckel himself sums up: “Kites are the carriers of unspoken communications. They are more dense, more compressed than voice communication. I want countries to talk to each other, and kites are a good medium for this. I think of my projects as work done for future generations.

“I’ve had many ideas some people didn’t like. I’ve given kites to the sea-----fed them out into the ocean on a long line until they vanished. I’ve burned kites; some people treat kites as pets, I don’t. I want kites to be a provocation---a way to realize ideas. We have only one life. Why waste time with things already known? I seek new realities every day.”



# *Soul-Searching in a Ford Capri*

*Conrad Shawcross has been described as a dealer in memorabilia from a British organization called the IBLs. The acronym stands for Investigative Bureau Into the Location of the Soul.*

*The IBLs was established, according to this self-described London artist, to settle the matter of where the human soul is located. The project initially became bogged down in bureaucracy and internecine strife until a revolutionary notion was formulated that a soul is not to be found in the body but outside it----in the sky, in fact. What was needed, it was decided, was an apparatus-----“both real and subtle”---to trawl through the clouds, catch souls, and then reel them in. Kites, lines and hooks were envisioned for the project. Looking rather like a fishing chair on a boat, the equipment was to be mounted on the top of a Ford Capri, “the car you’ve always promised yourself,” as an advertisement went. Twelve Ford Capris were suitably equipped and the vehicles dubbed Soulcatchers.*



*Conrad Shawcross and his unusually equipped Ford Capri.*

*The vehicles set out in various directions and all duly vanished. That seemed to end the quest. That is until Conrad Shawcross came across a Capri Soulcatcher in a field in Russia. He bought the vehicle and brought it back to England, where he placed it on exhibition in Sunderland and elsewhere. Retailers viewed it with alarm.*

*Well they might, since the vehicle was equipped with personal possessions of the vanished driver-----his shirt, cans of food, a cap, even a can of oil found to contain traces of human blood. Complete with an official looking IBLs logo on the door, the Soulcatcher is in running condition, it moves, it drives.*

*The Soulcatcher is quite battered. Shawcross spent some time doing handbrake turns into straw bales to create satisfying dents in the sides.*

*What with its construction of welded black metal on the roof and back, the car draws a lot of initial attention parked out on the street, then tends to be pointedly ignored by onlookers. Shawcross likes that although strange and out of place looking, the car also looks authentic. It looks as though it had a purpose in the real world, not just in the world of art.*

*Shawcross, as further reported by the trendy British Modern Painters magazine, has created an artwork called Measurement and Control for the Infinite, a portable sculpture. Resembling a marker buoy, it is sliced into four precise, right-angled segments. Each of the inner surfaces has a mirrored face. When the segments are put together the mirrors form an infinite regress. However, since the mirrors and therefore the regress can't be seen at all, the viewer just has to believe they're there. This is, Shawcross points out, not entirely unlike the human soul.*

# The Fulfillment of a Old Dream

## English Collector Opening Own Museum

Fulfilling a dream of 30 years, Malcolm Goodman is readying a small hotel he bought in the north of England as his own personal kite museum.

The structure is in Teesdale, near Durharm, in a scenic area of hills, rock fences, and sheep that draws lots of tourism in warm weather. The largest waterfall in England, a great attraction, is nearby.

Goodman's museum, to open next spring after he and wife Jeannette execute extensive renovations, will show the cream of his collection of 500 kites, more than half of them from Asia.

International kitefliers enroute last June from a festival in the south of England to the famous Sunderland fly in the northeast of the country, both organized by Goodman, detoured for a preview visit in Teesdale. Thijo van Beek, of Misdrect, Holland, spoke for many when he walked in, took an amazed look, and said: "Can you get any closer to heaven than this?" On view was just a temporary display organized for the visitors because Malcolm and Jeannette had just moved in, but it was stunning. Kites lined the walls, sat on furniture, hung from above, spilled from boxes. Hundreds of them. Some were tiny, many were large. All were of highest quality. Goodman has an eye for only the best.

Also the drive to collect, against the odds. When asked how he managed to ship home some of his enormous kites, he tells of cooperation from some of the Asian airlines. On a flight from Beijing, a large dragon head of his was given pride of place-----three first class seats, "while I sat back in economy," he adds ruefully.

As he explained his plan, one of the large rooms will display his collection of Japanese kites, including an eight-foot Shirone, another his trove of Chinese masterpieces, including large Centipedes and exquisite 4mm miniatures. Elsewhere he will show the rest of Asia-----Malaysian Waus, Thai Chulas and Pakpaos, Cambodian Kleng Eks, Vietnamese Flute kites.

American and European kites, both old and contemporary, will be exhibited as well. One of his goals will be to show how kites were crucial in the development of manned flight. He expects to highlight the work of the pioneering English scientist Sir George Cayley.

In addition to the kites, an assortment of kite memorabilia such as books, magazines, stamps, coins, pins, ceramics and art work will be on view. An extensive collection of videos and films will be screened.

In a remodeled six-car garage, Goodman plans to hold kitemaking workshops for school children and adults. He hopes to bring grandmasters to teach and demonstrate. "I'm going to invite Eiji Ohashi of Tokyo, Mikio Toki of Funabashi, Japan, Mr. Ha of Beijing, Anka and Kisa Sauer of Viersan, Germany," he says. Toki, Ha and the Sauer sisters were in fact on hand for the preview visit, as well as such luminaries as Michael Alvares of Australia and Claudio and Catarina Capelli of Italy.

"It's the highest mortgage I've ever had in my life," says Goodman of his purchase. "But it's been my ambition to have my own museum for three decades." Having been in the electronics business, Goodman took early retirement. The bonus he received he used to buy the seven-bedroom hotel. "I also borrowed a large amount of money," he adds.



*Malcolm Goodman welcomes a visitor to his projected kite museum, still labeled a "B&B," or bed and breakfast hotel. International kitefliers Claudio Capelli and daughter Caterina mug for the camera.*





*Goodman's new property includes a line of garages, which he plans to renovate into gallery and workshop space.*



*A patio offers respite from the sometimes harsh northern England climate.*



*1: Jeannette Goodman has been awakened more than once by middle of the night tourist calls. 2: A giant Chinese centipede kite awaits proper display. 3: Although the sign discourages drop-in tourists, phone and fax bring daily requests for hotel reservations.*





*Boxes and boxes of unopened treasure kites crowd the Goodman home.*

“I am hoping to get grants from the local government’s education and tourist departments to help me out financially,” he adds.

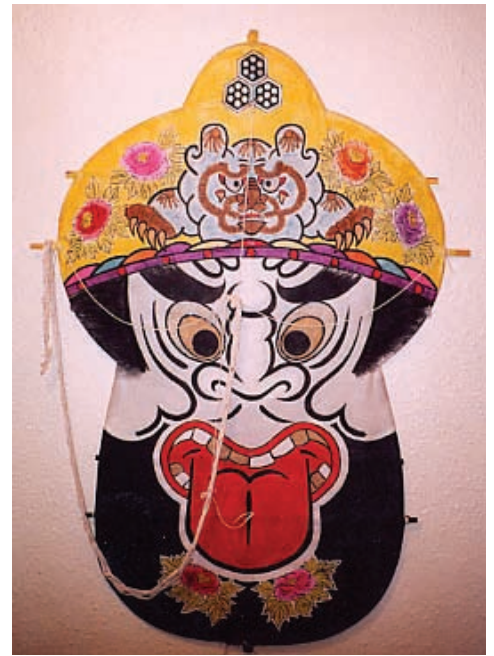
“If things don’t work out, Jeannette and I can still run a bed and breakfast,” he adds. “We’re receiving telephone calls and faxes all the time. We must be in dozens of guidebooks. Jeannette was awakened the other night at 1 a.m. with a reservation request.”

Although the hotel sign remains hanging outside, visitors noted that the window sported a small “no vacancies” notice.

Goodman became a convert to kites when he saw them being flown in San Francisco in the early 1970s. Why kites? Goodman explains: “I’m a practical person. I saw that kites represent culture as a whole-----they combine making, learning, art.” On his return home, he started building his own. Hooking up with Dave Checkley, of Seattle, he traveled to China (Weifang, Tianjin, Shanghai, Beijing, the Great Wall) and Japan (Hamamatsu). He has since visited many other countries in his pursuit of kites. He and Jeanette were married at a kite event, the American Kitefliers Association convention in Hawaii in 1989.

“I started collecting almost immediately after first seeing kites in China and I’ve never stopped,” he says. “Early





*Here are six examples from the collection of hundreds: Masterpiece Orientals flank an unusual European feather kite (shown upside down) and an Oceanic leaf kite.*

on I conceived of this museum as a way to get my kites out of their boxes. I wanted kitefliers and the public to see these wonderful works of art.”

Because they are doing most of the renovating themselves, the Goodmans won’t open until next April. They plan to operate during the warm months only, closing for the season in September. Although the Goodmans have moved well away from their former home in Billingham, he expects to continue operating the kite festival in Sunderland which has given him such renown, and welcome, in the global kite world.

Not entirely pleased with the purchase because there is no space on the property for a proper garden, Jeanette Goodman says guardedly: “I’m prepared to go along with the museum for a few years, at least.” Goodman smiles knowingly.

# *A Look at the Drachen Foundation*

*Since opening its new headquarters in Seattle some four years ago, the Drachen Foundation has welcomed visitors from around the world. For those kite enthusiasts who have not yet made the trip to the American Northwest, here's a small view of the foundation both from outside and inside, complete with an introduction to some of the charming staff members. As Scott Skinner, president of the foundation, and Ali Fujino, administrator, say: "We want to meet you. With a library, archive, photo file, and large kite collection to view, we are at your service. Come study with us!"*



*Stacked filing cabinets provide useful workspace for aide Kiyomi Okawa (left) and Ali Fujino, administrator.*



*The Drachen Foundation is located in the heart of Seattle.*



*A Robert Trepanier creation oversees the photo archive corner.*





1



4



2



3

1. Drachen aide Courtney DeRouen peruses the foundation library. 2. Framed kites dot the walls. 3. Even the glassbrick stairwells are pressed into service for display purposes. 4. Kites and related materials tend to stack up in corners, awaiting sorting.



## Noted for Refined Parafoils

# Californian Ed Wright Dies at 59

Ed Wright, of Clayton, California, who died last spring at the age of 59, was a devoted kiteflier and kitemaker. Known to many in the kite world from his appearances at national and international kite festivals, and in particular for the wonderful Parafoils he made with his devoted wife Bonnie, Wright had another significant impact on the sport of kiting. He was involved in brainstorming the Drachen Foundation, then served on its board of directors after the foundation's incorporation in 1994. He will be succeeded on the board by his wife.

Educated in accounting at the University of Hawaii, Wright was a long-time and widely-traveled employee of the federal government, first as an electronics expert with the U.S. Air Force, then with the Internal Revenue Service where he had an important role in moving the IRS into the world of computerization. He retired three years ago.

Wright became interested in kites when he saw stunts being flown in Hawaii in the early 1980s. Quickly tiring of kites with sticks, he became an unofficial apprentice of Parafoil master George Ham of San Francisco and with wife Bonnie was soon specializing in making and flying Parafoils. "The no fuss, no muss kite that you pop out of a bag and fly anywhere appealed to Wright's logical mind," recalls Scott Skinner, a close friend and president of the Drachen Foundation. "Soon the Wrights were creating Parafoils of a refined design," recalls Skinner. "Their 'foils were characterized by a narrow profile and high flight angle-----perfect for beaches with high, steady winds. Fano, Denmark, was one such beach and it held a special appeal for Ed, who made four trips there. He loved the almost fanatic interest in kites of the Germans. He loved flying there. It was perfect for Parafoils because of the rock steady winds. He liked having a little house in the dunes to live in. It wasn't roughing it, but it was different."

Battling a variety of medical problems, Ed Wright made a final pilgrimage to Fano last year. "I think," says Skinner, "it was his chance to see all the good he had found in kiteflying-----a beautiful place, wonderful weather, fine food, unforgettable friends."

"Ed was a keen observer of contemporary kites and appreciated and applauded the work he saw in friends' efforts, from Peter Malinski, Jorgen Moeller-Hansen and Wolfgang Schimmelpfennig, to Jose Sainz, Martin Lester, and Ed and Gail Lindsay. But he staunchly worked to make the finest Parafoils, always insisting he had no artistic talent, but continually finishing flying masterpieces."

Skinner recalls that "Eddie Bob," as Wright was widely known after an early visit to the fabled annual Junction, Texas, kite retreat, had a sarcastic wit, an intolerance of children, and a love of good food. "This led to many moments of laughter, contemplation, and special friendship," says Skinner. Skinner recalls Wright "almost falling over himself with amusement" when he saw a "death from above" kite being flown by an 8-year-old in a competition he was helping judge in Berkeley, California. This boy had made his kite completely black with a skull and crossbones in white as its design. The word "Death" was written above the design. The kite stood out dramatically among the other conventional kites. "Let's give this kid the whole box of awards," suggested Wright to a fellow judge.

Skinner speaks for the global kite world when he says: "Ed was great as a friend, valuable as an adviser. He was a good influence on kiting with both his personal and professional ideas. He had a sense of humor, to say the least. He created a lot of fun on a lot of kite fields and kite beaches."



*Ed Wright*



*Wright uses his strength and bulk to anchor Peter Malinski as they jointly fly a giant Parafoil on Marina Green in San Francisco.*

## The Boxkite That Flies Without a String

It looks like a boxkite, but flies without a string. What is it? A Voltair Cube, that's what, a radio-controlled airplane that has been giving a lot of people fun across the U.S.

Invented by Dr. Lance Liotta, a research scientist at the National Cancer Institute, the device is built and marketed by Dan Prentice, of kite fame. Prentice formerly published *American Kite* magazine and for more than two decades has been marketing kiting materials.

Prentice took up the challenge of the Voltair three years ago because he saw it as blending the pleasures of kiteflying with the freedom of radio control. Stable, easy to fly, durable, the 19-inch wingspan, battery-operated Voltair has a hitch to it-----it requires almost dead calm to fly. A solution here is to fly indoors, if one can find a large enough space. Also, the little bird is expensive-----about \$400 with electronics installed and ready to fly. It is available in kit form also.

Constructed of carbon fiber rods and ripstop fabric, the Voltair houses a propellor in its interior for thrust. Since there is no rudder or elevator, flight control is accomplished via thrust control. Point the motor in the direction you want the bird to fly and it dutifully goes just where you want it to go. If you want it to climb, apply full power. For landing, cut the power below 60 percent.

One disadvantage to flying the Voltair is you don't get all that much flying time out of a battery charge, from 20 to 30 minutes, maybe. A solution here is to have two batteries, one for flying, the replacement being charged from your car's cigarette lighter. Or a 12-volt car battery can be taken to the field to provide a recharge as needed.

The Voltair has one significant advantage. It moves so slowly the flier can use one hand to pilot the thing, the other to snap photos.

# 15 Years of Relaxed Creativity

## Texas Kite Retreat Still Flourishing

After 15 years, the annual kite retreat at Junction, Texas, retains its magic. Friendly people, kitemaking around the clock, sunny weather, a big sky, interesting wildlife, peace and quiet-----that's Junction.

Organized to a formula worked out by Betty Street and Dr. Bill Lockhart (Bettyandbill, Billandbetty, as they are known) and then continued on by regional enthusiasts after the two Texas Tech professors, of Lubbock, Texas, called it a day, the gathering over a long weekend last May emphasized casual creativity, as always.

As Scott Skinner, of Monument, Colorado, a sometime teacher at and devoted supporter of the gathering, says: "In the beginning, people filled up their class schedules, they wanted accomplishment, a finished kite. Then they saw that wasn't the point of Junction at all, and took it easier. The hot sun makes you slow down anyway. There was no pressure. People had space to ask questions and receive immediate replies-----or three hours later. You got creative ideas anywhere, from the lunchroom to the classroom to the flying field."

It was not unusual to find a dozen people busily making kites at 1 a.m., or flying them out on the vast 40-acre (16 hectare) athletic field, observed by deer, jackrabbits, armadillos, and the gigantic west Texas prairie moon.

Advertised by word of mouth, the retreat over the years drew kitemakers from two dozen countries and most of the U.S. states. Teachers over the years ranged from Europeans Brockett, Bodoczky, Diem, Lester, Fabre and Fosset to Australian masters Wolfenden and Alvares. There were Balinese, Afghans, Chinese, and Indians. Japan contributed a sizeable contingent of dedicated instructors, including Sato, Matsutani, Endo, Tsutsumi, Inoue, Nakamura, Oe, Takeda, Toki and Modegi. From the U.S. and Canada came Kurahashi, Murosako, Toy, Hadzicki, Swanson, Goodwind, Gramkowski, Sinotte, Wharton, Stanfield, and Tucker. "It's like something out of a kite who's who," said one awed student.

Junction ran so well over the years because of a formula promulgated by Betty Street and Bill Lockhart, and continued on for the last five years by their disciples. The formula is straightforward. Keep costs down so the retreat is affordable. Keep things low key and free form, but maintain a rudimentary schedule. Schedule good presenters. Program workshops short enough so students have plenty of time to work on their projects, talk about kites, fly kites, wander the sprawling Texas Tech campus, observe the wildlife, or take a dip in the nearby Llano River or the newish campus pool.

Kites are the backbone of the retreat, but hardly the only attraction. Extracurricular activities over the years ranged from boomerang throwing to shooting blowdarts, pottery making to glassblowing, horseback riding to fossil hunting. Indian artifacts were found by some. There was inner-tubing in the river. Treks to remote bat caves were always memorable.



*Feeders with voracious hummingbirds are an attractive part of the Junction kite retreat scene.*





1. A Wan Wan Dako made in a workshop gets a successful test flight.  
 2. Charlie Sotich (left), Judy Kingery and George Weber have attended all 15 kite retreats.  
 3. Randy Shannon (left) and Rick Miller built the Wan Wan Dako, with help from friends.  
 4. Among the friends were George Peters of Seattle (left) and George Peters of Boulder, a star act.

Some years a stunningly beautiful carpet of Mexican hat and blue bonnet flowers covered the landscape for miles and miles. Most years, though, it was bone dry and brown. Afternoon temperatures of 110 degrees fahrenheit (43 degrees celcius) are common at Junction, although there is always efficient air-conditioning to escape to. Rain? Almost unknown in late spring.

A kitchen crew served hearty, abundant fare, enlivened by Texas specialties, including biscuits with gravy and hominy grits, a kind of corn, with brown sugar.

Appropriate to its unique character, the Junction Retreat predictably had an unusual birth. While in Malaysia flying kites, Street and Lockhart were asked by a Malaysia Air official to teach sewing techniques to national kitefliers. Without proper equipment, the two were unable to oblige. "Since you have an airline, you can fly your people to Texas, can't you?" asked Lockhart. "We can teach them there." The airline could and did. This was the impetus for the first workshop.

The couple had been to kite retreats in the U.S. before, and knew there was a nucleus of fliers in the Southwestern U.S. They knew that there were no major kite events in Texas at that time. As Texas Tech professors, they knew of the university's remote auxiliary campus at Junction, in the striking hill country of west Texas. Finally, as art educators, they realized they could impose high esthetic standards and seek innovation.

Thus the end of May gathering at Junction was born. With little advance publicity, the first year's turnout was less than 50. There were four Malaysian presenters (who of course learned to sew too) and five other instructors, all American. Eleven U.S. states were represented. Donating their services, Street and Lockhart decided they would make up any financial loss from their own pockets, but needed to break even to continue a second year. Thanks to care about costs and in part to funds raised by donated kites and related paraphernalia at a fund-raising auction, they ended up in the black. The retreat would now be an annual event. Word of mouth did the rest.

As interest rose, Street refused to permit the retreat to grow beyond a certain point, in order to maintain quality. An attendance of 150 was set as the maximum. Numerically, the retreat may have peaked in 1996 when there were 23 presenters, and 10 countries and 17 states represented.

Following the sad departure of Street and Lockhart, regulars spearheaded by Judy Kingery, of Abilene, Texas, and Bob Josjor, of Ogallala, Nebraska, decided they would make the retreat regional rather than international and continue on with it in reduced size, but maintaining the basic formula. And this has worked well. With Kingery and Josjor serving as low-key organizers and cheerleaders and Texas Tech personnel doing detail work, the retreat has been attended by 50 people annually, on average, since then.

This year's 15<sup>th</sup> annual event followed along predictably pleasant lines except for the addition of a sizeable Drachen Kite Foundation contingent which chose the retreat as the locale not only for kite play but for a board meeting and to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday of its president, Scott Skinner. Presenters included Rick Miller, of Silver City, Nevada, and Randy Shannon, of Flagstaff, Arizona, making a giant 20-by-30 foot (6-by-9 meters), multi-bridled "sledhead" kite, aided by a corps of volunteers, and a 15 foot (4.5 meters) round Wan Wan Dako, both of which flew splendidly. Charlie Sotich taught how to make postage-stamp size miniatures flown on a thread with a wand. From a personality standpoint, the joint George Peters show was a great hit. One George (from Boulder, Colorado) had his students making elegant small kites, blowdarts for blowgun shooting fun, and party hats for the end-of-retreat dinner and auction. The other George Peters (from Seattle, Washington) taught construction of the six-sided Mad Bull kite he learned to build as a child on the island of Grenada in the Caribbean. This kite is equipped with a hummer and "sings" fiercely as it flies in a strong wind-----thus the name Mad Bull.

Scott Skinner sums up: "It's hard to gauge the impact of the Junction kite retreat. But it's certainly been a model of how to be constructively creative in kites and culture and humanity. It's been a great platform for that total exchange."

## *Commenting on Junction Retreat*

*It's like the Paelolithic time, and the tribe has come together. (George Peters, Boulder, Colorado)*

*It's special, it affords an escape from the metropolis. I use it as therapy. (George Weber, Carrollton, Texas)*

*Peaceful respite. (Judy Kingery, Abilene, Texas)*

*I like to watch the hawks and buzzards circling around. You can go out to the hummingbird feeders and see the different bird societies there. I like it here at Junction, it's fun. (Charlie Sotich, Chicago, Illinois)*

*You feel better about yourself after a weekend here. (Joe Hadzicki, San Diego, California)*

*There are no cellphones, no family responsibilities, no TV, the world has gone up in smoke. (Ali Fujino, Seattle, Washington)*



*Flying one of his flat, skinny, multi-bridled Noodle kites in Greece, artist and writer Tal Streeter manages to make it appear as though an apparition is emerging from just over the horizon. The Edo-type kite is bowed just slightly in back to provide necessary stability.*



# *North East Kite Fliers*

## *Portrait of a Friendly English Club*

“We’re a friendly club,” one member of the North East Kite Fliers commented. Others nearby concurred. One produced an unasked for but much appreciated cup of tea for a guest as evidence of the general good will.

Twenty years old and with 70 members, North East is unofficial host to the annual Sunderland weekend kite festival, one of the largest and best-run kite celebrations in England.

The club embraces an area bounded by Counties Northumberland and Durham and the Tyne and Wear metropolitan region. It is just southeast of Scotland.

In typical English fashion, members tend to be highly articulate and slyly witty. Brief sketches of some of those attending the Sunderland event last July make the point.

A professor of information management at Newcastle University, Professor **John Dobson** took up kiting when his hobbies of rock climbing and running had to be abandoned for a less active sport following a medical operation. With his children grown and departed from home, Dobson moved house-----“the last time in my lifetime”-----and took his 5,000 books with him. Literature, poetry, visual arts, philosophy are his interests. As a second career, Dobson is a professional piano accompanist.

When he took up kiting he collected choice examples but mainly made his own until he came across Joel Scholz, of Texas, who argued “instead of making your own kites, earn more money and buy them from a professional kitemaker like me. That way, we both benefit.” Dobson agreed with the logic and has commissioned his kites ever since, designing them right down to the size, color and shape. He may be proudest of the kite which displays on its sail a poem of his translated into Chinese. The translation and calligraphy are both elegant.

Captivated by hearing visiting Japanese master Takeshi Nishibiyashi talk on the radio, **Jeanette Dunn** took workshops in kitemaking he held during a two-month stay in 1986. Nishi and Eiji Ohashi had been brought to Sunderland by new festival organizer Malcolm Goodman, in cooperation with the Nissan company which had just opened a car-making plant in the area and was intent in fostering Japanese-English relations. “It was a dream come true,” she remembers. “My father had made model yachts when I was young, so I was interested in the air, in aerodynamics.” As a teacher of art and design in an area school, Dunn introduced kitemaking into the curriculum and also studied Japanese culture in general. She learned to make kimonos, obis, fans, to embroider, to dye, to paint Japanese-style. She even took Japanese language lessons. And of course she collected Oriental kites. She estimates she has gotten hundreds of thousands of children interested in Japanese culture over the years.

Jeanette became a North East Kite Fliers member early on-----“I’m one of the oldest members now,” she says---and for her first festival in ’86 she built a Rokkaku kite which she flew with friends. “We came second, almost beating the Nissan factory team. We were so proud. The Japanese won the bottle of champagne, but I was the star on telly,” she recalls. “That Rokkaku with clipper motif is still flying. All my kites still fly, because I keep mending them. They’re old warriors.”

Interested in kites since he was a boy scout, **Harry Peart** is the editor of the North East Kite Fliers quarterly, a good read. He helped found the kite club and has been a member ever since. He has served in every elected position, including chairman. He made a point of doing many kite workshops for children over the years and never tires of kites as a hobby. “I love the vibration of the string, the link between earth and sky.”



*John Dobson*



*Jeanette Dunn*



*Harry Peart*



*Peter Braithwaite*



*Peter Sturrs*



*Alison Braithwaite*



*Jock Walker*

An engineer by profession and earning a substantial living, Peart in mid-career decided the job didn't suit his principles and switched to nursing instead, becoming a nurse tutor at one point. "I did orthopedics in Canada for a while," he says.

Peart is particularly proud his club has a member in Russia, who originally made contact via the BBC. The Kite Fliers eventually brought the man and family to Sunderland to visit and the club has since supplied him with raw materials such as ripstop nylon and carbon fiber rods to build kites because he cannot find such modern materials in the Urals. Having seen Ray Bethel fly three kites simultaneously, two from the hand and one from the belt, he is now learning this feat on his own. "He's good at it too," says Peart.

"A boomerang was thrown, flew around the world, then was caught by the thrower. Where in the world was this accomplished?" An interviewer poses this egghead question to **Peter Braithwaite**, a structural engineer, who quickly comes up with the correct answer to the brainteaser: "South Pole," he says. This is of course where the 24 meridians meet.

Braithwaite recalls becoming interested in kites when his father bought him an Eddy diamond at a seaside resort when he was 11 years old. "I even remember the colors-----red and blue," he says. He took up kiting, eventually gave it up for motorcycles, then came back to kites. "I made one-, two- and four-liners, but now specialize in single-line models. Partly because of a precocious daughter interested in pop culture, I specialize in Rokkakus these days." The point is he varies the silhouettes on the kites and produces puzzles for viewers to guess at when the kites fly in train at festivals. If the silhouettes are human, the question becomes: what is the rock and roll band pictured? The Stones, Pink Floyd, The Doors, Jethrol Tull, Meat Loaf?

"I like kites for the satisfaction of working with a sewing machine for hours. You fly the kite and it goes up. You don't have to quarrel with engines. It's free. The wind costs nothing."

**Peter Sturrs** is called by one member "the heart and soul of the club." Peter answers: "That's what they threaten me with. I do a little bit."

Deputy director of a small, elite school for children, Sturrs works long hours under high stress. He comes to kites “for relaxation, because it’s multicultural, because anyone can join in, because there are no confrontations.” One role he assumes for the club is custodian of the European Air Gallery, a collection of 23 large Edo kites painted by artists and flown simultaneously at festivals here and there. “They’re a floating art gallery,” he says. “The idea of filling the sky appeals to me.”

“I take the bookings for the collection. I’m the organizer. When not on display, the kites live in my garage.”

Sturrs says the Claudio Capelli self-portrait is the most appreciated painting of them all by the public. Two others with particular “carry” when airborne are Cara Lockhart-Smith’s portrait of a cat and Kaffe Fasset’s colorful “Snails in the Sunset.”

**Alison Braithwaite**, 12 years old going on 19, embraces her father Peter’s hobby with enthusiasm, at least for now. She specializes in flying fighters. “They’re quite fun,” she says. For the Sunderland festival she is decked out in “Goth” style-----all black clothing with neck and wrist gear that look like something an attack dog would wear. She enjoys helping her father fly his Rokkaku kites with their “rok” ‘n’ roll images. “People have to guess whether it’s the Doors or Led Zeppelin or whatever. Sometimes it can be hard to tell.”



*Kaffe Fasset’s “Snails in the Sunset” is one of the beautiful kites in the European Art Gallery, a set of large Edos flown as an air gallery at festivals by the North East Kite Fliers.*

Conversation with Alison is joined by her mother who pronounces her daughter “rather outspoken,” then adds, “I’m **Kim**, the long-suffering wife.”

For charm, **Jock Walker** is hard to beat. A native of Dundee, his Scots accent has survived a lifetime of living in England. “I have an active mind and good hands. Anything I want I make myself. I took up kites 15 years ago because I like a wee bit of challenge.”

Walker’s kites reflect an original turn of mind: a spider’s web with spider climbing the line, a large paintbrush, a circumflex decorated to resemble a crown celebrating Britain’s Jubilee Year in 2002. “I’m not a royalist,” he hastens to add, “but I do like the combined royal colors of purple, gold, black, red and green.”

“Basically, I like a lot of fun,” says Walker.



# What They Had to Say

Modest to a fault, New York advertising executive Will Yolen in the 1972-73 edition of *Who's Who in America* billed himself as “kite-flying champion of the world.” There being no appreciable evidence for the claim, a newspaper columnist asked Yolen whether he constructed his own kites. “Did Babe Ruth make his own bats?” he demanded. “Does Heifeitz build violins?”

“I took up kites as a warm weather leisure hobby because the existential concept of flying interests just about everybody, including me.” (Dr. Jeff Cain)



*Maidin bin Ahmad*

“I was born in a village built on stilts over the water in Brunei Darussalam, Borneo. We used kites bigger than Indian fighters but with the same cutting line, and young and old joined in the battles. There were no obstacles and there was always a good wind. I remember flying kites in those days as something grand, something honorable.” (Maidin bin Ahmad, head of the Brunei Kite Association)

“I didn’t start making small kites at the beginning. But as you know, transportation is a very big deal in Japan. It is troublesome carrying a big kite bag on trains, so I started downsizing. I got the idea from New Year’s greeting cards exchanged by our kite group in Kyoto. I thought it might be fun to fly a card as a kite. From this beginning, small kites gradually became popular among our group, and now we compete to see who can make the best miniatures.” (Nobuhiko Yoshizumi)

“The Chinese believe that when you tilt your head back to look at a kite in the sky your mouth opens slightly, which gets rid of excess body heat, giving you a healthy yin-yang balance.” (Malcolm Goodman)

“Beijing is modernizing, clearing out old neighborhoods, planting full grown trees, creating instant parks. Lots of boys are flying kites and the result is ‘kite city.’” (John Stevenson)

“A good source for high grade bamboo to split to make kites is international festivals. I used to rescue giant poles of bamboo left behind by the Japanese-----they never take the bamboo home with them.” (Shakib Gunn)

“Yes, the man who stands anchor to a kite not only stands in the long stream of history which reaches back into the folklore of the East, but he is also a living link between the beauty of earth and sky. He sails with his kite on the dipping windwheels of the night. He soars on its wings into the birdsongs of the day.” (Jane Yolen)

## *Another Sunday Morning*

*Among the kite-fliers and fly  
The private kite of poetry-----  
A sort of winged sandwich board  
El-Grecoed to receive the Lord:  
An airborne, tremulous brochure  
Proclaiming that the end is near.  
-----Derek Mahan*



# The Convoluted History of Brookite

## A 97-Year-Old English Kite Company

Through surprising turns of fate, the Brookite company of Okehanpton, Dartmoor, in far southwest England, appears to be the oldest continuously operated kite company in England, and probably Europe.

Brookite was registered as a business in 1906, although it may well have been running before then, by the brothers Tommy and Walter Brooke. Mad for kites at a time when aviation was all the rage in Europe, the Brooke brothers peddled their kites at English beaches from a motorcycle. One brother flew kites, the other sold.

The business flourished and Brookite records show photographs of a company kite being used by Marconi in one of his pioneering long distance voice transmissions, this one in 1910 from Newfoundland to the steamship Principessa Mafalda in Clifton, Ireland. Almost a century later, Brookite (the “e” was dropped early by the Brooke brothers) makes and sells the exact same kite-----a winged, double-box Conyne. The shape is the same, the wooden spars the same. As a concession to the revolution in kite materials, the Brookite Marconi kite today is offered with ripstop nylon sails instead of cotton ones.



*Nick Harrison*

As a business, Brookite has a convoluted history-----made difficult to document because a fire in 1938 gutted the company’s London headquarters and forced it to move. Nick Harrison, owner of the firm with his wife Mandy, believes the Brooke brothers sold their firm sometime in the 1930s. By the late 1940s, Harrison’s maternal grandfather Ernest Sewell was running it. Sewell was a master magician and branched out from performing to



*An old paper punch used in the early days of Brookite kite building.*



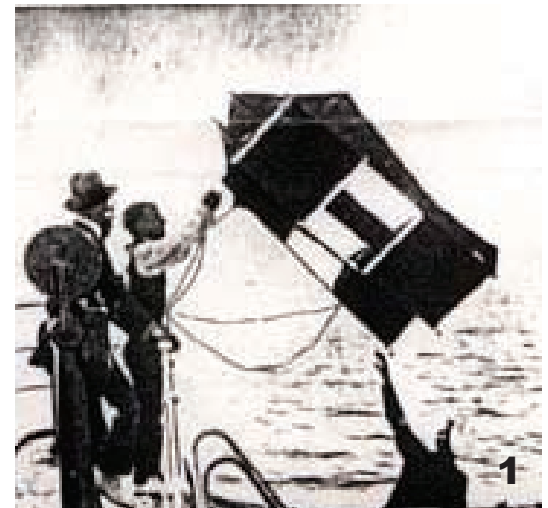
sell box games such as tiddlywinks and to renting out fun fair equipment. His operation shared quarters with Brookkite, so he was able to learn all about kites.

Although it suffered a serious reverse with the 1938 blaze, Brookkite made a comeback during World War II as it created barrage and other kites for military use. After the war, it benefited from a new interest in recreational kites and increased personal incomes. The revolutionary new space age materials for kites-----ripstop nylon, carbon fiber spars, virtually unbreakable flying line-----made little initial impression on ultra conservative Brookkite, however.

Noted British designer Martin Lester, who was then running an avant garde kite store in London, recalls: "Brookkite in those days put out the archetypal British kite. It took a hurricane wind to fly. The Brookkite kites in the 1960s had sails of porous cotton like cheesecloth, only heavier; the spars were half-inch spruce, and the

*1. Brookkite emphasizes quality and packaging. Here a kit permits the buyer to color crayon his own design on the kite sails. 2. In addition to kites, Brookkite sells a wide variety of other toys, including this handsome hobby horse. 3. Brookkite's warehouse bulges with boxes of kites marked "Made in China."*





1. A Brookite double box is used during experiments by Marconi on the ship *Principessa Mafalda* in 1910. 2. A page copied from an old Brookite catalogue shows the famous "BrooKite" double box. The term "By Royal Letters Patent" was apparently used by the firm to give the impression the company had the King's blessing. 3. George Brooke, co-founder of the company, shows off one of the firm's large kites.

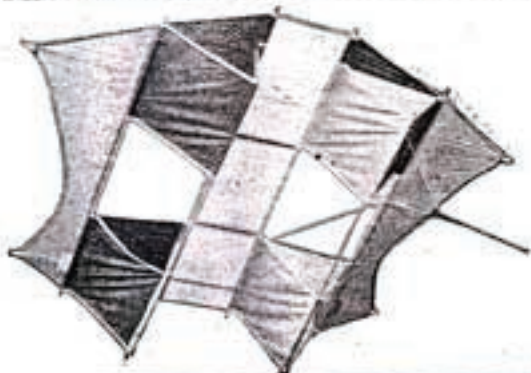
## The "BrooKite" Kite.

By Royal Letters Patent, No. 23493/06.

A Kite for Sport, Scientific and Advertising Purposes, &c.

### Double Box Aeroplanes.

#### The "BrooKite" Double Box Double Stretcher Aeroplanes



No. 6	Area about 16 square feet.	10/6
" 7	" 28	15/-
" 8	" 60	25/-
" 9	" 70	30/-
" 10	" 85	42/-

For Sport, Aerial Photography, Signalling  
Life Saving at Sea, and Meteorological  
Purposes.



sail was stapled to the frame. The kites were oversized. British memories of the kite are of running along the beach at Brighton, ploughing furrows as you ran to get them aloft. My shop never sold them. We wanted our customers to come back.”

Nick Harrison says his father Peter took over the business in 1963 and started building it up and modernizing it. Nick himself worked for the firm part-time starting in 1969, but his heart was in sports and he worked at Lords, the legendary London cricket field, for the next seven years, before joining Brookite full time.

By this time Englishman Peter Powell had marketed his delightful two-line stunter, easily flown in train, and put recreational kiting to the fore. A television interview of Powell had the Brookite phone line ringing off the hook the next day. “We had to get into two-string stunt kites,” says Nick Harrison, “and we did.”

Because of time wasted in commuting to work, the Harrisons decided to move out of London. The government was promoting the underdeveloped southwest part of the country and generously offering to pay company staff that would not move a redundancy settlement, so the Harrisons went scouting and found a sturdy old water mill in Okehampton, on the fringe of wild Dartmoor, near Exeter, and bought it.

Father Peter Harrison kept the business running in London while son Nick and wife Mandy adapted the stone mill as a kite factory. The move west was finally accomplished in 1980. Nick took over as production boss, Mandy ran sales. Although there were initial financial strains, within five years Brookite had increased its staff to 20 people and employed another 20 as “outworkers” creating kites in their homes. By this time Brookite had switched over to spinnaker nylon, or ripstop, and was making kites in 25 shapes and many sizes. At first, the firm made only basic two-line stunters, but now it produces a number of models. To keep up with the competition, the firm bit by bit added a range of two-line stunters and soft Parafoils as well as large, expensive arc “power kites” to its line.

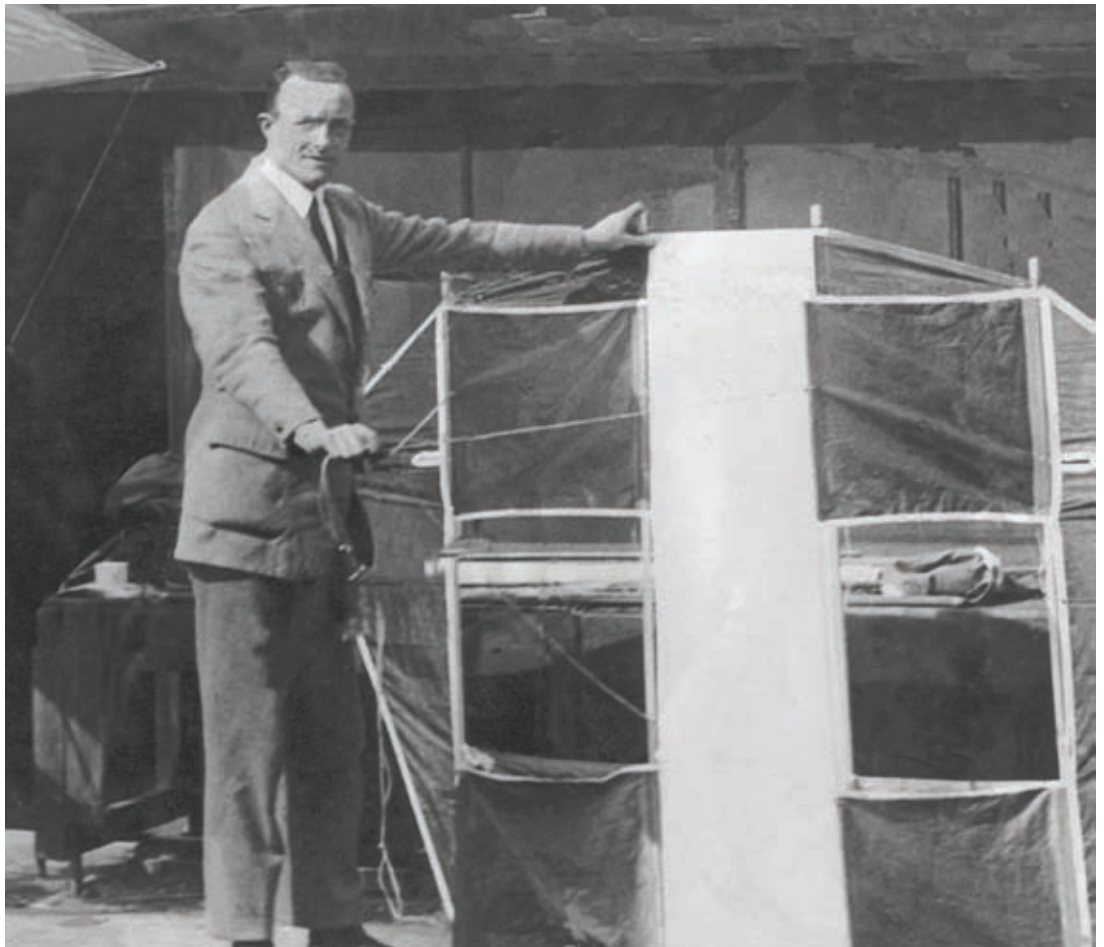
Brookite made it a point to emphasize quality in its kites and concentrated on developing attractive packaging, and as a result the firm established a good reputation among retailers. “We sell a half million kites yearly, which is pretty small,” says Nick Harrison. “But we’re doing very nicely with kites and all the other toys we sell----- hobby horses, toy boats, bubble makers, wind spinners. With a variety of products, we’ve taken the risks out of the business.”

Brookite very much goes its own way. “We don’t go to kite festivals,” says Nick, “our interest is business. We don’t have to make an impression on the kite world.”

Other than leaving London, Brookite made its most important business decision when it studied China as a place to manufacture its kites a decade ago. “When I got the first price quotation for China, I thought they got the decimal point in the wrong place,” says Nick. That’s how great the savings were-----an estimated 50 percent.

Brookite inevitably switched over and now has three-quarters of its kites made in a Chinese factory employing 400 people. “Our business is negligible there. If we asked them to make 100 speciality kites for us, they’d laugh in our face.” Harrison is satisfied the quality is first rate. “We get pre-production samples. If they get it right the first time, they’ll get it right every time.”

Longevity as a business has inevitably provoked outside interest from kite fanciers and the Harrisons maintain an archive of clippings and photographs they make available for study. They also have some old kites stashed away, but are hesitant to dig them out because of the work involved. The archive is a motley assortment dealing with Brookite in particular and kiting in general. Here and there are fascinating articles: a 1974 story of a kite bringing down a German helicopter when the ‘copter caught the kite’s string and a 1937 piece on Amelia Earhart testing kites she planned to take on her round the world flight to fly in case of an emergency. Old photos document the



*In another of the historic pre-World War II photographs from the Brookite archive, Thomas Brooke (top) shows off yet another large kite his firm was producing. The production line for making kites (below) was staffed mostly by women.*



impeccably dressed Brooke brothers displaying and flying their kites.

With their business running smoothly and the remodeling of their handsome mill, house, outbuildings and gardens virtually completed, the Harrisons look to the future with optimism. Having a daughter and two sons, all in their 20s, they hope the business will become a third generation one. “I’m not saying this is our pension, something in the coffers to keep Mom and Dad in red wine in years to come, but I would like to see the business continue in the family,” says Nick.

# Letters to the Editor

## Re-creation Project

I'm a teacher in the U.K. and am currently researching Cody's kite-powered channel crossing, with a view to marking the anniversary in November of this year. The Berthon boat used has a fascinating story attached and I am currently with touch with the firm who designed it. There are only about five known Berthon boats in the world, but one has been discovered at a stately home and museum 10 miles from my present home. Based on this local one, I am making a reproduction of it but suspect that the Cody boat was a later design based on a patent of 1897. My ultimate aim is to recreate the crossing using a replica of both kite and boat. (Roger Sewell [tykeafloat@hotmail.com](mailto:tykeafloat@hotmail.com))

## Compliments

Your site is awesome. I myself am running a website in Hebrew and will translate some of your material for my own site. Thanks. Bye and shalom. ([itay@znavot.co.il](mailto:itay@znavot.co.il))

Issue No. 11 is amazing. The scope is immense. By far your best issue. And one heck of a lot of work. (Rick Miller [kitefiter@cybermesa.com](mailto:kitefiter@cybermesa.com))

Thank you for your nice website, which provided me with a lot of useful information. The kite virus has just infected me recently. I hope to visit your foundation when I visit a friend in Seattle. ([hugo@macnews.de](mailto:hugo@macnews.de))

## In Appreciation

(Editor's note: The Drachen Foundation held its annual workshop on historic kites in Maschen, Germany, last spring. A participant sent this commentary.)

What amazes me is that a lot of the knowledge that I gathered at the workshop was somewhere around in my small kite archive. It was the way the stories were told and information organized, the way we worked together, that made it all come alive for me.

For example, in issue No. 8 of the Drachen Journal, there was a lot about the Eddy kite. I knew this but never read the journal until I came home. Now I know Eden Maxwell's articles on Eddy by heart!

The talk that Hans Snoek gave on Arno Haft, the Hamburg kiteflier, was worth a whole weekend. I would loved to have heard more, to see Haft's kites and kite plans. With his films, stories and other materials, Hans made Haft come alive for me.

Werner Schmidt did a nice talk about the reasons a kite flies. I did know that we need a kite, string, and some wind. The string seems to be the essential part. No string, no kiteflying, no joy. Even the guys who did the meteorological flying in history understood this. So Werner could get on with his basic topic, the weather station at Lindenberg.

The Eddy kites we made turned out nicely. So what if they are off by a few millimeters? We all will find the guts to fly them. I put my sail in tea to get a wonderful color, but it shrank the fabric a little bit. So now I will have to adjust the whole kite again.

The tee-shirt with the Eddy image was most appreciated. Thanks for that gift, Drachen.

Let's keep on going with these workshops. (Douwe Jan Joustra)



## About Our Contributor

**Tal Streeter** has been a kite enthusiast since childhood and has traveled the world in search of kite lore. His essay from a book in progress is reproduced on the next page.



## The Journal Staff



**Scott Skinner**, president of the Drachen Foundation, is a former pilot instructor at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He has been a kite enthusiast for two decades—designing, making, flying, collecting, and teaching about kites.

**Ali Fujino** is the administrator of Drachen. A museum specialist since age 19 when she began work at the Smithsonian Institution, she has long been fascinated with anything that could become airborne. Fujino has recently been elected a member of the prestigious Explorers Club of New York City in recognition of her 25 years of cultural work in Third World countries.



Editor of the Drachen Journal, well traveled **Ben Ruhe** regularly contributes articles to special interest publications on subjects as diverse as boomerangs, tribal art and flint-knapping.

## *Fly Kites*

*Note to readers: Articles in this issue of the Drachen Foundation Journal not bylined were written by editor Ben Ruhe.*

*Fly kites, fly kites in the sky  
With the nice wind high above  
Fly up, fly up in the clouds!  
Or fly up to heaven.*

-----Kazuko Narui

## Illustration Credits

Tom Jeckel----Cover, Page 3 (bottom), 4 (Nos. 1 and 3), 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. Ben Ruhe----2, 3 (top) 4 (No. 2), 6, 8, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 31, 33, 34, 35, 40 (Streeter, Skinner, Fujino). British Modern Painters magazine----15. Bonnie Wright----25. Frank Whaley----26. Courtesy of Tom Jeckel----29. North East Kite Fliers----32. Brookite company----36, 38. Malcolm Goodman----40 (Ruhe).

## *How to Find This Journal*

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# *The Path of Least Resistance and the Trick*

*Editor's note: Following is an excerpt from a book in progress titled Measuring the Sky.*

*By Tal Streeter*

*In the sky. Among the clouds. A kite at rest, still. A child's kite.*

*On it's back, a child.*

*A kite at rest, still. Something even our fine-feathered friends are incapable of achieving, this child's kite in the sky with its passenger, unmoving. A point of stillness in the vast heavens.*

*Only a slight breath-like ripple on its skin-----the wind's breathing holding the kite aloft. This kite, any kite.....This kite with a child's hand holding its long line of string stretching back down to earth. The child perched there riding on the kite's back wide-eyed with the fabulously new perspective of earth, the earth embraced in a child's mind. Astride a kite, kite and child, a still point in the sky.*

*Then moving, the kite leaning to the left, dipping, next to speed across the sky, its passenger holding on tight, before coming to rest once again, creating another still point in the ocean sky. The wind once again breathing lightly, rippling the kite's skin, holding it aloft ever so gently.*

*Its passenger looks down on the small body whose hand shakes the string, sending message from the earth up and out into the distant sky.*

*A child's imagination notwithstanding, the kite follows the path chosen by nature, pulling from an arc into a straight line, tracing the path of least resistance across the sky. The frugality of nature, spare, the conservation of energy even in the flight of a child's kite, as in science, as in philosophy, the evidence of "Ockham's razor," the "law of parsimony," the "path of least resistance."*

*The evidence of stillness government by the "law of inertia."*

*As a child-----in the sky on the back of a kite; running across a meadow; hopping, one foot on the curb, the other in the gutter of a city street; sitting at the breakfast table eating a piece of toast-----seeing everything as if by magic. Not by the laws of man's physics, not by laws at all, but the way of nature and kites and a child's mind. Kite. Sky. Hopping. Skipping and breakfast toast. All magic. Enchantment.*

*That's the trick.*