

John Irsfeld- scholar, writer, and deputy

by Thomas Moore

John Irsfeld works hidden away in a dark office. Books are stacked to the ceiling and there is an atmosphere of seclusion. He said he wants to disappear.

Although Irsfeld is a vice president at UNLV, and the deputy to President Robert Maxson—a man always in the spotlight—he thinks of himself primarily as a writer.

"Writers are outsiders," Irsfeld said. If he had his way he would always be outside of the public eye.

"I'm doing my job best when no one knows me or knows that I'm doing it," Irsfeld said, referring to Maxson, who is usually in the media spotlight.

The supporting role Irsfeld has developed toward Maxson works well, and not only because of Irsfeld's personality. Maxson is "very good at (the publicity)," Irsfeld said. "Maxson wants it that way, and he's the president."

Irsfeld said he supports Maxson by "protecting the quarterback," and "enhancing the president's ability to be the president." Maxson seemed to share Irsfeld's view of his job.

"I don't know where I end and Irsfeld begins," Maxson said. He

said he likes their complementary relationship and he clearly would be at a loss if he were to lose his deputy.

Maxson said he has reservations about Irsfeld's self-image. He called Irsfeld one of "Nevada's best writers of fiction," but said he "is selling himself short as an administrator" when he thinks of himself primarily as a writer.

Maxson said that Irsfeld is "the best kind of administrator for a university—a scholar with administrative experience."

Dr. Chris Hudgins, chair of the English department, agreed with Maxson. Irsfeld was formerly the chair of the department and Hudgin's boss. The department was "terribly pleased with Irsfeld's work," Hudgins said.

According to Hudgins, Irsfeld was instrumental in getting a creative writing course at UNLV. He attributed Irsfeld's work as the beginning point for the master's program at the English department.

Irsfeld likes to talk about writing. He said it was good he knew early that he would write. "It was a freeing decision," he said. It allowed him to move from job to job feeling secure he would always be a writer.

Irsfeld said his reasons for writing could be a fundamental,

genetic drive to scribble down his thoughts or a need to reveal the many personalities he has inside.

It could also be his "pearl is the oyster's sickness" theory. The theory compares writing to an oyster producing a pearl. While pearls may be treasured, they are simply an oyster's response to an irritant. If there is no irritant, there is no pearl.

A writer's response to an irritant is to write. However, if he ever completely ejects the pearl

and loses the irritant, he's cured—he would never write again.

If this theory is true, there are many people who hope Irsfeld is never cured. Along with Maxson's praise, Irsfeld's work has been noticed by many others. He has published three novels, 14 short stories, three poems and numerous articles, notes and reviews.

Larry McMurtry, of Lonesome Dove fame, encouraged him to keep writing, and his papers are included in the 20th Century Ar-

chives at Boston University. There his work sits beside the works of famous authors such as Isaac Assimov, and revered thinkers such as Martin Luther King, Jr.

Irsfeld is a talented and respected writer, but he said he enjoys his current job too much to write now. Although he said he will write again, let's hope he tells someone when he does. If he doesn't, we'll never know if he's gone off somewhere to write or if he's finally managed to disappear.

"I'm doing my job best when no one knows me or knows I'm doing it."



John Irsfeld, a vice president at UNLV

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