

in a NUTSHELL

Vol. 2, No. 3
 May-June, 1973
 Mental Patients Association Newsletter
 1982 - W. 6th Ave.
 Vancouver, B.C.
 Phone: 738-5177, 738-1422



**molly's in the kitchen,
 cooking up a storm**

SUN MON TUE WED THUR FRI SAT

CALENDAR

is special

2:00 Writers Group 7:30 Male/Female Discussion	10:30 Crafts at Residences Noon Drop-In Centre Meeting 8:00 Mental Patients Lib Rap Group	Noon Business meeting 7:00 Hairdressing 7:30 Religious Discussion 8:00 Drinkers Group (SMASH)	May 30 10:30 Crafts 6:00 pot Luck 7:30 GENERAL MEETING (West End)	10:30 Crafts 10:30 Riverview Visit 8:00 Therapy Group	10:30 Farm Visit Crafts at Farm	11:00 Breakfast 8:00 Sing Along
---	---	--	--	---	------------------------------------	------------------------------------

NOTES & SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

Activities listed across the top are regular events at the Drop-In Centre and happen everyday. Wednesday is special and is listed down the center of the page through June 27.

BASEBALL: Baseball season is now starting. However, we have no schedule yet. Those interested in playing should phone Patty, Lanny or Rolly. Schedules will soon be posted on Activities Board at the Drop-In.

CRAFTS & WORKSHOP: The Crafts and Workshop areas are always available, even when regular activities aren't posted.

FIIMS: The Activities Board at the Drop-In regularly posts lists of free and/or cheap movies being shown.

June 6 6:00 Supper 7:30 Politics Nite	June 13 6:00 Supper 7:30 Politics Nite 8:00 Over-30 Women's Group	June 20 1:00 VOP Meeting 6:00 Pot Luck 7:30 GENERAL MEETING	June 27 6:00 Supper 7:30 Politics Nite
---	--	--	--

"SMASH" / DRINKERS GROUP: This group is for people with drinking problems. We've had some conflict about people with no drinking problems who come to the group to observe. Though it is MPA's policy not to have closed meetings we feel the group would lose its effectiveness if it wasn't kept for people with booze conflicts.

PICNICS: Picnics will be happening spontaneously throughout the summer.

OVER - 30 WOMEN'S GROUP: A quiet rap group. If you're interested, please contact Molly or Cathy Bat-ten.

NEWSLETTER: Nutshell meetings will be announced on the Activities Board.

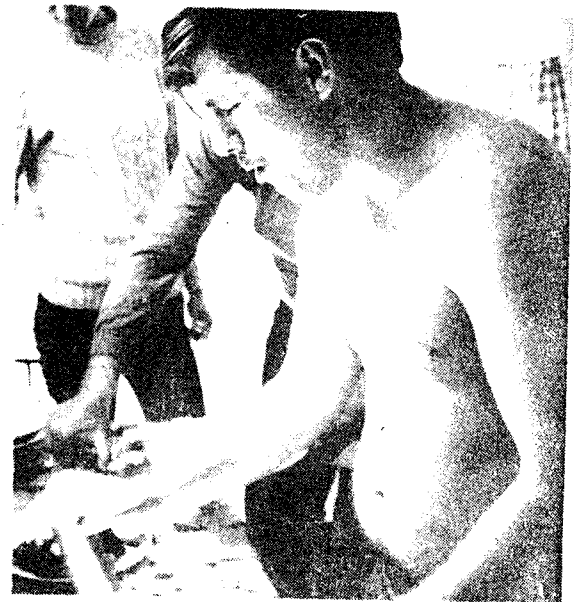
Late Flash - Play Ball!
 Sundays 2:00 p.m., baseball practice or game.



Saturday morning, 11 a.m., is breakfast time at the Drop-In Centre. Molly's on the cover cooking bacon ("It disappears as fast as I cook it") and four dozen eggs. And, of



course, there's toast and jam and a giant pot of coffee. Dave (centre, above) takes his with milk and sugar. Now that summer's here, picnic tables have been set up in the back



yard and the sun deck has been painted. Norm (above right) is all set to get a suntan. By the way, if you know where to get a big frying pan or some knives, contact Molly.

BUSY DAYS AT THE DROP-IN



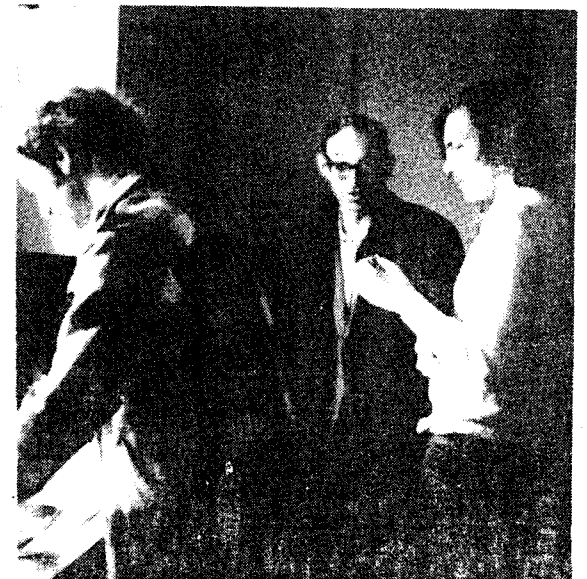
Patricia is in from the farm for the May 8th noon business meeting at the Centre. There are things to fix, schedules to arrange, more meetings (naturally) to attend, grants to be filled out, licenses to apply for...and after all that, there's even time for conversation.



Barb (above) is ready for clean-up. Those are mops in both hands. She's going to use one, and that means that the other one is for...whoops! "Promised I'd see a friend about a dog." Fred (he's in the middle, below) stood still long enough for this snap. Usually, he's moving too fast, keeping the Centre in shape, for photos.



Yes, Lan (on the left) is back. Gerry (centre, below) studies the latest report on cigarette and coffee consumption at the Centre. And Frank (bottom, right) is at the keyboard.





At the May 9th General Meeting (and don't forget the one on the 30th at West End residence), Anita (on the left), Gail (far right) and Gerald behind her with a grin.



We get calls (738-5177, 738-1422) and calls and more calls. Carla (above) takes a message. So, if you're at home, deciding whether to come down, give us a call.



That's Frodo (above) sitting in as night-watchman for Earl, who's in Toronto. Very gentle, will snuggle up to anybody, always glad to snooze in your lap. Frodo, that is.

LOONEYTOONS GAZETTE

No Peeking

A brand new \$225,000, 15-bed psychiatric assessment unit was opened May 3rd at the Vancouver General. The ward sounds quite posh, decorated in bright colors, offering a private room for patients requesting separation. Rooms are equipped with large windows facing the main desk, giving staff what a hospital doctor called "a sort of visual control."

Yes Peking

A group of Canadian doctors touring a Chinese mental hospital observed the patients in study groups on Mao Tse-tung thought. Dr. John Evans, President of the University of Toronto, said of these therapeutic study sessions: "It's probably as effective as most of the things we use as regenerative techniques. The aim of the psychiatrist," he continued, "is to develop behavior that is compatible with the norms of society, and since this is a society governed by Maoist thought, the use of that thought in therapy should be effective." Quite an amazing quote! Think about it....

Missing in Action

What ever happened to NDP Bill 114 which received first reading in the House and then dropped out of sight? The Bill, you may recall, was to amend the B.C. Mental Health Act. There were to be three main changes: 1) to permit the patient to appoint one person to a three-person review panel (good); 2) to increase the maximum detention period in a psychiatric unit from 30 to 60 days (bad); 3) to permit a police officer to have persons involuntarily certified on the basis of, not necessarily his own observations, but evidence relayed to him by others (such as community mental health team workers?) (very bad). If you're out there Mr. Cocke, we'd like to know what happened to the Bill and what are the government's plans for mental health legislation in the fall session?...

Referred

The New York Women's Psychiatric Referral Center circulates the names of therapists - mostly, tho not all female - who do not view

women as 'ill' simply because they reject the traditional female role.

MPA hopes to provide a similar service. Please send us names and descriptions of local therapists who have a feminist outlook....

Condemned

At a recent business meeting, MPA passed a motion of condemnation against the Mental Patients Rights Committee for irresponsible actions in encouraging patients to leave hospital without arranging adequate support and accomodations...

cc: n. levi, d. barrett

dear mr. cocke,

MPA operates at 2 levels. One is responsible, disciplined, reasonable -- read 'services'. Give us an inch, we accept it with gratitude and humility. This wins us friends in high places.

The other level is chaotic, demanding, 'unreasonable', --read 'politics'. Give us an inch, we want freedom.

This sometimes wins us enemies.

So be it. For better or worse, the two levels are wedded to each other, and together they make up MPA.

At different times, one of the marriage partners pipes up louder than the other. For the sake of clarity, we would like to specify which is which. For example:

reasonable suggestions

People being discharged from hospital are broke, often scared, and faced with lots of red-tape to get welfare. Could you please stick a welfare worker in Riverview and places like it so people can have their money before they have to face the world again.

* * *

Everybody getting out of hospital should be given a six-month free bus pass. In order to live a regular life -- look for a job, renew friendships -- you have to be able to move around in the city. Bus passes would give ex-patients the encouragement to do these things.

* * *

Could you arrange with Ma Bell to have lots of free telephones in all mental hospitals? The scariest thing about being there is being cut off. The way it is now people have to wait in line worrying about correct change. Having phones handy would make people feel better and would hardly cost you a dime.

* * *

Looking back at these ideas, we realize that reasonable = cheap. Unreasonable = expensive. Is that the way you see things?

unreasonable demands

Mental patients are people who've had their lives wrecked by society. A decent government would bend over backwards to pay society's debt to these people. There ought to be a law that covers mental patients just like there's a law covering victims of crimes.

Let's start by talking about life in the hospital.

First, they shouldn't be called hospitals. They should be called "Resorts for the Mentally Oppressed" (RMO), and should offer:

Private rooms for everyone who wants them.

Right to elect all RMO workers.

Control over all RMO programs.

First-run movie theater at RMO.

Covered swimming pools.

Large financial restitution when guests check out.

* * *

For a start, the Provincial Government should purchase 20 houses in the city of Vancouver and turn them over to former guests of B.C. RMOs to use as they see fit.

* * *

editorial

THE NEWSLETTER SHOULD TELL WHAT MPA IS REALLY ABOUT: PRIORITY NO. 1 IS HELPING PEOPLE

The great majority of MPA's activities fall in the area of 'services'. A very minor portion of energy goes into what can be called high-falutin theory about 'mental health'. Anyone who is around the centers knows this to be true.

Our newsletters, for whatever reason, have tended to reflect the opposite of these priorities, devoting little space to the daily concerns and needs of the membership. Most of the content has been theoretical, often of a muckraking and aggressive variety.

This policy has alienated too many people, mainly those whose only contact with MPA is through the newsletter. Beginning with this issue, therefore, we hope to correct the imbalance and to make the NUTSHELL a more accurate barometer of the actual activities of the group.

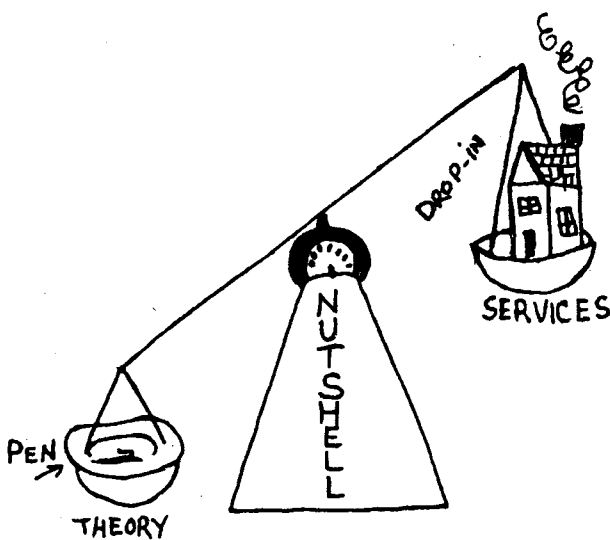
While not renouncing our previous publications, we do feel the new direction indicates one of MPA's many strengths, namely, that we are capable of making mistakes.

And of learning from them.
And of making positive changes.

Our relationship with mental health professionals is closely related to what has been discussed so far. Some professionals have wondered aloud whether MPA is designed to help ex-patients or to indoctrinate them. Based on previous newsletters it is easy to see how such a question would arise (though it is in a sense insulting to imagine that ex-patients are so easily indoctrinated). Appearances notwithstanding, the answer to the question lies more in our deeds than in our words. This is known to the many professionals familiar with and fully supportive of our services. They can see the 41 beds for people who would otherwise have nowhere but

hospital to stay. They can see the food on the table in the residences. They can see the supportive community at the drop-in center.

The newsletter has at times misrepresented our priorities and we hope to change it so as to bring words and deeds into alignment.



Another common question asked by professionals is whether the newsletter is actually written by ex-patients or by others taking advantage of a politically opportune situation. To answer this we have checked through the past five issues. They contain 78 pieces of writing. Forty-one were written by people who have been hospitalized mental patients. Eleven were written by people known to have been in therapy though not in hospital. Twenty-six were written by people not known to have been patients, though some may in fact have been.

Clearly, the newsletter is not the product of outside agitators, but of actual members (who are more political than the group as a whole).

For the most part, antagonistic mental health workers tend to be the

ones who have had no first-hand contact with MPA. One professional told me recently that some of his colleagues are critical of the organization, though all recognize us as a group that is alive and kicking.

"Kicking whom?" you might ask. and the answer, as provided by the newsletters, seems to be 'professionals'. Without suggesting that MPA and the Psychiatric Section ought to be bedfellows, it should be stressed that we have taken pains to criticize the mental health system and not professionals as a group or as individuals.

So long as MPA cannot meet the needs of certain people (as indeed we cannot) and so long as mental hospitals remain sometimes necessary, we are defeating our purpose by antagonizing those whose services we require.

For the most part, we see professionals as dedicated and well-intentioned people, working under often-impossible conditions. We seek to cooperate with them in providing services to individuals and in struggling to improve the conditions under which we all must work. (The thought just crossed my mind that some professionals may be disappointed to see us relinquishing the aggressive rhetoric with which they secretly agree.)

Be that as it may, the change in newsletter policy will hopefully accomplish two goals. First, to heal the antagonisms held by some professionals toward MPA. Second, and more important, to produce a paper which is readable, interesting and reflective of our programs and activities.

Feedback from readers on these ideas and on this NUTSHELL will be appreciated.

- Lanny Beckman

STAFF THIS ISSUE:

Lanny, Dick, Barb, Marie, Brian, Paige, Stan, Nancy, Carla and special thanks to Kini for photo dark-room work.

IN A NUTSHELL can always use staff, people to help with typing, layout, editing, proof-reading, all the tasks that go along with putting out the paper. If you would like to help and learn newspaper skills in the process, contact Stan at the Drop-In Centre.

We get many requests for subscriptions to IN A NUTSHELL. We have no fixed rates for this but any person who is able to contribute towards the costs may do so. IN A NUTSHELL is free to all people in hospitals and to all hospital staff as well as MPA members or anyone else who has been in hospital. All movement and community service grass - roots organizations can get the paper free. Write and tell us who you are and where you are staying.

IN A NUTSHELL is the official publication of the MENTAL PATIENTS ASSOCIATION. Our address is 1982 W. 6th Ave., Vancouver, B.C. The telephone number is 738-5177.

West End

KNOTS

Troy and Lone tied the nuptial knots May 3rd. Molly treated the house to a salmon dinner May 8th. Thanks Molly.

Extensive renovations were done to meet fire regulations. Clyde, Everett, and other residents were involved in helping, enduring and finishing up the job.

Grace is back from tripping to San Francisco and Prince Albert.

We awarded our Most "Amiable" Resident-of-the-Month Award to 8 month old Erin.

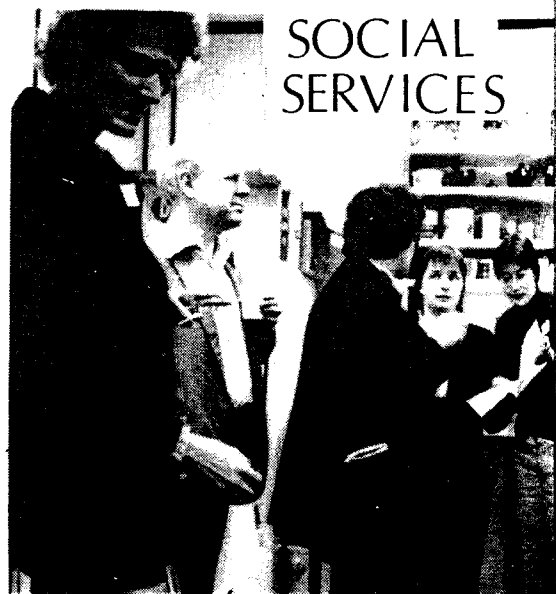
- Grace

HOW TO DO IT

Anyone who would like to visit the residences or become a resident is asked to please phone ahead and make arrangements. Prospective residents are required to attend at least one house meeting before they can be voted into that residence.

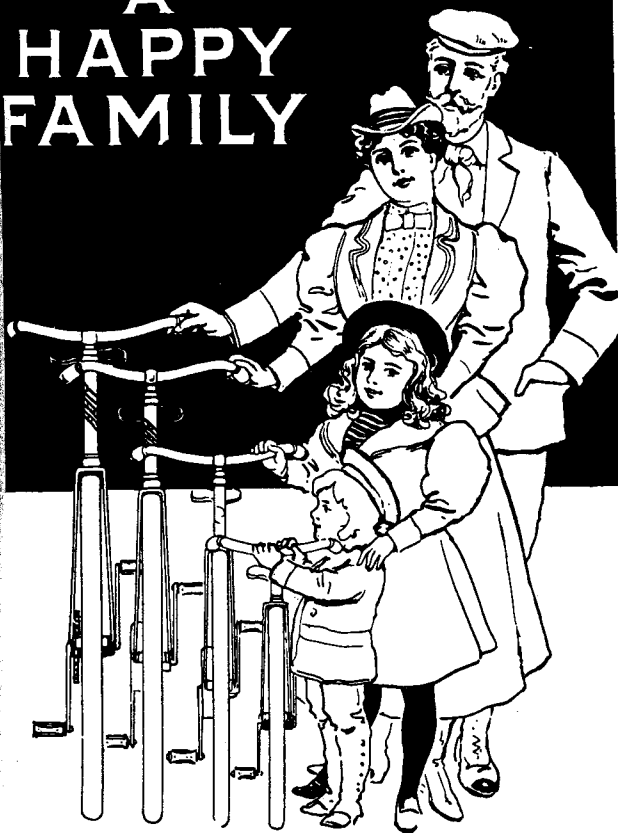
The coordinator at the residence you wish to apply for will give you the house meeting times and arrange for you to visit.

- 732-8222 - West Residence - 1754 W. 11th Avenue.
- 874-9422 - East Residence - 369 E. 21st Avenue.
- 872-5526 - South Residence - 166 W. 19th Avenue.
- 462-7750 - F.U.N.N.I. Farm- 2694 108th Ave., Whonnock, B.C.



Val (on the left) at the GVRD Social Services Policy Meeting May 8th, along with representatives from daycare centres and other community organizations.

A HAPPY FAMILY



RAP GROUPS & ROUGH TIMES

evening during the week perhaps?) and we're away and doing it.

If we had a study group formed we could have a name like "Mental Patients Liberation Rap Group" or something. If you want to come and you have a better idea let's hear it.

So, inspired by the success of the Male - Female Discussion Group and the drinkers' group (SMASH) -- by success I mean a small but devoted group turning up consistently over a long period of time -- I would like to propose that we start a Mental Patients Liberation Rap Group/Study Group/Discussion Group (see, more ideas already). We should be able to get a core group of people turning up regularly, getting to know one another and learning together. I would propose that we begin meeting MONDAY EVENINGS at 8:00 p.m. in THE DROP-IN CENTER QUIET ROOM. I would suggest the first meeting be MAY 28.

Once we get a group together we can decide more concretely what to do. The only clear idea I have at this time is that people should get together to discuss the ideas and activities which make up the movement we loosely term "Mental Patients Liberation".

* * *

Speaking of Mental Patients Liberation, there's a book that's been out for a number of weeks now entitled *Rough Times*. The book is an anthology or collection of articles taken from the newspaper "Rough Times" which shows up regularly at the Drop-In Center. Many people may have seen RT's first anthology called *Radical Therapist*. *Rough Times* would have been *Radical Therapist II* except the paper, as most of you know, changed its name.

As a book *Rough Times* comprises some of the best and clearest writing I've seen in a long time on political things in general. By comparison it is a lot clearer than *Radical Therapist* in that it has done away with the professional pretension which still lingered on in that book. *Radical Therapist* concentrated on therapy per se as a liberating force. *Rough Times* puts therapy much more in the context of actively changing the society we live in.

This is very important since if we concentrate too much on therapy we begin to see problems in living as existing 'inside' people's heads instead of 'out there' in the world where they really come from. *Rough Times* shows how we are connected to the world in which we live and tells us some things we can do about changing that world, that reality.

In terms of the suggestion to begin a study group in MPA, *Rough Times* is a book we could start on. The articles are short, concise and easy to read. And, most important, the book is only \$1.65. If enough people come to a discussion group we could order some copies in bulk and get them more cheaply. Here are some quotes from the book *RT*.

"Within the present confines there will be people who concentrate on self-help, hospital organizing and the like, but the goal should always be to build a society where all people will share in helping each other..."

"What is called 'eccentric' among the rich is often called 'mental illness' among the poor."

"As I would put it, simply, certain people have problems in living which come from an oppressive society, not from 'intrapsychic' problems."

- Dick Betts

What is Mental Patients Liberation?

Who is this guy R.D. Laing we keep hearing about? What's Anti-Psychiatry?

What is so special about MPA and other mental patients' groups like it?

Questions like these may or may not be running through your mind everyday, but I'd like to put them there.

Questions like those plus:

What's our society all about that people can become 'mental patients'?

How can we find out more about ourselves through studying (awful word, can't think of a better one) together?

The way to find out about things is to examine them and maybe listen to or read about what other people have to say about them. All we need is a place to meet (say, the Drop-in Center?) and a time, (some free

reports

Farm

PEANUT BUTTER

May has been a round month for our funny farm with the welcome additions of the van and a potter's wheel. The tension in the house just shows how comfortable we are with each other, and the peanut butter flows.

We await the change of coordinator and weather.

- 'the house in the country'

South House

BORN

Birth pangs at MPA's newest residence seem to have subsided recently as we trip on into our third month of existence...a huge, rambling mansion on 19th Ave. has become home to three women and five men - so much so that an offer to move to a tighter, more "comfort-

able" space was politely declined by the entire group...an orange kitten (L.S.D. Tom) threatens the mice gang to extinction and a gambling black bear/pup completes the current menagerie...

Our main activities have centered around integrating new members and discovering our capabilities and weaknesses relative to the group....Cleaning, furnishing, and repairing the old house...there's heaps left to do which pleases Gerry, Robyn and Gordie who get off on things physical...

WHO.

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

- Gerry

We've had some hair raising scenes and some times of laughter.. we've popped popcorn at 5 a.m. and there's been a tub-dunking...As was reported to the *Georgia Straight* by Robyn, the Easter Be-In kicked off a week early in our living room... the times were high...we're learning to cope with badly cut fingers (call Carollyne and Gerry!) and to fend from crashers...

We're always ready for painters, plasterers, carpenters, gardeners and people who love to prepare feasts...anyone in MPA-land who is into these trips is most welcome to come and create at the South House ...there's lots of space, too, for those who want to relax or rap... meet new people...

This week the group's plans include shopping excursions to the Sally Ann down the street, a housewarming for MPA'ers, stripping paint and refinishing our fine wood living room pillars and slowly building up our residence population to 10 or 12....Come & visit... our home is happening!

- Marie

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 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 climbed upon a nearby slab of time and went looking for a conventional short story.

Optiman carried on. 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 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 did my first writing at the age of five. I knew the letters of the alphabet, but not how to string them together into words; so I wrote a letter to my Aunt Constance which looked authentic, I thought, because I had remembered to leave spaces between the conglomerations of letters. I told her all about Thanksgiving. Much was my surprise when she wrote back, "I am glad Catherine is so well. Ask her to tell me about Thanksgiving." I already had.

After I'd started school, I would startle my class about twice a year by producing what looked like very grown-up poetry. A lot of my reading was magazine verse, and I thought I had a pretty fair idea what a poem ought to look like. It never occurred to me that my poetry ought to reflect my own experience. I remember some gup I wrote about the Nativity in Grade Four, "Veiled in Godhead here we see / The newly-born divinity" -- well, I was very proud of myself for knowing what 'divinity' meant, but a voice in the back of my mind was saying, "But you don't believe in God." And there was the poem about Thanksgiving which won a prize from *Country Gentleman* magazine; wasn't it a little odd that I was thanking God for "my home, and my parents so dear", when I was engaged in constant warfare with my mother and usually ignored my father? I don't remember any of the other poems I wrote, but there were some short stories set in Ireland, of which I knew practically nothing. All very derivative stuff.

MY LITERARY CAREER

After I'd started university I found that I had a certain facility with words for writing required essays. Well I did, for most of mine were written between midnight and 8 a.m. on the night before they were due. My style must have been fantastically stuffy; as J. B. Priestly said about some of his early book reviews, I wrote as if I were about a hundred and fifty years old. But somehow I fluked my way into good marks, despite the fact that I often didn't understand what I was writing about. That essay on Yeats' *A Vision* -- I must have read twenty works of criticism on the blasted book, and it looked as mad to me in the end as it had in the beginning. Once I was supposed to write an essay on Wordsworth's "White Doe of Rylstone", but decided to drop the course instead. The poem seemed to have been written to prove that everyone should join the Anglican church, and

I couldn't see how to make an essay out of that. Finally, to complete a misspent academic career, I wrote a very emotional essay on a fifteenth century subject, which ignored most of the facts, and barely passed the course.

I still feel badly about some of those essays. Almost all of them were done at the last minute, without any intensive work. If a thing's worth doing at all, it's worth doing well. Anything you like to say may be wrong with the academic world, but if I didn't work, the greatest fault lay in me. (cont. on p



DIRECTORY

Where to get help when you need it (s.o.s.), or
How to help yourself before they help you

MPA DIRECTORY

Drop-In: 738-5177
738-5178
738-1422

Residences
East End - 874-9422
South House- 872-5526
West End - 732-8222
Farm - 462-7750

EMERGENCY

Fire & inhalator - 34-1234
Free ambulance (police) 683-1122
Crisis Centre - 733-4111

HOSPITALS

Vancouver General - 876-3211
Health Sciences Centre (UBC) -
228-3731
Riverview - 521-1911
St. Paul's - 682-2344
Lions' Gate - 988-3131

FREE MEDICAL HELP

Pine St. Clinic - 738-6622
East End Clinic - 872-2511
Reach (medical) - 254-1354
Cool Aid Clinic - 731-6929
Gastown Clinic - 685-2744

Abortion Referral 873-3984
688-7133
736-8471

Women's Self-Help Clinic 731-6929
VD Control - 874-2331
City Health Unit- 736-9844
Gordon House Clinic (V.D. and
birth control 683-2554
684-4191

DRUG FREAK-OUTS

The House (soft drug bummers) -
732-3301
V.G.H. O.P.D. 876-3211

DENTAL

UBC Faculty of Dentistry -
228-2112
Gordon House dentist (free) -
683-2554
Reach (dental) 253-0232
Health Dep't. 738-9844 Loc. 03
Emerg. dental 8 p.m.-midnight -
738-9844

AND...

Birth Control Info 261-9821
Alcoholics Anonymous 688-1716
Methadone Rx 872-8311
Narcotics Addiction Foundation -
736-6746
Salvation Army DeTox Centre -
688-7796

OPEN LINES - 24 HOUR HELP

Crisis Centre 733-4111
Cool Aid 736-9971
MPA 738-5177
STAY 876-8232
NOW 736-7376

OTHER HELPFUL SERVICES

Cross reach 732-3245
K.I.N.D. 733-4144
Kits Info Centre 736-3431
Fish 299-4824
922-1311
Woman's Place 872-1824
Dial-A-Dietician 687-6439

JUDY

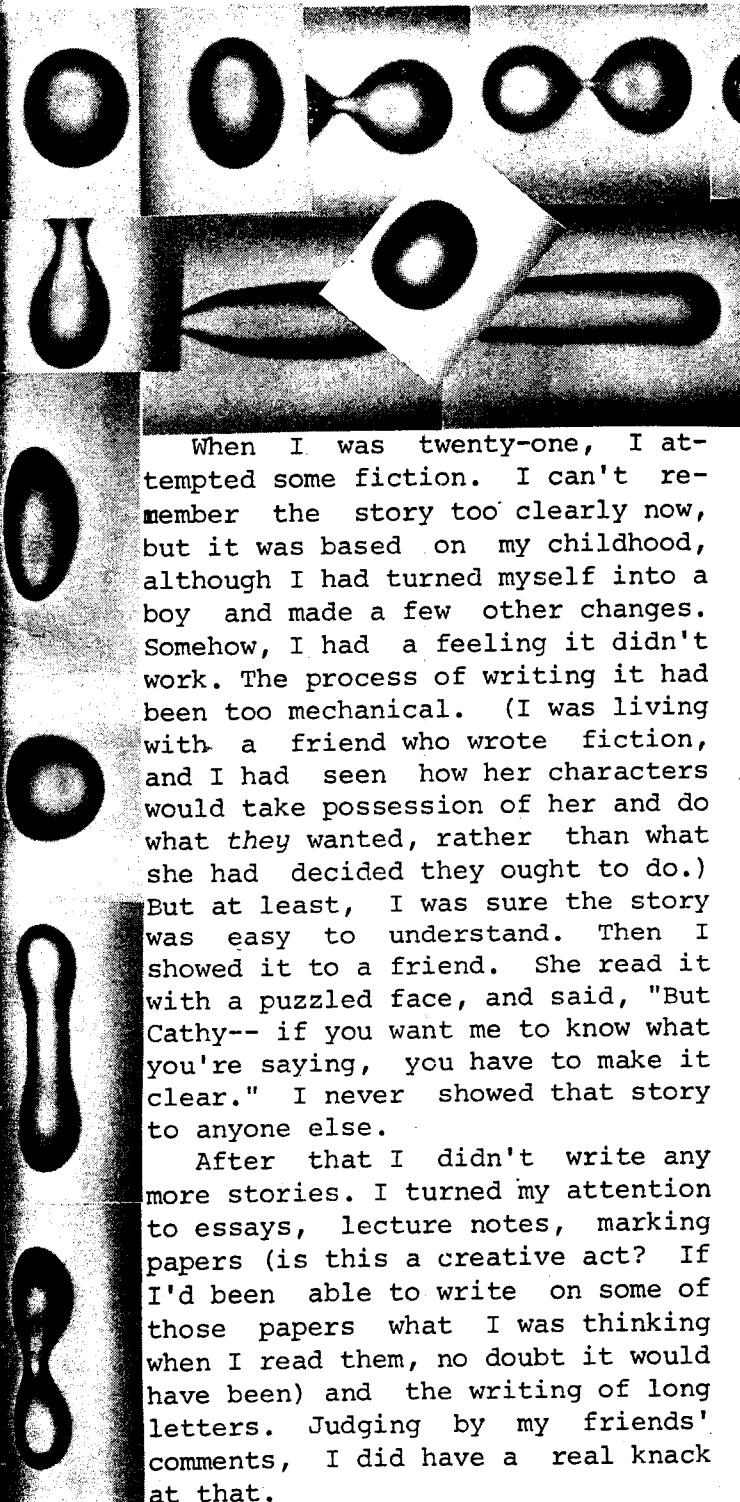
Wind
through a fleeting
thought

Warmth
Flowers need
to spread apart

Touch
music creates
LIKE

LOVE
in Judy's
HEART

- Brian



But then, I *did* have a brief career as a great poet. I was in hospital, recovering from a serious injury. When I began coming alive again, I found myself with no books to read; so I scribbled poetry on the back of a menu card -- Chaucer, Donne, Hopkins, Wilfred Owen, anything I could think of. The card went back to the kitchen with my tray. A few weeks later, one of the nurses asked, "Have you written any more poetry?" "I don't write poetry." "Oh, but we all read what you wrote on that menu card. We thought it was very good." I should think they might, considering who wrote it. But what kind of person would think I'd express myself in fourteenth-century English?

Then, four years ago, I took a two-week poetry course from Margaret Avison at Regent College. One day, after she'd read aloud a poem she liked, I said scornfully that it didn't mean much. She said, "Much what? All right, you write a poem for next Tuesday." It was a terrible poem, but at least it was grounded in my immediate experience. It was about me sitting in the chapel at Regent, repelled by the emotionalism of an Evangelical service, and wondering if I'd get anything out of saying my prayers, or whether it would make more sense to go to a fortune-teller. I think Margaret liked it.

Then, one day when I was trying to express my religious position to

someone in a letter, I found the thoughts turning into a poem. Again, it was a bad one, but I found out something about the writing of poetry. I became possessed by the words, and much as I worried at the thing with my conscious mind, the expressions I wanted came mostly unbidden.

About this time, I read Thomas Merton's *Secular Journal*. It was the first time it had occurred to me that journal entries were an acceptable form of literature--that I didn't necessarily *have* to write fiction, poetry or plays. I liked the *Journal* so much that I began to dream of writing a similar, but even better book, which would excite all the critics. Then I would enter a convent and leave everyone wondering who I was. But this plan was never put into action. I was too lazy to write the book, and I would have made a lousy nun.

Except for some odds and ends for the MPA newsletter, that's my literary career to date. I'm a bit more hopeful about writing than I used to be, since I feel more free to write about my real experience. But I'm overwhelmed by my own inadequacy. How many times have I heard someone say, "If I could just write down my thoughts--they're so extraordinary--I could produce something really great." Well, I am just another of these poor fools. If I could only express my thoughts, surely I'd produce something to rival *Ulysses*. O for a muse of fire. But the words escape me.

- Cathy Batten