

literary issue
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Health care professionals contribute to the arts

Welcome to the Literary Issue of *Synapse*, featuring creative writing by UCSF staff, students, and community members.

A medical center such as UCSF is at once an evocative and trying setting for artistic concerns. Health care work offers a rare vantage point from which to witness the human condition — the basic processes of birth and dying, the life histories unravelled behind examining room doors. But there is also the numerical onslaught of high-technology research, the steady drip of I.V. lines, the whirring of dental drills, the locomotion of gurneys in transit, the unrelenting chatter of typewriters and telephones, of lectures and case conferences — the countless forces which numb the eyes and ears and begin to render experience senseless.

The writing in this issue attempts to make sense of the world not by the hard facts of news reportage but by a more intuitive expression of perception and feeling.

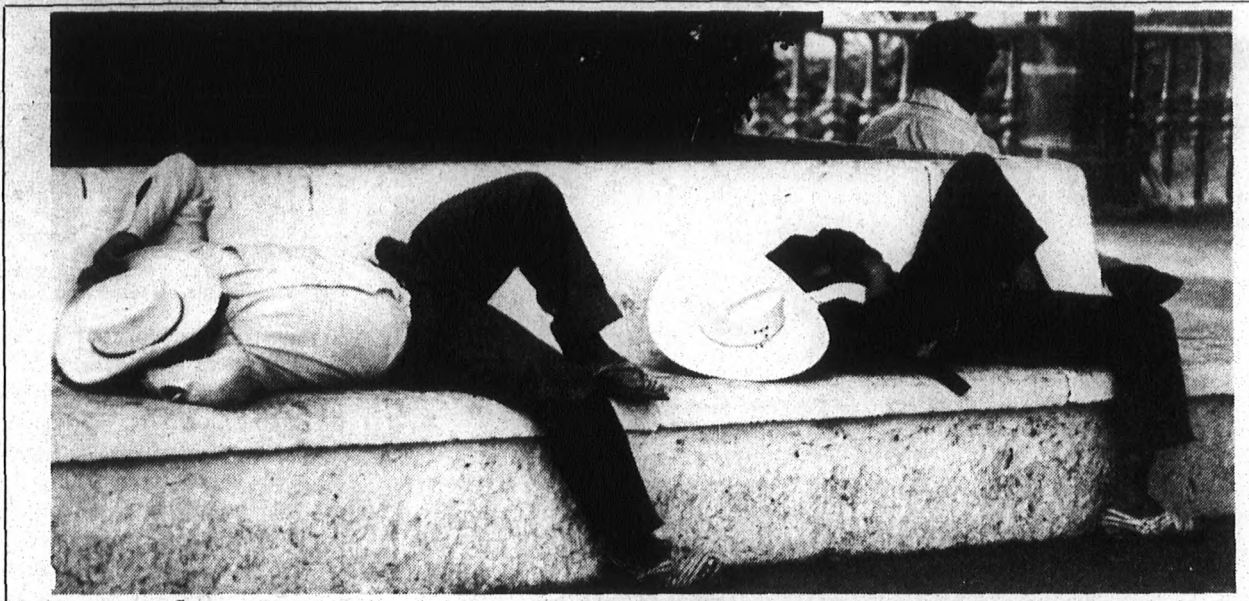
The health professions have had their share of contributors to the arts. The playwright Anton Chekhov, for instance, practiced medicine as he worked on such classics as *The Cherry Orchard*. The great American blues singer Alberta Hunter worked for years as a nurse at Manhattan's Goldwater Memorial Hospital. (At one point Hunter discontinued her musical career so the hospital wouldn't be alerted to the fact that she had long since passed the mandatory retirement age. Hunter finally retired from nursing in the late 1970s — just shy of the age of 80 — and has since resumed a successful nightclub and recording career.)

The individual who perhaps best exemplified the fusion of careers in art and health was the poet-physician William Carlos Williams. Residing and practicing medicine in the town of Patterson, New Jersey, Williams would steal moments between his patients' visits to type out a line or two of verse at his desk. His poetry, first appearing in print in the 1920s and continuing in a steady flow of productivity until his death in 1963, established a whole new tone in American free-verse. Williams' poems captured the natural rhythms and inflections of American speech, and spoke with refreshing accessibility and humanity of the events and occasions of everyday life.

Williams' poem "Death" typifies his directness and humor: "he's dead/shrunken 'up to skin/ Put his head on/one chair and his/feet on another and/he'll lie there/like an acrobat." Another poem, about his nights of medical duty, begins simply, "They call me and I go."

The following excerpt from Williams' autobiography stands as one of the most eloquent statements of the complementary relationship between the practices of poetry and of medicine. Fortuitously, 1983 marks the centennial of Williams' birth. It is particularly fitting that Williams' words should usher in this issue of *Synapse*. —K.G.

Excerpt from "The Practice"; William Carlos Williams, *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS*. Copyright 1951 by William Carlos Williams. Reprinted with permission from New Directions Publishing Corp.



By William Carlos Williams

It's the humdrum, day-in, day-out, everyday work that is the real satisfaction of the practice of medicine; the million and a half patients a man has seen on his daily visits over a forty-year period of weekdays and Sundays that make up his life. I have never had a money practice; it would have been impossible for me. But the actual calling on people, at all times and under all conditions, the coming to grips with the intimate conditions of their lives, when they were being born, when they were dying, watching them die, watching them get well when they were ill, has always absorbed me.

That is why as a writer I have never felt that medicine interfered with me but rather that it was my very food and drink, the very thing which made it possible for me to write. Was I not interested in man? There the thing was, right in front of me. I could touch it, smell it. It was myself, naked, just as it was, without a lie telling itself to me in its own terms. Oh, I knew it wasn't for the most part giving me anything very profound, but it was giving me terms, basic terms with which I could spell out matters as profound as I cared to think of.

As far as the writing itself is concerned it takes next to no time at all. Much too much is written every day of our lives. We are overwhelmed by it. But when at times we see through the welter of evasive or interested patter, when by chance we penetrate to some moving detail of a life, there is always time to bang out a few pages. The thing isn't to find the time for it — we waste hours every day doing absolutely nothing at all — the difficulty is to catch the evasive life of the thing, to phrase the words in such a way that stereotype will yield a moment of insight. That is where the difficulty lies. We are lucky when that underground current can be tapped and the secret spring of all our lives will send up its pure water. It seldom happens. A thousand trivialities push themselves to the front, our lying habits of everyday speech and thought are foremost, telling us that *that* is what "they" want to hear. Tell them something else. You know you want to be a successful writer. This sort of chit-chat the daily practice of medicine tends drastically to cure.

Forget writing, it's a trivial matter. But day in and day out, when the inarticulate patient struggles to lay himself bare for you, or with nothing more than a boil on his back is so caught off balance that he reveals some secret twist of a whole community's pathetic way of thought, a man is suddenly seized again with a desire to speak of the underground stream which for a moment has come up just under the surface. It is just a glimpse, an intimation of all that which the daily print misses or deliberately hides, but the excitement is intense and the rush to write is on again. It is then we see, by this constant feeling for a meaning, from the unselected nature of the material, just as it comes in over the phone or at the office door, that there is no better way to get an intimation of what is going on in the world.

Do we not see that we are inarticulate? That is what defeats us. It is our inability to communicate to another how we are locked within ourselves, unable to say the simplest thing of importance to one another, any of us, even the most valuable, that makes our lives like those of a litter of kittens in a wood-pile. That gives the physician, and I don't mean the high-priced psychoanalyst, his opportunity; psychoanalysis amounts to no more than another dialectic into which to be locked.

The physician enjoys a wonderful opportunity actually to witness the words being born. Their actual colors and shapes are laid before him carrying their tiny burdens which he is privileged to take into his care with their unspoiled newness. He may see the difficulty with which they have been born and what they are destined to do. No one else is present but the speaker and ourselves, we have been the words' very parents. Nothing is more moving.

The poem springs from the half-spoken words of such patients as the physician sees from day to day. He observes it in the peculiar, actual conformations in which its life is hid. Humbly he presents himself before it and by long practice he strives as best he can to interpret the manner of its speech. In that the secret lies. This, in the end, comes perhaps to be the occupation of the physician after a lifetime of careful listening.

The News

The news glides above
our frozen meadow
and nothing changes.

In the cabin we listen
by crystal or satellite.
We merely flinch.
Out of our range
the numbers defeat us,
remain apart and sinewy.
A blackrobed myth.

Only the static...
that appalling hum in numbers
of hunger and overkill...
only the static gets through.

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Noon poetry reading today

Six of UCSF's poets will hold a poetry reading today (March 10) at noon in C-130. Reading will be Frances Carney, director of Alumni, School of Medicine; Gala Fitzgerald, administrative editorial assistant in Interventional Radiology; Meryl Glass, director of the Child Care Study Center; Mirium Gould, MD, psychiatrist for Student Health Services; Ida VSW Red, resource director for Aging Health Policy Center; and Carol Tarlen, secretary in Family Medicine. The event is part of International Working Women's Week, and all are welcome. FREE.

Note: Due to the spring break, the *Synapse* will not be published again until March 31, 1983. The *Synapse* office will be open daily from approximately 8 a.m. to approximately 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, during the break in publishing.

Announcements

Physical therapy lecture

The Physical Therapy class cordially invites the medical community to attend the following two lectures:

On Friday, March 11 from 11 a.m.-noon in HSW-300, John Flaherty, Pharm. D., will speak about "Drugs Used in Cardiology."

Friday, March 18 from 11 a.m.-noon in HSE-317, Tim Van Maiverik, Pharm. D., will speak of "Drugs Used in the Management of Rheumatoid and Osteoarthritis."

Film on the Philippines

Health Care Student Alliance will be showing a documentary made by the British Broadcasting Corporation on the Philippines on Friday, March 11 (noon-1 p.m.) in HSW-303.

Entitled *To Sing Our Own Song* and part of the BBC series *The Third Eye*, the documentary has angered the Marcos' government and has been banned in the Philippines.

From the Filipino workers whose struggle for decent wages are brutally suppressed to the Bontoc-Kalinga Tribe in the Mt. Province whose very existence as a people are threatened by the Chico River Dam, the film reveals the impact of the regime's social and political policies.

The film is narrated by ex-senator and former political prisoner, Jose Diokno. A representative from the International Movement for a Democratic Philippines will be at the showing to answer questions and discuss the formation of a medical supply drive.

Campus Compendium Classified Section

The *Campus Compendium* is accepting entries for its classified/professional directory sections. This new guide to programs, resources, benefits and services available to UCSF employees is scheduled for publication this spring. A listing in the Compendium will inform 7,000 staff employees of your professional service or business. Interested staff, faculty, students and neighborhood residents are invited to call Carol or Sandy, 666-3022, for more information.

GSA Column

New Guidelines for research conference travel funds

The GSC recently has approved new guidelines for the awarding of travel funds to graduate students attending research conferences. There will be four award periods for travel funds. Applications received after the deadline may be considered with reduced priority, if sufficient funds are available.

| PERIOD | DEADLINE |
|--------------------|----------|
| 14 June - 31 Sept. | 1 June |
| 1 Oct. - 31 Dec. | 1 Sept. |
| 1 Jan. - 30 March | 1 Dec. |
| 1 Apr. - 13 June | 1 March |

The Executive Committee will rank the applications for each period and then make awards subject to the following criteria:

- Prior to consideration, applicants will be put into one of two categories — presenters and non-presenters. Once individuals have received funds, they will lose priority in both categories.
- Persons presenting may receive a maximum award of \$200 per research conference.
- Persons attending a research conference may receive up to \$100 per conference.
- No applicant shall receive more than \$300 in travel funds during enrollment as a graduate student at UCSF.
- Non-presenting applicants will be awarded funds for no more than two meetings.

Thirty percent of the travel funds will be allocated each quarter for students who are presenting. Any unawarded portion of the 30 percent will be available to presenting students.

At least 40 percent of the annual travel funds budgeted will be retained for the third and fourth award periods.

Financial Aid Column

Spring Quarter hold list

The Financial Aid Office sent notes to students who still need to submit information in order to complete their files for this year. Spring Quarter financial aid checks will not be released to students until all requested documentation has been submitted. Since counselors will have to check all the material, plenty of time should be allowed between the date of submission and the first day of Spring Quarter.

Financial Aid transcripts needed

All students receiving financial aid must comply with the federal regulation requiring information about previous aid from each school attended prior to UCSF. Several months ago, letters were sent to students whose Financial Aid Transcripts are still missing. These documents must be received by our office by Spring Quarter, or financial aid checks cannot be disbursed.

Julius Krevans

Chancellor made official

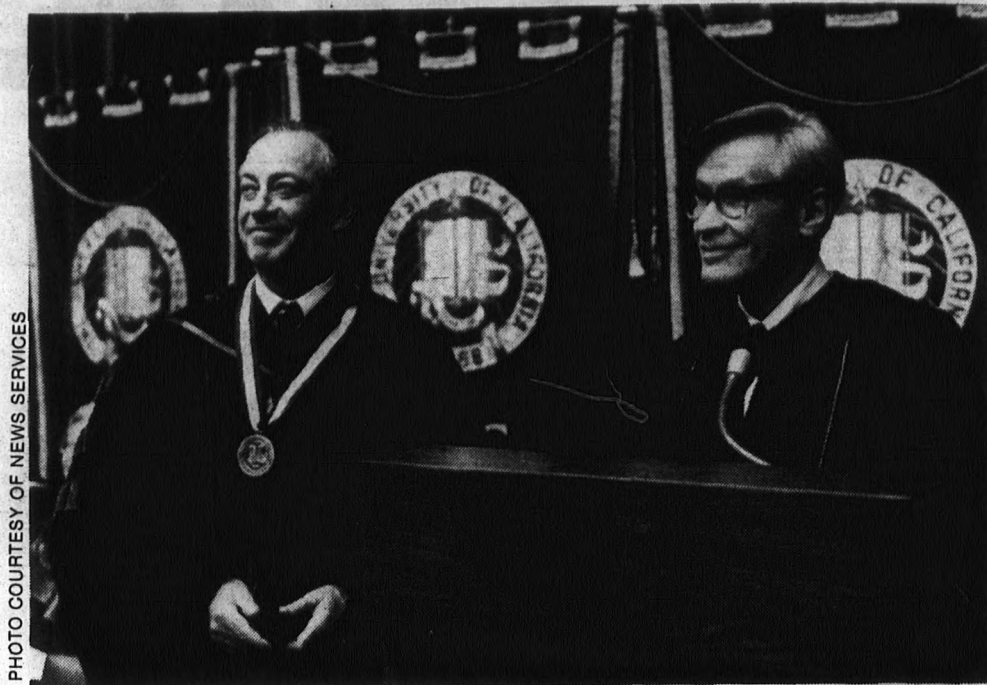


PHOTO COURTESY OF NEWS SERVICES

UCSF celebrated its Second Annual Founders Day March 5 by formally inaugurating Julius R. Krevans as its fifth chancellor. In a day of processions, speeches and presentations, UC President David Saxon hung the ribbon bearing the official chancellor's medal of office around Krevan's neck (above, photo) — placing as well the many problems of UCSF officially and squarely on the new chancellor's shoulders.

In his brief speech following the investiture, Krevans listed these problems to include declines in financing, changes in public attitudes, changes in the structure of the health care system and shifts in educational programs. He indicated, however, that he remains optimistic about UCSF's future.

Hundreds of staff, students, faculty and visitors filled Cole Hall to watch the proceedings, during which GSA's Marjorie Bogaert, on behalf of UCSF students, presented Krevans with the Eighth Edition of *The Directory of American Scholars* and urged that a close relationship be established and maintained between the chancellor and the students here.

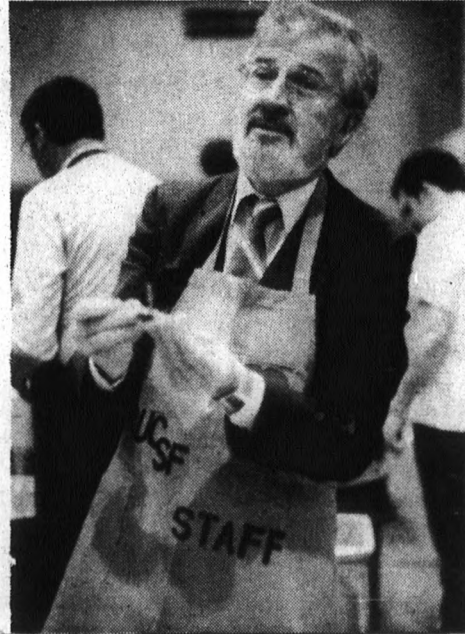
Other Founders Day activities included scientific presentations from the four schools, tours and demonstrations of various programs.

Friday's (March 4) Founders Day kick-off party filled the MU gymnasium to capacity with staff and other campus members who weaved through the tightly packed crowd to accept wine and beer poured by aproned UCSF administrators (See photos). The party, planned by a host of campus organizations, included musical entertainment by Drs. David Watts, Roger Crumely and John Conte, a juggling act performed to classical music, a Filipino dance group and a Latin band. The party was planned as a thank you to UCSF staff.

UC President David Saxon presents Julius Krevans with the chancellor's medal of office (above) during last Saturday's Founders Day activities. At the staff party Friday, Krevans (middle) and School of Pharmacy Dean Jere Goyan (bottom) were among those serving beer and wine to the UCSF campus-at-large.



PHOTOS BY LESLIE STEERE



UC selects new president

The UC Regents announced a successor to retiring UC President Saxon last week; David Gardner (above), current president of the University of Utah. Gardner, a former UC vice president with a Ph.D. in higher education from UCB, was chosen from a field of more than 250 candidates.

Elsa Aguilar, ASUCSF president, along with the rest of the Student Body Presidents Council, met with Gardner prior to the regents announcement. She reports a mixed response to Gardner: "Most student representatives were encouraged that Dr. Gardner appeared to enjoy working with students and had an open and friendly manner." She explained that under Gardner's leadership at the University of Utah, students had a more direct governing role than at UC, via participation in the "University Senate," made up of students, faculty and staff as

opposed to an 'Academic Senate' such as at UC, made up entirely of faculty."

Some of the SBPC members expressed skepticism, however, at Gardner's expressed ignorance about such issues as affirmative action and UC's management of the Lawrence Livermore and Los Alamos nuclear weapons labs.

Gardner's salary has stirred up considerable controversy. He is slated to be paid \$150,000 per year, in addition to being provided with a house and car. Saxon receives \$94,265. The \$150,000 figure would make Gardner far and away the highest paid state official.

Legislators, such as Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair John Vasconcellos, sharply criticized the regents for the salary offer, which is particularly notable in a period of extreme belt-tightening around the system. Most employees, for example, received no salary increase last year.

synapse

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The *Synapse* seeks to act as a forum for responsible dialogue between the authors and readers of the campus community, representing the spectrum of belief and action. Articles and columns published in the *Synapse* represent the viewpoint of the author and not necessarily that of the editorial staff. Unsigned editorials reflect the majority viewpoint of the staff and not necessarily that of the Board of Publications of the University of California.

Board of Publications: Mark Perez, Kathy Maloney, Leslie Steere, James Kenealy, Anita Barzman, Bob Bajorin, Mark Nixon, Carol Copeland and Mirium Gould

Winter Solstice

I lie on the floor,
pumping my legs, impregnated
or swollen with blood.
A cobweb in the corner
shivers with each kick.
All summer and fall I let the collector
of winged and thoraxed life
construct her net, but darkness
came early tonight, and I can't bear
the swaying web. I tear it from the wall

but it hangs there, a ghostly rag,
as I pump my heels again.
My white blisters,
desires I walk on daily,
swim with oxygen.
I see the floating
unformed fists lifting
with my left kick, the remnant
of the spiderweb
falling with my right. The day
pulses, the walled-up flesh
a month or more engorged pulses,
my lips and lungs and throat
one angry ring of panting, kick,

kick. And if the spider crouches
on her easily crushed legs,
waiting to build again,
I wish her luck. Winded,
I reach for the ripped threads,
clinging despite me, breathing with me,
until their gray fringes my fingers,
a child's disintegrating glove.
The ache inside
unravels like silk.

I'm getting hungry, grasping
this almost-eaten winter. Halfway
into the kitchen, I predict
the first white strand extending
from the dusty corner—even, eventually,
the infant's heels beating the uterus.
But until all that, I'll boil the water
for my new potatoes,
still ravenous for the old year.

Lisa Bernstein

1936

At Sea Breeze there was a freak show. It cost a dime
to get in. It featured the dog-man, He had a deformity
and crouched in the corner. Once in a while he would
jump like a toad and the watchers would retreat a
step.

My sister said he is full of hate.
I said his eyes look so sad.
My father said it's a living.

M. Gould

High Places on the Food Chain*

Do you see that judge
shaking his wig
through the loophole
of his own tax shelter?
...Harsh voices
and the carriage of justice
unsettle growing things,
bloody the compost.

Crops next season
will grow dwarfed:
Hunchbacked tomatoes,
a meager spindle of chives,
carrots knobbed as carbuncles,
the potatoes all eyes.

Imbalanced as gavels and thumbs,
no scale can give an honest weight.

* Supreme Court Upholds U.S. Ban
On Abortion Funding For The Poor
—Newspaper Headline

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I Cannot Grieve

Walking down the hill to work
down the wet hardness
Convincing myself that calvary is downhill
after you're forty.
Reminding myself that broken lives
are nothing to laugh at.
The air is cool this morning.

Who I have lost
father, mother, sister
How I miss them in this place
they have never seen.
Soft gray fingers
touch my face.
The mist touches the trees.

Through the pain tunnel
Under the fluorescent lights
Careful cadenced footfalls
Along rows of hard doors.
I cannot grieve the
Easy mud of old coffee grounds.
I have an appointment with
Someone who waits for me.

M. Gould

Lucid Interval: The Interview of a Man with Huntington's Chorea During the First Year of Medical School

You watch as a memory surfaces: your fist
Swollen with years of cutting wood,

Swings out of control into the face
Of your wife. No anger, just the image

Of her smile crushed, her eyes terrified:
She cannot be your mother anymore.

In the hospital room, your two arms
Bounce like diving boards as they try

To touch the lamp glazed tip of the Doctor's
Finger. Your father gave you the gene

Years before he pulled the trigger with his
Nearly uncontrollable hand. You have not

Wondered why since your disease began.
The black rectangle in the green lawn

Approaches as steadily as the nurse
With a bedpan. You have become a teaching

Tool. In another century you would be
Burning at the stake. The demon, presently,

Clutches your throat so tight a tube
Must be placed in your stomach that feeds,

That sucks: a late stage umbilical cord.

Virgil Hancock



The Amulet

I cut the cord that tied me to you —
Or you to me. It's the same thing.
You were the talisman worn round my neck
On that bit of string, (or didn't you know?)
Protecting me from reality.

It's all nonsense, you said; face up to facts!
So I cut the thread. Easily done,
No more than a silver strand of cobweb.
Yes, I cut the cord and set you free
I wonder what's to become of me.

Martha Gould Axelrod



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PHOTO BY JOY MELNIKOW



On the Ward: Beyond Summer

It's not so much the way
his face is all caved-in,
or how their stares settle
over him like dust as if
no one were still inside.
It's not even how he must
whisper from the rubble,
chin crumpled to forehead,
his smile folded in half.
Or the way he has to gag
the bent tube down his throat
to gurgle questions
in a hideous croaking
no one can translate.
Here, you get used to that.

Every week I wait
for the Cyclops. Perfect
in tweed suit and tie,
he lumbers up, briefcase
in hand. Head down,
hair parted from behind,
you barely see the pink,
swollen grapefruit nodding
from his forehead. Without
looking up, he asks the way

to somewhere else,
each time halfway
down the hall
before he turns
to ask again.

Some say when the weather
turns ripe and glistening,
from up here you can see
all the way to summer,
where the moon and clouds
never lose their way.
And there are those
who sit along the halls
who stare at something
even farther away.
They ask me how to
get to the laughing,
where can they find
the rest of these butterflies.
I tuck in their paper gowns
and give them the right directions.
You can hear them
smiling at the view.

Gala Fitzgerald

These Women

These women. Where do they come from? Sandals slapping down narrow halls. They always seem to know where they're going. Long legs plastered in blue jeans, fleshy calves secreted in coarse, brown hair. Hair everywhere! Even their mouths slashed with it. They never smile the way they used to. Lash shadows lacing pink cheeks, lips as crisp as autumn apples. The sweet meat hidden in their questions. Those girls. How they made your thighs surge, always desiring answers to the mysteries of life, answers only you possessed and they knew it when they came seeking to bite your knowledge with their small, white teeth. Gone. All gone. Now these women with crumpled notebooks and T-shirts covering their blunt, sagging breasts.

I remember a girl...oh...fifteen, twenty years ago when they all wore their hair in blonde bubbles. How she looked at me. Her lake blue eyes hiding the depths the black depths where I was afraid of water, afraid of some mossy log or root at the bottom catching my foot and pulling me down down into the sucking sand. I never looked at her but once, never again. Her breasts were small, pointed mounds, and her thighs flashed beneath short hems. She came to me in my office. The walls crawled with books. Homer. Sophocles. Aristotle. I offered her a cigarette. She smoothed her skirt with her delicate white hands as I waited for her to speak. She seemed afraid, but I deliberately allowed my fingers to graze her slim shoulders in reassurance. She finally spoke, and her voice was the hum of wind brushing through long grass.

"I don't know why I'm here," she said. "I mean, what have Platonic Absolutes got to do with wiping coffee puddles from the counter? And I don't care what that dead man said about the Golden Mean, no matter how hard I try to please, the tip's never enough."

Her painted nails tapped my desk. Over and over. Red flickered. She uncrossed her legs.

"You must understand," I said. The situation called for a calm self-possession. "Many girls have come to me with this problem. Life is cluttered when compared to the classics. I know. I know. We all serve. And sometimes we resent it. But it is our place in the balanced relationships of society. Some decorate the cave walls, and some sit close by the campfire, contemplating. Each is harmonious in his place. His cubicle."

I paused to light my cigarette. I held it firmly between my thumb and forefinger. My compact office was quiet, like the desert is quiet in the hot afternoon just before the sun sets. I smiled. I owned the air I breathed.

"You see," I said, but she thrust her tongue over her wet lips and hissed. Spit almost.

"What I want," she said, "is to take the midterm a week late because I have to go to Tijuana to get an abortion. 500 bucks. How many tips did it take? I saved. I had saved for next semester. 500 dollars."

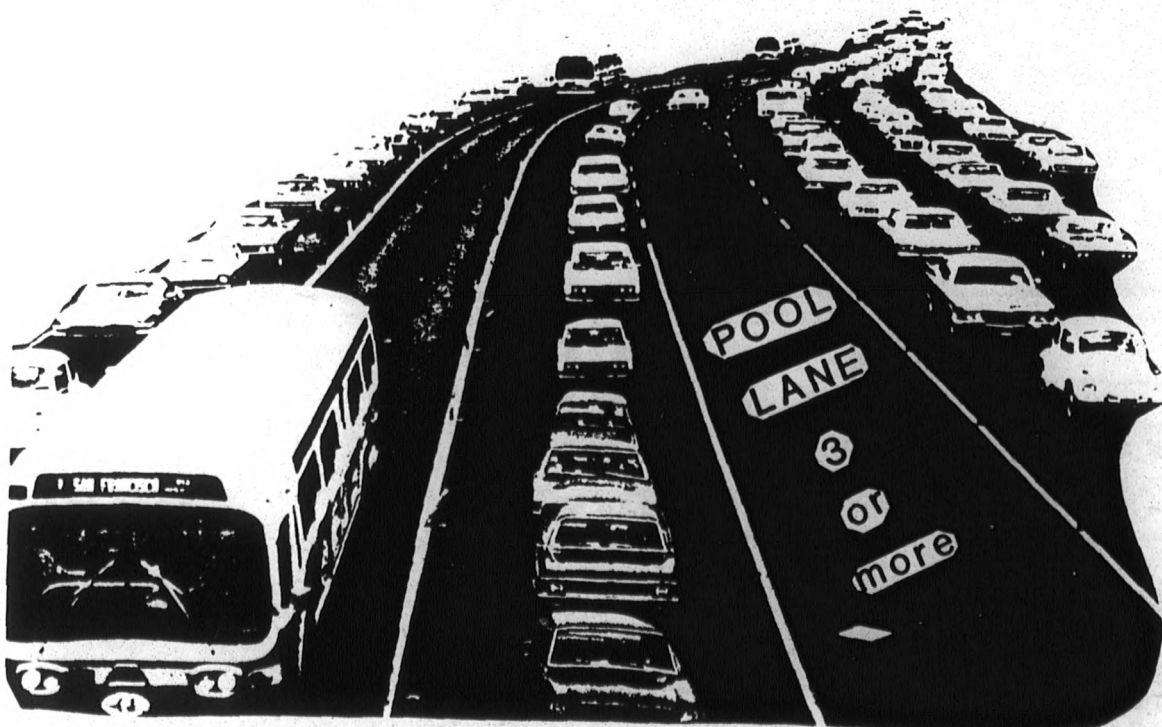
And then she smiled, but it was a sly, evil little smile. She made me stare into her eyes. She grabbed my look and held it, and then I thought that maybe I was drowning.

I let her take the midterm two weeks late. She got a C.

And now these women. Their precise eyes know all directions. They never cross their legs. The corridors are corroded with their hips and elbows. They shove into my office and demand, yes demand the right to questions. I don't know. Those girls. Sometimes I think I see her, but the lake is frozen over. I can't see through all the books she presses to her chest as she glides into the classroom and bends her long hair over her ball point pen. Those girls. Gone. Their shy laughs, kitten faces, their sharp little claws.

Carol Tarlen

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Narrative

My oncologist refers me to the radiation department at the hospital. I meet the radiation doctor, a small mild, not very expository man, quietly busy in his own direction, which has very little, really, to do with me. He will direct the machine and its attendants, calculate the dosage, give his approval every once in a while to the proceedings.

He asks me which kind of biopsy I want. I can have a simple needle biopsy or a surgical excision of one tumor, which would give a more precise diagnosis; the treatment will be the same whichever kind of lymphoma I have. My peace of mind would be helped if I could be sure that it's the same old mild slow-growing lymphoma I've had before. But I decide against the surgical. In order to achieve peace of mind I'd have to hurt my body: more anaesthesia, stitiches, pain, to Hell with it. There is no peace of mind for a cancer-patient. We'll go with the needle.

"Compatible with lymphoma" is all the news the needle can guarantee, and away we go. Into a room where a bulging rectangular machine hangs from the ceiling, about ten feet by five by three, massive, moved by push-buttons in the technician's hand.

It's an electron machine. It can delimit the distance the radiation will go; it will stop at my skull and leave my brain alone. (A doctor told me last time that I was lucky to be at a hospital where I could be treated by this kind of machine. The tumor then was under my chin, and he said if I'd had another kind of machine I would have lost my sense of taste. He said they don't send patients around from one hospital to another if they need different kinds of machines; the hospitals just use what they have on hand.)

The technician is a young woman, small, several months pregnant, pleasant, and creative. I tell her I don't want to place my head face down into a rubber ring with two small air-holes the only connection to the outside, (and keep absolutely still while adjustments are carefully and lengthily made, and occasionally wait for the doctor to pay a visit and say it's all O.K., and then keep still for the treatment,) anxious and claustrophobic. She immediately devises another position for me in which I straddle a chair on wheels, bending my head forward so that the machine can reach the tumor area at the base of my skull near my neck.

It's essential that I not move even a fraction of an inch, so she places a table in front of me with a podium on it; I reach forward with my arms and hold it firmly. She gives me ear plugs because, she says, the machine is very noisy. The doctor draws a purple mark with a marking pencil around the area to be radiated, and I mustn't wash my hair during the treatment period without letting them re-draw and darken it before-hand.

With her push-buttons the technician maneuvers the machine so that it touches my head, its cylindrical tube exactly fitting the purple ring. The doctor says everything is correct. They tell me to sit still and not move my head and they place a call-button in my hand. They leave the room. I am alone with the machine.

The room feels cold. In a recent dream a friend told me to love my treatment. "Not cooperate only but love it, unite with it." I try to think how I could do that. I decide to name the machine. The first name that comes into my mind is "Fred." That seems right, a friendly, large name, inarticulate and powerful. I speak to him. I tell him to try and do a good job. I smile at him, keeping my head down, however, where it belongs. I visualize him: Wind in a child's picture-book, blowing radiation from his puffed out cheeks through his tube into the tumors.

The radiation shoots into the cancer cells until they lie helpless and leaking fluid. Healthy cells hold up lead curtains to protect the rest of my head. The machine makes an enormous whining scream; I watch the drama for what feels like two minutes. The silence when it comes is sudden. I say "Thank you Fred." He takes a deep breath. I keep my head bent and visualize macrophages coming to clean up the dead and dying cancer cells. The technician comes into my room followed by her bearded young assistant. They move my chair away from Fred. I take the plugs from my ears, smile, say "Thank you." They say "See you tomorrow."

© Frances Jaffer



PHOTO BY JOY MELNIKOW

Radiation Therapy at Eighteen

(A woman with Hodgkin's disease speaks)

I want to die each night before
I sleep: the laser needle

The wind sweeps me up in its fist.
I watch earth revolve:

Sews a heart into my skin.
In nightmares,

The brown of continents twists
In the blossoming blackness of space.

My bed stops and starts
Like an ambulance.

Falling through dreams, the bottom
Is so close, I smell of loneliness.

Will the landmines in my neck
Grow tinier beneath my fingers?

My nipples were stiff as dried clay
Between my boyfriend's fingers:

Or will they ignite like the roses
I recognized this morning:

Will he want to touch them again?
In the bathroom mirror,

The petals arching like flames,
I've never seen anything so bright,

A wrinkled pale lady stares at me.
A little girl is trapped

Or noticed how many stars
Penetrate night like icicle points

In an abandoned refrigerator.
I want to explode at the seams.

Dripping water in such fine spray
My bald head is baptized again.

Virgil Hancock

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PHOTO BY JOY MELNIKOW

April 28

I.
I am 38 today becoming invisible
today my body is hot a moth
sleeps out the day in the ceiling niche
on the bus a man with a black eyepatch
reads, "On the Sanctity of Solitude."

II.
at a phone booth at 7th and San Carlos
I hear him tell me the smear is positive
traffic rushes by someone waiting
taps on the side of the booth death
seems funny funny and giddy
life seems very sharp

III.
it is 3 o'clock when my children
remember the birthday one says
he thought it was on the 29th
the girls say it was all a lack
of money I ask them if
I am too casual about ceremony

IV.
a visiting professor from Japan researching
mathematical analysis of human motion
brings me a box of chocolates
we drink lapsang soochang while he
explains arc tangents their implications
upon two dimensional analysis

V.
at a wine party I drink
too quickly eat tuna and wish
someone would hold me

VI.
I climb the stairs when
the moon has set
a moth
flies over my left shoulder
dips
and spins toward the light

the moth makes sense of solitude
but I want everyone I see

Mary Frances Carney
Foothill Quarterly, Vol. III, No. 3

The color of forgotten

I have seen them
in the day rooms of hospitals.
Old men, strapped
securely in place. Smoking

if they can. Their
dignity in puddles beneath
the wheelchairs. Futility
is the smell of old urine.

We are separate in
our white coats and uniforms.
Orbiting in our
separate purpose. Defended,

we invoke
the old leper cries:
Outcast! Unclean!
Placement.

But listen,
I've heard it whispered.
When you're old,
with skin as yellow

as tobacco stains;
and frail and deaf.
They'll take that
clean white coat away.

Terry Osback

Marking Your Absence

The first frost
dulls late autumn's fire.

A blaze of leaf
becomes
brown tattered tracery
on frozen ground.

The precise moment
of transition escapes.

Perceptions heighten
beyond bearing,

Your absence
more tangible than my presence.

M. Swafford

CHOLO

(From the 9/5/81 San Francisco Chronicle: "Galvin (Snake) Shine, a gang leader who boasted in the press that he and his cohorts "wasted" a Mission District teenager was found guilty of second degree murder. . . Shine and two other members of a gang from the working class Crocker Neighborhood, fought with three Latino youths in a parking lot on Twin Peaks. Afterwards, Nelson Rodriguez, 16, lay dead on the pavement, his skull crushed. . .")

My green-eyed daughter lifts
blonde hair from her pale face
and says, "Sometimes it's hard
not to be prejudiced. The guys
all want my ass and the girls all
want to kick it." Inner City
Public High School, USA.

"I wasted that Little Cholo,"
Snake told the reporter.
Front Page Exclusive. No
regrets. No regrets. At the
24th and Mission Bart Station
Home Boys and Girls lift black
music machines to their faces
while soul salsa lowrides
the traffic. "I wasted that
little Cholo."

Mother and Daughter at the Roxie—
16th and Valencia/"Revolution or Death."
A child lies face-down/thumbs tied
behind back/revolver pointed to
head. That night Alicia
dreams of a mutilated corpse and
screams. "I wasted that little Cholo."

Last week in San Salvador
Four headless bodies
Four heads found
Four miles away
The youngest was
Fourteen
Four becomes a denomic number
Four grins from headlines
Four nuns raped and murdered
Four severed heads
One barely a woman
One a child.

In Elizabethan England
decapitation was reserved
for nobility. The poor
were drawn and quartered.
In El Salvador they kneel
before machetes. "I wasted
that little Cholo."

The sweat that soaks your skin
belongs to you, Alicia/your flesh
is yours to give and take as you
judge best/this is not rhetoric/
this is our life/I tell you
respect is a right/demand it.

I tell you that to bear a child
is a political act/to acknowledge
that to be "hit on" again and again
is physical assault/that, too,
is a political act/to worry when you
are late/to wait for the phone
to ring/fill out the police
report/wash blood from the body/
watch the coffin descend into the
ground/and then another and
another/that is a political act.
Ask the mothers of El Salvador/ask
the mothers who are circling
the plaza in Argentina/they
write history with the photos of
teenaged faces they hold to the
sun which is not blind to their
witness. Alicia. I am tying
a scarf around my head/I am
standing before a locked gate/I
am facing the silence and I am
crying your name. I promise you,
I will not go away. I am here,
and I am crying.

Carol Tarlen

HOUSE OF PAIN

I

As I lay dying elegantly burning
under sheets of beaten gold
thin and crisp, carrying me down
(as golden boots entrap the swimmer undersea)

As I lay dying delicately perfumed
with the rare odours of pain
refined and honed to scrape the nerves
into a tracery of glowing knowledge

As I lay dying all my ears alive
to scurry of rubber soles and gurney wheels
the expensive music of voices wavering
in and out like darting fish now near now far

As I lay dying all alone
the cool scalpels severing the bones
I knew the taste like stone
heavy and silent from mountain waters
of silence, indescribable,
as when the drowning ended
and the swimmer floated
freely, lazily for ever
tugged by whatever current

the silence rose around me
cool and still
a music without noise

It is hard
even with the hooks of fear
to take hold again
of the blurred voices,
of the costly weight
of all the living left to do.

II

Under the central dome of light
the blurred figures revolve,
their ritual faces swathed and floating. . .

Coming around. . .coming back. . .
the cool expert hands like hooks
pull me to shore from out those deep silences. . .
they persist. They will not let go.
(What's it to them
but another heap of disordered flesh,
a mutilated organism
like a bloody fish
gasping, lying on the dock?)
I see the doors inexorably closing
and I know: it is inescapable, now.

They hover, floating cool angels
who will not be content
unless I produce a miracle,
obedient to their commands.
The air smells of mercy, stupor, and pain;
they expect me to live again.

They live with miracles.
Every day through these swinging doors
trussed like a sacrifice,
comes a beast whose blood has been spilt,
and becomes the shape of a man.
Every day, the formless ether-weighted gowns
rise up like awkward souls, like human figures.

They persist. I have lost, now, the place
where pain went golden, silent
under the ringing lights.
They persist. They have no nerves.

III

Whispering down the hall
the gurney wheels turn swiftly
under the artificial lights.

I sink down drowned into whiteness
behind drawn curtains; harsh whiteness
under the delicate expensive skin.

Pain is always alone
behind drawn curtains.
One responds to pity
or to another's pain
with a mechanical gesture
dizzily remote.

Now there is nothing
but to know where every nerve
flashes from every muscle;
now nothing but to endure
the flaming tracery
the body has become.

It is inescapable, now.
There is no where to go.
Except for the sacramental
shining needle, brought in procession
solemnly by the serious angels,
it is inescapable.

It lies under the shrunken skin
like a leaden skeleton
penetrating all the flesh;
wherever I move it is there
part of every movement.
Like carrying braces on crippled legs
so carrying the mutilated spirit
is a weight that cannot be put down.
Since one is not allowed to die
one must accept life.
It does not seem much like a gift
to go on, crippled, carrying pain.

IV

Irregular as a nightmare, time
bulges slowly, a balloon
being imperceptibly filled. . .
it is a deliberate exercise,
a careful choice, to breathe.
It is an act of discipline
to turn over under the sheets
(whose minutest imperfections, tiniest wrinkles—
the princess and the pea syndrome—
are etched in acid clarity
upon the tissue-paper skin).

Slower than a cinematic technique
of slowest motion, time passes
but does not pass, water spilling but never spilt.

The lights of pain are restless,
winking in the night. From another
bed I hear the thick babble of pain
only half-drugged: the beast, moaning.
I discover that other bed is mine.

Night deepens. Moans, fretful cryings,
someone retching.
Then we hear it.

Perhaps the absence of a noise. Somewhere on the
floor
death is slipping in, unseen yet, unfelt
except by us, the gifted.
Somewhere in the dark interior
in one of these mutilated bodies
a ligature has unaccountably loosened
and already, inexorably,
the tide is turning.
Drawn by unknown moons
the rich fluid bubbles, froths,
spills slowly, slowly emptying
those vast, those intricate channels
by which the singular cells survive—
the secret leakage proceeds in silence.
We lie rigid, helpless,
knowing, but not knowing what it is we know,
listening.

It comes, finally.
A sudden hoarsened breathing
bubbling up the fierce odour of blood;
an inarticulate strangling.

Now the feet hurry and we hear them;
the clatter of bottles, blood swaying
in shining bottles on skeletal stands,
and we hear them. But we know.
Already half-emptied
the heart is quivering, frantic,
into a tremble, an orgasm,
a spasm of convulsive beats—

for the brain it was
a slow dimming
as the lights shut down, one by one.
First the expendable cells were sacrificed,
then, the networks darkening, and, quietly,
one by one, the yielding up
of the vital cells.
We lie and are silent,
hearing that utter, baffling silence.

Last night I should have been glad to go down
into the quiet where pain is limpid as light
and nothing tugs at your nerves—
but now I am almost relieved
to feel the insistent claw of pain
(now only tingling the surface; later
ripping the gut).

The voices have died down.

No need to hurry now. A slow
arrogant footfall follows the gurney
on which the sheet falls over head and foot alike.
The form is bound and motionless.
For a moment I welcome
the fox in the belly.

And we settle down to wait again.
How bloated time becomes.
It is impossible to know beforehand
how long the night can be.

V

They come with crisp clinical steps.
Today I am to learn to walk again.
Their assured smiles cannot imagine
the inertia of all that lead
strapped to every bone,
transmuted into every bone.

May be it is as the saints insist,
not the weight of lead but the weight of gold,
this pain that makes each movement
clogged as in a nightmare.

But gold or lead
when it comes to wearing the weight
there isn't much to choose between them.

One foot, the other. Pick up the foot
by tightening the thigh,
bending the knee.
(See, it's not so bad)
swing the foot forward.
(Easy, now, we don't want to fall.)

The corridor goes ever on and on.
A daze of lights (look, people walking
without thinking about it!)
the smooth interminable floor
shines like glass, for ever on and on.
Lift the foot. . .

Whether the bones be lead or gold
the weight breaks almost through the small thin skin
which gives a semblance of humanness.
It looks like a person, lifting one foot,
swinging one foot, putting it down.
If it's a mechanical man
betrayed by its awkwardness,
it hath the face of a pain,
it hath the pain of a man,
this marionette
jerking in the hands of some damn amateur!

One foot. Two feet. Right and left.
And in another world, stairs. . .

VI

Everyone is ecstatic.
How natural it looks!
One would hardly know.

But all the survivors
(grimacing a little
with their awkwardness)
know that all who live
are mutilated flesh or spirit.

I know the pain of loss
beyond the sutured stump,
the ache in the bones that are gone,
in the flesh irretrievably lost.

There is a bright language for us
(we are the survivors:
none who live are whole)
not artificial leg but prosthesis,
or, perhaps, prosthetic device.

The artifice of speech
does not conceal
the brutality of loss.

We walk on new prosthetic limbs
to rehabilitation wards
and one would hardly know
how under the stiff new limbs
the anguished flesh erodes away
shredded by the flow of time:
no one would hardly guess
how much can be lost
and the man still live.

Carol Christopher Drake

Brightness Falls

...from the air, trembling, drop by drop,
the soft rain glowing in the dusk, falling, falling

over the rustle of sage
(amethyst and jade
shadowed with the delicate gray
of a dove's pearled wing)
over the wrinkling wind
over the flowing dust
that shall not bloom
like any rose again
unless it be the rose of fire

brightness falls from the air,
brightness whose face is death.

Here is a handful of shining sand
singing, unheard,
its mysterious, passionless music,
glowing faintly in the dusk
with a light to make men blind.
Innocent and obedient to its laws
this handful of dust shall burn, all pure,
into the secret marrow of your bones.

Brightness falls, obedient
to the laws all nature knows
(except for us, except for us)
and here, without spitefulness,
only simplicity, are we weighed
and found wanting.
The mutilated forest,
the grassless fields blown away,
mute and inexorable, proclaim
what we are choosing, and have chosen.
the slimy water, lapping
on poisoned banks, runs
in deep pollution, offering us
the poison we have chosen, and are choosing.
The wind bears its burden
clogging the delicate intricate lungs
with sediment and fire;
the bright rain burns the hand
and our bones are corroded with a slow dying.

Time and our choices are falling
bright through the heavy air,
and what we have scattered we shall gather,
what we have sown, shall reap.

Carol Christopher Drake

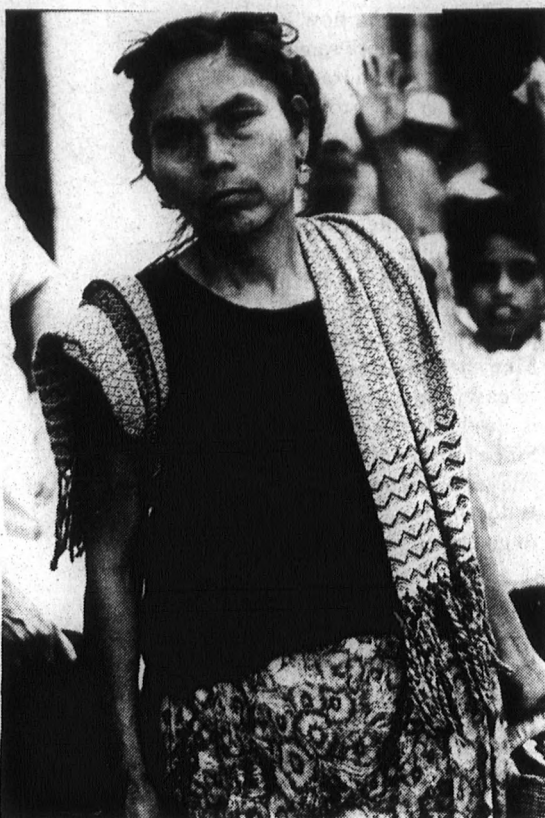


PHOTO BY JOY MELNIKOW

Train-track sojourn

North Carolina train-track sojourn
I alone saw the violent act.

The angry dogs were barking loudly into the fall air,
Too intent on their own noise to see anything but me.
Sometimes, not often, a gunshot in the distance
But I remained the only witness.

You were locked inside your tiny piece of property,
Too afraid of all those autumn things—
The field of tall grass—still perfectly shaped—now
colored blue-gray,
The old frame house that had spent more than one
summer alone.

Suddenly around the bend came a speeding train
The trees quivered and bristled hoping to avoid their
unpleasant fate
The wind from the passage of the train ripped the
already dead leaves from the screaming trees
Left a scar that would last the winter.
The trees bowed, and drew their branches together
to cover the wounds.

I alone saw the violent act.

Larry Procopio

Babylon

I hear them as they muster at the threshold of my
sleep.

They whisper and cajole and mourn their fate.
And what they say so urgently is lost despite
their alien language.
(At one time, I must have understood)

Their screams cloud the air of my dreams
with a dense, jaundiced mist;
Their eyes jitter in a finalizing terror,
then slowly glaze to eucalyptic stillness.

Who administered the draught that poisoned their
unrecorded history?

Why does it now churn through my bloodstream
and chase my heartsong?

And when the morning finally tears down the funeral
wreaths,

I wonder why

I remember nothing but their tauntingly echoed
warning...

BABYLON
babylon
FELL LIKEWISE
likewise.

Randy Griffin

Teaching

Another term is over
artificial time set by the Unknowns
and not to see all these
young men and women ever again.
They leave for a world promised to them
entering a world unprepared for their honesty.
Not to hear of their failures
not to experience and live through their worries
and only to get a note reporting successes
and so only a few envelopes a year to inhabit
my mailbox.

Memories grow at the same rate
as their minds and hopes;
to be able to forget the laughs and bright eyes
that is the qualification to become a teacher
no, not to know,
but to know how to forget and get on.

Jorge Harrett-Aigla

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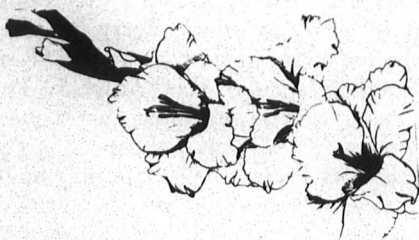
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Meryl Glass



Professional

I am a professional.
On my right, you'll note my desk.
All papers are precisely aligned.
My pencils are evenly sharpened.
My calendar is filled and current.
The incoming and outgoing always evenly balanced.

I walk with a measured, rapid stride,
posture perfect, eyes fixed firmly forward.
In high heels, I click like a clock.
If I run, I don't sweat.

I am stylish, though not extreme. In suits,
grays, tweeds, muted patterns are appropriate.
Blouses should be plain, white, or soft beige.
One cannot be knowledgeable in lemon or turquoise.
Of course, fuschia is totally irresponsible.

My wardrobe is an investment.
My makeup is subtle, natural.
Eyebrows perfect penciled slashes.
The lips should always match the occasion.
I kiss expertly, without smudging.

I am a professional.
When I speak,
my words are precise, well-chosen,
and pronounced crisply.
As a professional, I take charge.
I'm witty and assertive.
And my skills are in great demand.

As your lover, I am thorough, responsive,
and I always know how to please.
My lovers must know how to please me as well.

If you're in need of my services,
friendship or affection,
I am sure a meeting can be arranged.
Here, let me check my calendar.
I always keep it handy.
Your name?

Gala Fitzgerald

Where It All Began

Neighborhood streets:

fat sweaty women
shout from second storeys;
dark
against the brightness of the window
a sudden pupil
in a blank blind eye

in the doorways
men in dirty T-shirts
yellowed men
with wire hands
and jerky neon movements

at the drugstore door
"the boys"
figures waiting for the something to happen;
philosophers of the uselessness of effort
they will endure
the apocalyptic moment
and still find
nothing to do.

The street
is where the kids spring up
cracking the pavement;
they learn
the texture of the concrete skin
the rough blacktop callouses
the sand and winter gravel
the roadway wears

streetlights
thin cold nannies
gather them in the evening.

Richard Pierce

Fall

There is dilemma here. Celibate,

you slide into my autumn bed,
and the adjectives no longer applies.

Married, you slip into my dormant life,
and your rings fall with the leaves.

Shy, but I scream with passion,
disturbing the wind-whipped silence.

Your husband taps at the cocoon
we rest in, but it is not spring.

I feel the echoes of his tapping in my limbs,
the withered leaves are for his sadness.

In my eyes the first rain, your heart
the first snow — covered over, covered

over.

Terry Osback

MY NAME IS SCRABBLE

Potpourri of shiny pieces.

Striking poses.

Like flopping flecks in kaleidoscopes.

WOMAN WILLOW SONG
MEADOW LIGHTHOUSE STORM.

Jenny Houston

Nights of the Immaculate

It was there we
learned the guilt
of natural mind—works and pomps

spilling upon the novena
like flecks of mud on
a lotus. The incense never

ceased. They would whisper
under their veils. . .through Him
and with Him and in Him. . .

while we
creatures knelt
in the smoke and awe. Old

women purified
from the sanctuary braced
the world with their hurt, lonely

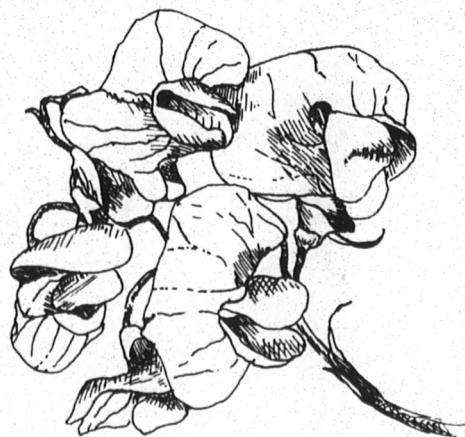
singing and the sounds
fled through the stained
glass into the snow-

shoveled city. And it was there
we learned to dream—mothering
on our tongues the gods

they'd left behind. We
wandered in the contagions expecting
death to find us, dizzy

in the unsureness that if
we turned around there would be
nothing there.

Mary Frances Carney



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Breast Exam

She stretches out, chest undraped, on white sheets,
A fifty five year old woman, appearing not

Too unlike my mother (I imagine) when she visits
Her fat male gynecologist. My left hand presses

The fingers of my right hand, their tips
Indent the slopes of her breast. For an instant,

She IS my mother and I'm her son, pressing deeply
Around the shrunken lobules from which I once

Sucked milk, turned towards reflexly when my cheek
Was brushed and formed that haunted, primary

Attachment. The one I keep trying to return to
Twenty-seven years later. As I carefully

Squeeze her nipple looking for blood not milk
Perhaps she remembers the lips and tongues

Of her children. Suddenly, I become aware
That I'm attracted to this woman, her breasts

Firm beneath my hands. (She probably thinking:
'Why don't more women go into medicine?')

Embarrassed by the unacceptable sensations
Behind my white coat and blue slacks, I force

These thoughts and feelings into the adjective
'Professional' and objectively record

In my two years, medical school trained brain,
The varying densities of her breast tissue

As routinely as any radiologist.

Virgil Hancock

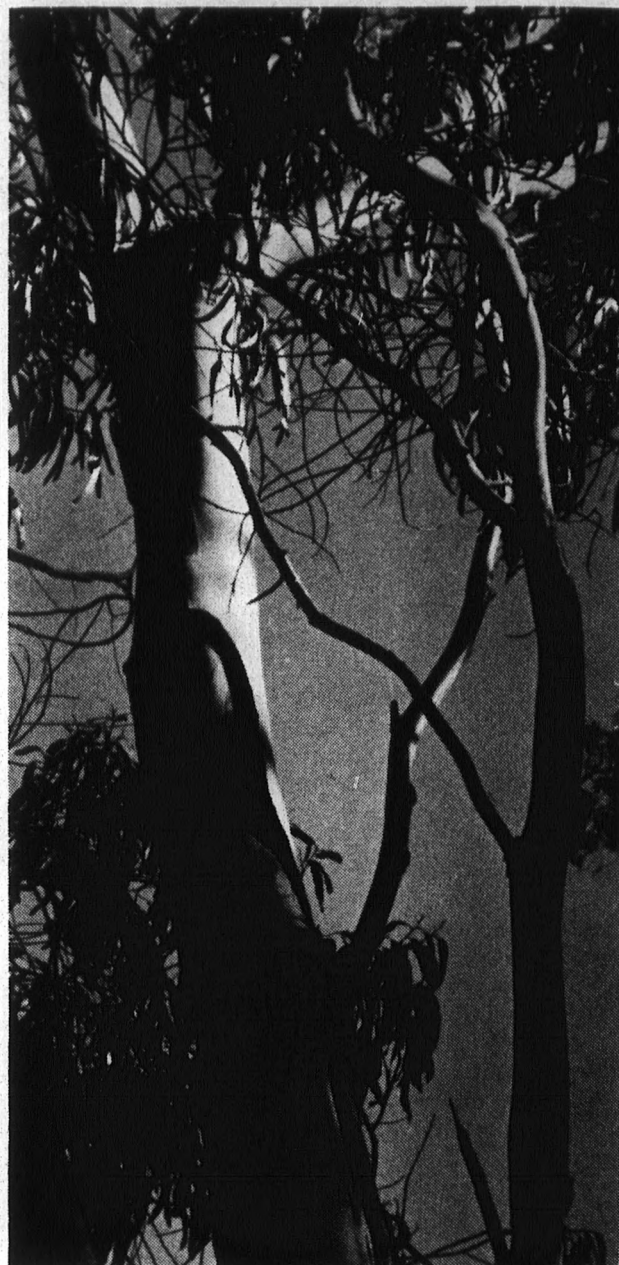


PHOTO BY JOY MELNIKOW

Synapse literary contributors

Mary Frances Carney is director of alumni for the UCSF school of medicine and is working on her master's in creative writing at SFSU. A painter as well as poet, **Gala Fitzgerald** works as an administrative editorial assistant in the department of Interventional Radiology. **Miriam Gould** is a UCSF medical school graduate currently working as a psychiatrist at the campus' Student Health Center. After moving to S.F. to study creative writing, **Meryl Glass** developed a career working with children and now is director of the UCSF Child Care/Study Center. **Virgil Hancock** is a fourth year medical student at UCSF. **Jorge Harrett-Aigla** graduated from UCSF medical school and now teaches anatomy at S.F. City College and classics at St. Mary's College. **Terry Osback** is currently in the third year of study at the UCSF school of medicine. San Francisco poet **Anne S. Perlman's** work has been widely published; her collection of poems, *Sorting It Out*, was published by Carnegie-Mellon University Press in 1982 and may be found in Bay Area book stores. While his wife works on her graduate nursing degree at UCSF, **Richard Pierce** is studying for his English doctorate. **Larry Procopio** is in the midst of his first year at the UCSF school of medicine. **Maria J. Gonzales-Swofford** is a graduate student in the UCSF family nurse practitioner program. In addition to working as a secretary II in the Division of Family and Community Medicine and being a member of AFSCME 1650, **Carol Tarlen** has published her poetry and prose in numerous literary journals. **Martha Gould Axelrod** is Miriam Gould's sister. Her poem "The Amulet" will be appearing in the 1983 *Anthology of Best American Poets*.

Our invitation for submissions to the Literary Issue of *Synapse* met with a remarkable response. Regrettably, space constraints limit us to publishing only a selective few of the many poems and stories we received. We would, however, like to gratefully acknowledge all those who did submit their work. We hope we will be able to publish additional selections in a future issue of *Synapse*.



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MILLBERRY UNION RECREATION

MU Calendar

Thursday, March 10
TWILIGHT CONCERT: Casselberry and Dupree. After a half-hour reception with food and drink, Casselberry and Dupree will perform their songs of universal appeal, spanning gospel grace notes to raw silk blues. Their magical and contagious blending of voices is based in the folk idiom. MU Lounge, 4:30 p.m., FREE.

Millberry Union is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a series of events during the week of April 11-15. Each day will feature an activity sponsored by one of the various units of Millberry Union. The following is a summary of these events. Further details on all the events may

be obtained in the MU spring brochure, MU spring newsletter and other Millberry publications available at the Union (or call 666-1800).

Tuesday, April 12:
Outdoor Adventuring: A demonstration of outdoor adventure equipment that will include a hang glider and windsurfer simulation that will be available for use by participants. Other simulations will include rock climbing and whitewater boating.

Wednesday, April 13:
Mt. Sutro Run for the Chancellor's Cup: (Sponsored by the MU Bookstore and the Synapse). This will be a 2.2 mile round-trip up and down Mt. Sutro and hopefully will become an annual event. T-shirts

will be given to the first 50 entrants. All others may purchase them for a nominal fee. Starting time is 12 noon on Medical Center Way just up from Parnassus.

Wednesday, April 13:
Video Game Tournament: This tournament is open to novices and video experts alike. It will begin at 5 p.m. in the Millberry Union game area. Prizes will be given out to the winners.

Thursday, April 14:
Fitness Education: Through a series of evaluative events, qualified members of the campus will perform free fitness evaluations from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Along with the evaluations, information on ex-

ercise, risk factors of common drugs, and management of low back pain will be available.

Campus Talent Show (MusiCale) and Buffet: Talented members of the campus community will show their stuff on stage during the CAL-sponsored show. 6-9 in the MU Gym. Wine and hors d'oeuvres will be served.

Friday, April 15:
Reception: A reception honoring the founders of Millberry Union and the many contributors who made the union possible will be held in the MU Lounge from 4-6. The presentation of a commemorative artwork also will take place at this time.

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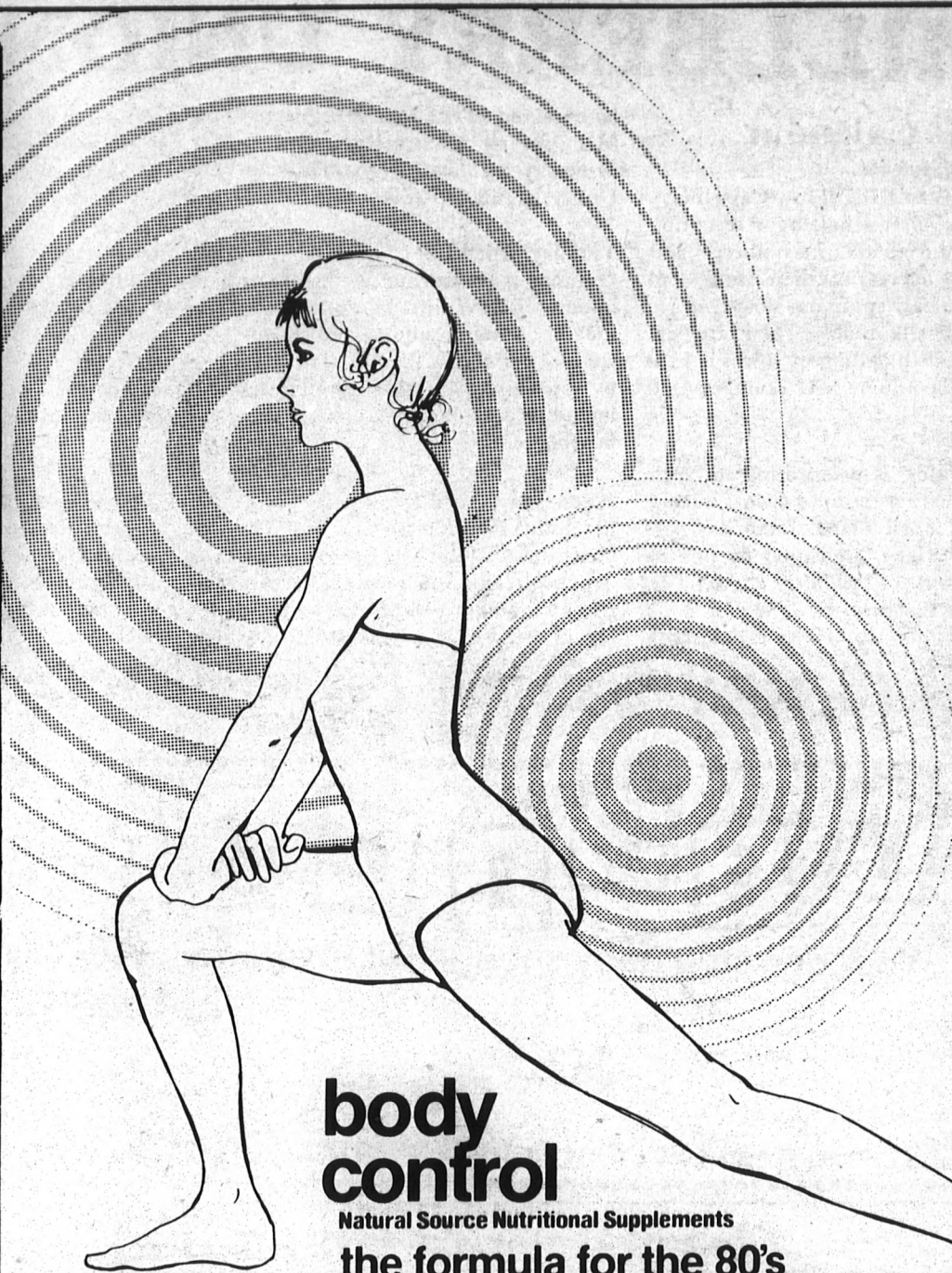
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