

Artist

Poet

Cook

By CYNTHIA HANCOCK
Staff Writer

Philip J. Saraf.

A wonderfully eccentric man. A gentle man. A man who finds beauty n everything, even the ugly. A cheerful man who has every right to be bitter.

Philip Saraf, painter, collector, philosopher, poet, cook. His three-room parlor floor apartment on Harris Street is filled with treasures he has saved to remind him of every experience he has had. There is a story behind every piece of canvas, shell, old shoe, key, bird nest.

As a guest in Philip's home for dinner or conversation, you come away with a new insight into everyday, taken for granted, things.

I was met at the door by this tall dark man of Syrian-Armenian descent. I forgot all about Cook of the Week. This was a

treasure house. Rooms filled with memories, and dreams.

The first to catch my eye was a large painting in reds and yellow of a little fruit stand. "I call it the Yellow Awning. It is my favorite. Even though many want to buy it, I can't sell that painting. The inspiration for it came one day as I was out shopping for vegetables. I happened by this little fruit and vegetable stand on the corner of Barnard and Gordan Street. The sun was on this awning against the red painted wood. It looked so cheerful, I had to put it on canvas. It is one of the best I have ever done.

There are paintings all over the walls of his apartment. Most are water color and oil. His favorite subjects are shacks he finds in the country around Clio. His paintings have won several shows including two judges choices in the Arts Festival.

Having lost his hearing

when he was two years old, he "used his eyes as his ears" "I saw everything and looked at everything."

As I stood there taking it all in, he indicated a sofa covered with a patchwork velvet and corduroy afghan.

"Look at the work in this cover." There is a story behind it. The grandmother of a young man made it for him as a present. You see, he had been in Vietnam with the Army and was bringing home his new bride. Well, it was pretty sad, the wife didn't like the gift. I asked if I could have it. Look at all the work and love that she put into that cover. Every piece of velvet is hand-stitched and each section has a different style stitch.

On the wall, in an arrangement with other paintings was a westhaer worn piece of board mounted on rust painted bur lap.

"As I was walking along the



Staff Photo By Walt Johnson

Philip Saraf adds labor and love in food preparation even to grinding his own coffee.

water's edge on Wilmington Island. I came across this board. First I picked it up, looked at it and threw it down and walked on. Something made me come back again and pick it up. Twice I did this. That board said something to me and I knew there was a painting in it. When I was back home, with the board, I saw what was in it. And here it is as you see it. The only thing I have added to it are some sandpipers and in the background to the right, some marsh grass.

His collection of old boards inspired many paintings. "Every knot and shell reminds me of a picture."

As we entered the studio, dining room, bedroom, I was shown a shadow box of an Early American kitchen. It was completely furnished with miniature copper pots hanging from the fireplace, candlesticks on the mantel, tiny dishes on the table, a rocking chair, and a dog stretched out in front of the fireplace.

The table was set for two. The theme was red, yellow, and green. "I believe the eating of food should be a beautiful experience. There should be beauty in the preparation of the meal, the table, and the atmosphere." said Philip. In the cen-

ter of the table was a copper watering can filled with red geraniums surrounded by scented candles in red, and yellow.

Now we come to the kitchen, he said. "The only room n the house where I truly feel comfortable."

Here again I was overwhelmed by the many articles on display. He prepared some coffee. "I always grind my own, he said. As we began the discussion of his recipes, he set out yogurt and sour cream dip and raw asparagus tips.

"As a young boy, I wanted to be an artist. My father wanted me to be a doctor. When I was 11, my father was shot in the back and killed. This left my mother with seven children to raise. It was very hard on her and us. We were very poor and couldn't afford the materials for me to paint.

"Being poor influenced my cooking too. I remember eating rice, rice and more rice. I was sick of rice and said to my mother, when I cook for myself I going to have potatoes. I had mashed potatoes, fried potatoes, baked potatoes, boiled potatoes and got sick and tired of potatoes. Now I cook rice, but a different flavor for every meal, and I fry it, always."

Shelves laden with antique jars fill one wall of the kitchen. Hundreds of spices fill a cabinet within easy reach. "Spices to food are like color to a painting", said Philip. He raises his own herbs and is especially fond of mint. "So many people don't know about mint. Often whe you buy it in the store it has turned brown. I get mine while it is green and dry it myself. It remains green and has a beautiful fragrance. Before you use it, crush it in the palms of your hands to bring out all the aroma from within the mint. It goes so well in soups stews, and in lamb dishes.

Philip experiments with recipes, coming up with original creations of his own. He entertains often usually having at least two to dinner every weekend. He has agreed to share two of his favorites with us.

Chicken Juliette

Two whole chickens, cut into serving pieces, are placed into a very low oven (about 200 degrees) for about 2½ hours. This is seasoned with salt, pepper and paprika.

While the chicken is cooking down, melt 1 stick of butter in a sauce pan and add 1 cup of

mushrooms and 3 cloves of garlic (crushed). Let brown slightly and add 1 bottle of capers, 1 can cream tomato soup 1½ teaspoon salt, ground pepper. Heat for 30 minutes. Pour over Chicken and cook for 30 minutes more.

Remove chicken from the oven and place in welled serving platter. Heat 1 cup of wine on stove and pour over chicken before serving.

MIH-SHEE WA-RAK IN-AB (Stuffed Grape Leaves)

- 4 lbs. ground lamb leg
- 1 cup rice
- 4 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. ground peppercorns
- 1½ tsp. Allspice
- 3 lbs. grape leaves
- 6 cloves garlic
- Crushed dry mint

UTENSILS: Kettle with cover, large bowl, wooden board, small knife, 1-cup measure.

STUFFING ? Mix uncooked rice with raw ground lamb in a large bowl. Add 1 teaspoon salt, crushed peppercorns, allspice and garlic and a cup of water.

GRAPE LEAVES: If preserved grape leaves used, wash well. (Fresh grape leaves should be soaked in warm water for at least half an hour to soften

them so that they can be rolled easily) Place leaf, greener side down, flat on board stem toward you. Place 1 heaping teaspoon of stuffing on it, distributed across the leaf in a narrow roll. Leave space on both sides of the leaf so that you can tuck in the ends and roll as a package. Roll firmly, yet loosely enough to allow rice to swell. The wet leaf will hold together during cooking.

DIRECTIONS: Wash lamb bones, place in bottom of kettle, and cover with a few grape leaves. This "bed of bones" will serve a double purpose: to keep the rolls from sticking to the bottom of kettle, and to provide subtle extra flavoring. After you make the rolls, arrange them in neat rows, close together. Place the second row of rolls in the opposite direction — and so on, as if you were building a log cabin. Invert a medium sized dish on top of the rolls to keep them in place while cooking. Pour enough water — to which 1 teaspoon of salt has been added — to reach the inverted dish. Cover kettle and cook over medium fire for 35 minutes. Now add the lemon juice to bring out the full grape-leaf flavor, and cook for 10 more minutes. Serve hot with yogurt or a salad.

COOK of the WEEK



"I live all of my paintings. The beauty I find is in what most people cast away" Philip captures on canvas the character in old boots, pieces of board, and shacks.

