

LIBRARY: THE DRAMA WITHIN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DIANE ASSÉO GRILICHES

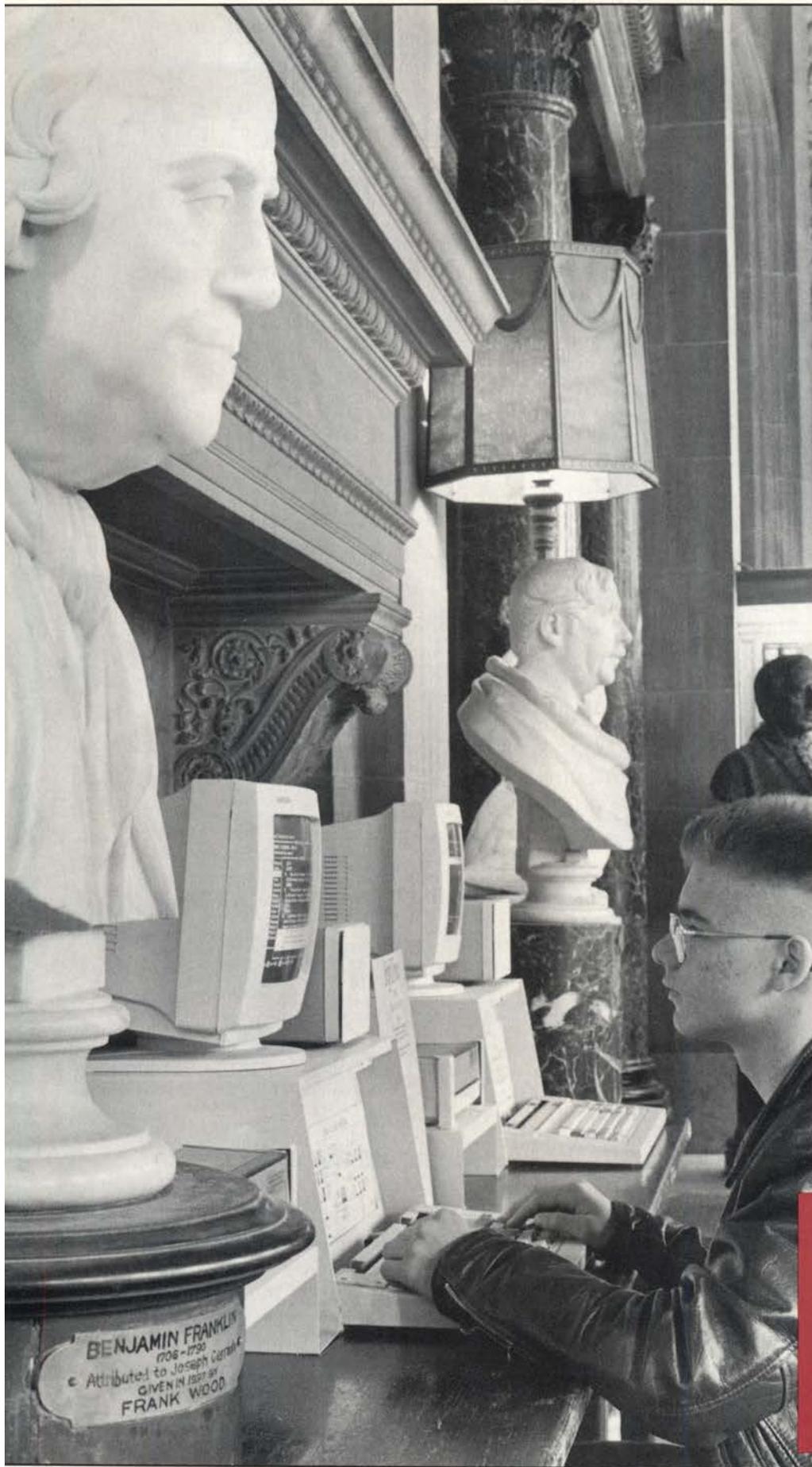
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I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.
—JORGE LUIS BORGES

Bibliothèque Nationale

Paris, France

The glorious reading room took my breath away. It was built in 1862 by Henri Labrouste, who also built the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, and has nine domes, each with an “eye” providing natural light from above. The roof is supported with twelve slender iron columns. Currently an enormous modern library is nearing completion in Paris, the infamous TGB (“Très Grand Bibliothèque”), and the Bibliothèque Nationale is preparing to merge with it to become the Bibliothèque de France. Perhaps it will be a “very grand bibliothèque,” but nothing can have the majesty or the grace of this one.



Pierpont Morgan Library

New York City

Dwight Peters was on a class field trip from Brooklyn to the Morgan Library. I doubt he'd ever seen a book like this medieval illuminated manuscript. The library, an Italianate palazzo, designed by Charles Follen McKim, was built in 1906 by the financier and voracious collector of literature and art, J. Pierpont Morgan. In 1924, the library was made public by Morgan's son, who felt that its holdings were too important to keep private. As one guest said, "I love the Morgan... especially for being open to me." The collections contain masterpieces documenting man's creative achievement. ▶

Boston Public Library, Bates Reading Room

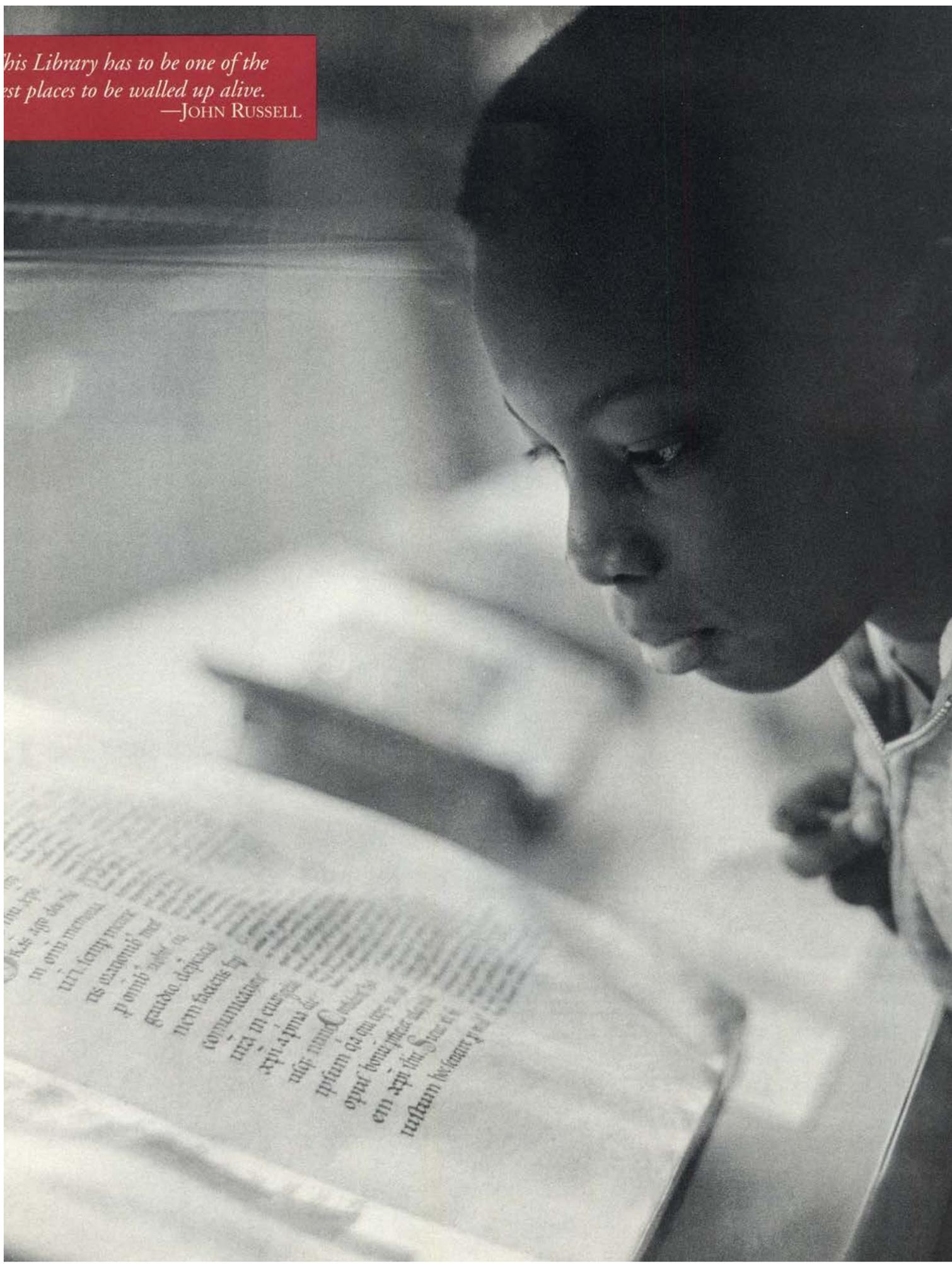
Boston, Massachusetts

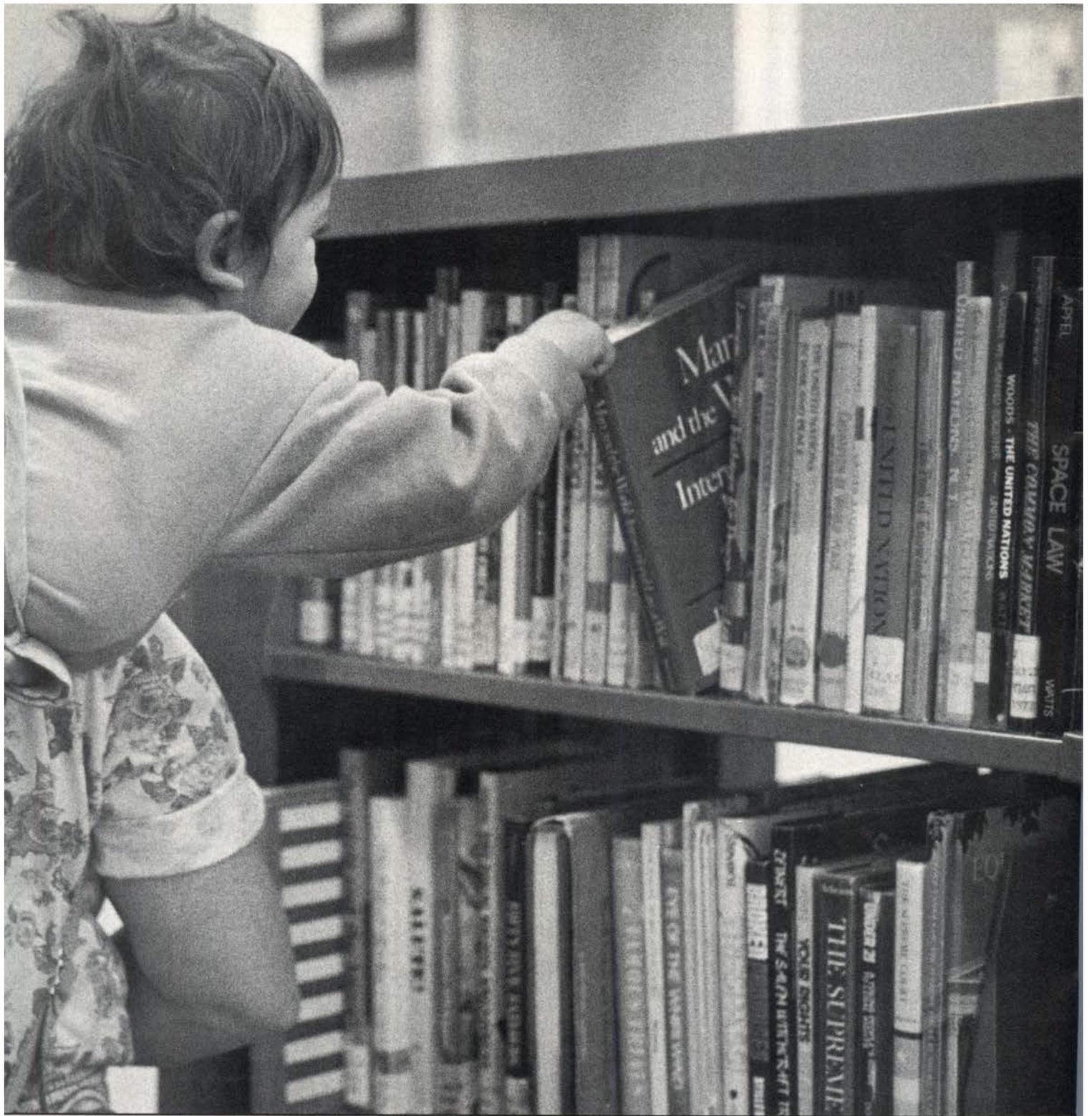
David Osborn was sitting there before the computer screen, another beautiful head among the marble busts of New England worthies. I asked permission to take his photograph and to send his parents a release form, since David was only seventeen. He said sure, but would I please not tell them what time he was in the library as he was supposed to be in school. (His mother now knows he was in the library, and it's okay.) ◀

He grew dutifully, conspicuously studious, spending long afternoons in the town library, watched over by a white plaster bust of Ben Franklin.

—DAVID McCULLOUGH

This Library has to be one of the best places to be walled up alive.
—JOHN RUSSELL



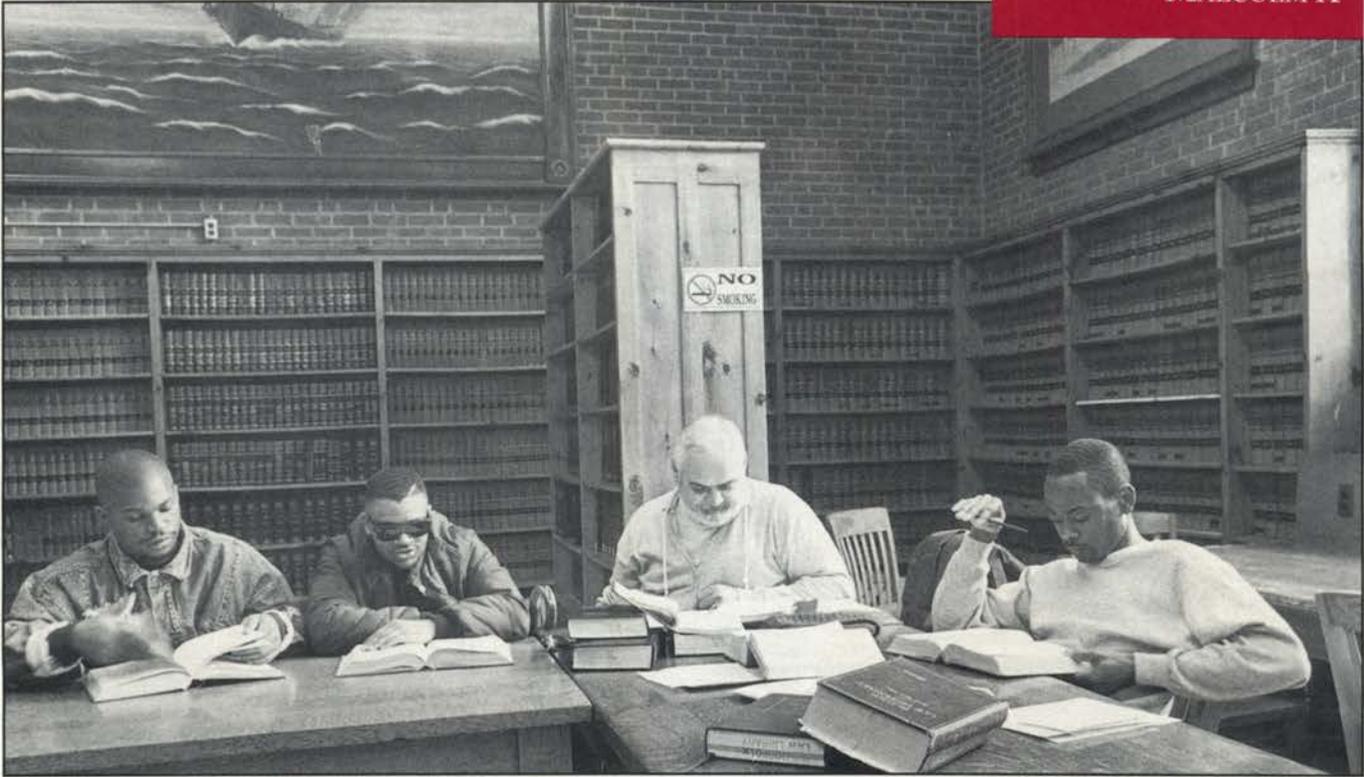


Newton Free Library

Newton, Massachusetts

*Read meanwhile....
Hunt among the shelves,
as dogs do grasses...
—RANDALL JARRELL*

Ten guards and the warden couldn't have torn me out of those books. Months passed without even thinking about being imprisoned.... I had never been so truly free in my life.
—MALCOLM X



Massachusetts Correctional Institution Law Library

Norfolk, Massachusetts

The library is in the medium security prison where Malcolm X was held. He was transferred to Norfolk on the request of his sister, since the library and the educational-rehabilitation program are its outstanding features. Malcolm X started slowly reading a dictionary from beginning to end, copying out each entry. He went from there to reading and understanding books for the first time. "My alma mater was books and a good library. I don't think anybody ever got more out of going to prison than I did."



**Cambridge
Public Library,
Central Square
Branch**

*Cambridge,
Massachusetts*

The kids had entered into the world of the story. Neither the librarian turning pages nor the presence of a photographer could bring them out of it. ▲

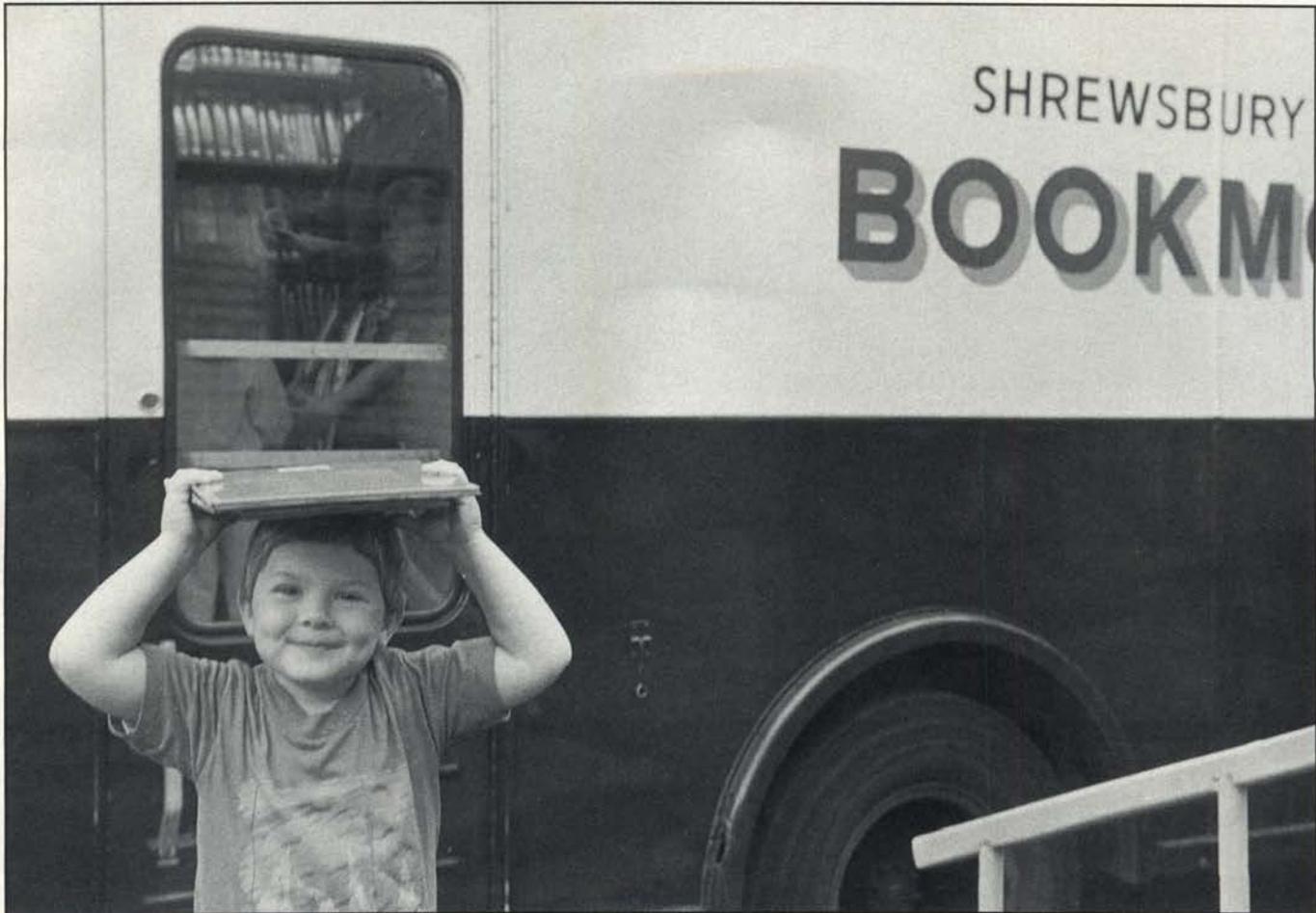
...their grave eyes reflected the eternal fascination of the fairy tale: Would the monster be bested...or would he feed?

—STEPHEN KING



When I...discovered libraries, it was like having Christmas every day!

—JEAN FRITZ



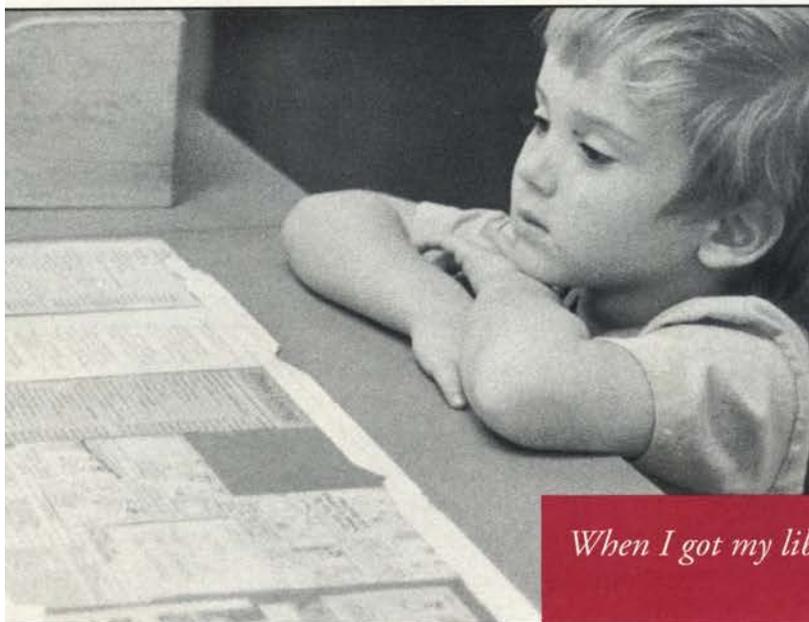
Cambridge Public Library

Cambridge, Massachusetts ▼

Shrewsbury Bookmobile

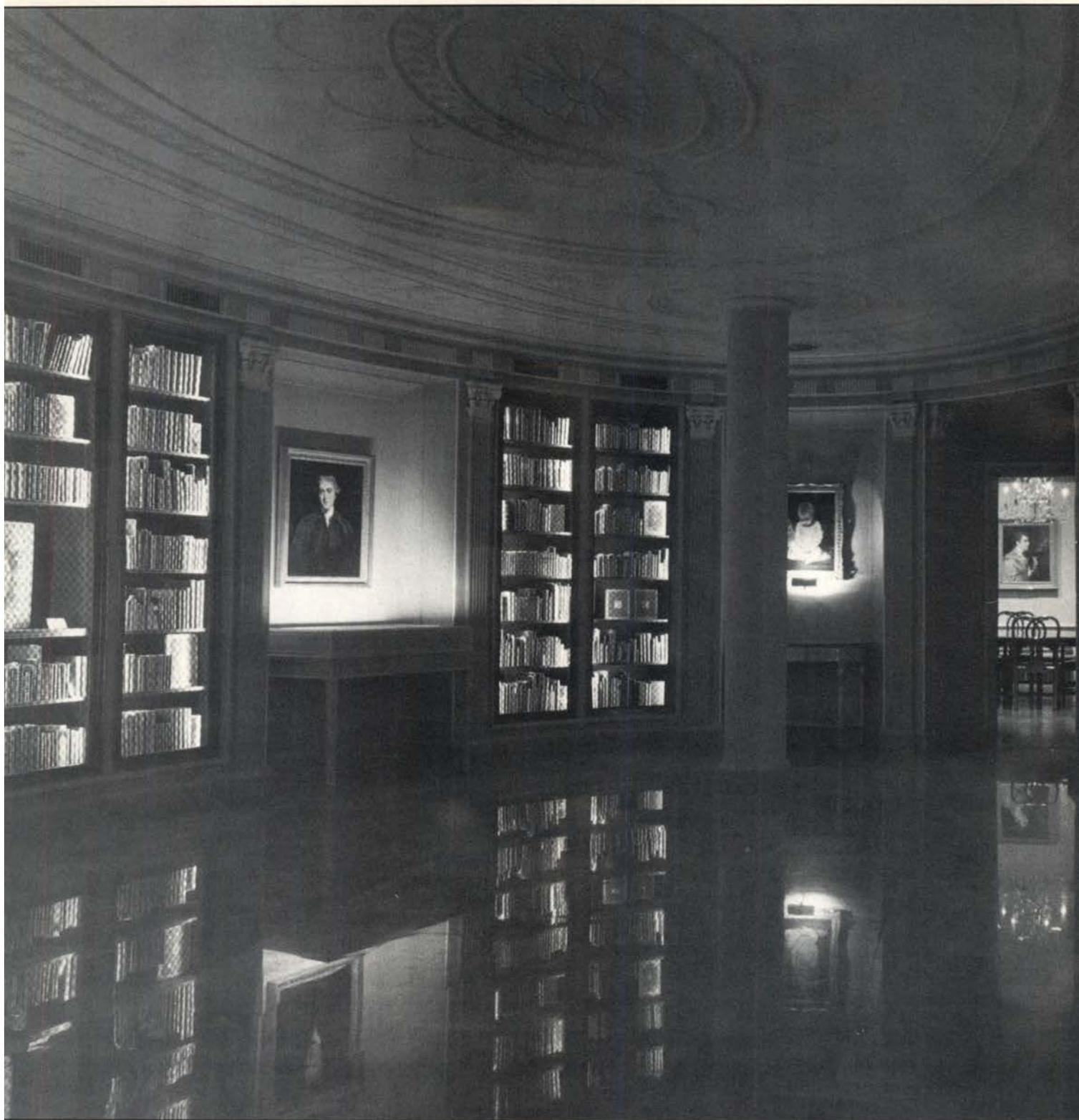
Shrewsbury, Massachusetts

As the library bus rounded the corner and assumed its usual place, children and adults poured out into the street. It was as attractive as an ice cream wagon. ▲



When I got my library card, that's when my life began.

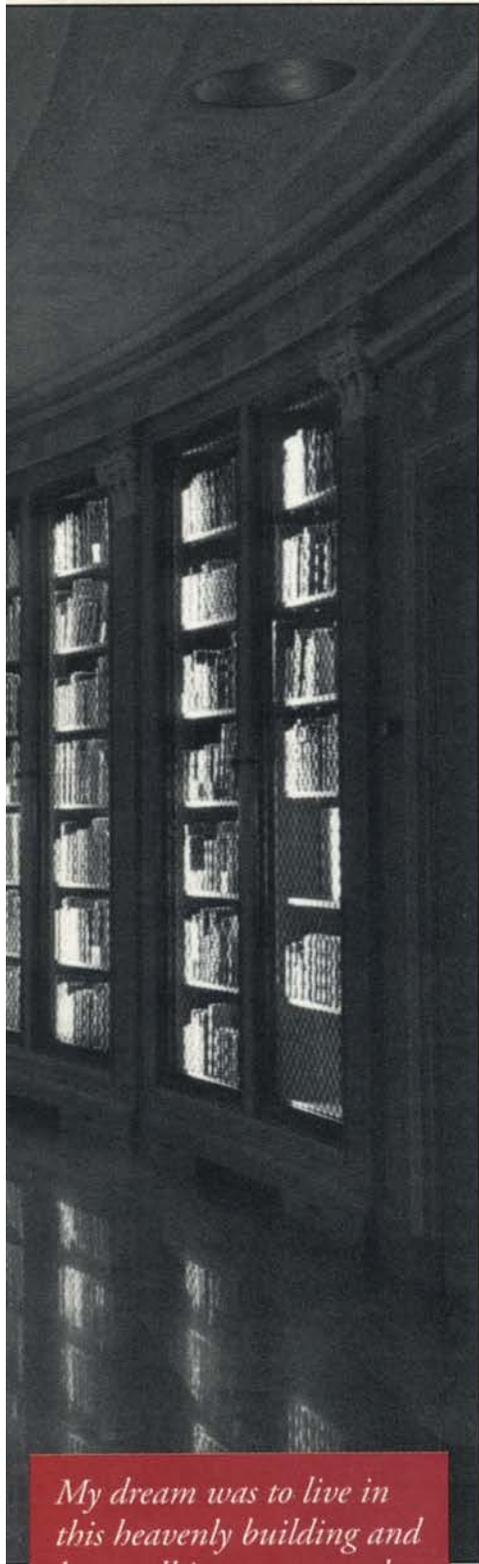
—RITA MAE BROWN



Houghton Library, Hyde Oval Exhibition Room, Harvard University

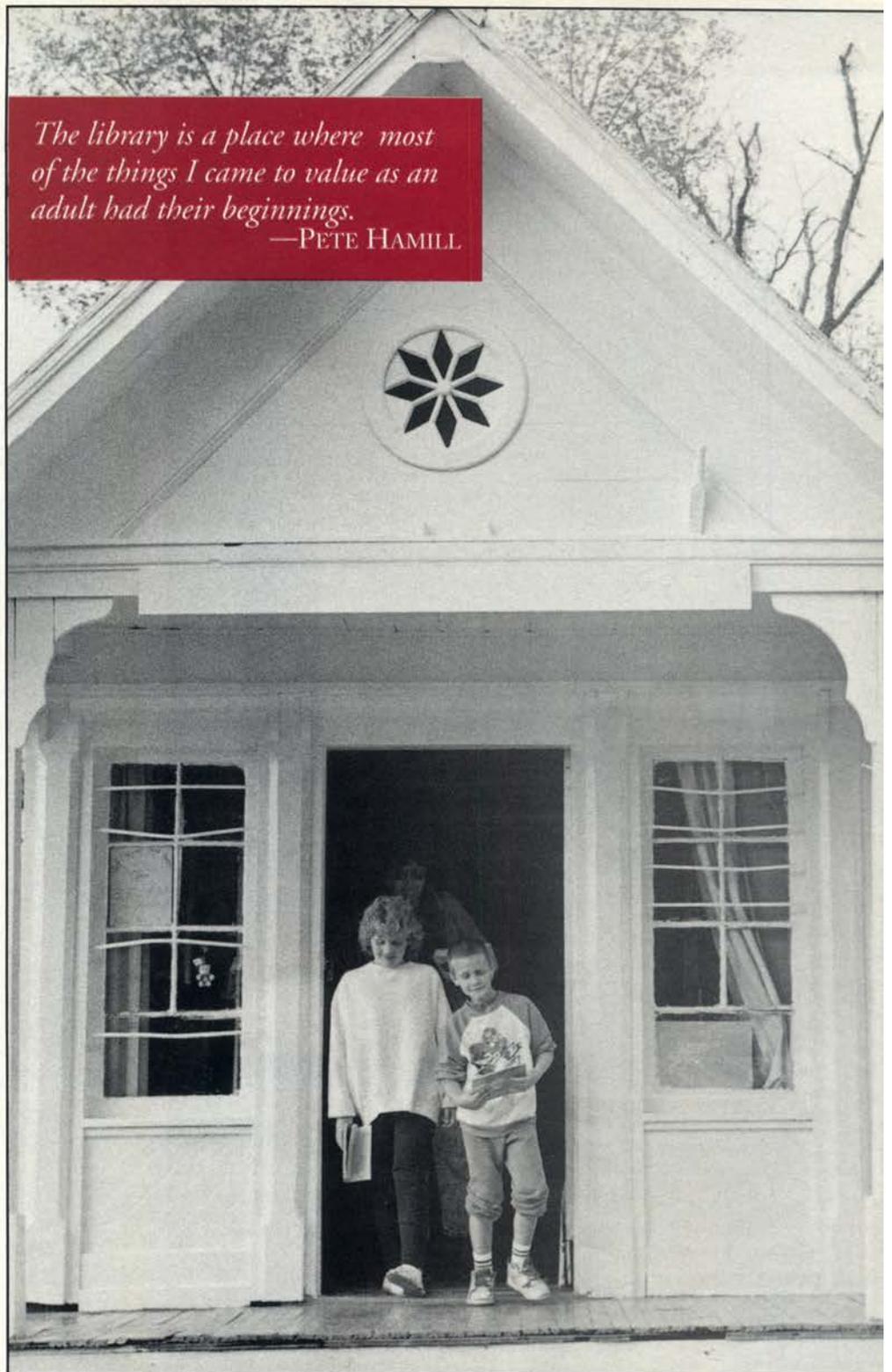
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Its eighteenth-century English literature collection, delicately illuminated, the cast-in-London plaster ceiling, and Italian marble floor are all a part of the beautiful room created by Mary Hyde (now Viscountess Eccles) in memory of her first husband, Donald Hyde. Samuel Johnson's portrait presides over this room; the one on the far wall is by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Marty Hyde Eccles has the largest collection of Johnsoniana in the world, and it includes many other images of Dr. Johnson.



The library is a place where most of the things I came to value as an adult had their beginnings.

—PETE HAMILL



My dream was to live in this heavenly building and know all its secrets...to be allowed to go behind the curving book-clad walls into the stacks and have keys to unlock the cabinets of bookish rarities.

—GERMAINE GREER

Pembroke Public Library

Pembroke, Virginia

I found this library only because I was chatting with a customer at a local antique store who happened to be the president of the County Historical Society. He sent me to this little library that used to be the town's post office. It is certainly the tiniest library I've ever seen, and with five people inside, I had to stay outside and photograph.

*Scholar examining an 11th-century manuscript
of a Hebrew translation
of an Arabic commentary
on the logic of Aristotle.*



National and University Library of Israel, Manuscript Room

Jerusalem, Israel

It is communication across the centuries: the ancient texts, copied onto film, are accessible by the latest technology. Unlike national and university libraries generally, this one is open to the public for reference and borrowing.

National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo

(now destroyed)

In August 1992, the Serbs bombed the library for three consecutive days with incendiary grenades. Only the walls now remain. Almost the entire written record of Bosnia's multicultural heritage went up in flames—one and a half-million volumes, including 155,000 manuscripts and rare books. I made my photograph in 1991, not having a clue that very soon the library would be destroyed. Enes Kujundžić, the library's current director, said that this was an extremely reading-oriented population and that the Bosnian Serb forces "knew that if they wanted to destroy ['cleanse'] this multi-ethnic society, they would have to destroy the library."

I warned myself that it would take only a few wars...or a single period of brutality or savagery...to destroy forever the ideas passed down with the help of these frail objects in fiber and ink.

—MARGUERITE YOURCENAR



The remains of the library. Photograph by Esad Bakira Tanović, February 1993.

