

FROM THE ROOFTOP

The Newsletter of The Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning



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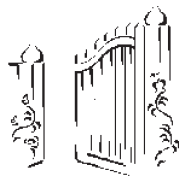
THIS ONE'S BY YOU

No, this issue of the “*Rooftop*” is not promoting Budweiser. It says “by you” not “for you.” Here you’ll find no Clydesdales and no references to the king of suds.

“This One’s By You” does refer, as you will soon discover, to the contents herein and nothing more. This week, halfway through the Winter Session, our newsletter promotes our remarkable community as it pays homage to the ingenuity and accomplishment of the members of the Fromm Institute. With the exception of the reminders that appear on page seven, everything here in this issue is written by or about our students and faculty.

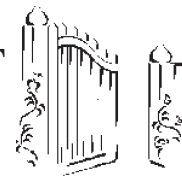
Could you be the most talented and involved school on the planet? We wouldn’t go that far. There might be one or two others that are our equal. After reading the next pages, however, even the most casual observer might have to agree that something good is going on at the Fromm Institute and it isn’t just a bunch of “old folks” sitting passively in classes. This issue is proof positive that you are involved and deeply committed to using lifelong learning as a springboard for all kinds of meaningful, intellectual and social activity. The stories and poetry, the cartoons and columns on travel and the performing arts, the advice and the advocacy on these pages all just testify to one and only one fact. You are something else! This one’s for you!





HEAVEN CAN WAIT YOU OUT

By Howard Nemerovski



Nice first impression: The gates ARE pearly!

Bright blue sky. Billowy white clouds. Wide, white brick streets lined with lush Oak trees and blossoming rose bushes. At each intersection, gold (not gold-plated) fountains burbled clear water into ponds hosting ducks and swans. It could have been Disneyland, but there were no ATMs.

The Main Reception Area was God's version of the O'Hare United Terminal—but larger. As far as the eye could see, Applicants of all races and species waited in comfortably short lines. Every line ended—or began—in front of a corresponding computerized workstation, each of which bore the sign “Admissions Officer”.

But, even with those throngs, there was... calm...and...silence. Waiting for the Prostate Exam To Begin Silence. Meeting Your Future In-Laws for the First Time Silence. SILENCE—except for the George Benson and MJQ tracks on the audio system, interspersed with the periodic voice messages of James Earl Jones majestically welcoming us and bidding us to join the nearest line.

My line moved steadily forward until I stood in front of my “Admissions Officer”. She was—Heavenly: Peaches and cream complexion, flowing blonde hair, wide, ocean-blue eyes, and she was tastefully attired in a high-necked pure white linen robe. She swept her curved eyelashes up from her computer screen and beamed me a welcoming smile.

I began uncertainly. “I feel as if I'm in the right place, but I don't have an appointment. I mean, there's nothing in my Palm about—about—my being HERE today. As a matter of fact, I just was training for my first Marathon.”

“That's correct. You WERE training for your first Marathon.” She sighed. “We get a lot of first time would-be Marathon Men up here. Let me assure you that you're on my screen. You see, your Palm merely records what you enter into it, and, of course ...well, you couldn't really know to schedule THIS. It's not like a dental checkup.”

“Or an annual physical.”

“Hm... You DID miss your appointment for your stress test last year. And the echocardiogram.”

“That appears to have been a mistake.”

“Yes. But, in any event, we're happy to have you with us.”

“Thank to...stay. .. Up...Here?”

“Well, that decision hasn't been made yet. Let's see—you're only in the ninety-third percentile. You consistently parked your BMW in the middle of two parking spaces. You lied to your dentist about daily flossing. You answered your cell phone in theatres. And, you made your wife go alone to movies based on Jane Austin novels. But those are merely typical character flaws. If they were disqualifiers, we'd never keep any American men up here. I mean, you're not Larry David.

“Your file is being evaluated. So, you'll need to stay here at the Reception Level for a brief period. Just feel free to wander around, relax, meet some other people, and learn how we do things. We have a very comfortable Main Lounge, with customized sections. In your section, you'll find The Journal, The Times, 'West Wing' reruns and Tony Bennett CD's. Also, throughout the day, John Lennon and Buddy Holly are giving a joint concert.”

“Live?”

“Welllllllll——”

“Will I meet... You Know Who? Or is He busy at the Hebrew National Salami factory?”

My Admission Officer's eyes narrowed, and she frosted me.

“No. He simply is not available to see you. And, you should be grateful, because He's in an unusually foul mood. Pat Robertson. And Howard Stern. And the French.”

“Dick Cheney?”

“Don't ask! How many warnings does one person need? In any event, He's just not available. But you will meet St Peter. He tries to conduct as many of the final phase evaluations as he can fit into his schedule. He's terribly overworked, but he's charming and informative.”

“And he is pretty high up, isn't he? Hah hah. No pun intended.”

Again with the narrowing eyes. I just never learned. I smiled weakly, backed away, and moved along. I strolled around, nodding and chatting with men and women of all ages, and, sadly, young people and children. People from all over, rich and poor. Strangely, none of them—none of us—seemed depressed or lonely for those whom we had left behind. We knew that we would see them again.

I was delighted to see so many dogs. No cats, but lots of dogs.

In the distance a large banner read “Pre-Acceptance Qualification Center—Applicants With Blue Cards Enter Here.” I passed the main entrance and entered through a side doorway under a sign that read “Observation Deck—Visitors Welcome.” I climbed a short ramp to a large platform carpeted in a charcoal gray tight weave and surrounded by a brushed chrome railing. From that vantage point I looked down on a series of large chambers with glass ceilings.

The first chamber contained dozens of small desks, each with a telephone. At each desk, sitting on an unpadding, uncomfortably small metal folding chair, was an Applicant.

A distinguished looking white haired man ambled over to me and nodded a greeting. His neatly trimmed beard matched his tailored white linen suit and white shirt and tie. He told me that each Applicant in the first chamber below had been responsible for designing and maintaining his or her former employer’s automated phone system. Each Applicant was required to make telephone contact with St. Peter, to plead for permanent status. The Applicants punched in the phone numbers written on cards on their desks, and heard: “Hello, this is Heaven. All of our representatives are occupied with other Applicants right now, but your call is very important to us. If your principal language is English, please enter the number one—for Spanish, number two. If you believe that you have lived a sin-free life, please enter the number 23. If you have performed a significant amount of good deeds, please enter the number 24. If you claim to be a religious person, please punch in the number 666.” The recording was interminable. And it played John Tesch and Yanni background music!

I asked my companion how many of those frustrated Applicants were likely to reach St. Peter. He chuckled. “Well, none of them have gotten through yet.”

He led me over to look down into another chamber containing a series of mock-ups of passenger jet interiors. The rear rows of each crowded jet were occupied by 100K Frequent Fliers who, during their lives, had flown in the front and stubbornly had refused to check their overstuffed luggage through. Each Applicant had been given ten minutes to reach the front of the jet to meet St. Peter, but first he or she had to try squeezing past a plane-full of fellow passengers who were stretching up into the overhead compartments and muscling down and into the aisle their bulging backpacks, swollen duffels, torn shopping bags, woven palm leaf hats, African walking sticks, bubble-wrapped ceramic elephants, crushed hat boxes and scarred computer cases. It didn’t look very promising for the hapless Applicants fuming and sweating in the rear of the aisle.

The third chamber contained a large number of dining tables set with sumptuous meals. My companion (who certainly knew his way around) explained that each Applicant was required to finish dinner in less than one hour to qualify for an interview with St. Peter. No problem, I assumed, but then I noticed that each diner was seated in front of a telephone, and the din of ringing phones was matched by the voices of the would-be diners screaming into their handsets phrases such as “I already have enough credit cards!” “I don’t need to refinance my home!” “I don’t want to answer your lousy survey.” “I’m not interested in a free trip to Cabo, and I don’t want a time share!” And, “I’m trying to eat my dinner here!”

“Former Telemarketers?” I asked.

“You’ve got it.”

Below us in the next chamber, an arena-sized, multi-purpose computer facility, thousands of Applicants were feverishly tapping their keyboards, unsuccessfully trying to respond to a variety of on-screen messages: “You have entered the wrong level diagnosis code. Please check your collateral application server data base and reenter the correct XPLP sequence.” “Your Hypergraphic Network access has been denied. Please review the sub-net cache and correctly follow the indicated protocols.” “Your ISP connection has ended due to erroneous encryption logging.

Turn off your computer immediately to avoid permanent damage to your hard drive!” “Your document size has exceeded the sixteen megabyte limit of your HTML Broadband. It has been erased. Do not attempt to recover it from the Trash Bin, because such an action will damage your hard drive.” Similar messages flashed on and off of hundreds of computer screens. The moans and groans below us were wrenching.

“Who do you think they are?” my guide asked.

“It’s obvious. The nerds who created those incomprehensible computer screen messages.”

“No. Those are their parents. We think they’re the truly guilty ones.”



Reluctantly, I followed my companion to other overlooks, from which I observed chambers full of varieties of wretches, all of whom were struggling vainly to overcome specially-designed obstacles to their meeting St. Peter: creators of reality TV programs; White House Press Secretaries; medical office appointment schedulers; the inventor of shrink-wrap; the man who discovered Adam Sandler; and Antonin Scalia's law teachers.

I turned on my companion. "This entire arrangement—all of those chambers—they're ingenious, all right, but the procedures seem unnecessarily cruel—surprisingly cruel."

"How so?"

"Well, admittedly, none of those people down there have led perfect lives."

"Indeed!" my companion replied.

"But this is Heaven! This is the place of forgiveness, not punishment."

"You're new here, so let me explain. Those people below are not in Heaven. Do you remember the banner? Those people are the ones with the Blue Cards. You're looking down at the Pre-Acceptance Qualification Center. That is definitely not Heaven"

"Not yet. But they believe they're going to meet St. Peter."

And they're going to wait."

"For—Eternity?"

"Yes. Eternity."

"But that's not fair."

"'Fair'? Did you say 'fair'? This is HEAVEN, my friend. HEAVEN! If YOU were running this place, we'd be inundated with people like those you see below."

"And just what's wrong with that? If The People Who Run This Place can't show a little forgiveness——."

"Then what?"

"Well, They're wrong!"

"Does that mean you're not interested in staying Up Here? The Other Place is not nearly as nice. Think of Newark in August."

"Look, I'm no hero. I want to stay Up Here. But let me tell you, if I make it, I intend to discuss this with Someone. I just believe that, when They get the facts and look at the big picture, They'll——."

"Forgive?"

"Yes. Forgive."

"My friend, you truly are an unusual, caring person. Perhaps that's the reason you're up here on this platform and not in one of those chambers." He paused and smiled benignly at me. "Look," he said, "I've got to run, but let me direct you over to the elevator to the Permanent Residence Level. I think you'll like it Up There. We've got full-length replicas of Pebble Beach and Augusta National. You can tee off with Sam Snead and Bobby Jones and Bob Hope. And you'll get unlimited Mulligans."

"Thanks, but the nice lady behind the desk told me I have to wait for Them to finish my evaluation. Also, how'd you know I loved to play golf?"

"Well, it's my job to know all about you. And, don't worry about the evaluation. It's been completed."

"Well, that's good news, but don't I need some—official stamp or something?"

"Not to worry. I'll see that it's entered into your file."

"And you have that authority?"

"Oh, Yes. I do. Not at the Hebrew National Salami Level, but close. Please excuse me, but I really must move on. Welcome. And enjoy."

"Thanks. Will I see you again?"

"I'd like that very much, but I'm afraid my schedule is quite jammed. I am glad that we had this chance to talk."

He left me, consulting his Blackberry. Glancing across the street, he crossed over and stopped. He looked down and patted the head of a very old black Lab with white hair on his chin and tummy. He shook the pooch's extended paw, dropped down on one knee and seemed to be having a chat. He pointed to a large green park with no pedestrian walkways but loaded with trees and surrounded by bright red fireplugs. I had never seen a dog smile before.

I stopped and made my way to the Main Lounge. I had caught John Lennon with the Beatles once, years ago. But Buddy Holly, never.

"Not"
The End.



Alma-Tadema's "The Favorite Poet"

WHY POETRY?

"It makes the 'everyday' rise to the extraordinary through language and imagery. Poetry is the balm of the imagination." Carla Hall Belmonte proclaims. In preparing this "by you" issue of the newsletter she asserted her editorial prerogative and chose these two that fulfill her criteria perfectly.

TO JOE

Clifford Barbanell

In walking by
There's a change of gait.

It is not as sly
As it was of late.

The memory
For long term is fine,
For the short term
Memory's benign.

Erect he stands
And there is the smile
Hearing refrains
Not heard in a while.

Harriet, you say
I do not hear too well
And this is so
But in the sound booth
I heard sounds
You did not know.

I hear the flower open,
Touched by the morning sun
And the bird bring a twig to the nest.

I hear the clouds tinted
By the setting sun

And the water on the shore caressed.

I hear the child in the dark afraid
And the heartbeat of those aspiring to achieve.
I hear the anguish of those alone and abandoned
And for them I grieve.

I hear the tender caring love so fragile
And the gunshot cruel and mean – so agile.
I hear the Lord asking about the children
And the children asking about the Lord.

ON THE BUS WE ARE ALL ONE

Adela Spindler Roatcap

I used to have a yellow Volvo – an expensive thing
that kept me isolated, holier than thou – but intact.
Doors, windows closed tight – me always in a fright!

Now I ride the Muni, jam-packed with random souls:
diminutive Chinese grandmothers with pink plastic sacks,
smiling babushkas with gold teeth and too-big purses,
bent old fathers, no longer working, suspicious
of skateboarding teenagers reeking testosterone.

Myself, I'm arguing with a nosy neighbor:
"No – I'm not Mexican, nor Italian, nor German.
What's my accent? I'm one of the human species."

Suddenly the driver slams on those blessed brakes,
and we fall bashfully into startled strangers' laps.

We're making friends the way God intended –
by touching. On the bus, dearest, we are all of the flesh.
You see that fresh young blonde helping an ancient
crone carry a suitcase stuffed with dirty laundry?

A working stiff brings on a pizza redolent of garlic,
making us salivate for home! Will we ever get there?

A cell-phone plays Beethoven's Third and we hear
how cleverly the boy extricates from her loving grasp.

Exact words for vague promises. Later Babe!
That's how it is on this lonesome voyage we call a life.

We pick up a young mother. Her baby's afraid, crying.
The driver scowls: "Get it out of the stroller, lady!
These are not my rules! Don't give me no rhetoric –
now there's a grand word for what ails us all.

On the bus, we are
as God intended
all of one flesh.

COMMAND PERFORMANCES

OPERA & SYMPHONY SUBSCRIPTIONS IN APRIL MAGIC THEATRE BROWN BAG

By now everyone should be settled in for the Winter Session, and hopefully many of the new students have taken advantage of their new student status and gotten some great discounts on tickets with their Fromm Institute/USF ID card. The year has begun with a bang for most of the performing arts organizations and there are many good shows to see. One that I heartily recommend is *Marin Theatre's* "Killer Joe" now playing in Mill Valley. I have often recommended this little theatre to you and if you still haven't had a chance to go, this is a great opportunity to see what they are capable of just across the bridge. You can use your student ID card to get 1/2-price student tickets in advance and go to a weekend matinee. Just call their box-office. The postcards and season brochures are in your classrooms.

Many of you are anxious and have already asked me about the *San Francisco Opera* and *Symphony Student Subscriptions* for next season. Both will not be out until the middle of April, so you will have to be patient until then. If you are a current student subscriber to the *Symphony*, you will get a renewal brochure in the mail in April. The *Opera* does not send renewal notices to students, but both brochures will be in your classrooms by mid April. For those who haven't subscribed in the past, these are fantastic savings and I will write more about them in the Spring Session columns. If you are anxious for opera now, then I would suggest that you pick up one of the brochures in your classrooms for the *San Francisco Lyric Opera*. This is a terrific little group that performs at the *Gould Theatre* at The Palace Of the Legion of Honor. Their new season begins in March with "Tosca," and as a students you can attend for \$15. Give them a try; I am sure you will not be disappointed as they perform with orchestra, supertitles, and have many excellent young singers.

In my previous column I stated that on Monday, February 13 we will have a noontime Brown Bag talk with the artistic director of the *Magic Theatre*, Chris Smith. That is only two weeks away and *The Magic* is beginning this coming month with what they call "Hot House '06." This is their third year introducing three world premier plays which will be running in repertory until the middle of April. Chris will be discussing "Hot House" on February 13 along with other *Magic* information, so please join us. Coffee and cookies will be provided by the Fromm Institute Student Association. More in two weeks! *Bob Morgan*

TOUR AND TRAVEL NEWS

GET IN THE PICTURE AT GREAT SAVINGS!

You can be in the picture for next summer's romantic Uniworld Rivership cruise on the brand new River Royale through the heart of Provence at great savings! This very special offer has just been announced and offers a \$500 per stateroom savings on the regular brochure price for all deposits received before March 31, 2006. What's more, returning guests save an additional \$100 per person! All you Blue Danube cruisers, pay attention. This "alumni" special offer applies to anyone who has ever cruised on these lovely Uniworld ships, whether as a Frommie or on your own. Please see the full brochure available in all classrooms and pick up a flyer copy with our special group price starting at \$2048 per person. All accommodations, shipboard meals, entertainment and all shore excursions are included. Space is limited and at these prices may sell out fast.

Mark your calendars for **Thursday, Feb.16** for a 'Brown Bag' Preview of the 'Connoisseur's Province.'

Info on Ashland and Croatia is also in all classrooms or call me at (707) 257-1804.



Fromm travelers at San Simeon

Happy Travels!

Susan Kennelly

SOME ANNOUNCEMENTS

PROFESSOR HASLAM RECEIVES THE WYLDER AWARD

In an October ceremony in Los Angeles, Fromm Institute faculty member Gerald Haslam was presented with the *Delbert and Edith Wylder Award "For Exceptional Service"* to the Western Literature Association. In 1999, he was recognized with their *Lifetime Achievement Award*. His 27th book, *Haslam's Valley*, a 50-year retrospective of his fiction and non-fiction, has just been released by Heyday Books and he has also been named a Contributing Writer to the *Los Angeles Times'* Sunday magazine.

Next session, Prof. Haslam has co-ordinated a Wednesday morning series that will welcome 8 California writers to talk about and read from their respective body of work. Speaking in the California Writers Series: Al Young, Dorothy Bryant, James D. & Jeanne W. Houston, Jonah Raskin, Cyra McFadden, Maxine Hong-Kingston and Gerald Haslam.

WHEN YOU ARE DONE TAKING YOUR TEMPERATURE

I recently was trying to find a way to safely dispose of a mercury thermometer and came up with the following information. I thought this might be of interest to other Fromm Institute students.

The SF Department of Environment is encouraging us to replace mercury thermometers with digital thermometers. Mercury thermometers should not be thrown into the garbage but disposed of safely. If you have thermometers you wish to dispose of and have replaced by a digital thermometer, this can be done at two places by simply bringing in your thermometer. Both sites do this free of charge.

Department of Environment, 11 Grove St., Ground Floor, 415-355-3700, Monday through Friday, 9 to 5.

UCSF Bookstore, Milberry Union, 500 Parnassus, 415-476-1666, Monday through Friday, 8:30 to 6.

Lyllian Wendroff

... AND EVEN MORE ANNOUNCEMENTS

WONDERS OF SCIENCE If you have been attending the 'Wonders Of Science' Series and reading about its lectures in the "*Rooftop*," then you know that this week on **Wednesday, February 1 at 10 a.m.** in **McLaren 252**, UC Berkeley Anthropologist **Professor Margaret Conkey** with a new lecture she calls "**Human Engagement with Art.**" Based on her appearance in the series last winter, we're sure her presentation will be as engaging as the following week's lecture might be volatile. That's because Dr. Conkey will be followed by **UC Santa Cruz's James Gill**. As a professor of earth sciences you can expect he'll erupt with enthusiasm in **McLaren 252 at 10 a.m.** when he speaks on **Wednesday, February 8** in McLaren 252 on his topic — "Volcanoes."

'BROWN BAGS' COMING UP Pack a lunch and come to two interesting and quite different 'Brown Bags' This week, on **Tuesday, January 31 at Noon in McLaren 250**, **Susan Ruwart** who served on the **2004-2005 SF Civil Grand Jury** will be joined by others in our student body who are currently serving and they will share their experiences and let you know how you, too, can also be considered for service. Then on **Monday, February 13**, you'll want a front row center seat for a **Performing Arts 'Brown Bag'** featuring **Chris Smith, Artistic Director of S.F.'s Magic Theatre**. For both, bring your lunch as beverages and 'just desserts' will be provided.

BY RANDY HARRISON

FROMMTOONS



Fromm Institute Events & Reminders

Tuesday, Jan. 31
Noon, McLaren 250

SF Civil Grand Jury “Brown Bag”
Bring your lunch! Refreshments will be provided.

Wednesday, Feb. 1
10 a.m., McLaren 252

Wonders of Science Series presents Margaret Conkey
“Human Engagement with Art”

Wednesday, Feb. 8
10 a.m., McLaren 252

Wonders of Science Series presents James Gill
“Volcanoes!”

Monday, Feb. 13
Noon, McLaren 250

Command Performances “Brown Bag”
Chris Smith, Artistic Director, Magic Theater

ONGOING:

Mondays and Wednesdays,
12:20 p.m., McLaren Porch

The Mid-Day Stretch with Jack Bray
A 20 minute exercise program.

JOIN IN THE
STRETCHING FUN!



**The Fromm Institute
For Lifelong Learning**

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