

# Central Coast Times

Feature and Review

San Luis Obispo County

May 15, 1975 Number 40

## Singles

by Janet S. Herring

This warm Saturday morning in May the birds were singing and courting outside, back in San Luis to set up house-keeping for the spring. And that is just what pairing is for—the birds! Or so the group of single men and women inside the red brick building were beginning to realize and believe. They were learning and unlearning many of the myths about being single they had heard in grammar school classrooms years ago. It really is okay to be single, they were told— even more than okay. It can be desirable and fulfilling to be single, even in a society geared to couples and engulfed in pairing pressure.

The 26 men and women, Caucasians, Orientals, Blacks, ranging in age from 20 to 60, scattered around the airy, white-walled room, reclining on sofas or sitting cross-legged on the green carpet were participants in a Cal Poly weekend extension course, "The Challenge of Being Single." It was instructed by two single-and-liking-it ladies, Carol J. Laws, Ph.D., senior psychologist at the San Luis Obispo County Mental Health Clinic, and Gail W. McPhail, M.A., a counselor in the San Luis Coastal Unified School District.

Carol began the workshop dialogue Friday evening. The unique mixture of humor and sincerity evident in her gentle eyes and quick smile immediately put everyone in the room at ease. "I got interested in the workshop because I'm recently single and I wanted to get together with other singles...and I want to make it the best lifestyle for now."

She hurriedly added that what is right for her, might not be comfortable for another. She and Gail emphasized that there are absolutely no rights, no wrongs, and especially, no shoulds; this was the only workshop rule—one to be followed by all.

Gail nodded her head in agreement with Carol. She moved her torso gently forward, as if reaching out to the group before her as she began to speak of her two-and-a-half single years. "It's been the most exciting, most growing, and absolutely the most painful time in my life."

Their honesty and openness about the ups-and-downs and ins-and-outs of their private singleness set the stage. Before long, the men and women present, some divorced or separated, others widowed or never married, began sharing aloud their reasons for coming to the workshop and their feelings about single life.

The reasons and feelings varied, but the need for reassurance could be heard and felt in nearly every comment. Most enjoyed being single, but weren't quite sure it was "normal" to. Others felt guilty because they were having fun in their lifestyle.

Many, especially the younger never-marrieds, came because they're annoyed when friends and relatives deluge them with questions and innuendos: "Why isn't a nice (boy or girl) like you married by now?"

Paul, in his late twenties and not quite sure he likes being single came to the workshop to gain reinforcement and new ideas. Jan, a touch of gray in her short, dark hair, said with a note of pain in her tight smile, there is nothing she likes about being single.

Geoff, dark-haired and mustached, attractive in his red plaid shirt, is an outspoken man in his late twenties who has been disappointed in his efforts to meet other singles. Ginny, a grandmother with a whisper-soft voice, says most of her nine-and-a-half single years have been happy.

All came a bit scared, but wanting to share and gain support from other singles. All wanted to know for sure there were

cont.

other singles—many others (one-third of the nation) like themselves. All wanted to be reassured that they were not deviants, losers, failures, immature, frigid, impotent, or any of the other degrading adjectives society joins hand-in-hand with those who have never made it down the aisle to the altar.

All came wanting affirmation and understanding, and they got it. As Gail said so well, her long gold earrings moving with her nods, "It makes me feel more human when I hear you say what I feel."

Positive statements were voiced. "I like: sticking to my own bad habits, without putting up with another's; not having to explain where I've been; having friendships with the opposite sex without my mate being jealous; not having to fix someone's breakfast and dinner; eating what I like when I want; less hassles and pressure to have children."

Sensitive, often loaded, subjects such as the unpredictability of a single's sex life, masturbation, going out alone, and the fear of growing old alone were discussed in small groups. Nobody was forced to participate. Each had the choice to listen, talk, laugh, cry, leave or remain.

The feelings of inferiority and failure common to singles who often feel left out, along with fairytale fantasies such as waiting for the "one and only" Prince Charming or Cinderella to arrive and make life perfect were discussed, as well as facts: singles are discriminated against when it comes to housing, insurance, credit and taxes.

The weekend was by no means an indulgence in singlehood idealism. No claims were made that singleness was utopia; nor were such claims made for marriage. As Marie Edwards and Eleanor Hoover say in their book, *The Challenge of Being Single*, each individual must realize "being self-aware, autonomous, free, self-fulfilled and whole has nothing to do with being married or single; but, in the final analysis, comes from being ourselves."

For those singles trying so hard to be themselves in a pairing society and for those singles searching longingly to meet others—friends and-or lovers, very-British Barbara voiced a meaningful message in her interpretation of Eastern philosophy: "As I understand it we get into situations where we really want to control our environment and we get panicky... Trying to meet someone is like pushing the river and the river could care less.... You must jump in and that doesn't mean being buffeted about, but it does mean deep involvement. This means a lot of awareness. You can't go to sleep in the river. You must be awake."

This experience was so rewarding that when Sunday afternoon and the end of the workshop came, many hesitated to leave that little red brick building. Those who had come frightened and afraid of rejection Friday night had learned to take risks and ask others for what they wanted. For many, understanding, not pitying pitying friends were wanted; many new friends hugged temporary farewells while making plans for lunches and dinners the next week. These singles left knowing they were not alone and knowing they really were okay.

They had gone past the everyday how-do-you-dos and become aware of how they felt as singles in the face of society's pairing pressure. When asked again why they aren't married, many will respond, "why are you married?" It's about time the tables were turned.