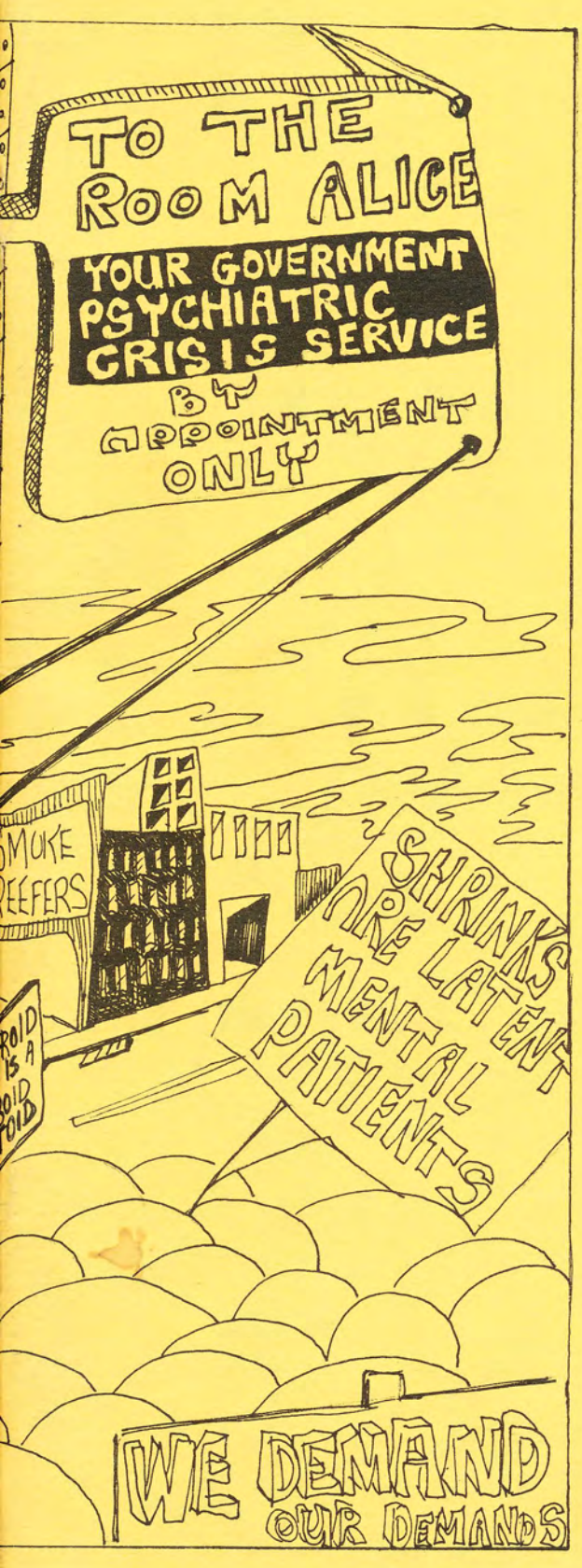

Madness Unmasked

the mental patients publishing project

Madness Unmasked


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THE MENTAL PATIENTS ASSOCIATION
CREATIVE WRITING BOOK - MADNESS UNMASKED
is published by:

The Mental Patients Publishing Project
2146 Yew Street
Vancouver, British Columbia
Canada.

tel: 604 738 1422 or 604 738 5177.

I believe that mental illness has been with us for some fifty years or more, depending on your age.

Sir Figby Snort

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INTRODUCTION

We can only begin to be powerful when we recognize that we are not powerful. We who are mental patients have been stripped of our power. We have been kept in mental hospitals against our will. We have been abused by the psychiatric profession's practices of electro-shock therapy, drug-therapy, and sleep-therapy, and we have been abused by the psychiatric profession's legal powers to make our decisions for us. Our lives have been turned into living nightmares that never end. We are less than second-class citizens; we are the scapegoats of society. We had no voice, until January 1971, when a small group of us came together to form the Vancouver Mental Patients Association as a viable alternative approach to traditional mental health practices.

MPA is a member-controlled organization. We operate as a participatory democracy because we believe that we can only be powerful if we control our own lives, shape and forge our future together. We believe in self-help, the kind that comes from our own special understanding of our suffering. As a group, we support one another to overthrow the chains of our oppressors. Together we have shaped the development of MPA.

Today we are a strong group of several hundred ex-mental patients, and we constitute one of the most advanced people's political groups practising and learning "participatory democracy" in North America. We operate a drop-in-centre, five democratically-run residences, a research operation working toward radical change in the laws governing our lives, and we are active in the community to destroy the myths that surround "mental illness." MPA is allied with other oppressed struggling groups - other Mental Patient Liberation Groups, the Women's Movement, the Gay Liberation Movement, and the Working Class. Our oppression is the same.

As mental patients, we have been punished for our revolt against the tyranny of the establishment. As women, we are punished for refusing to adopt the behaviour defined for us by the male patriarchy we live under; and as men we have been punished for being unable to "stand up and be a man" in the ways that are also defined by the male patriarchy we live under. Together we are making a new world.

This is the first book publication of the Mental Patients Publishing Project, a spin-off project of MPA. It is a compilation of creative writings primarily by ex-mental patients who are members of the Mental Patients Association. Many of the pieces have been published previously in our monthly newspaper --'In a Nutshell.'

The material for this book was solicited by a committee of seven people who were elected to the project on the basis of their qualifi-

cations. The committee was composed of five women, and two men; three of whom were previously patients on psychiatric wards, but all of whom have been abused by traditional psychiatric practices. The project was funded by the federal government through an Opportunities for Youth grant during the summer of 1974.

The book attempts to represent through poetry and prose, the experience of someone who is admitted to a Mental Institution. It is sometimes not totally understood that the mental patient suffers from a situation as thoroughly crippling as a physical, visible affliction --perhaps more crippling because it is not visible and thus, not so well understood. It would seem then, that the understanding of, and compassion for what has been labelled as 'mental illness' is a desperate need.

Our book touches upon a progressive emotional experience from the time of the recognition of alienation, through the hospital experience, followed by the struggle to understand and communicate, to the need to express anger, indignation, and revolt, and finally, to the healthy release of creative energy that accompanies the urge to grow and change, both ourselves and our society.

There are various interpretations of mental illness. We present this book to the reader in the hope that it will greatly contribute to your understanding of the nightmare of madness that society has inflicted upon us.

The democratic experience of working together to prepare this book has been a broadening one for us, and we hope it will prove to be the same for you.

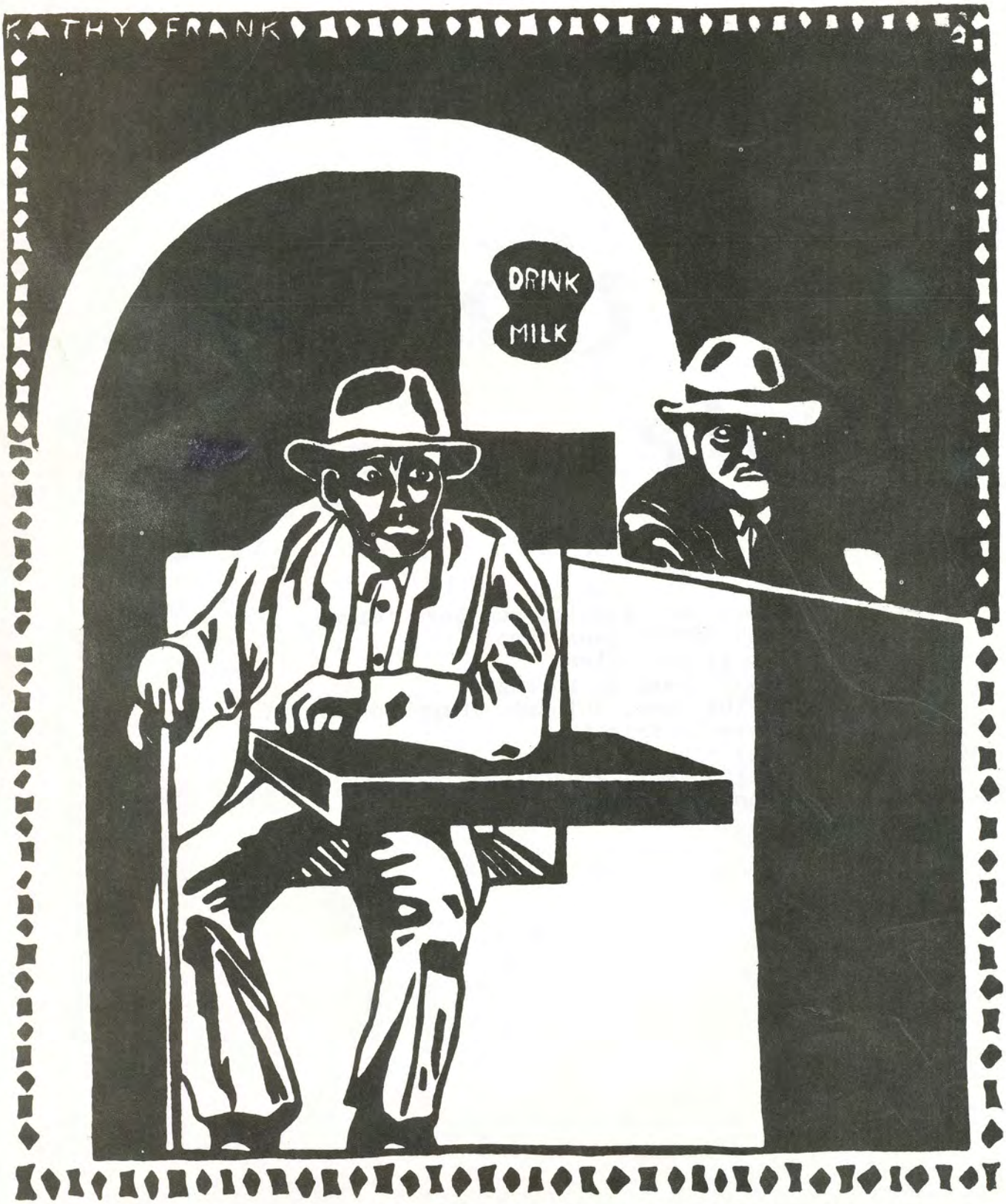
Barbara Bussigel
Petra Graves
Terry Haughian
Peggy Ross
Robert Melnick
Saeko Usukawa
David Wallace

Madness Unmasked

Chapter 1

ALIENATION

Close your eyes to nameless fears.
Seal within your throat
The silent cries.
Never speak to strangers
Of the dark, chimeric images of night.
In their fright
they might
build a wall around you
from the world.


KATHY FRANK
DRINK
MILK

I have spent a lot of my life
climbing walls that aren't there.

Molly Dexall

THE ENEMY

Sophie reached the door and opened it and knew she was safe. Putting the bag of groceries on the table, she straightened up and took a deep breath. Now it was over and she wouldn't have to go out again until tomorrow.

Slowly she took off her coat and put on the kettle. Now was the time to sit down with her pencil and pad and try to work out her grocery list for tomorrow. It would have to have five items to stand for the five words in "I love you very much." She struggled with it but it wouldn't seem to come out right. Leaning back to the stove, she turned off the kettle and continued. Suddenly it all fell into place:

Lettuce
Oranges
V8 juice
Eggs
Radishes

She put it away satisfied and lay down on the bed. It had been a terrible walk. She took it every day and each time it became worse. It was only four blocks but it seemed like twenty miles.

Today had started out in almost a frenzy of fright. Thinking about the walk made her shake like a leaf as she dressed. At ten o'clock exactly Sophie walked out into the street as she did every day. It was absolutely necessary or she would have no food and would not survive.

This morning she had held her purse in that special way she had decided was the least dangerous. Calming herself she had walked out into the open with the sun glittering on the snow. Keeping her head down, of course, showed her very great humility. For, although she couldn't see them, she knew there were observers at the windows of the tall apartment houses that lined the street. Sophie felt like running, but with great control and courage she kept her step steady and regular.

There were people she met who turned their faces from her. Sophie knew where they came from and felt fear and contempt. There were others who looked deeply into her eyes and gave her strength. Her friends had sent them.

Nearing the store she suddenly slipped and fell. A man grabbed her under the arms and helped her up. Glaring at her he said something, but deafened by fright she couldn't hear him.

Finally reaching the store she hurriedly gathered the groceries in the order of her shopping list and took them to the same cashier she always used. This was her contact. This was where she left her messages. Her messages were about how she was getting along. She might say, "I got a green light this morning," or "Watch the garbage." Today she said, "Bad morning."

Pushing wearily out of the store she stopped suddenly. There was the man who had helped her up. She knew he would follow her home. Steady. She held her walk to the usual regular gait, but terror gripped her heart. He was right behind her all the way. She didn't turn

and look, but she could feel his eyes on her back, past the apartment blocks, past the snow-covered lawns.

Sophie reached the door and opened it and knew, for another day, she was safe.

Molly Dexall

Worry sprouts
on the shore of my conscious mind
like dark black petals
falling heavily
on the pattern of my dreams.

Shiny
the black back
barking in the sun
out of the flow
of the grain-dripping waves;

Again upon a snow-born morning
a red flower bloomed
twice for each season.

A hint of death
flushed in the winter
once more
in the spring.

Petra Graves

to r.d. laing

the leper kisses the saint
beneath the hanging tree
the dead man
dancing on my tomb
eats my hands, and
swallows
my eyes
the world
is one orgasmic hole
it looks me in the eye
and spits

into the middle reaches
of my mind
come i
wandering
collecting
chickens and roosters
gutting
and choking
with one quick blow my mind

Lid Strand

NIGHT

Katherine stands against the lampost, watching the rain in the gutter -- standing and watching for so long she has forgotten what she is waiting for. Looking up, she feels the rain fall in her eyes. It's pleasant to blink rain from her eyes like a cat, unworried.

The streetlamp flickers and goes out, leaving her standing in a pool of shadow. Katherine imagines her eyes to be turning yellow. She steps into the gutter and stands with the water running over her feet and ankles. All along the street the lamps are going out; the air is turning purple.

She wonders how it is that the rain and the gutterstream are so warm. She would like to lie down and bathe in it; it is so pleasant. She leans over to dip her hand in the water. Someone's hands touch her head. Straightening up, she sees it is a woman in a nightgown. Her eyes are closed and she continues to touch Katherine, who stands still, not knowing what to do. The woman's hands are like the rain, warm and light. After a while she seems satisfied that what she is looking for isn't to be found here; she turns, eyes still closed, and goes away. Katherine wonders if she should follow the woman to make sure that she comes to no harm, but the gutterstream draws her attention again, and she forgets.

Now she sits in the gutter. She rests her head against the lampost and spreads her legs out before her into the streat. She notices that not only is the water warm, but the pavement is soft. It seems to adjust itself to her body contours. She rocks slightly to see if it will rock with her. Yes. The rain increases.

Katherine closes her eyes, and imagines the water flowing over her to be small grey serpents, -- feeling them curling over her thigh, climbing her belly, slipping away. The water is streaming down her head. The serpents slide down over her eyes, her breasts, slipping away. She opens her eyes.

There is a pool of water on her coat between her legs. There is a grey snake curled in it. Katherine touches it; it twines around her hands. She raises it to her lips and kisses it. It uncoils itself and slips away in the stream. She closes her eyes again, and sees what she saw when they were open. The rain is washing her completely. She stops feeling the warmth, and becomes it. The warmth has become the world. There is a quickening in her body as it prepares to take its first breath.

Elaine Bougie


ALL the Eyes
of
PORTFOONERIE
KF

THE BOOK OF PORTFOONERIE

Preludium

1. Will the Apocalypse
come?

2. Yes, yes,
for it comes
with the wind and the rain
at daybreak
and rides the sooty black locomotive
all down the track
outside my windowpane.

Portfoonerese Invocation

1. Approxilmede and approuzied.

2. Fractuled floozie.

3. Approxilmede.

4. Expenderie expenderie prephenderie expenderie all the way to the balconie. Balconie in the starlight; noonday prefunctory.

5. At times IT WAS blank blank blank blank blank all the way back and forth Yonge Street.

6. Once upon the way home from the bank I ate a jelly donut.

7. Then cried.

8. Prespoonerie, prespreenerie, frenzied, eshmexied and Approxilmede.

9. Because IT WAS Borderie: a good lesson in the degradation of meaning and UH Buckled Guffaws.

10. Portfoonerie, Loonietouneerie, so Approxilmede I had to keep looking.

11. Because IT WAS only megaphoning mushroom stand carpet.

12. Oh God, is this what's really happening? And then it happened again.

13. IT WAS.

14. Approxilmede.

15. (Approxilmede.)

16. And then we stopped at the What's-Winnipeg? Station ("Dear Kathy: I am trying to understand....").

17. Hobble People. Hobble? Two. I don't seem to fit anywhere at all.

18. Approxilmede.

19. Outside windowpane.

20. Apprixilmede.

21. A woman.

22. I SAID, I SAID, I SAID, I SAID, I SAID.

23. Approxilmede and approuzied.

Chapter 1

1. BENEATH the August naked noonday sky,
Below Toronto's blinding scorching sun,
Beyond the concrete sidewalk winding back
Uphill toward the train station: I sat

2. There momentarily.

3. Approxilmede.

4. Some kind of garish roadside trap
On outskirts of Portfoonerie.

5. So I got up and walked over to a fence surrounding the pit.
The pit was occupied:

6. Yellow mechanical shovels
Gouging out craters of earth;
Clanking in courterpoint,
Over, over, over
And over and
Over again,
The Mechanical Shovels Chant:

7. Pare-a-noi-a
Stare-a-noi-a
Scare-a-noi-a
Snare-a-noi-a
Pare-a-noi-a
Stare-a-noi-a
Scare-a-noi-a

7. x
Snare-a-noi-a
Pare-a-noi-a
Stare-a-noi-a
Scare-a-noi-a
Snare-a-noi-a

Chapter 2

1. "Dear Kathy; I am trying to understand a problem the only way I know how.

2. "It was at long last apprehended approximately in an immediate fashion. And do you approve and concede?

3. "Furthermore, this apprehension has led me to apprehend that apprehension potentiates sacrifice."

Chapter 3

1. BENEATH the August naked noonday sky,
Below Toronto's blinding scorching sun,
ABOVE the concrete sidewalk winding back
Uphill toward the train station: I saw

2. A traffic tunnel.

3. Approxilmede.

4. All the eyes of Portfoonerie were upon me as I stepped inside the traffic tunnel.

5. And so I began walking to meet them at the far side.

6. I could hear an old familiar Portfoonerese victory incantation pulsing from the spinning tires of passing automobiles, rising in glorious cadence from the pavement everywhere:

7. Mai-ni-a
Trai-ni-a
Mai-ni-a
Church-win-dow-pai-ni-a
Mai-ni-a
Trai-ni-a
Mai-ni-a
Church-win-dow-pai-ni-a
Mai-ni-a
Trai-ni-a
Mai-ni-a
Church-win-dow-pai-ni-a

15. (Faster and
ster.

16
K-9. Only the now fading sun of a late August afternoon was there to cheer me as I at last emerged triumphant - but alone - from the traffic tunnel.

10. Syllogism:
If the sun on this side
Is the same sun on that side
Then

11. Why have I come here?

12. Because it's on the way
To the train station
(anyway).

13. And so I went there
To see
Heavy dusty engines
Lined along the tracks.

14. And so I stayed there watching, standing miles above the tracks, just inside an official Portfoonerese vantage point, and guarded by a fortress of magical black criss-cross iron railing.

15. Just outside the ladies washroom.

16. Approxilmede.

Approxilmede and Approuzied

Kathy Frank

WHITE LUNCH CUSTOMER

$1.00 makes 3 beers and one for the waiter
at the Niagara
or any other pub for that matter.
It's really quite improper
to enter alone
but I go on past caring
on lonely occasions
to settle with a book
or a passing man,
depending on my state of mind.

Glutton yourself
with that bitter brew
125 calories times many;
occasional hiccoughts
escaping gas
and trips to the "ladies."

Abandon with the fellows
at the next table
who buy you a round
and cast
the reassuring looks of lust.

You're on top of the world
until Monday's hangover
and the alarm.

Petra Graves

1.
blindly I trace the hollows and
hills of a face
a plaster cast
I reverse into life
(a carved mask that someone has
left unbroken)

2.
You are here
(sadness corded with words)
striking my face with violence
(that is mind)
silence answers silence
a cross lies rotting on the hill

3.
I have run my fingers along
the chair inside your blood

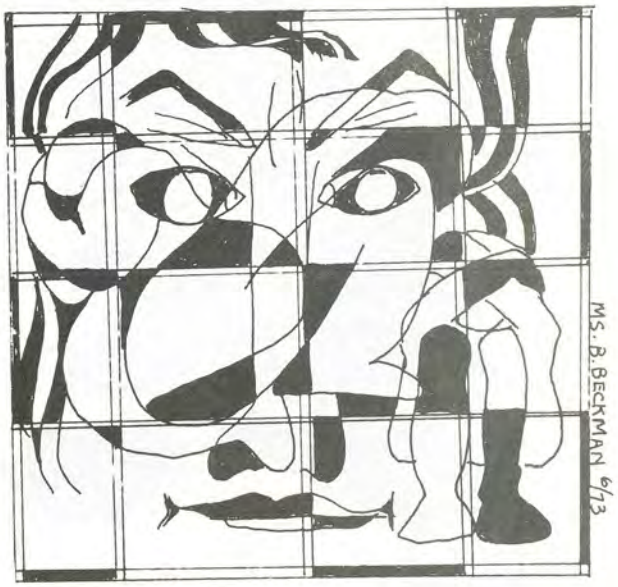
there is no escape

Sue Landell

BEYOND SOUND

My day is a snare
In which I am caught
Struggling.

At dawn I am revived
To continue
What life has become to me -
A life outside of life
Where my life screeches
To unimagined heights
And instinct holds me back,
Puts on the brakes.
Till gathering strength
I quietly descend to the glass surface
And I remain,
Healing myself
By the steady routine
Of my existence.



And yet
I am not healed,
For a word
A distant threatening sound
Shoots me off again
Shattering the cobwebs
That enfold me
Encircle me
Bind me
To some hidden sorrow
That lies there in a stupor
At the back of my head.

There is no word
That accurately describes
The feeling of foreboding
That I once had
That now slides past like some reptile
Nudging at the corners of my eyes.

Let me look away;
Let me see the things I love.
How wonderful!
How beautiful!
But it is still there!
I know it is still there!
When wil I feel safe again?
Never?
Yes -- never.

Molly Dexall


DONNIE
ESECKIIAN 4/73

MY FATHER AND I

My father and I murdered my mother
and watched her and watched her
through madness and joy;
But somehow she locked us together in darkness,
Four walls with no windows
One floor and no sky.
But father and I escaped from our dark room
and did what we did with no laughter or joy.
And now all alone with the scent of our sinning,
We're locked in our secret.
But soon he will die.

Eve-Lynne Rubin

Chapter II

THE HOSPITAL

Bedlam --
No more the callous
pay a penny just to stare
at writhing wretches tearing at their hair
amid the filth.

The clinic halls are quiet, cool and clean.

Seldom now do screams
display an inmate's agony to all the world.
But deep behind the drug-soaked eyes
the muted echoes linger.
Horror in slow-motion grey
portrays a scene for only
one
to see.

Pennington Hall Series, No. 1
Riverview Hospital

Today
A shot.
My medication
as you say.
Just another not-thing --
I seem calm.

If I could show you
What's behind the walls
if I could rip them out
if I could suck you in
if I could blow your mind
as mine is blown.

Peggy Berkowitz

I sat on the bench watching the continuous flow of people. They were not people. They were monsters with grotesque mouths slashed across their faces; eyes bulging, blood-shot and full of horror. Their shuffling, disjointed walking showed disgust and degradation.

Somehow I had lost track of time. How long had I been here? My head was hot and the pressure was so intense that I could feel my teeth pressing against my gums in an effort to escape the prison of my skull. I was turning into a black panther and my eyes were full of the thought of death.

The sun was very hot. There were trees, big trees, lifeless yet pounding with green terror. They were living beings trying to impose themselves on my vision. I must beware of them. The flowers, bright pools of blood cushioned in a sea of green, swept over my consciousness. I was filled with the desire to explode and unite with the brilliant flashes of colour and flowers and agony. Each yellow, each blue, each mauve, cried out to be noticed; each hue painfully sharp, like a knife piercing my flesh.

Then it was clear.

The lawn swept through rolling hills of soothing green, well watered and well tended by the men toiling under the guise of work therapy. I could see their institutional baggy brown or grey trousers, checked red and green lumber shirts, and straw hats pulled down over their ears. They were slight, anomymous men standing in rows and progressing mutely across the lawn, slowly raking debris and loose grass into piles, and then bundling it up in wagons to be wheeled away. Only the quietly bizarre and quietly depressive roamed the grounds. Let us not disturb the public.

I sat on the bench at this home for the homeless. People came and went, all ages, but surely united by misery; for here the automatic smile was a mark of shame. The chronics passed well satisfied in this outcast society, secure in a hierarchy of their own, constructed out of their helplessness, built on the gossip and camaderie of the mad and the lonely. The goodness and tolerance of their fellows, which is unfortunately rare on the "outside", was their cushion from the world. Here was some kindness and acceptance.

The only beauty was the flowers and the trees. Magnolias were cupped in a pinky-white heaven and daffodils were snappy yellow, perky, bursting with morning. Battalions of red flowers marched in circle formations livid with exquisite scarlet, surrounded by other regiments


kathy
frank
A
mental
PATIENT,
CHANTING
IN
Pennington
HALL

of polite sunshine petals. And everywhere were the soft weave of the willow trees and the whispers of towering dictatorial oaks.

These gists were created and nourished by the patients. Somewhere there is a sense of beauty waiting to give birth.

Petra Graves

IDENTITY HUNT

to watch them leaning
over themselves
is to think of
the mad bird
struck by stone
pulling its guts
out a hole in its feathers
and swallowing them
the beak keeps shrieking
its own endless probe.

Elaine Bougie

The Blind Bastard Reflects in Old Age

his eyes have been worn down by: faces in anthracite
the invariability of
their descendents
the mineral bonds
that link them to their self-
same image.

Elaine Bougie

MRS. SHAFFRON

Mrs. Shaffron?
Mrs. Shaffron!
Can you hear me?
Yes.
My name is Fernie.
Can you hear me?
Yes.
My friend Una and I have been watching you since you came on the ward the other day. You look so pathetic, dear, with that blank expression. Can you hear me?
Yes.
We want to be your friends. We feel that you are terribly frightened and we can't bear your suffering.
Mrs. Shaffron?
Mrs. Shaffron!
Please don't look like that. We want to be your friends. We want to help you. You never move from that chair except to go to the bathroom or eat or go to bed. We've seen you sit in the same position for hours on end. My dear, God is with you and Una and I are with you too. We have both been terribly ill and are getting better, but we have had help. We have had each other and we have had God. We don't speak of Him except before our meals when we thank him for his blessings. We take turns doing that and we would be happy if you would eat with us and take turns too. Mrs. Shaffron, I speak to you of God. Do you have something to say?
Amen.
Una is Pentecostal Tabernacle and I'm United. Can you tell me your faith? You don't really have to say. I guess it's not really importandt.
It is important. I'm a Jew.
Do Jews have special words they say before they eat?
Blessed art thou O Lord our God, King of the Universe who brings forth words from a frozen mouth.

Molly Dexall

I WISH I COULD REMEMBER THEIR NAMES

It's impossible to forget. And of course, there are certain things that bring back vivid memories --
Practically any song popular in the summer of 1966. There was always a slightly out-of-tune radio blaring the top ten, usually in competition with the T.V. on the opposite side of the dayroom.
The word "ladies" used as a command, to herd us around -- to the cafeteria, to the backyard, back to the ward. I used to wonder if there wasn't some term that would sound less demeaning, but the tone would have made any word as ugly.
Or keys, clipped to a belt. Those keys were a symbol, as official as a badge, of status, of power, of the ability of the wearer to leave at any time. I used to wish they would hide them away in their pock-

ets, but of course, symbols of power are to be used, and enjoyed.

For years, each time I tried to express the pain to anyone, to people I thought were my friends, I was told not to be bitter. And I supposed they were right, and I tried not to be bitter. If I was supposedly "normal" the best way was to be like all the other normals. And if they thought mental hospitals were places where sick people went for help, then I'd better appear to think it too. In those days, when my only instinct was to hide, I never would have considered another ex-patient for a friend.

Only after I learned to accept my identity as a mental patient was I able to remember two people I met while in hospital, who gave me two of the best pieces of advice I ever received.

The first came shortly after I was admitted to a new hospital and was immediately taken off all medication. Over the preceding few months, all varieties of tranquillizers, anti-depressants, mood elevators and all the rest had been tried on me, with little effect that I could see. Now, it was decided to "evaluate" me without any drugs, which at least sounded sensible. The only thing I couldn't understand over the next day or so was why I felt so awful -- chills, cramps, a crawling feeling all over my skin. The staff said nothing, and finally another patient explained that I had become addicted to my medication, and was experiencing withdrawal. At least, with that explanation, the pain had a name.

The second occurred at still another hospital, a state hospital, the end of the line. Frightened and alone, a few hours after admission, I sank down on one of the hard dayroom chairs. Over the last few hours, I had had my clothes taken away, had been subjected to a humiliating search, and had been issued a huge and faded cotton dress with the name of the hospital stamped on the back. Feeling lost and abandoned, I drew up my knees to my chest, buried my face, and started to cry quietly. Another patient approached, leaned down beside me, and whispered, "Don't do that; they'll think you're depressed." It was a lesson in survival. Immediately I straightened up and hid any trace of tears. After that I was careful to cry only alone in my room in the middle of the night, quietly.

Those two people should have been my friends. How I wish I could remember their names.

Judi Chamberlin

THE TAPPING FOOT

She sat on the chair in the corner protected on her back and both sides by the wall. From there she looked out at the scene around her. There were 40 women on this ward. It was an admitting ward and many of the women seemed perfectly normal. They wore their own clothes and not hospital dresses. Their hair was neat and they wore make-up. They chatted and moved around freely. There were others who sat, pale and silent, as she sat. It seemed to her that the day passed like a tearing, tortuous poem, punctuated by meals and the giving out of pills. It began with getting up and ended with going to bed. Now and again a purse snapped shut like the completion of a thought. A voice rang out like a powerful wave of emotion. The nurses moved to and from around and about like an illustration of lovely, crisp little flowers. At pill time, the nurse's voice blared out like a beat -- James, Smithers, Josephs, Darrell. Voices in the room rose and fell. People spoke to her and she tried to answer in the rhythm. They said,

"Where do you come from?"

"I come from Vancouver."

"Do you have children?"

"I have an only son."

"How old is he?"

"My son is nine."

They passed and others came. There were the same questions and answers like the repetitive beat in a poem.

She began to move her head back and forth in time. The nurses told her to stop. So she tapped her foot instead. In three months she was released, but she still tapped her foot. After three years the pounding rhythm ceased and faded again. Later peace gradually filtered through her heart and mind and stilled her tapping foot. Later she couldn't tell you why she tapped her foot. Mercifully, she forgot.

Molly Dexall

Woman in Riverview sits chatting with her voices.

Looking Back on Six Useless Months in Riverview Hospital

Most all of the pain, anguish, suffering and humiliation comes from the memories of being locked up in an airless cell-like room, with bars, no toilet, no bed: Because I ran away in my pyjamas when I learned that my psychiatrist had decided to give me shock treatment, and didn't want my brain cells destroyed. But I had to have it anyway because he ordered it. And the injections of trifluoperazine, the pills, and then more pills for the side effects; with no right to choose, ever. Working in a laundry folding clothes still smelling of urine, with senile, chain-smoking deranged women. The despair of months of uselessness while incarcerated in a huge institution with bars -- wondering when I would get out; knowing there was nothing wrong with me.

The unhappiness and loneliness tinged with faint memories of a true experience of the past --

The Rape of a Virgin

It was New York City
I was 21 --
You saw me,
Fresh, my purity, my innocence
The bloom of virginity
showing quite clearly.
You wanted it,
and you took it.
Sex can't be like this
I thought --
"No,no," I cried.
Years later I still shook
in men's arms at dances.

The memories have faded --
the fear, the struggle,
the discomfort, the nightmares.
But even now, with tears in my eyes
I have to try not to hate you.
Because every girl's first experience
of sex should be beautiful
and with someone she loves:
And really you weren't very much
more than an animal, were you?
And you a Doctor, as well.

Now, years later, it is the memories of the Hospital that linger so terribly. The illness is long forgotten, but the scars of the medical abuse still remain.

Carollyne McCready

AN OPEN AND SHUT CASE

I do adore
A door
That acts like a door
That opens like a door
And doesn't ever lock
like a door
Cause I've had that
galore before

Molly Dexall

Passage

from the Text of The Late August Pilgrimage

to

999 Queen Street Hospital, Toronto

I STAND FACING A LOCKED DOOR and push my fingertip into the buzzer's orifice. A metal key is then turned from inside and the aged door swings open. Now I enter the Hallway of the Stations of the Mirrors.

Outside the ladies' washroom. I see a woman vested with red and white striped pyjamas, rollers covering up her head.

She stands facing a full-length mirror: the first in a long row of identical full-length mirrors lining the inside of the wall. Her left hand is clasping an open black leatherbound book. Sequentially repeating the handwritten passages from this book, she utters its whispered litany to her full-length reflection.

The other hand is pointing at what she sees.

While celebrating this same enigmatic ritual at each successive mirror along the way, the roller-coiffed woman painstakingly walks herself into the far distant end of the narrow passageway. I ask myself: Is she verily making the Stations of the Mirrors?

Thirty minutes thereafter, the last mirror is reached. She then closes the text. Slowly, reverentially, and with both eyes penetrating dead-center into the mirror's image, she now prostrates herself before the face which faces her.

Then rises. Her bright eyes circle the room; she straightens her shoulders; then she turns; she goes; she is gone from sight.

Kathy Frank

Growing up in a Mental Hospital

This is a story about the other half of my life.

Psychiatrist and social workers had already decided before I was born that I was going to be a mental patient. My natural mother had been locked up just before she gave birth to me and was locked up again soon after. The social worker from the Foundling Hospital told my foster parents, as they put it, that my mother was "peculiar" and Miss Callaghan soon had them looking for symptoms in me, too. Every month Miss Callaghan would come and discuss my "problems" with my sister and make mud pies, this was a sign that I was too passive and withdrawn, and my "mommy" and "daddy" were supposed to encourage me to explore the neighbourhood more. When I started to wander around the neighbourhood, I went to a neighbour's garden and picked some flowers. The neighbour complained, and Miss Callaghan held a long session with my "parents" about curbing my hostile impulses.

If you're not a good boy....

I knew that my foster parents were afraid of the Foundling Hospital lady, but I didn't understand why. Because it was only me she could take back to the hospital. "If you're not a good boy, we"ll take you back to the hospital where we got you," my "mommy" and "daddy" said. But sometimes they would make the hospital sound nice, the place where they picked me out from all the other little boys and girls though they never explained why they picked me. Three years old, I tried to remember or imagine how it must have been. I was in a crib in the middle of an ocean, thousands of babies like me, all screaming and crying for mothers they didn't have. My "mommy" and "daddy" pointed to me and the nurse brought me out, wrapped in a blanket. And they took me home to the Bronx.

When Miss Callaghan had discovered enough symptoms, I was sent to Bellevue children's psychiatric ward, to be officially diagnosed and to be made an experimental animal for Doctor Bender. I was one of the first children to be "treated" with electric shock. I was six years old.

I won't go....

I gave up that little boy for dead thirty years ago, but now he's come back to life, kicking and struggling, just as he did then. "I won't go to the shock treatment, I won't!" It took three attendants to hold me, small though I was. At first Doctor Bender herself threw the switch, but later when I was no longer an interesting case my tormentor was different each time.

I wanted to die but I didn't really know what death was. I knew that it was something terrible. "Maybe I'll be so tired after the next shock treatment I won't get up. Something in me beyond my wishes made me put myself together again. I memorized my name, I taught myself to say my name. "Teddy, Teddy, I'm Teddy...I'm here, I'm here, in this room, in the hospital. And my mommy's gone." I would cry and

realize how dizzy I was. The world was spinning around, and coming back to it hurt too much. "I want to go down, I want to go where the shock treatment is sending me, I want to stop fighting and die..." But something made me live, and to go on living I had to remember never to let anyone near me again.

I spent my seventh birthday this way, and my eighth and ninth birthdays locked in a seclusion room at Rockland State Hospital. I had learned that the best way to endure this was to sleep as much as possible, and sleeping was all I could do anyway. I was in a constant state of exhaustion, and I began to have colds that lasted all year because the more sadistic attendants would turn off the radiator and open the window, even in December. Doctor Sobel said it was a sign of my sickness that I didn't like fresh air.

My friends the mice....

Sometimes the attendants would leave the door to my room unlocked while the rest of the kids went to the dining room. I would roam the hall looking for something to read, something to look at, to play with, anything I could use to keep myself distracted. I would save part of my food and think for hours of when I would eat it. Sometimes mice would run through the room, along the walls, and I would watch them carefully and try not to scare them. I wished that I were small enough to run under the door like they could. Sometimes there was nothing in the room, nothing at all, and I would lie on the mattress and cry. I would try to fall asleep, but I couldn't sleep twenty-four hours a day, and I couldn't stand the dreams.

I would curl into a ball clutching my knees and rock back and forth on the mattress trying to comfort myself. And I cried and cried, hoping someone would come. "I'll be good!" I said. And the attendant would stare at me unexpectantly through the little window with wires in it so I couldn't break the glass and kill myself. Every few days, Doctor Clardy would come in surrounded by attendants and tell me that I had to learn to "adjust." "Well adjusted" was a phrase that Doctor Clardy used often. By the age of ten, I had adjusted well to being in solitary confinement.

And so I spent my childhood waking from nightmare to nightmare in locked rooms with scraps of torn comic books and crusts of bread and my friends the mice, with no one to tell me who I was. And when I was seventeen and the shrinks thought they had destroyed me, they set me free.

I was free.

Ted Chabasinski

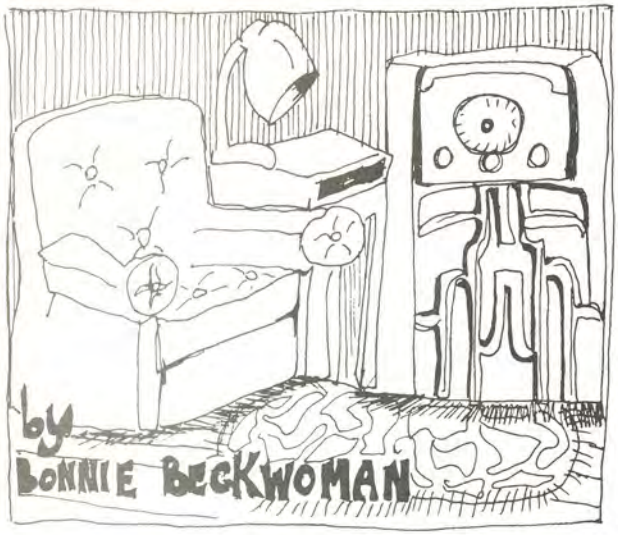
Chapter III

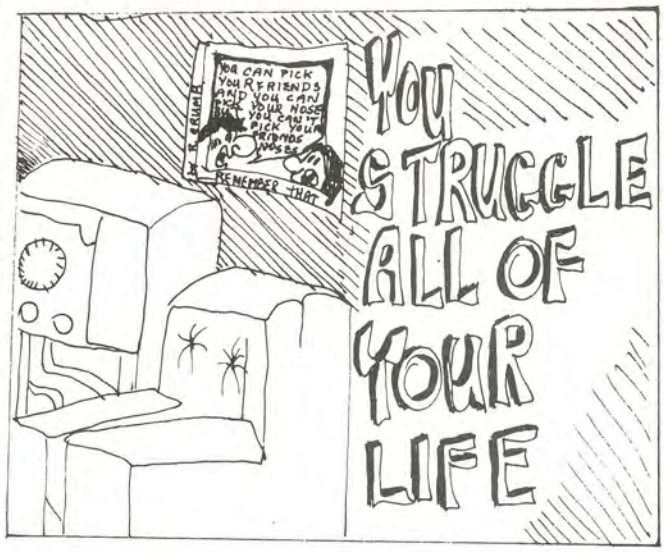
EVOLUTION

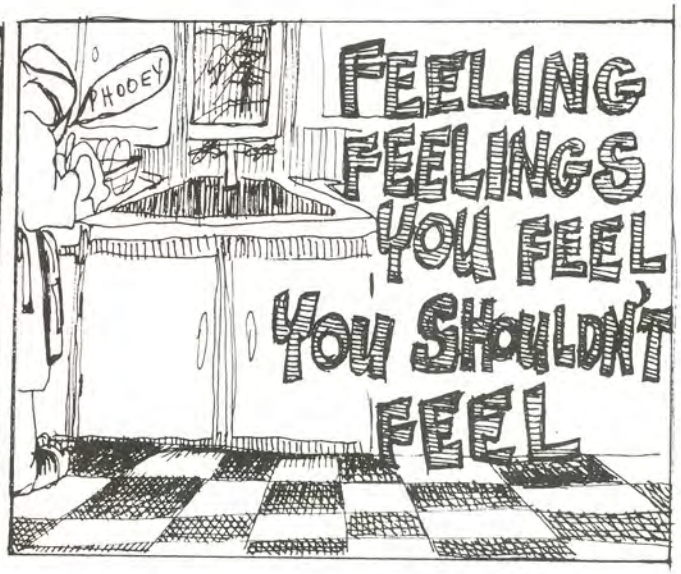
Freedom is a silent room
in an old house, with strangers passing on the stairs.
Freedom is striving
to reconnect
with the world again.

Search within to understand.
Get it all down on paper.
That always helps --
a little.
Pour out the memories,
impressions, confessions.
Reach out and touch
someone

with words.







THE ONLY FEELINGS YOU SHOULDN'T FEEL ARE THE FEELINGS THAT YOU SHOULDN'T FEEL THOSE FEELINGS.

What?

May this seem what it is
May I understand what it is not,
And cradle that which it should be!

Murray Sidenberg

COMMUNICATION

"Did you never tell the truth before?"
"Not since I was a kid."
"Why not?"
"Because when you tell the truth, you kill it. And it changes into something else. Into a corp. I once shot a kingfisher with a catapult. Knocked him off a twig into a bunch of reeds. And he looked like a piece of cheap satin."

Joyce Cary - The Horse's Mouth

When I was a child, living in total solitude and never having confided anything to anyone except my mother, who used my confidences to torment me with, I imagined that somewhere in the world there would be a person, or people, with whom total communication would be possible. When at last I began to have a few friends, any small scrap of communication I had with them seemed to me a miracle, a jewel beyond price. What was actually happening was that since I had no life of my own, I was adopting my friends' interests, their attitudes, their expressions, and in some strange way, friends of theirs whom I had never met. Once I tried very hard to find a dress exactly like one a friend of mine had, not because I especially liked the dress but because it was associated with her. I did not really understand these people (and I doubt if they understood me either) because, being totally lacking in any experience of other human beings, I had absolutely no perception of what another person was like. Also, because I had such a low opinion of myself, it was unbelievable to me that anything I did could possibly hurt another person: since I was a nothing, nobody could be hurt of affected by me. My friends were my charms, and everything about them was magic. When I had made a visit home, and had my identity totally destroyed by my mother, I would think, "If only I can get back with Liz, or Jim, I'll be a person again." And all this I imagined to be communication, when it was really an attempt on my part to assume another identity.

Or take it from another angle. Suppose I really try to tell you all about myself. This is quite impossible. I once agitated someone quite a bit by telling him that no matter how much I might try, I could not tell him all about my childhood, because so much of what I half-remember consists of complicated sense impressions for which there are no words. But these things are of great importance to me. There is nobody in the world to whom I can say, "Do you remember the Daisy stable?" Suppose I try to tell you about my friend, Miriam, whom you haven't met. I can show you her picture. I can even show you pictures of her as a child, which convey a great deal to me

because they show aspects of her that I recognize in the adult Miriam. I can tell you about the books we read together, and the way we read them; about jokes we had together. And then about the ways she quite unintentionally hurt and damaged me. But at this point there is a two-fold lack of communication. You still don't know what Miriam is like, because you haven't met her, and I now realize that I myself didn't understand Miriam in the first place.

And yet if you're really going to know all about me, you have to know about Miriam, because she was for a long time the major influence in my life. And you can't know about Miriam. So communication breaks down hopelessly at this point.

I once had a very happy relationship which was not based on words at all. The Nairs--MSP and Geetha--came from Kerala, and were living at UBC while MSP did some graduate work in Biology. MSP could speak English very well, but was not at all Westernized. Geetha spoke English poorly, and had suffered from encephalitis, so that she was perhaps somewhat retarded--I could never estimate her intelligence because of her lack of English. We talked together, I suppose about something, but it was all trivia. Every time I went there, Geetha would start trying to feed me something as soon as I walked in the door. MSP would once again play me the tape of Indian popular music his family had sent, and he would show me some slides he had taken; I think he showed me the same slides on three successive visits. We would have supper and I would praise the food and be urged to eat more and be teased about by difficulty in learning to eat with my hands. The first time I met Geetha I fell asleep on the couch, and woke to find that she was putting some of her glass bangles on my wrist. I wore them for months and finally had to break them off because my wrist is not as small as an Indian's. I think I still have one that remained unbroken. I hope so.

I never knew why MSP had such a secret of his name. He said the initials stood for Malabar Special Police. Finally he told me: the name was 13 syllables long, and I still remember it. When I was in Crease I stayed with these people on two weekends. I'm sure they didn't know exactly where I was, or what for; they just knew I was their friend and needed a place to stay. It is impossible--here we go with the communication thing on two levels again--to convey the quality of this relationship. I knew nothing about them; they knew nothing about me. Yet we were friends. Communication is often greatest when fewest words are possible.

Cathy Batten

COMMUNICATION
GRAVEYARD

She calls a spade a spade:
So let's bury her with it.

barbara joyce

In the empty square beside the fountain
where the pigeons cooed and jerked
I sat alone and thought of now
and what I was.
I thought no more
of what I hoped to be
for I have learned

I thought then
of my form crouched there
beneath the sky
and heard the god's disdainful laugh
at breath
which meant so much to me.

But I have loved, I cried
and held a tear and sighed.

Petra Graves

Why yes
I do feel that nobody cares or understands
how can they
when I don't even understand myself.

I rested in peace on a green couch
while over there
the black skull of my eternal quest
screamed
in a torn attempt at communication
to whomever would listen.
Its wildness
turned me mad
with empty laughter.

Bone seeking warmth
brittle bones and broken shells
in cold black mud
seeping through my bony fingers
cold at the extremities,
my heart vainly trying
to maintain warmth --
but it is cold
and I am without comfort.

Petra Graves

may i?

may i watch
the pain
that we inflict
unconsciously
on each other

may i help
you kill
and tear
another
limb from limb

may i scream
in pain
and humiliation
as i tear you
limb from limb

Lid Strand

(Note: the David referred to here is David Berg).

You look like the ruins of something, David says, -- whiskers, grey corduroy jacket with the collar turned up. I look like the American's image of Angkor Wat after the Communist takeover.

David is tired too, -- twenty hours since Friday directing his theatre, weaving the strands hanging loose, growing tired with me. Outside, David's children play on the trampoline; their noises enter in the cool breeze. His 16 year old step-daughter moves naturally about the house respecting our asylum. She calls him David; he too married a woman with a child.

For me it was not just the marrying, but the consistency, the pattern of attractions, five or six times. Carl's reaction was typical, when he found out Becky had two children. He said I was crazy to go after her, "What do you want that kind of trouble for?"

Buffalo, 1964, the Main Street bus moves thru the decay for seven miles from the university to Pearl Street. The lever is the civil rights demonstration (I actually canvass in Black neighbourhoods for Lyndon Johnson)! She is in the plastic lime seat before us;I hand her a leaflet. She turns about forty-five degrees, non-commital, using the seat and the wall for a back. Her face is pleasant -- broad and flat, the lines give her thirty years away. It turns out she is lonely; it turns out she is poor, wears a shapeless tweed overcoat, left her $40,000 -a-year husband in Los Angeles. She is, in her words, a refugee from middle-class splendourland. He wants her back; doles out $150 a month; she won't ask for more.

Carl doesn't understand. He's so inexperienced, -- for all practical purposes a virgin. Me, I want an experienced woman, I want to flirt with danger, I want to suffer. I want a woman who is a mother, who knows how to be one (be one to me? but who can't be, for whom I can only come second). Branch by branch, I build the trap. It's more complicated of course; I use the children to get to their mother. She makes it clear I come first in the short run. They can sleep at Roberta's; I can pick them up around noon.

It is important for me to believe I like children, --to show it also --to show it to her. The four of us eat together on Hallowe'en. I sense it is a special dinner; the dispenser-type napkin lies carefully beside the fork. The kitchen is dingy, old institutional green paint on the walls. Now I remember --I start eating when she gives me the food; don't wait for her. That annoys her, she tells me afterward. I feel her splendourland values encroaching upon the slum kitchen. I knew nothing then, --how I could hate a child, deeply --how it needn't be matter of fact to get up each day feeling okay.

I adjust the mask, quip with the little boy behind it, playing always to her. He's eager to get going; costumes ready. We move to the street; the row of windows shine like teeth in the black nite. Capes fluttering, they move from door to door, growing bolder with each one. I wait self-righteously, full of my goodness, on the sidewalk with her. He has a cold, has to keep lifting the mask to wipe his nose. I hold the Kleenex; when he is done he perfunctorily hands me back the soggy mass, already on his way up the next walk. The next morning I sit on the chesterfield with coffee and cigarette, the table cluttered with apples and orange candies. His mask lies face down beside me, the lines of dried mucous between the nostrils and lips.

A long time later I see her high up on the library steps. I feel the flush of embarrassment and guilt; want to yell up the reason I never called you back is...my voice is hollow, "Hi". She looks down at me, her tweed coat blowing in the Buffalo wind. I'm stuck. "How is Michael"? I ask. "You mean Martin"? She's disgusted; her words bounce down the steps like grenades. I don't remember how we said goodbye then.

Lanny Beckman

1.

I found in the forest a skeleton
of a small deer
(the bones untouched
mushroom growing thru the ribs)

I lifted the skull (wanting to know
what animal had died in this place
there was a dying (of another sort)
the poem in the forest moving with
the rag and bones of branches
(the urge of cariboo)

2.

words bend I bend over them
stumbling

I react to pain on the inside
of my skin
(a switchboard operator) trying
to unscramble the electric wires

the colour codes broken

boxing life fitting it to a wall
(as if it were a window)
feeling the pressure of seeds
growing thru the dust

reborn with that cretinous
non-knowledge
(fingering whiteness)

3.

Sometimes I just have to move
faster
I sing then
(poems that go straight ahead
without stopping)
or
(poems that dig and grow fat)
planting those seeds
(in straight lines)
the flowers fall
in the right order
the artist holds on
to what he can remember
but the colours leap from
the page
to return to the earth

4.

I feel the curves and sharp
corners
of nine-foot letters
B-O-A-T-
boats on the horizon
(zipped into the sky)
or
(falling into the water)
sinkers waiting for something
to bury

a question
of movement growing split/solid
(an apple taste barbed with
red streaks)

Sue Landell

I wake up alone (roll over and kiss the yellow shaft of sun on yr cheek, then yr eyes open slowly, you smile, stretch and yawn, pull the burlap curtain from the window, the sky is blue as ice, these four arms know what they're doing in an attic room dangling in hot mid-summer. There's no where else we could imagine being.

Your limp, warm arm rests on my belly (O Christ, another day to plough thru, to be the flimsy center of these voided wanderings, what have I to do with the sun burning in thru forgotten sacks, the ferns are dying in this dingy, dim tomb of a room, and I have nothing but that clutter of papers and books. My mind overflows with thoughts of death.

The effort just to get out of bed (how yr warmth keeps me here, the green motion in yr eyes, yes, it's so far-out, nothing could ever touch it, I could stay here forever, feeling my coursing blood governed by outside magic pump, feeling my fullness, my connections, my hand in yr wet love-pit. We're up in a hayloft in heaven, floating on the soft breath of sleeping animals.

Let's drive to the country, pack a lunch (the forms on the sheet make no sense, green paramecia that imbed in my tendons during dreams, like those wire puzzles that had no solution, shapes inside and outside shapes, this mind is diabolical invention, somewhere in the interstices it's lost its way, I can't write any more letters to assholes.

It takes an hour to sit on the edge of the bed (I hold yr bum in my hands, slide my finger in where the crack starts, it's damp with sweat, I could live there, I could live anywhere with you, I know and love every millimeter of you, each is perfect in arrangement, in smell, inside and outside, this tongue will touch you everywhere. We're temples together. I watch you dress everyday, you dance into yr colours.

You sit on the toilet while I shave (I'm afraid to look in the mirror, to lose myself in the oscillations, in a silver oblong trap. The reflections flip back and forth like words trying to bounce from mind to mouth, getting nowhere, exploding like clay targets. The room smells bad, there's ringing in my ears, someone shit in here a few minutes ago. Dried shaving cream is caked on the frosted window. My face feels like amber, cut grass.

I see the day from the veranda and want to be elsewhere (the brown dusty road curls us into green countryside, we roll slowly toward gentle water sounds, the vents are all open, cool forest air rushed up our bared legs. Facing behind you gather cheese and apples in the back seat. Maple trees flow out of yr long hair. The road narrows, at the first fork, I decide, at the next, you decide. We're making love in the sun, the sweat puddles between yr breasts. It must be 4 o'clock when we wake up beside the still folded blanket.

Everything is bleached in sunlight (the bland little man behind the desk says I"m afraid yr research is too controversial to be conducted in public schools. You're an ostrich, I say. It would be better if I didn't want to jump out his window. In the elevator I lean my head against the cold metal wall, the secretary from the next floor stands against the opposite wall, thumbing thru her yellow forms.

I don't understand what's happening (I just say I love you slicing apples in the tall grass, humming on yr haunches).

Red slivers of sunlight snap in the arbutus tree (this is so hard to accept, that I HATE the body, that my senses fasten onto imperfections and I am repulsed by the simple materiality of you. My lips

have to turn away from your yellow teeth, your sagging breasts, your pimples, your small eyes, your nostrils.

Who do I think I am (to deserve yr love, there's a bump on our middle fingers from years of writing. Well, we press them together, without speaking. The day evaporates into warm air.

Lanny Beckman

POEMS FOR JOHN

I
being with you
is like walking
always on shifting sand

being without you
is like walking
always on stone.

II

Our bodies cast pear-shaped shadows
that will grow closer, towards evening
until we can pass each from our own
into the other's, forming new postures
for each shifting of the branches
above

why should I sometimes imagine that
I fill a mould you formed long ago;
the limbs that would have been excesses
have folded into my skin
like petals

Elaine Bougie

I wish I cd write a poem
beginning w/those two lines
standing
Standing at the corner of 12th & Guelph
Out of my mind with desire

I felt then all kinds of things,
the desire, pain, joy, to be feeling
anything that clear (is this the poem?)
the transparency pf praxis, the sweat,
I wanted to love
(your image coming
at me, straight at me, goony)--
and then Brian did something, it
was like a sleight of hand, a
card trick (stop). This is not about Brian.
This is about you. I wanted to love
you then (stop) to (stop) we were newspaper
boys, as we had all been. That was
what it was like then, after the (stop)
our routes, to throw ourselves down on
the grass (I saw you beyond my ideal,
you were not beautiful, you were goony,
I loved you, I wanted to roll around
with (stop) in your arms & smell yr
sweat, unshaven face, all your many,
loose, loose-jointed, head tilted,
upward, back, speedster. I was so
happy to feel that, sweating myself,
in the muggy, dull (stop) there
was no sun, I'm not looking for
perfection. I want that relation
(is this the poem?)

that I never got enough of on
the paper routes, I know
it will be this way when we are in
the trenches (women would laught, my WW II
image), we can't even imagine, I see
myself passing you the gun, we kiss
under a hail of
bullets? stars?
The revolution
will have to make room for us,
the revolution in our own bodies
will have to
(We were doing a route
for the GRAPE, to open up distribution).

George Stanley

Crystals in the Sand (for Helen)

Now that you are back at your desk
Where you write in a strange city
Where I can no longer speak to you
Your voice becomes remote.

Wherever you are, your presence
Recalls all of our talk
There is the pain of silence
The words you spoke without ever knowing:
        That now the silence would be pain
        And I am at home nowhere.
Now that we cannot see each other
Are we still real
Or a surrealistic nightmare
Of each other's solitude?

The night speaks, the sands shift along the beach
The coastal waters transparent to the bottom,
But for the sun and the rain and the words of books
I would be alone.

I have found a secret place, a beach
That speaks of you
As its waters rise and fall
As I walk its length--alone.
        But I know the sound of silence
        And I do not merely hear--I see.

You spoke the words that have vanished
They did not go into the air and die;
They have become me. They are so close to me
I cannot hear them.

Summer, 1973
Donald Steele

No Apologies

Death is never having to say you're sorry.

Patty Servant

Remembering Becky

It was close to Christmas, 1954, and I was fourteen. For three months I had been watching the mails anxiously every day, waiting for a letter from Becky. She was the first friend I had ever had, and in some highly idealized way, I was in love with her.

Becky had lived in Merritt for only six weeks. Her father was a welder for a pipeline company, who went wherever he was told to go. For years Becky and her family had been living in a trailer. She had discovered that stamp-collecting is one of the few hobbies that can be carried out in a trailer-- it doesn't take up much space--and the fact that I was just starting my own stamp collection brought us together. But I suspect, too, that Becky, who was never in one place for long enough to make firm friendships, took to me because I was an outsider like herself. Any American was a rarity in Merritt. Becky was from Missouri--she and her brother Tom had been named out of Tom Sawyer--and had a lovely soft accent and a habit of calling all older women "Ma'am".

I remember a picnic our class held by a little mountain stream. I had expected to spend the day trying to look busy while nobody at all talked to me. But almost at once, Becky, patting the ground beside her, said, "Come here and have a talk." I could hardly believe it. Later in the day we were crossing a stream, and the plank broke, and Becky, laughing, caught me from behind--and I realized that this was the first time in my life that I had liked anyone to touch me.

We exchanged a few--from my point of view, enchanted--visits. The first time Becky came out to our ranch, my mother tried to monopolize Becky--I think she was so frightened of adults that the appearance of any child spurred her on to frantic vivacity--but Becky appeared unimpressed; she preferred to be with me. And I remember an evening in the trailer--Becky's parents laughing together--my wondering how long it was since I'd heard unforced laughter in my own home.

Then Becky's father was suddenly called on to leave Merritt and go to Hope, and I was desolate. I remember thinking, "So this is love--I've so often read about it, but never experienced it before--I didn't know it would hurt so much." For a short time Becky and I exchanged letters fast and furiously--I cherished the one in which she said, "I wish we could be together again."--and then there was a gap of three months, during which I thought at almost every waking moment, "Will there be a letter today?" or "Will there be one tomorrow?" My father always collected our mail from the post office, and I had a fantasy that he realized what Becky meant to me and would steal her letter out of the mail as a punishment to me for not loving him.

Finally the letter came, around December 15th. By this time Becky was in the Southern States somewhere. I don't remember the contents of the letter, except that she closed with, "Have a Merry Xmas Cathy." And I vowed that I would, though I knew Christmas that year would be even worse hell than usual. We had just moved from our ranch into Merritt, and my mother was obsessed by the idea that the whole community would be tromping through the house on Christmas day, looking for a free drink. On Dec. 25th she forced my father and me to clean the whole house before we could open our presents. (In point of fact, only one person came--the man who had done the renovations on our house; I suppose he felt that having half-built the place, he had a right to have a drink in it. I think the whole community realized that Mrs. Batten didn't welcome visitors)

But Becky's presence seemed to hover over the whole miserable time. Somehow--how does one thing become associated with another?--the thought of her letter was all mixed up with a jigsaw puzzle I was doing, and the carol "Ding dong, merrily on high."

After this I found, somewhat to my shame, that my affection for Becky was waning. We exchanged letters once more, and then she disappeared from my life. I often wonder what happened to her. Because her coming set for me a pattern of romantic-devotion-in-friendship that continued long into my adult life, and because she taught me, for the first time, what it is to love.

Cathy Batten

Comfort

I want to go to the beach
when everybody sleeps.
I want to see the wild ocean
and the holy night.

And yet the old woe embraces me again.

On the water a boat dances.
It lures me out into the storming sea,
away, away for ever from hate and distress
into the sea, into the night,
into happiness, into death.
I untie the rope,
and freedom laughs behind the mist.
And I sail with joy into the night
to flee from dolor into death and peace.

Once only I look back.
A friend's hand
beckons me.

And as I see this
I forget all hatred and misery.
The old woe embraces me again,
but I turn my boat back to the land,
and kiss my true friend's hand.

Ursula Honold

BONNIE BECKMAN 7/73 ©

Nicky

It seems to me that it must have been unreasonable to feel the way I did at that time. It was, I guess, unreasonable from a distance but the closer you got to it, the more sense it made.

I was happy!

I had been in East Lawn in Riverview Hospital for some months (time in East Lawn was usually counted in years), and there was no real indication from anyone that my time there might not lapse into years like so many of the others around me. Even if I were released tomorrow, I would be returning to the same problems that had brought me in and might easily bring me back time and again. From a distance, I was in a desperate situation.

Nevertheless, I was happy!

It was summer, and after breakfast I would walk in the sun to the Vocational Building up the hill a piece. I worked in the shoe shop with half a dozen men who were also patients.

That summer the sun shone every day and the walk was warm and pleasant. On the way, I met many of my friends on their way to work too. Our greetings were soft and affectionate.

We had a boss called Norm and he was the best boss I ever had. He told us what to do and looked after everything in such a way that we hardly even noticed him.

There was a table at the back where we had coffee whenever we wanted. I sat at another table and worked with Nicky.

Nicky had learned to make shoes in Europe. He was an expert craftsman and his shoes were beautifully made. The strange thing about Nicky was that he looked very much like my father, who had been dead for twenty years and whom I had deeply loved.

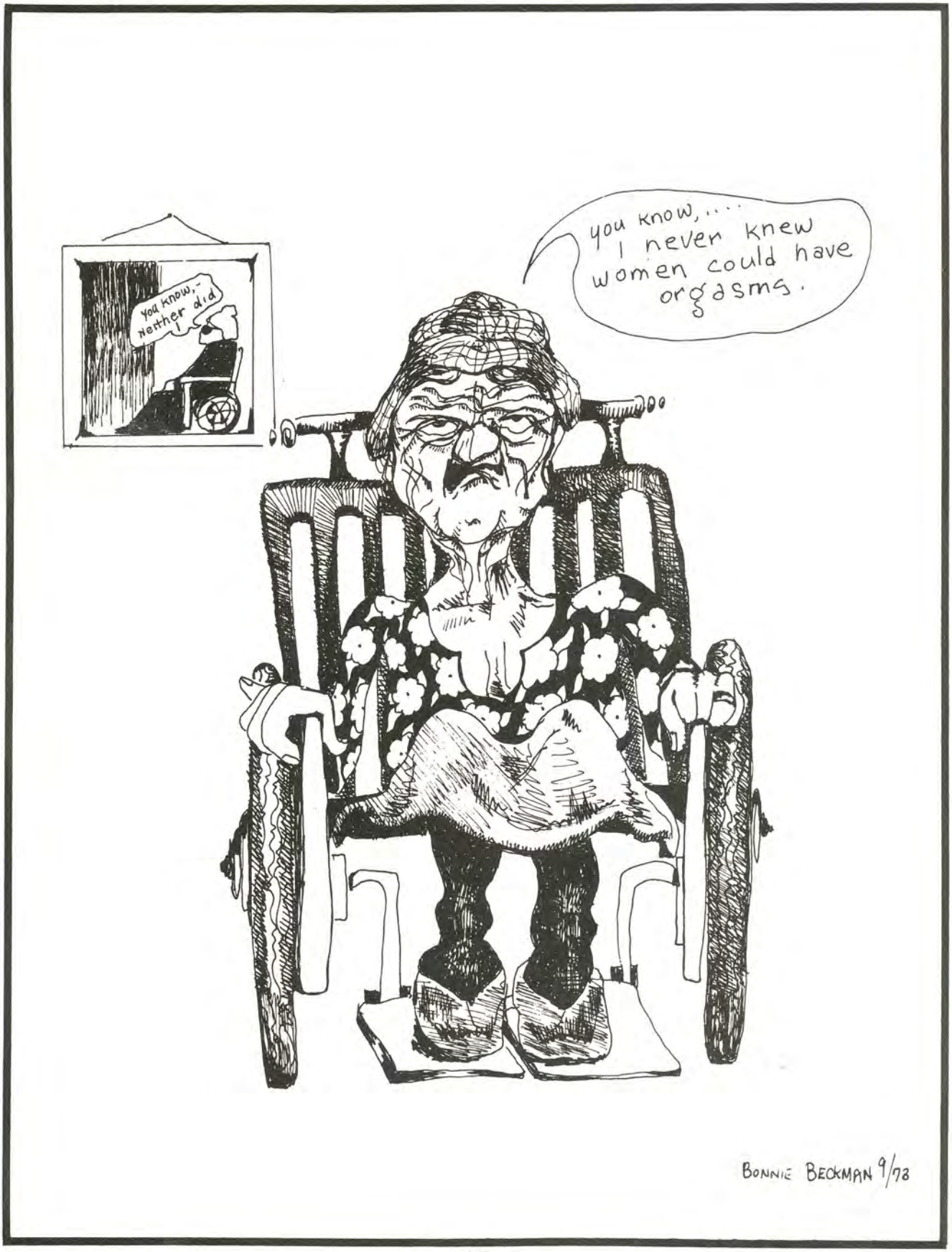
Nicky and I sat at our table in the warm sunshine and he showed me easy things to do with leather. We sat and worked quietly together--companionably. We spoke very little and when we spoke it was usually about the work. Sometimes the thread would simply not tie the right way but he was patient and gentle. He was sixty-five. His hair was gray, his face sallow with deep creases and he was small and slightly stooped. I loved him.

Molly Dexall

Chapter IV

REVOLUTION

Now that I think it over--
now that strength flows slowly back
and the glaze fades from my eyes,--
anger, festering under the stitched
  wounds
of my mind
bursts out--
demanding power.


You know,... I never knew women could have orgasms.
You know,- Neither did I
BONNIE BECKMAN 9/78

WHO

I am
the undecided
fool
who began
to doubt
the lies
in
truth.

Gerry Walker

The Dilemma

I would like to share some thoughts. I have been living with attacks of severe depression and apathy for ten years now and they sometimes have the power to immobilize me. I have analyzed myself until I'm blue in the face. I have read all the books I could find on such things as "How to Find Happiness". I have searched the library for writings by Freud, Adler and Jung. Each one supposedly offers the secret but somehow it fails me.

Their policy seemed to be to park you in a dayroom, feed you pills, take away your matches and wait. With a little bit of luck you saw a doctor for ten minutes every two weeks. When these tactics failed they zapped you with shock treatment. My personal experience was that the shock treatments have left me with a partial amnesia, and recurring fits of depression. I can't help believing that a manic attack is some sort of spiritual happening, for it comes out of your spirit and your mind. I feel there must be some significance to the delusions and feelings that occur during this so-called deranged time. These feelings should be worked out with the patient in therapy.

But what hospital authorities do is shock your body and rape your mind (although they are not sure of the effects this will have on you), so that hopefully you will fit into a sociable pattern and demonstrate acceptable behavior. They leave you with no resolution or explanation for your manic experience other than the feeling that you have been terribly inadequate because you have not been able to cope with your problems and have therefore "escaped reality".

My family has had a history of mental illness involving two aunts, one who committed suicide in Riverview for lack of adequate care. Several other of my relations were similarly affected. There was always an air of secretiveness about this fact--it was something to hide and be ashamed of. I learned the idea somehow that to be different was sinful. I am asking the question now: Was this strain in our family because of deplorable traditions of toilet training? It seems incredible to me that this theory could be accepted.

I believe now that it has a physical cause and I believe also that the doctors and nurses, instead of admitting that they really don't know what causes such a state, hide their ignorance by insinuating that it is some defect in your personality that you willfully cultivate just to be perverse. They make you feel guilty.

They don't call it crazy any more. In fact, "crazy" is something of a status symbol and something very chic to be. I applied for two separate jobs recently and on each occasion I was told with a grin that a

person had to be a little "crazy" to work there. I had a wild feeling that I should convince them I was crazy. Perhaps I should have said, "Oh, I'm crazy. I was admitted to Riverview Hospital nine times, twice for being psychotic and the rest because of suicide attempts and depression. In fact, I'm so crazy that I miss a lot of work because of it, or on second thoughtwould I be crazier if I had a sterling attendance record? Is that crazy enough for you?" But I know I would be defeated because now "crazy" is "cool". The new scientific word for the heavy stuff is "emotionally disturbed".

Even "emotionally disturbed" seems to be relative. Somehow, if you have money and power it is made to appear perfectly normal that a small group of people have attained the power to press a button and destroy humanity, civilization, all life on this planet. If you have power, you can hide in a bunker while sending young men out to kill human beings they don't even know. If you have power you can use people like objects. This is normal.

Yes, "emotionally disturbed" certainly seems very relative. No one seems to be sure what it is except for vague symptoms like being impolite to your host or eating your dessert first at a dinner party.

Well, whatever it is, they have certainly succeeded in making me feel guilty about it.

Woodstock.

the sensuous woman

one hand caressing the electric machine
she masturbates
her thousand nightly words
a masterpeice of How-to...
by J.

turned-on new electric
J...
vacuous soul
locked forever in an empty waiting room.

Moira Ekdahl

Heightened View

Mount Baker, suspended as a pubic triangle
past Fraser Valley fog
and strike-stopped tankers on the river
after an easy rock-clambering of hungry people eager to taste
their German sandwiches and warm canned juice.
On all sides from Mount Seymour
we can see strikes: Island ferries,
wheat carrying railroads, millworkers.
How easy to stop the monster when we
no longer dissociate ourselves from its reality.

Feel our energy! Our bodies are warm and warned against incursions
from sexual bosses and factory bosses
and failed positions of no-trust.

Phil Brown - for my comrades in Vancouver.

Paper People

What makes me so very different from the supposedly paper people I see in the media and all about me? Is it only my perverse paranoia that should be diagnosed and treated?

What makes me dishonest in the presence of paper people? I know why darling! It's because your honest self has been labelled and sealed away in the past in an institution, and only "coping" could save you. And in my case, coping means sitting in an office doing their thing with their typewriter.

I have coped now for five years since the lock-up by hiding myself within and through fear of being once more thrown to the wolves.

But I grow weary and begin to find salvation in the bottle. My frustration builds into violent thoughts.

It struck me suddenly at the office that day that not only did I not wish to be there, but that I could not be there. So I left.

It struck me suddenly that I don't wish to wear shirtwaist dresses and nylons as part of the performance to pay my rent.

I realized with a new vision that I wished to find truth and beauty and joy in living. For not to feel joy in life is certainly a sin.

I cry because I cannot fit into the mold of hypocrisy. Yet I am the worst hypocrite if I do not find, somewhere in myself, the strength to be honest about my desires in life.

No one can do this for me as my mind wanders into other visions of a lonely death on skid row, but my mind also wanders to sense the joy of perhaps freedom and the joy of discovering a new self.

I tremble with fear yet I must try, and because I tremble, it is mandatory that I strike a blow for freedom in spite of the possibility of failure.

Do not dismiss me lord of the paper people with a wave of the hand, a shrug, and the comment that I'm too lazy to work or that really, she has always been a little "odd". If I am odd I exult in it.

And I do wish to work. But I have one life only and that life, to me, must mean fulfillment and development.

It is light I am longing to see and cool spring fresh water.

Petra Graves

to my psychiatrist

There is a hard magnificence
In the thin yellow light
of your rationality,
and disjunction is betrayed
with black leather
into reticence.

Terry Haughian


BELIEVE ME,
I'M ON A
BIGGER
BUMMER
THAN
YOU
ARE

Men
scare me sometimes,
and just fleetingly
I feel I have enough hang-ups
about men to last a lifetime.

I have just discovered
that being a perfectionist,
I would probably only trust
Jesus Christ
and Morris Nishi--God damn it!

Carollyne McCready

SEX OBJECT

Once I met a young computer
With a bright and sexy gleam,
With swivelled hips and plastic lips
She was a fine machine.
I asked her out,
And she accepted;
We went out on the street.
And we held hands and were together
To the people we would meet.
And for a time we loved each other;
Nothing at all seemed wrong.
Our lives moved in sweet harmony
Like the rhythm of a song.
Then one day she was obsolete,
And simply had to go,
And where her parts were scrapped
for salvage
I simply do not know.
Now I am old, no longer young,
And I no longer dream.
I know for me there can never be
Another sex machine.

Len Lorimer


I'm suffering from a severe case of never being seen or heard.
Say Sam, D'ya hear somethin?
don't know Butch - do you?
bonnie beckspeaking-up 6/74

THE WOMEN HAVE HAD ENOUGH

of men's shit. They have
seized the newspaper, the telegraph,
the time-machine,
they are running the navy

by the tides.
They will break the banks
and smash the state.

They are here
and will do it their way;
run it how they want.
The big sun

is their mother
a yellow fog
slides off her body

towards the earth, men
have called it moonlight, what
do they say it is, we

have to ask them.
What if they name everything?
We won't have words even--

Is that what men fear? Where
do shining images
come from? They don't fall

out of heaven, but flow
from the sun
"her great shining shines through me"

one of their poets says
the images come from what we do, "we rock

and grunt / grunt and
shine." This is most
of what I know. I never wanted

a sister, I was
an only child
in fact, I hoped for a brother

or a puppy-dog with a tail
my mother miscarried
she was 33, I was 4

in 1945, I stopped
letting her in

then. She cried out
from the next room.

Stan Persky

PATRIARCHS

I am your placenta
the nurturing protecting
creator of life.
I am your afterbirth
the appendaged anomaly
cumbersome as
death.
You flush me again
relatively noiselessly
down
into the sea.
And deny knowledge
washing
bloody
damned
spots from your hands.
The sea is turning
red....
Historical Pollution.
The reddening sea
is burning
churning
revolution.

barbara joyce


they say it takes all kinds to make a world
but what really amazes me is
by bonnie beckperson 10/74 ©
how few it takes
to destroy one

Mad Mind!
Magic
WhY?

Does my inarticulate tongue move so fast and--my articulate fingers move so slowly--when--my mad mind flies/flees so fast?

I walked home today from Eatons during the rush hour--why--because I thought I couldn't. I'm still shaking. Cars, people, lights--fear, anxiety, cold sweat--just putting one foot in front of the other--don't let them know--I'm so frightened. I'm almost dead of fright--its amazing that legs that are quivering so much still hold me up.

If I could talk I could get a taxi but my throat is frozen and somebody stole my tongue and put a lump of lead in my mouth in its place. Besides---I have to prove I can do it.

SHAFTED -- I've been tricked. They took my pain and scars and put them in a meeting. USED -- they took the place I'm tender and insecure and WHAM -- threw it in the middle of the floor to turn the spotlights on and examine and analyze and justify..

I'm sorry if I freaked out wrong but nobody gave me the rule book. I'm sorry I didn't call some people enough and call other people too much. Since I don't know the rules of the game--the support game--maybe I should just drop out. I read somewhere that you can buy a life-size doll that looks exactly like you and program it to be you. Then people could support the doll. And me--I wouldn't be needed anymore.

I hope most of the bitterness has poured out through my pen but I still can't understand. Each of those people supposedly knows me yet I've told every one of them how hard it is for me to relate/reveal in front of even one person. So why did they put me in my most vulnerable position? It was my impression that we were going to talk--about what I'm not sure but something to do with my freak-out sexism. Male-baby-sitters I believe was the phrase used. So, some phone calls must have been made to invite all the team (rah, rah, sis boom bah--let's hear it for our side--the good guys). So they all had some ideas of the rules. It was like being in a play in front of an audience of thousands with a major role--except--nobody invited me to rehersals or gave me a script--except I did feel one person tried to hand me one after the first soliloquy but by that time I was shaken up too bad to accept it.

I just don't understand. Really. Take two giant steps back. Mother may I? You may.

One positive thing though: this is the first time in months I want to be alone. After being alone in a room full of friends, being alone alone is quite preferable. I even like the silence and the emptiness.

If seeking support puts me in jeopardy of a meeting like that--I don't want support. I'll be the hi guys, there's nothing wrong with me isn't it a helluva day and a gorgeous world, me. And what I do on my own time is my business. I'm allright, really--believe me--I'm O.K., alright, on top it it, 100%, money back life-time guarantee. I even like the silence and the emptiness.

Patty Servant

G A MENTAL PATIENT

I freaked out three years ago, and spent five months in Riverview Hospital. It's taken me this long to accept what happened, and start rebuilding my life again. Admittedly I have had help. I married my husband one year ago, and the experience of living with another human being in such an intimate way helped me integrate my intellectual and philosophical conceptions about how life should be, with what actually is: in other words I became much more realistic about what I was capable of giving and wanted to give, and more demanding about what I expected and needed from other people, particularly my husband.

In that time, my awareness about the false liberalism that society hands out in place of understanding and acceptance and actual help to people like me changed dramatically. I found out that, in fact, it would have been better if I had been a 'criminal' and broken the law rather than committed the awful social 'crime' of not being able to cope with society's expectations: not having friends or an acceptable job, being awkward and 'unfeminine', and consequently breaking down.

At least if I had been sentenced to prison the concervative element in society would have felt that I had been 'punished' and done my time. As it is I am afraid that if I mention to Joe Blow that I had a nervous breakdown, my anger at his pass at me is taken as evidence of 'penis envy' or downright frigidity. My aggression is taken as an 'inadequate adjustment' to my feminine role, and so on, ad nauseum.

To put it simply, I am not allowed to express strong feelings without the people around me feeling I am about to freak out, and embarrass them. So, it seems that for the rest of my life, I am faced with the sheer necessity of concealing what happened, so that I can survive.

On a purely social level, despite my repugnance for lying, this is a fairly easy thing to do. I am, however, in the process of re-training for employment and in a few short months will be faced with the necessity of quickly finding a job. With so many others who have about the same skills also unemployed and my job history during these past years at best sporadic, and at worst non-existent, my chances of quickly finding employment are indifferent. The possibility of the poverty-lonliness-depression-chain starting all over again is high.

Having one other human being sharing these experiences means that I, at least, will have support and sympathy for my plight. What, I wonder, happens to all the other people who break down and don't have someone who cares enough to support them when they get bummed out, and encourage them when they feel they really can't go on?

Evelyn

KING OF THE WORLD

--or

(Look What They've Done to My Manic Depression, Ma!)

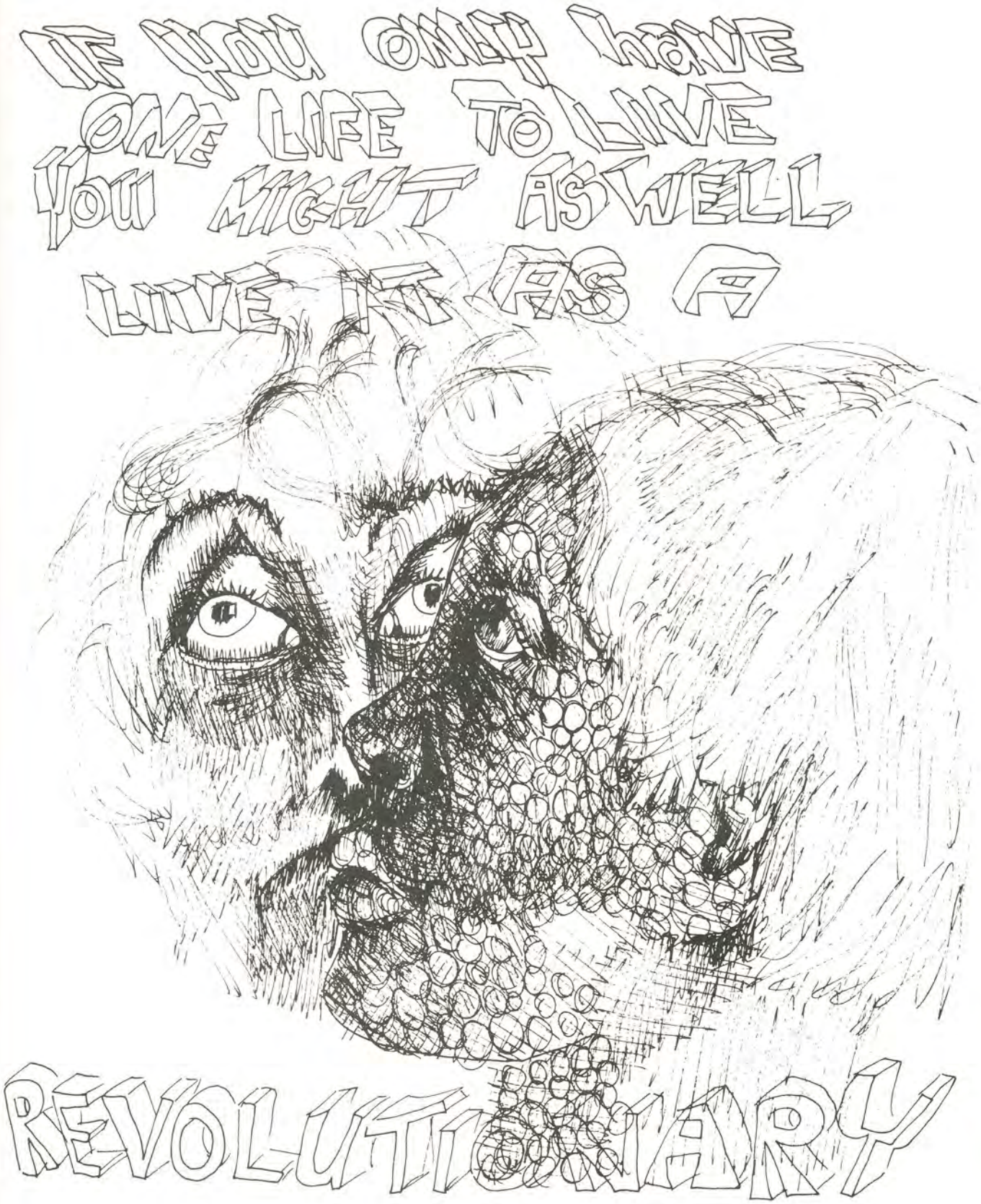
Once in a rare while
a wondrous power descends
to crown me king of the world.
My being bursts with energy:
I can be anything, do anything
go anywhere, meet anyone.
Nothing is impossible.
All around my lightning flashes
and life in its smallest detail
becomes significant.

Sadly, those not possessed of the power
are fearful,
for themselves, for me.
So I'm banished to a grim fortress
Where bearded magicians smoking pipes
Exercise their peculiar art
to drive the power away.

The bubble bursts, the ship sinks,
the plane crashes
and I come down hard.
It's all for the best I suppose
But on days like this
When I'm dead inside
I remember the power
and yearn for the crown.

Dave Beamish

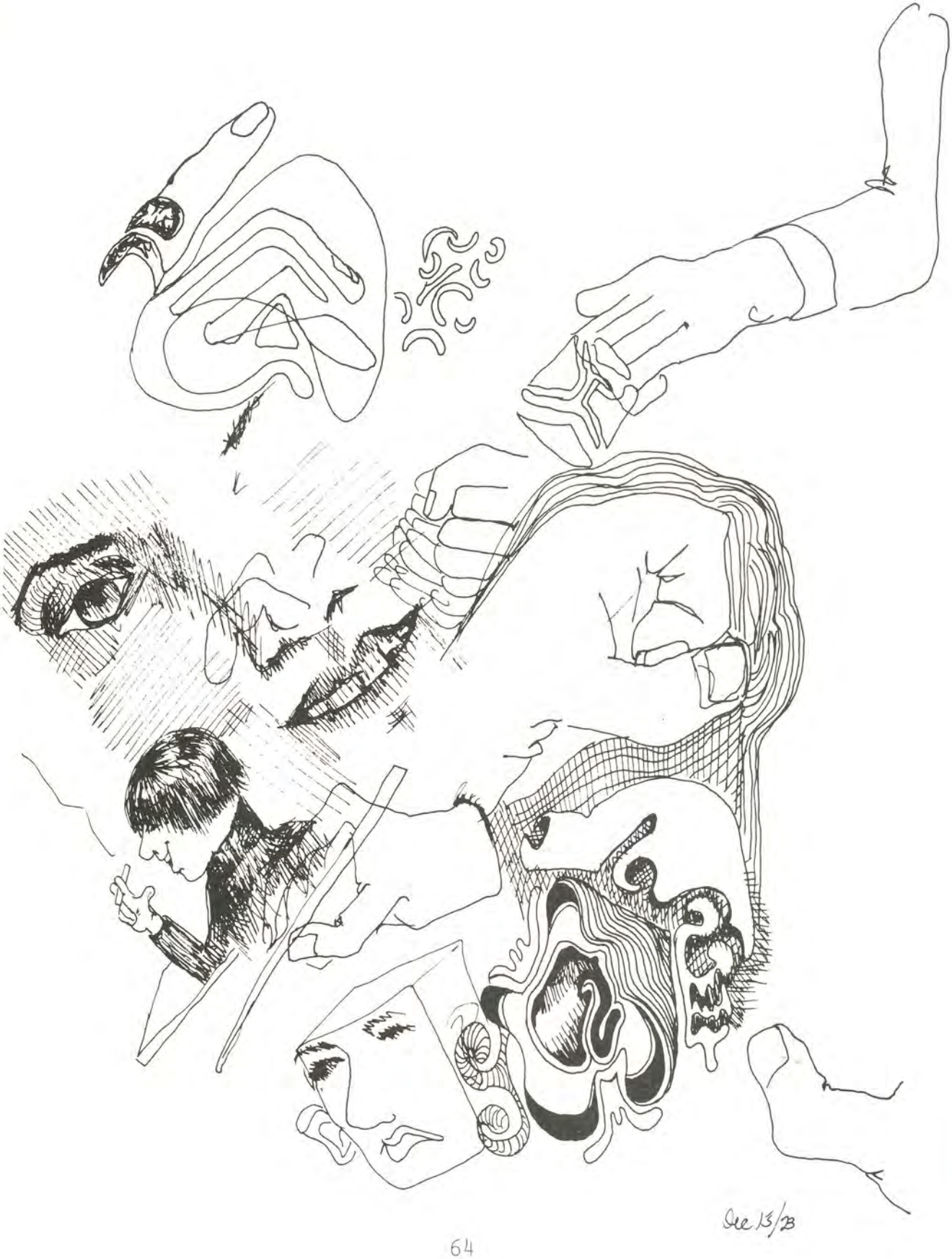

If the only thing we have to fear is fear itself
there's a hell of a lot of silly reality scaring the shit outa me
BONNIE BECKHERO 10/73


IF YOU ONLY HAVE
ONE LIFE TO LIVE
YOU MIGHT ASWELL
LIVE IT AS A
REVOLUTIONARY

Chapter V

RESOLUTION

Anger, well-spent, now
gives way to cleansing action,
pushing into channels
of constructive growth and change.
Delight and humour,
long constricted,
crack their shackles
and relax
with laughter and relief--
a chief experience
of harmony and health.
Breathe a little easier.
You feel strength and power.
Struggle, strive,
and survive.


Dec 13/23

LIBERATION

there are no more slogans to hide
our faces
we have stopped believing in lies
we know who we are

Ted Chabasinski

BRINGING UP YOUR SHRINK (PSYCHIATRIST)

If there's anything we at MPA are always exchanging opinions about besides drugs (prescription and otherwise), it's shrinks (psychiatrists to the uninitiated). I would therefore like to offer three guidelines on how to deal with these perverse and peculiar creatures.

Rule Number 1: Do not see a shrink.

Let your friends at MPA help you with your problems; they have the advantage of having been through these kinds of hang-ups which is something few shrinks have any inside information on (though the suicide rate among psychiatrists is rumoured to be quite high).

If, however, you are desperate for other kinds of help and are insane enough to believe the psychiatric 'establishment' really has the answers, to on to Rule No. 2.

Rule Number 2: Do not let yourself be brow-beaten by your shrink.

Most psychiatrists seem to be aiming at some kind of target, namely, the root of your problems. If you honestly feel that by some miracle they have hit the bull's-eye (and it can happen) rejoice and be glad but do not be too humble in your gratitude: it's probably good luck more than anything, and anyway, you might have thought of it yourself.

If he (or she) just plain misses the mark (and that can happen quite often) do not hesitate to shout 'bullshit' at the top of your lungs. (Don't worry too much about the waiting patients and secretary in the outer office: they'll soon get used to it.)

In particular don't take any nonsense such as the following: "What you really need is a good lay", or: "Why don't you go out and get yourself a boyfriend" (or girlfriend as the case may be). Likewise, if you see fit, resist violently such standard advice as: (if a married woman) "Why can't you be happy staying at home looking after your husband and children?" or (if a man) "Why don't you go out and get yourself a job?"

If your shrink is so myopic that he can't even see the target, get yourself another shrink, pronto.

Now that you've got your shrink to recognize you as a real person (and not just one of a long string of patients), go on to Rule Number 3.

Rule Number 3: By devious and underhanded methods try to radicalize your psychiatrist.

Suggest that he or she donate half his or her salary to MPA. Read some of the less savoury aspects of the Mental Health Act (for example:

the insane laws regarding involuntary committal). Convince your shrink that if we all made a united front we might actually get the reigning government to close down Riverview and provide adequate and humane care in the community. Last of all, you might even persuade your shrink to visit MPA (incognito, of course).

If you (and your friends) accomplish all of these things your shrink will soon be out of a job. He'll just be an ordinary human being like the rest of us. He won't need you. He'll at last be able to cut the umbilical cord.

Margaret V. Nelson

CHINA POEM
(for Jim)

A brown smear
  streaked
across a yellow plate

The method
somehow
in this madness
is poetry

As poem
  gaining fresh
and stone-
  bone
    antlers

Poems
  the circle within
the circle

Wine-soaked livers
and garden green
peas

Seeing this hurricane
of cups
    and tablespoons
whizzing
    around the counter

The routine stitching
patterns/berths
and cutlery

The feast, edged
with soft
grey...lines.

Sue Landell

There will be a time
perhaps
when tomorrow's sun is born indiscriminately
one morning;
when flowers gathered by your bleeding hands
will resurrect themselves
and bear fruit.

So often feeling futile, barren
you despaired
and vowed never again
to touch what grows.

But then
life beyond our understanding
gathers its forces and cries
curiosity.

Petra Graves

THE BEE, THE ANT AND THE PSEUDO-BRAHMIN

While worshipping Sol at the margin of a private untenanted pool I saw a bee on the water surface, six feet from the edge, struggling to take flight. It was obvious the effort would be in vain.

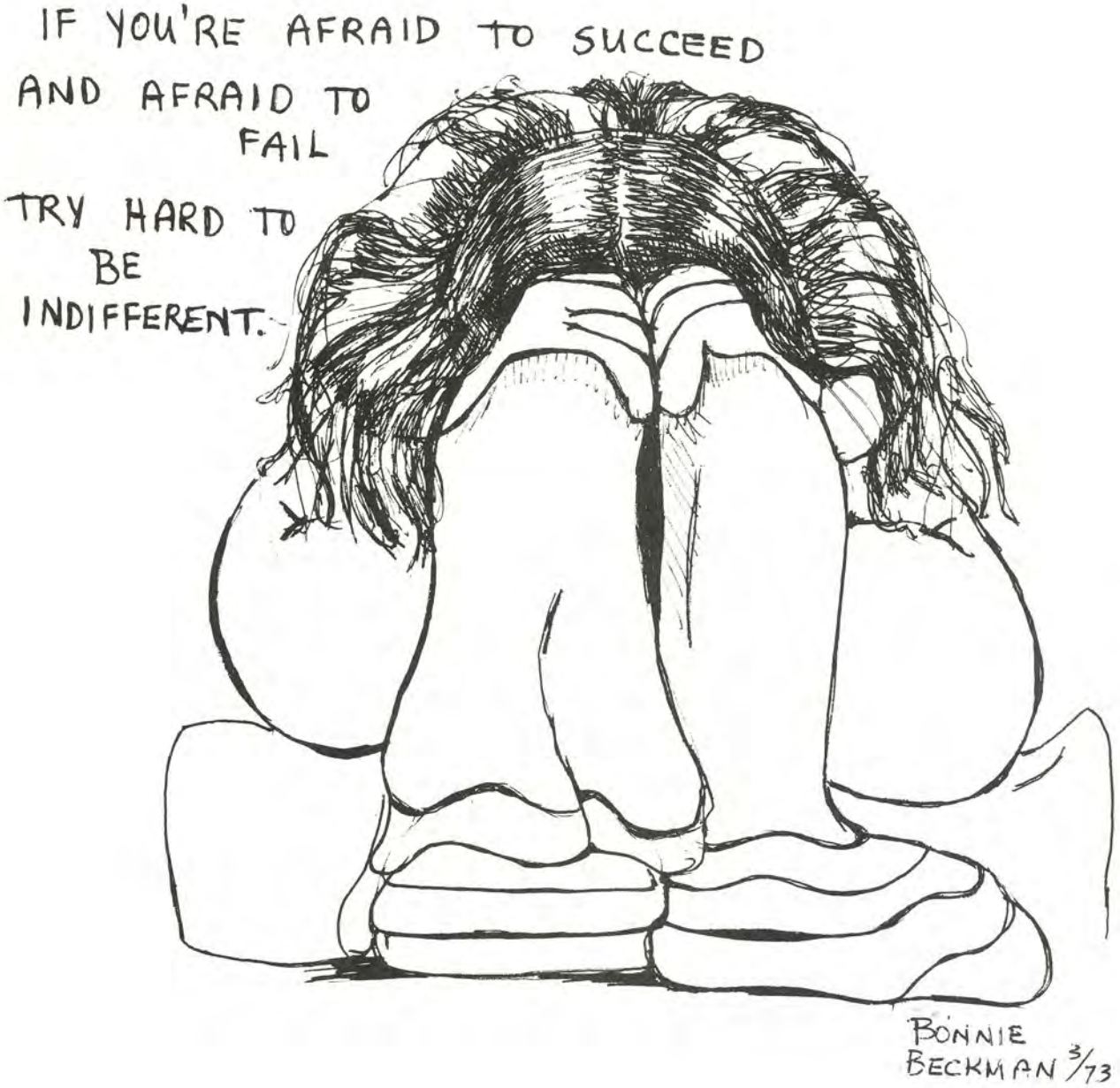
Since a slight current is caused by clean water entering the pool, the bee drifted to within one foot of the side. I arose, went over and placed one hand underwater just below the bee (a precaution -- the attempt would not be recognized as aid) and flipped it out of the pool in a cloud of spray. Much to my surprise the bee did not fall to the deck, but immediately took wing.

In more stable times a brahmin would have a servant precede him, sweeping his intended passage, so that he would not crush an insect. Was this act brahmin-like?

A few minutes later, a large ant ran off the edge and plunged into the water. I did not spring to its aid, but it too drifted toward the side, finally making contact and crawling out despite the over-hanging lip of the pool.

Does one have more empathy with bees than with ants? After all both are reputed to be industrious. Perhaps it is because bees have a faculty we lack, --that is, flight. This makes them wide-ranging while we, like the ant, are earthbound.

Gerry Walker


IF YOU'RE AFRAID TO SUCCEED
AND AFRAID TO FAIL
TRY HARD TO BE INDIFFERENT.
BONNIE BECKMAN 3/73

THE PSYCHIATRIST'S HANDY GLOSSARY OF PATIENT TERMINOLOGY

Any professional group develops specialized concepts and terms to aid communication among its members. However, technical jargon often hinders understanding between different professions. Such is the case with psychiatrists and patients.

Owing to the wide publicity given to the psychiatric profession, patients have no difficulty understanding their therapists. Psychiatrists on the other hand are often bewildered by the complex terminology of the professional patients. In the interests of mental health, the following glossary of patient terms is humbly presented to help the psychiatrist achieve a greater understanding of his client.

1. Bad - a condition of depressed moor or affect. Not good.

2. Not bad - a common reply to the question "How are you?" Usually a lie.

3. Hung-up - a fixation or overinvestment of libido in a particular object relationship. Usually followed by "on." (No relationship to telephones)
   Improper usage: If my patients insist on calling me at 3 in the morning, they can expect to get hung-up on at.

4. Up-tight - generally designates an anxiety reaction. Many psychiatrists express difficulty with the "up" in up-tight and hung-up, and erroneously say "up-hung" or "tight-up." This usage tends not to enhance rapport between the parties.

5. Flipped out - may refer to a manic state, a panic state or a manic panic state. Not related to male exhibitionism.

6. Freak out - acute anxiety state often accompanied by thought disorientation and loss of ego boundaries.
   Improper usage: What a relief when the hour is up to get that freak out of the office.

7. Funni Farm - The M.P.A. Farm Branch. The initials stand for the "Foundation for the Understanding of Nervous and Neurotic Illness."

Lanny Beckman

Your Foreign Reporter

After picking up my counterfeit money and passport from the M.P.A. house, I had a great feeling of exhilaration, and I set off to roam the world in search of newsworthy items of a foreign nature to send back to the 'In a Nutshell' newsletter.

As my first assignment was London, England, and because of the bulkiness of such a large amount of money, Janet Allen had cleverly sewn large denomination bills together into a complete wardrobe for me. My overcoat, suit, shirt, tie, shorts, and socks were all made of laminated one hundred dollar bills. The idea behind this was that if I needed to purchase anything I could just tear off a bill from any part of my clothing. They figured that it would take me roughly two months to reach London as I was told to hitch hike across Canada. By starting with my overcoat and so on, by the time I arrived I would be down to my shorts and shoes which would be perfect attire for the English weather conditions.

After spending the overcoat, the suit jacket, and the pants and shirt, I arrived at Buckingham Palace wearing my shorts, socks, shoes, and tie and was given room 316 in the motel complex run by Queen Elizabeth and Phil. They did not invite me into the Palace itself, but after finding out I was from the M.P.A. they showed me a picture of a crazy man that had tried to climb on the back of Queen Elizabeth's horse while she was on parade for the changing of the guard. I was quite relieved to find that he was not one of ours. Philip was kind enough to give me an original Rembrandt painting as a welcoming gift. I shall always treasure it because it is worth about two million dollars.

After a shave and a shower I went in search of the London M.P.A. It was situated near Kings' Cross Station and occupied a ten story building. The members appeared to be quite happy, but seemed to be having a hard time speaking without an English accent. I expressed my thanks by throwing a tantrum and smashing a few windows, which made me acceptable to them all, and I left them with a promise to return sometime and smash some more windows. And so on to Scotland next month.

Sir Figby Snort

I Read for the Blind

There are very ordinary people
Who suffer great deprivations
Of the heart and soul
Without a murmur.

Let me hold their ears in sympathy.
Let me lift their minds away
To other things.

I read for the blind
And my tongue
Eases out the words
In tenderness.

Molly Dexall

SERIAL METANOIA: FRAGMENTS FROM AN ASTRAL TRAV

I. EKNOIA

The beginnings of an Astral Apocalypse came to me in a Toronto rooming house. There, an Astral Doorway was bri- fest along the surface of one wall. The secret of this door lay - tained within the Keyhole. But it remained thus, guarded by a flaming mandala of dichromatic rays, driving me down and down into the substratum of the Astral World.

It was at that moment that I first head the Voices (all female): "GO AWAY FROM HOME," they said, screaming in unison above the roar of the Airplane that is my body...

II. PARANOIA

I left Toronto for Vancouver; the Toronto Astral Winds soon followed me there. They entered my room one night and nearly blew it apart; they entered my head and nearly blew that apart too.

Then returned the Voices (each in turn): screaming at me their Obscenities. The Winds: driving my body into Gold-Eye's Hell.

Then appeared the black-clad Metanoiac Phantom with Finger pointing the way out...

III. EN-NOIA

Visits to and from the Astral World continued....one evening....the Voices (now in silent retreat). Then opened a Passageway on my wall. My Airplane Body then entered the Infinity Fish Tank where water is air and fishes are stars....

IV. ANTINOIA

The Apocalypse continues, following me from house to house....last January....my Astral Body hovering mid-air between the bed and the table, listening (always) for the Voices: "O Voices, all possible realities are presently accessible: speak to me this time of Truth." The Voices (in solemn choir): "TO THE BEGINNERS OF THE UNIVERSE, TO THE BEGINNERS OF THE UNIVERSE, TO THE BEGINNERS OF THE UNIVERSE..... ....."

Kathy Frank

Poetry
Is not for me.
Though not as lovely as a tree,

A tree I think I understand.
Verse, on the other hand,
Is an unknown land.

You will say, "This does not scan."
Too bad, man.

Gerry Walker


Then appeared
the black-clad Metanoiac Phantom
with Finger pointing the way out....


TO THE
BEGINNERS
OF THE UNIVERSE
KATHY FRANK

The voice from the telephone moved closer to him, uncomfortably near.
"What do you mean?" he said.
The cast, with whom he had argued all morning, was gracefully, daintily, walking across the living room floor. It was difficult to listen to this voice when he had to watch and see what the cat would do.
"I mean that he didn't come home all night." The calm that had been in her voice gave way suddenly to frightened incomprehension.
"Does that upset you?"
"Yes. Yes, it frightens me. He's been drinking so much lately, and I don't know, I can't seem to talk to him any more. And now this..."
Her voice seemed to cling to him all over. His hands moved to wipe it off, away from him.
"What do you think it means?"
"Barney, for heaven's sake!" She started to cry and the cat, as if it knew, looking up from the studied licking of its paws and stared at Barney. "I may be losing my husband."
Something was pulling him away from the phone, denying that this was real, denying his sister's voice that troubled the stillness of his room.
"Did you ask him where he was?"
"I haven't seen him yet. He phoned and mumbled something about getting drunk last night and said he was doing some work at the school. It's just like it was when I first knew him and he used to be wildly drunk most of the time."
"You know," he said carefully, "that Eric has never found it easy to be a married man". And something about his voice seemed so heavy and awful that it hung in the air and then, weighted down, rested finally on the floor at his feet. He watched its curious heaviness. It was really quite grey.
She was angry now. "Well, I'd like to know who does. What has he got to complain about? I'm the one who puts up with his moods." But misery won out and she burst into tears again. "I don't understand him. What does he want, anyway?"
Watching that question mark float across the air occupied all his attention for a moment. It expanded, revealing all its complexity, until it filled the room and he felt quite suffocated.
"Barney, will you talk to him, please?"
The cat went mad again and chased its tail all day. I believe it will rain, he thought.
After he hung up the phone he could still hear--and feel--her voice. And no matter how hard he rubbed at himself it still clung insistently. Pulling his coat on hastily, he left the house and went for a walk.
The street lights were singing all the way down to the sea, even though the sun was shining. A woman was walking ahead of him up the street but she didn't hear the singing because she was crying. Passersby didn't seem to hear her. They all went on walking.
He thought of all the books that were lying in his house. They filled bookcases and spread on tables. And he wondered how it was possible to read so many books and know so little.
But the further he walked away from the house and the silent telephone, the louder became his sister's voice, until he finally stopped beside the sea and listened to it, and cried.
For the first time he really heard what she had been saying. She was saying "help me", and he couldn't. His arms and legs were dead

and his voice was short-circuited.

Can I help if I'm not God? How can anyone help if he can't remake the world?

And yet there were things like the soft grass on the slope above him that affirmed something besides the itch, the never-ending itch of self.

I can say 'that is the way it is' because it is the truth and surely the truth will help. But most people don't want to hear the truth, they merely want to be assured there is some way around it.

I can say 'the street lights are singing' but the woman will go on crying because, like most people, she can't hear. Street lights don't sing for her.

And I get tired of listening, because nothing ever changes. The cat goes on chasing its tail and it still rains. And we all feel somehow responsible.

Still, I will reach out and touch the grass and find my limbs and maybe somewhere fishing in the sea I'll catch my voice. And singing with the street lights I'll follow the woman--for she is now going back up the street--and I'll find the telephone.

Terry Haughian

THE NAME OF THE PRESENT WORLD IS PLACE

under a green pasture
bounded by apple trees

about to bloom
flowing water

moves down the ground
among cows, through the day

they are nibbling
against the sun

barnward as she goes west
the kine of heaven

pleasure the stars
she disappears into

a cleft of hills
guarding South Slocan her shining

brings out the man
in the man

who lives
as we do

given light

Stan Persky

THE LAST PEGASUS

This story, as all good stories must, begins once upon a time long, long ago in a land far away. There was an exquisite pegasus called Herman who could not only fly but could also talk. Despite his wondrous abilities Herman was very, very unhappy and lonely because he was the very last pegasus left on the earth. You see, ladies of that time thought it a fine thing to please their gentlemen by wearing the beautiful feathers from the wings of a pegasus in their hair. Needless to say, that brought greedy men of all sorts out to hunt down and kill the beautiful flying horses for their feathers. Besides, they reasoned, they're no good to anyone anyhow. You couldn't hook them up to a plow, for the silly things refused to respond to orders and besides, their wings got in the way. You couldn't eat them either--the muscles they developed from flying made them too tough--so what good were the silly things--they didn't make life easier for man.

Herman was very sad as he watched all his friends and relatives hunted down....not to mention lonely....but I don't imagine I have to say anything about loneliness, do I? For awhile he tried to amuse himself by frolicking through the emerald meadows and soaring through the clear blue skies which were things pegasuses did to please themselves, but it was no use. The best things in the world were no fun alone (there's that word again).

Herman got sadder and sadder. I'm sure if you could have seen him you would have been sad too. His proud arched neck gradually lost its arch and his beautiful blue hair lost its shine; the once-beautiful rainbows he wore on his back--his wings--drooped forlornly down his shoulders and began to molt. But the saddest thing was his eyes--sad and always brimming with tears. Finally, in desperation, Herman decided to give himself up to the hunters. What good was being alive when you're only half-alive--what good was anything?

He trudged into town to give himself up. The hunters took one look at him and laughed, small children threw stones at him. Not even the hunters wanted him. His feathers had become so colourless and limp he wasn't even worth killing. Herman was mortified. How humiliating.

He turned and slowly walked away, big tears running down his nose, destitute and alone. He wandered to his favourite spring where he used to romp as a young colt and laid down and waited to die. (Now this would be a very bad way to end any story, so I will go on.)

As he lay there, he heard a faint buzzing in his ears. The end must be near he thought, but the buzzing grew louder. Herman reluctantly opened one eye and there was a beautiful little fly perched on his wing. She sparkled with vitality and was looking right in Herman's eye.

Her name was Emma and she was, in her own humble way, as remarkable as any pegasus for she had taught herself to talk. She asked Herman what was wrong and why he was so sad. Herman was so happy to have someone to listen to him he poured the whole story out. She told him, "Well, nothing is all bad. I can talk with you and I can also fly."

Herman had found a friend. You may think the friendship was a strange one, but Emma was a remarkable little fly and just the ointment Herman needed to pick up his spirits. He kept saying over and over, "I have a friend!" Together they flew through the skies all day and sat around talking til late at night, and their friendship grew, as friendships sometimes do, into love.

They talked about children, but it was impossible. He was too big and she was too little, so they just dreamed about it. Then one day they overheard rumors of a strange little boy who could perform wondrous feats of magic.

They sought him everywhere and just as they were about to give up in despair they saw a little tow-headed boy walking towards the spring. "I know you're looking for me," he said, "so I came. What do you wish?" Herman and Emma told him in detail about their unrequited love and asked him if he could do anything. The boy looked at them and said, "My magic is very pure and will only work for those pure in heart. I have to be careful who I do magic for, for those with greed in their hearts will drain my magic from me. But I will do my best."

He got out his magic wand and waved it in arcs over their heads and Herman began to shrink. He got smaller and smaller until he was standing on a leaf and looking right into his beloved Emma's eyes.

Of course they thanked the boy profusely and lived happily ever after.

By the way, they had their children, and you know what? We still have horseflies to this very day.

Patty Servant

Idealism

Dissatisfaction, anger, disappointment, despair and frustration with the imperfect world and our imperfect selves is not wrong. For without these feelings we would be complacent, apathetic, and unchanging.

We have to be sensitive and aware of the faults, and in so doing strongly desire the changes and have the courage, initiative and self-discipline to strive to achieve our ambitions, however unattainable they may seem.

It's like a star--we may never reach it, but we should always be striving for it, just as we should strive in every way for the betterment of ourselves and humanity, every moment of every day, all our lives.

Carollyne McCready


N. MARSDEN
2/72

I rise
and look towards my tomorrow
with a trace of hope in my eyes
come after an ache of despair
swallowed my reason for being.

Yesterday I leave.
Today I accept.

Beyond death
I know of perfumed gardens
where golden fruit hangs heavy
on the ripening fertility
of strange-laden trees.

I shall reach that garden
through the gate
I saw in the mist long ago
when sunshine
  filtered
    into
my black thoughts.

Petra Graves

The soft plains spread as vel
carpet
Muffled trees crowded against
the dusk-weary sky.

A young lioness
solitary alone
moved very slowly
and crouched upon a rock
solid
in the evening quiet.

Dark beast
following the scent of blood
with centuries of prowess
twitching
in her restless tail.

Petra Gra

THE OPTIMAN PROJECT

Once beneath a time there was a scientist whose research grant was not renewed. He had been studying to determine the lifespan of the average tapeworm. The government did not think this was important.

Looking about for a project that would interest the government, the scientist hit upon the idea of an optiman. An optiman would be human, but with genetic characteristics carefully selected and modified, so that he would be the best possible citizen -- that is the optimum citizen.

The government approved the project. With many assistants and large funds the scientist produced an optiman.

The optiman was developed in a large bottle and emerged fully grown -- requiring no childhood care. Basic linguistic and other cultural information was genetically implanted as instinctive. Optiman had four prominent characteristics making for good citizenship. Optiman was loyal, intelligent, stable and conservative. Also there were other genetic modifications. Optiman could smoke cigarettes and drink Coca-Cola constantly without lung problems or tooth decay. Optiman could function efficiently for about 40 years, after which he grew old and died in 15 minutes, - (no need for geriatric care). So as to avoid inconvenient unforeseen interruption of services, six hours before age-death optiman turned blue.

The government was pleased.

The scientist turned his attention to developing an optiwoman. She hatched looking remarkably like Jane Fonda, and the scientist tested her moral reactions immediately. However she was too frustratingly conservative.

By this time the original Optiman had himself applied for a government grant. Pointing out his personal genetic qualifications, and his innate experience with bottled life, he offered to take over future optiman development at half the salary of the scientist.

Optiman's application was accepted.

The scientist, again out of a job, was disgusted. He complained that neither his degrees nor his name had been mentioned. Muttering about high employability and living happily ever after, he climbed upon a nearby slab of time and went looking for a conventional short story.

Optiman carried on. With persistance and enthusiasm, he developed a more agreeable optiwoman. then he worked on the genetic elimination of various health problems. Since Optiman had no childhood he had no emotional needs. He did not spend money on status symbols. Instead he invested wisely.

Then one day Optiman turned blue. He immediately went to a cupboard and took some pills. Shortly thereafter he turned light brown.

The government has been unable to locate Optiman. (Investigators finally assumed that he had died in some unlikely place where he fell into a river and was washed out to sea).

However, if you go to Miami Beach there is a chance that you may see Optiman. He is light brown, loyal, intelligent, stable and conservative; drinks lots of Coca-Cola; smokes cigarettes; reads the stock market reports every day.

Len Lorimer

I rise
and look towards my tomorrow
with a trace of hope in my eyes
come after an ache of despair
swallowed my reason for being.

Yesterday I leave.
Today I accept.

Beyond death
I know of perfumed gardens
where golden fruit hangs heavy
on the ripening fertility
of strange-laden trees.

I shall reach that garden
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Petra Graves

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Muffled trees crowded against
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A young lioness
solitary alone
moved very slowly
and crouched upon a rock
solid
in the evening quiet.

Dark beast
following the scent of blood
with centuries of prowess
twitching
in her restless tail.

Petra Graves

DEATH CALLED

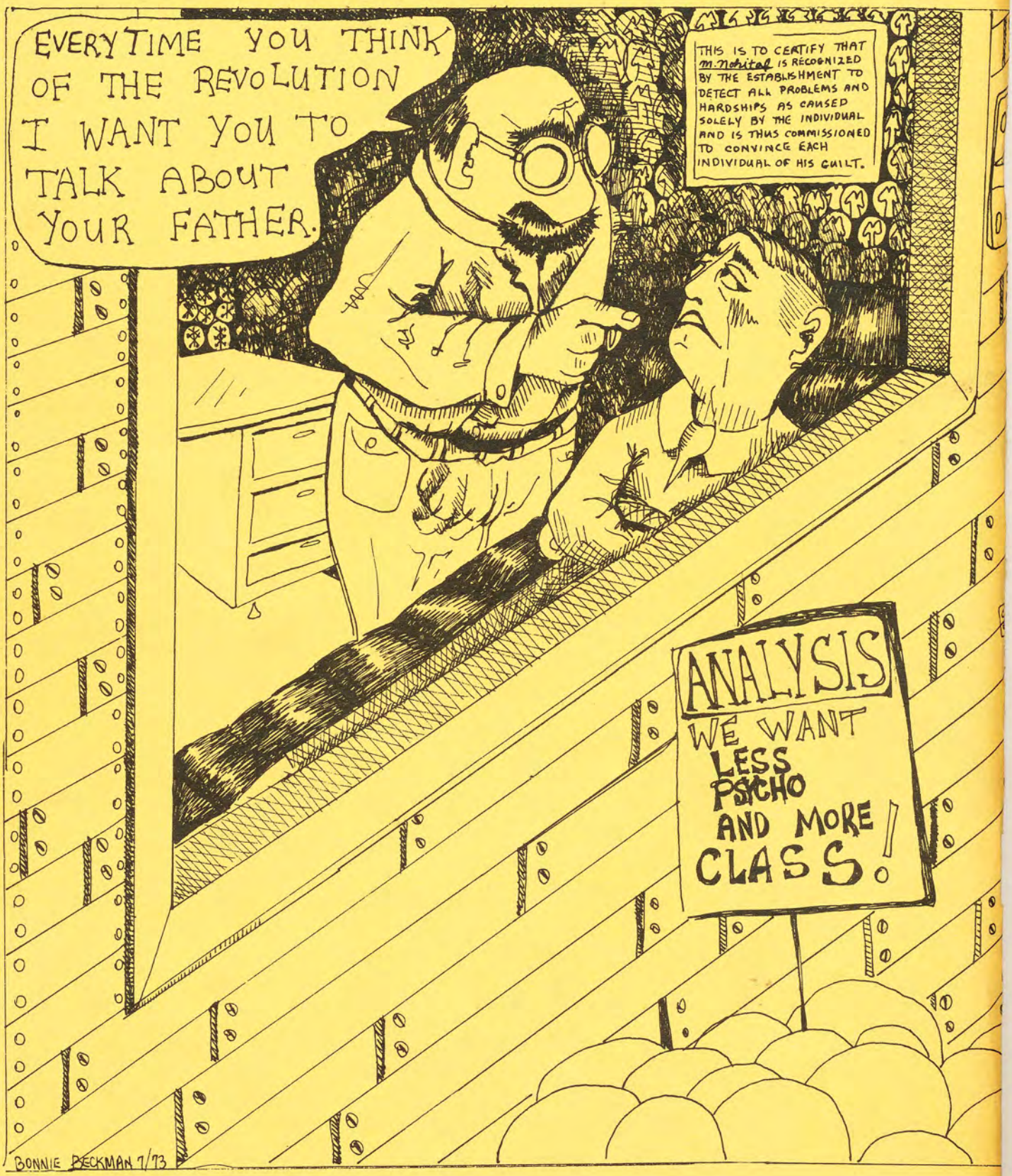
Death called, with beckoning finger,
To the relief of oblivion.
But life was insistent also
And continued to coerce him.

Depression and despair, these hell dogs,
Leaped at his heels.
Emptiness and anguish pulled him
Into nothingness,

Growth and becoming, sweet forces,
Urged him to actualization.
He followed the strongest vector
And continued to strive.

Al Kuenzli


MS. R. BECKMAN 6/73


EVERY TIME YOU THINK OF THE REVOLUTION I WANT YOU TO TALK ABOUT YOUR FATHER.
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT m. Nobital IS RECOGNIZED BY THE ESTABLISHMENT TO DETECT ALL PROBLEMS AND HARDSHIPS AS CAUSED SOLELY BY THE INDIVIDUAL AND IS THUS COMMISSIONED TO CONVINCE EACH INDIVIDUAL OF HIS GUILT.
ANALYSIS
WE WANT LESS PSYCHO AND MORE CLASS!
BONNIE BECKMAN 7/73