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Deprived of Unhappiness

Sam Pickering
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Sam Pickering, the author of this, his 10th book of essays, was the model for the Robin Williams? character in the 1989 film Dead Poet's Society. He is an English professor at the University of Connecticut at Storrs, one of many settings Pickering plucks from his daily life experiences to share with readers.

He warns in the preface that for an essayist, "anything can furnish a sentence, not only things done by or to a person but things that swirl around, or more likely bounce lazily along."

Pickering, himself, bounces the reader through one year's time, from early summer vacationing with his wife, Vickie, at her childhood home in Nova Scotia, to the return to Storrs for school year routines. Pickering also slips in fictional residents from his hometown of Carthage, Tenn., and their accounts of life.

These parts of the book are fun and funny to consume. For instance, "because of his drinking, Otha Hogletree's wife, Meleeta left him, saying she couldn't wait to dance on his grave. After hearing Meleeta's remark, Otha instructed Slubey Garts, owner of the Haskins Funeral Home, to bury him in Dunphy's Pond."

While Pickering writes in exquisite detail what he discovers on his many adventures, this doesn't work well every time and too much information tends to bog the narrative down.

But those characters with such wonderful names—Malachi Ramus, Piety Goforth, Carsten Slipperback and Leviticus Tuttle—the stories of their lives and goings-ons are wonderfully humorous. You'll burst upon reading about the 105-year-old woman being interviewed by the cub reporter. Here's to hearing more from those Pickering-created characters.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (August 16, 1998)

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