

Alan Bisbort, Editor

FEATURES

Drink and be merry for . . .

by CB Gaines
Asst. Features Editor

*Bee flies to the flowers,
He flies to the hive.
Bee flies at all hours,
He's glad he's alive.*

Yes, it's good to be alive, isn't it? To hear the whipporwill's nightly song, to lie on the grass between classes, to toss a Frisbee with friends.

But sometimes people forget about the nice things in life. Occasionally someone decides to cancel his act. One out of every 1,000 teenagers attempts to kill himself. In fact, suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students (accidents being first and cancer third).

There are several reasons why someone may attempt to commit suicide. A blue, spring evening or the loss of someone close may yield a suicide attempt. To some people, the loss of self-esteem is enough to cause self-destruction. Any or all of these tribulations could evoke the idea of suicide in someone's head.

Some suicides are just gestures. They are cries for help or a way of getting attention. A person might not intend to kill himself, but sometimes he unintentionally does.

Some people talk about suicide repetitively for sympathy and care. Eight out of 10 suicide victims had given definite warnings of their suicidal intentions.

And some people come to the unequivocal decision to kill themselves. They choose lethal and irreversible methods like blowing their heads off (a popular Southern method) or jumping off high buildings.

But even leaping is not as lethal as it looks. Recently, a patient in the psychiatric ward of Memorial Hospital, South Wing, survived a jump from the fifth floor. Dr. Seymour Halleck, a psychiatrist working at South Wing, said, "He was very out of his head when he did it."

Halleck came here from the Madison campus of the University of Wisconsin. While he was there, they had three or four jumpings a semester. He described one corpse as having "a look of total terror."

Dr. Bruce A. Baldwin of the Student Mental Health Service also mentioned a national concern in the mid-60's about

people jumping off high buildings. While he was a student at Penn State, there were many jumpings.

Baldwin said that on the Carolina campus there are about two suicides per academic year. Five to eight attempts are made.

Vickie Greene, director of Switchboard, said that they get four to five suicidal calls a month. Usually, they are people who have taken lots of pills. "If people call here," she said, "some part of them wants us to talk them out of it."

Switchboard gets the victim to emergency care, if needed, and tries to encourage ongoing treatment after the attempt.

Two recent suicide victims used guns. One was a foreign student, unfortunately a high risk for suicides. The other was a female repeater.

Repeaters, people who have attempted suicide before, account for a significant number of suicide cases. One Carolina student cut her wrists in a suicide attempt during the spring semester. She made an earlier effort by

taking an overdose of pills.

Female suicide attempts are three times more frequent than male attempts. But males account for three times as many completed suicides as females.

On college campuses, suicides usually take place six weeks into the semester. Spring is the season of the most suicides according to national figures, while more homicides are committed in the summer than any other season.

Alcohol has been connected with 85 per cent of all suicides. Alcohol is also related to sub-intentional suicides. Some people that get drunk, then drive their car 90 m.p.h. may be sub-intentionally suicidal.

Parachuting can be another sub-intentional suicide attempt. The sub-intentional suicide is not an overt act. But anyone who places himself in a dangerous situation where he might get killed could be a victim of sub-intentional suicide, a sub-conscious and temporary death wish.

For some people, the suicide attempt can be a good thing. Often for someone

to decide that they want to live, they have to come close to dying.

That's where methods low in lethality, like wrist scratching, or high in reversibility, like pills, come in handy. If everyone who attempted suicide, actually succeeded, the world would be significantly less populated.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. in *Welcome to the Monkey House* foresees Suicide Parlors built like Howard Johnson's where people can go for a free last meal and request euthanasia.

It is written in *Suicidology*, a publication of the National Institute of Mental Health: "There are no modern writers who contend that mental disorder is either a necessary or sufficient cause of suicide."

"You can't force someone to get help," said Baldwin. But after a suicide or some other behavior considered dangerous to others, one can be involuntarily committed. And according to North Carolina law, it is a punishable misdemeanor to attempt suicide. But so is smoking dope.

'Conrack is enjoyable myth

by Peter Hardy
Film Critic

Blacks may be appearing more in films but there have been few movies to treat black people much more intelligently than they have been for the last 40 years. The most that could be said for blaxploitation flicks like *Cleopatra Jones* and *Slaughter's Big Rip Off* is that they provide black people with their own heroes to cheer as they rampage and maul their way across the screen.

And though there have been more intelligent films about black people recently, few of them have dealt specifically with the problems of being black. *Sounder*, for example, was a lovely film about a poor family that happened to be black. It was directed by Martin Ritt, who directed Sidney Poitier in one of his first starring roles in *Face of the City* (1957) and later in 1969 made *The Great White Hope*, a fictionalized account of the career of black boxing champion Jack Johnson, who was persecuted for his color at the turn of the century.

Ritt is once again dealing with black people in *Conrack*, and it's difficult to know quite how to react to the film. It's a true story of a white teacher who worked with miserably underprivileged black children on an island off the South Carolina coast in 1969. He sheds light into their world, gives them a glimpse of the limitless possibilities of the world and then is forced to leave by a disapproving administration.

It's difficult not to be moved by such a story, particularly

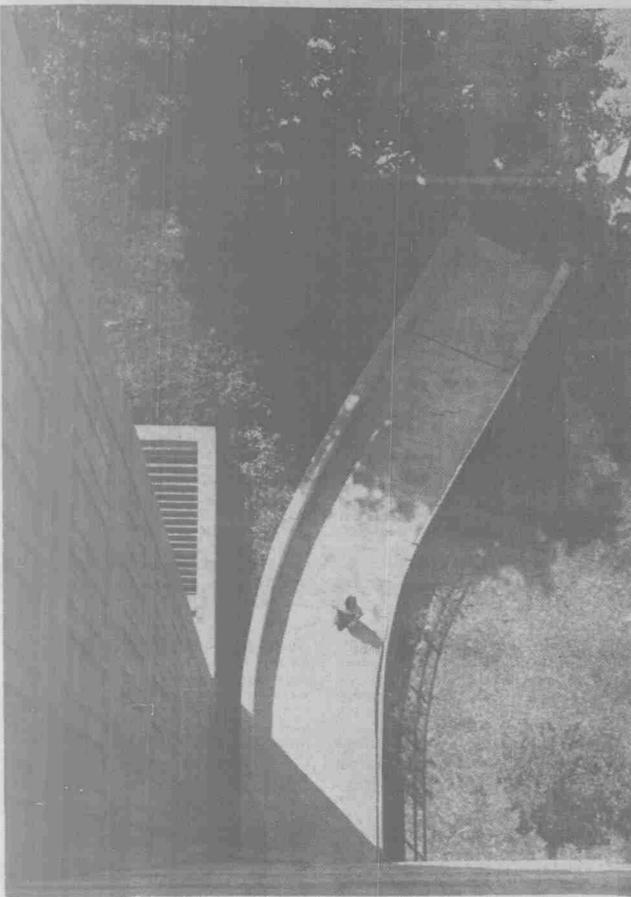
since it's true. But a very viable question can be raised: Are the students not perhaps worse off after the teacher leaves than before, since they now can see what they're missing?

More important is the film's attitude toward blacks. What we have is basically the story of a white god who comes bringing wonderful gifts to adoring little black kids, and then leaves—it's like a myth. And in these touchy times some people might be offended by it.

An interesting comparison is the new version of *Huckleberry Finn*. It's pretty limp generally, but the treatment of the black slave Jim is very revealing. In the novel, Jim was the standard image of the darkie, in both his language and his gullible, simple faithfulness. Twain still managed to give what was for his time a very strong, compassionate statement against racism.

However, today you could never get away with having Jim going around making with the "Ol' Massah Huck" dialogue, so in consequence Jim not only speaks better English than anyone else in the film, but his character has so much "dignity" piled up on it that the flavor of the character is lost and the racist statement loses most of its edge. In trying not to offend anybody, films these days may end up offending everybody by their utter blandness.

In any case, *Conrack* is generally enjoyable, thanks mostly to the warm, vibrant performance Jon Voight gives us in the title role. The film makers sometimes seem like they're patronizing, but fortunately Voight never does.



A lethal look

Tall buildings and point-blank pistol shots provide the ugliest reminders of human despair. Fortunately, this is a view seldom seen in Chapel Hill. (Photo by Ted Mellnik)



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