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# Hillside

College Heights Herald Magazine

Tuesday, November 23, 1993



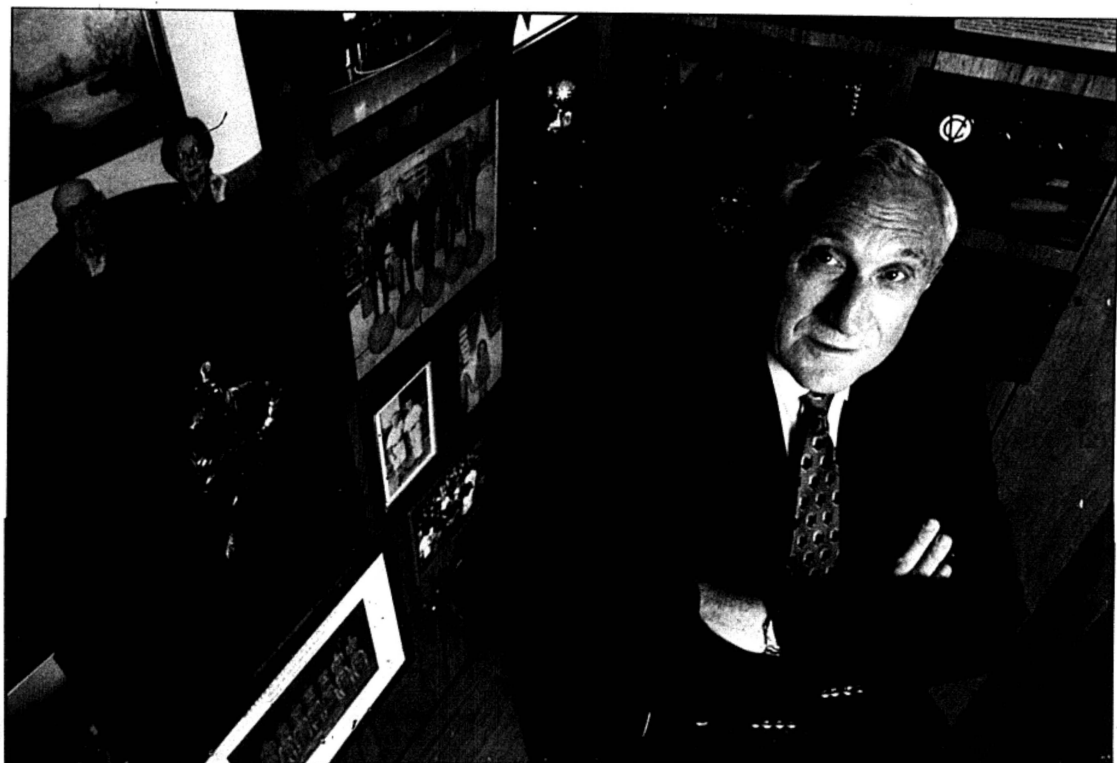
## A Simple, Peaceful Life

A look at Kentucky's  
Shaker Communities



Also Inside: A Western legend retires and  
a professor tries to save others from drugs and alcohol

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Francisco Adler/Herald

Johnny Oldham came to Western in 1946 and played basketball under Coach Ed Diddle. He later became one of Western's most successful coaches, leading his

1971 team to the NCAA Final Four. He's been with Western most of his career and he's retiring from teaching in December.



During World War II, Oldham had to leave Western for more than a year. He played on the Naval Technical Training Center team

# The Final Buzzer

♦ The man who coached some of the best basketball teams here is ending his lifelong career with Western when he retires next month. But Johnny Oldham will still be around telling his stories and keeping watch over the tradition he helped build.

If it weren't for a Quick Quaker Oats box, Johnny Oldham might have never played basketball, never attended college, never been an All-American and never been one of the most successful coaches at Western.

He might have never known the difference between a downscreen and a pick, goal tending and traveling, a 2-3 zone and a man-to-man defense. He might have never known that a round orange ball with black circles could mean so much to a man.

It was 1926. Johnny Oldham, age 4, was known around Hartford, Ky., just like everyone else in the tiny town of 1,000. His father owned Oldham's Grocery and Gift Mill and was the town jailer. His mother took care of the family and made Johnny and his brother eat Quick Quaker Oats. Johnny didn't like the soggy, warm cereal but his mother swore it was good for him. So, as a motivator, Mrs. Oldham would give the boys the empty box when they finished.

The brothers would cut the bottom from the round cardboard container, tack it on a wall and shoot a rubber ball through it.

A basketball star was born. Oldham ate a lot of oats as a kid, he

said, but more importantly he put hundreds of shots through those old cardboard containers.

"I don't eat Quick Quaker oats today because of it," Oldham said, his gravelly voice highlighted with a country accent.

Now he's 71. He's done just about everything there is to do with basketball. He played in the Kentucky State Basketball Tournament as a senior for Hartford High. He came to Western and was named an All-American while playing for legendary Coach Ed Diddle. He played professionally for two years. And he coached at Western from 1963 to 1971. His teams compiled a 146-41 record and won four Ohio Valley Conference championships. His best-known achievement on the Hill was his 1970-71 ball club that went to the NCAA Final Four and placed third.

After 1971, he became Western's athletics director for 15 years. Now, after several years of teaching basketball coaching, Oldham is retiring.

His years on the Hill have been great, he said, and dear old Western will always be special to him.

But the word retiring isn't in his vocabulary. He's just been re-elected to the Bowling Green city commission. He makes clocks, he gardens and above all,

he is a basketball junkie.

"He can't watch a game without screaming when a player moves his pivot foot, forgets to downscreen, misses an open layup or fails to grab a rebound."

Nowadays, his hands might not be as quick as they once were, his hair may be gray and he can't run as fast, but basketball is ingrained into his soul. His mind is full of stories about the game, his career, his players, his school.

In the sixth grade, Oldham was in a school play where he imitated what he wanted to do as an adult.

"I had a ball and I had this sweater that came down dragging the floor and these little kids sitting around me and they said they were projecting that I would be a coach, and that's what happened."

Hartford was a good place to have that goal. Basketball meant everything to the town, and it meant everything to Oldham.

There might not have always been a sturdy goal or a nice ball to play with, but Oldham found material that would suffice.

"Every place I lived had a goal up," he said. "Our parents didn't put it up. We put it up and you might have a two by four and a two by six and a one by six. No telling what the backboard was made of."

See Oldham, Page 7

story by Chris Poynter

# SHAKER TOWN

The communities of South Union & Pleasant Hill

The Shakers came to America from England in 1774 to avoid religious persecution. They settled in a number of different states including Kentucky, where they established two communities: South Union, which is located 15 minutes outside Bowling Green, and Pleasant Hill, located in Central Kentucky. Both communities thrived for many years because they followed their founder, Ann Lee's advice, "Hands to work, hearts to God."

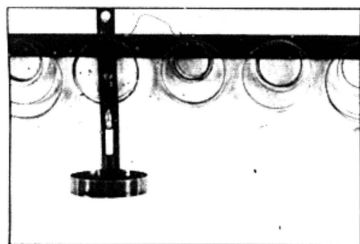
The Shakers became known as such because of their ritualistic dance during worship. The Shakers had a number of beliefs that caused many outsiders to label them as different. They accepted celibacy as an imitation of the life of Christ and any married couples entering the religion were forced to accept a brother-sister relationship. They depended on converts into

the religion and the adoption of children to increase their numbers.

The Shakers believed in racial and sexual equality and the conservation of resources, all advanced concepts for the time. They were practical and innovative and have become known for a number of labor-saving inventions including the flat broom, the wooden clothespin and the circular saw. Many of their ideals such as simplicity and perfection are reflected in the Shakers' style and craftsmanship.

The industrial revolution and changing social attitudes signaled the decline of many of the Shaker communities throughout the United States, including those in Kentucky. Shakers no longer exist in Kentucky but there are a few Shakers left in New Hampshire and Maine. South Union and Pleasant Hill exist as monuments to the Shaker legacy here in Kentucky.

Story & photos by Marc Piscotty

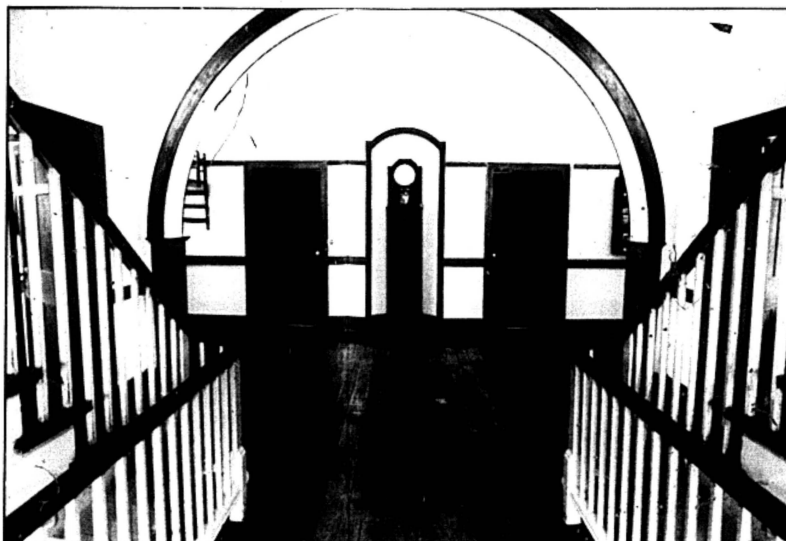


**Above,** a candle and a number of metal hoops used to make buckets hang from pegs in one of the buildings at Pleasant Hill in Harrodsburg. Pegs on the wall were used by the Shakers to hang all sorts of items to keep things organized and clean.

**At right,** medicine bottles sit on a window ledge in the Shaker Village at Pleasant Hill. The Shakers made many of their own medicines from herbs.



**Norma Lester** (left), **Lib Vandiver**, both of Harrodsburg, and **Devola Collier** of Cornishville serve as "interpreters" of the Shaker lifestyle at the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill in Harrodsburg. The women and men that serve as interpreters dress like the Shakers did and make handmade reproductions of Shaker-designed crafts. Shakers no longer exist in Kentucky, although a few live in New Hampshire and Maine.



**Above,** handmade glass panes and a candle reflect the Shaker's tendency to rely on the "outside world" as little as possible. Many of the objects on display at South Union in the Centre House are replicas of what the Shakers produced while there.

**At left,** the architecture at South Union reflects many of the Shaker's beliefs including simplicity, perfection and separation of the sexes. The Centre House is typical of Shaker design, with separate stairways and entrances to common rooms for men and women.



Dr. Eric Berg speaks to a student who showed up late for an exam in Berg's drug prevention class. The class is one of three Berg teaches at Western this semester. Before coming to Bowling Green last year, Berg was a surgeon who became a drug addict, bouncing from treatment center to jail to recovery.

## TEACHING FROM EXPERIENCE

Drugs and alcohol almost took away Dr. Eric Berg's life. The Western professor wants others to know it can happen to them, too.

As Eric Berg's night class on drug prevention begins, he coaxes students in the back of the room to move closer. He starts pacing, and begins his lecture with two questions.

"Anybody ever have any experience with narcotics?" There are no nods, no hands raised.

"Anybody been through withdrawal before?" Nothing.

"I have," he says slowly. "I have."

♦♦♦

Morphine and alcohol once had a grip on Berg. They took

a surgeon who earned more than \$150,000 a year and squeezed and squeezed until the spring of 1992, when Berg drove to Bowling Green in an old Dodge. He had \$5 in his pocket and everything he owned in the back seat.

The sequence of events isn't clear to Berg now, but he knows that he lost almost everything, including his physician's license and two marriages. He went from a job in North Carolina to a jail in Tennessee, where he went through withdrawal, but he looked for drugs as

soon as he was released.

A friend finally dropped him off at Nashville's Meharry Hospital, which gets a lot of street drunks and junkies, Berg said. He got kicked out in less than two weeks. "They said I was too crazy. The fact that I kept beating my head on a brick wall didn't help."

Berg spent time in another treatment center in Tennessee, then left for Bowling Green, with rumors of a bed and warm food keeping him sober.

When he arrived at the halfway house where he would live for the next 16

months, he was disgusted by what he saw. This house is full of drunks and junkies, he said to himself. Then he realized he was one of them.

He stayed sober the next day, and somehow, one sober day followed another.

♦♦♦

But it wasn't always easy.

One month after coming to Bowling Green, Berg went for a job interview at Shoney's, and as he drove he began to think. He was depressed. He had been given notice that he would be laid off from his current job. And no one at the house



Berg lost his physician's license, two marriages and a six-figure salary, but these days he is happy to have his own apartment and some time to think.

wanted to talk to him.

"I was saying on my way down Scottsville Road, 'What if I just bought a couple mini bottles of vodka?'" he said. "No one would ever know. I'll stop on my way back to the laundromat."

But the interview started late and ran long, and Berg got so scared that people would steal his clothes — the only ones he had — that he forgot to stop at the liquor store.

The urge passed, and Berg said he has never had such an urge again.

But the depression remained. A friend who helped at the halfway house noticed Berg's problem. He brought Berg to the two-acre field behind the friend's house, a field with waist-high grass and scattered rocks.

He brought out two lawn mowers, Berg said. One was new, and the friend put it away. The other was an old push mower that regularly broke down. "I wanted to call it the lawn mower from hell," Berg said.

Every week, the friend had Berg mow the field with the old mower, a four-hour task, for \$10. "It was a long way from a Mercedes and a fat bank account," Berg said.

But it taught him to like what he was doing, whatever it was, he said.

He spent a year working basic jobs — at Houchens, Godfather's Pizza and other places. When he was advised by treatment counselors to look for bigger jobs, he found a part-time position at a local recovery center.

He also applied to teach at Western, and the public health department accepted him over the summer as a part-time professor.

Until he received his first paycheck, Berg came to the classroom this semester in the only clothes he had — jeans or khaki pants with holes, one of two T-shirts and a pair of old shoes.

And in front of strangers, he introduced himself and told his story.

Continued on Page A7

*"He told his story  
and, well, I  
almost cried."*

— Mitchell Reed

story by Cara Anna photos by Francis Gardler

# 'I was like an electric wire; I could explode'

Continued from Page 6

His addiction was not the problem, he tells them. Living was the problem, and his addiction was the solution.

Berg said he had been a perfectionist who was totally imperfect, who compared his insides to the outsidings of others.

He grew up moving from place to place with his parents, always trying to fit in. But he just knew he was different in third grade. He was a head and a half taller than his classmates, so his teacher brought him a desk from the junior high school and placed him in the middle of the other desks.

"Every experience I had labeled me as different, at least in my mind," Berg said. "That different feeling eventually grew into the feeling that I was not good enough."

In 1980, a few years after

becoming a general surgeon, Berg started looking for ways to stop hurting. He found that drinking helped, but it was too messy.

He wanted something to use when he worked, when he performed surgery. He found morphine, which he could legally obtain at a local pharmacy. He started using the drug heavily in 1986.

"I had the steadiest hands in town, rock steady," he said. "I was barely alive."

His habit was discovered when the pharmacy was investigated, and his name turned up too often. "It was a tremendous relief to me that someone finally found out," he said.

Now, where other recovering addicts might choose to be anonymous, he shares his experience so he can help the "alcoholics in training" he sees on campus.

Between lectures from the textbook, he talks about having so little money that he would buy bottles of generic mouthwash and "shoot" them, throw up into a cup and drink it again.

He talks of addicts who always try to reach the level of their first high, a level that cannot be reached.

And he talks of his withdrawal in jail, where he shook, sweated, cramped and felt like tearing himself apart.

"I was like an electric wire; I could explode," he says to his class, shaking his arms and hands wildly. Then he lowers his arms and becomes still.

"Can you feel it," he says calmly, no question in his voice. "Can you feel it."

\*\*\*

"He told his story and, well, I almost cried," said Mitchell Reed,

a Bowling Green freshman. "It hits you. But it gives you hope."

It was an eye-opener, said Sharon Calhoun, a freshman from Rogers, Ark., who eats lunch with Berg and hangs out with him on campus, smoking cigarettes.

He's like no one she's ever met, she said.

Berg draws a lot of compliments from students, but others say his frequent stories are a distraction in class. "He gets off the subject," said one student who didn't want his name used. "You know, we're aware of his past."

But any teacher who comes into a classroom has had a variety of experience, said James Dunn, public health department head. "Some use it as a teaching tool, some do not."

Berg is open about the fact that he had a problem, and that's fine, said public health Professor Glenn

Lohr, who coordinates Berg's classes. "And I think that's real valuable because he attracts people who need help with their own problems."

Next semester, Lohr said, Berg is scheduled to teach again, but he also gets his physician's license back. It would allow Berg to practice in North Carolina again — or in Kentucky.

Berg, who doesn't even wear a watch anymore, waves off any possibilities. He doesn't know what the next day will be like, he said. He just knows he now has his own apartment, a winter coat on layaway and time to pursue things like art and cooking. And he knows he is happy.

"I may get drunk again tomorrow," he said. "I don't look at the future."

"I'm just gonna make it today."

## Oldham grew from small-town hero to big-time coach

Continued from Page A3

He and the kids in town played behind the county jail, in a vacant lot, behind the water tower or any place they could find. Back then, owning a nice ball was a luxury, Oldham said. He and eight of his buddies sold chocolate candy for Miss Ellis, who lived in town, and took their earnings and bought a new basketball.

That ball was handled by Oldham more times than he can count. Anytime of the year was basketball season to him, even if it was raining or snowing.

Mr. Ginger, who lived in Hartford, even put a goal inside the town's depot, so the kids could play in the winter.

"No heat. Played with gloves on," Oldham recalled. "Cold, ohh, it was cold."

Oldham perfected his skills on those old courts. Even while working at his father's store, Johnny would slip out the back door to shoot hoops. When his father needed him, he would call and Johnny would return to work.

Coch Diddle and Mr. Oldham were friends and Diddle used to visit the general store often, so the decision to play at Western was already made for the small-town basketball hero.

A year before he signed with Western, Oldham sat in front of Likens' Pharmacy in Hartford listening to the Hilltoppers play West Virginia in the 1942 NIT finals. A high school teacher lived above Likens and he put the radio out the window so Oldham and his friends could listen to the big game being played in Madison Square Garden. As the commentator called the game, Oldham got excited.

A year later, Hartford was listening to the radio as Oldham played in the tournament.

"I'm in New York City playing in Madison Square Garden and there's 18,000 people. Can you imagine coming from a town of 1,000 people and playing in a place that has 18,000 people? That was something that absolutely floored me to move that quickly in a year's time and be playing before 18,000 people in one building."

His time as a Hilltopper was great, Oldham said, especially playing for "Uncle Ed" Diddle.

As he sat in a rocking chair in a slick blue sweat-suit recently, Oldham recalled the years he played in the Old Red Barn, now the library.

Everyone in Bowling Green would pack into the place, he said, and people would sit on the second floor of the building hanging their feet over the railing.

"That was the best seat in the house," he said as he looked at a black-and-white photo taken inside the Red Barn.

People would come in the Red Barn and bring Mr. Diddle jam cakes and country hams and homemade goods, which he shared with Oldham and the team.

Diddle was a motivator, a father figure, a man who cared about his town, his players and his school, Oldham said.

Oldham remembers the time Diddle told him to "Get the ball down the floor. Get the damned ball down the floor. Oldham. Get the ball down the floor."

Johnny Oldham, the popular man on campus who was named "Talisman King," was standing out of bounds. He threw the ball to the other end of the court and it hit the backboard, shattered it, then went in the basket.

"By God, what happened?" Diddle said as he looked at Oldham.

*"Every place I lived had a goal up. Our parents didn't put it up. We put it up."*

—Johnny Oldham

"I got the ball down the floor quicker, coach," Oldham responded.

That was one of the first glass backboards Western had. And it was one of the first of many changes in basketball rules that Oldham has seen over the years.

A three-point line was added, people began dunking the ball (which Oldham said used to be a sign of disrespect) and, perhaps the biggest change, a 24-second rule was added to the NBA.

That rule had a lot to do with Oldham's 1950 Fort Wayne

Pistons team.

When he was playing for the Pistons (now the Detroit Pistons), Oldham and his teammates were told by their coach to hold the ball to limit scoring.

They were playing the L. A. Lakers, a powerful team which Oldham compares to the Chicago Bulls of today.

The Pistons won 19-18 (Oldham was his team's high scorer with five).

When the game ended Lakers fans stormed the Pistons' bench.

"I remember one lady hit me in the head with a parasol and another guy came up and hit me on top of the head with a wet towel."

Oldham said laughing. "I passed him good."

In 70 years, Oldham has met a lot of people and had a lot of articles written about him.

Wes Strader, the voice of the Hilltoppers, began calling the games the same day Oldham coached his first game on the Hill.

"Coach Oldham had a unique talent to command respect and admiration," Strader said. "He had total confidence in everything he said."

Strader says Oldham is a leg-

end.

There's a lot of hard work behind that legend and if there was one item Oldham would like people to remember him and his career by, it would be an article that appeared in the Indianapolis News on March 19, 1971 after Western beat the University of Kentucky in the NCAA tournament.

The story is mounted in a glass frame and it stands on top of a filing cabinet in his office. Three paragraphs are highlighted. They say a lot about Western and a lot about Oldham.

"Western Kentucky's shelling of Kentucky was more of a ballet, with choreography. There's something about the fluid grade of Western in motion that goes beyond basketball and invades the arts."

"The game was a no-contest in its early moments, yet Western demanded continuing attention, with the sweeping graceful moves of big Jim McDaniels and the counterpoint of Clarence Glover, who seems to specialize in impossible shots."

"In short, Western Kentucky would be a beautiful basketball team to watch even if there wasn't an opponent and a scoreboard."

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A message from Student Health Services and the Herald

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