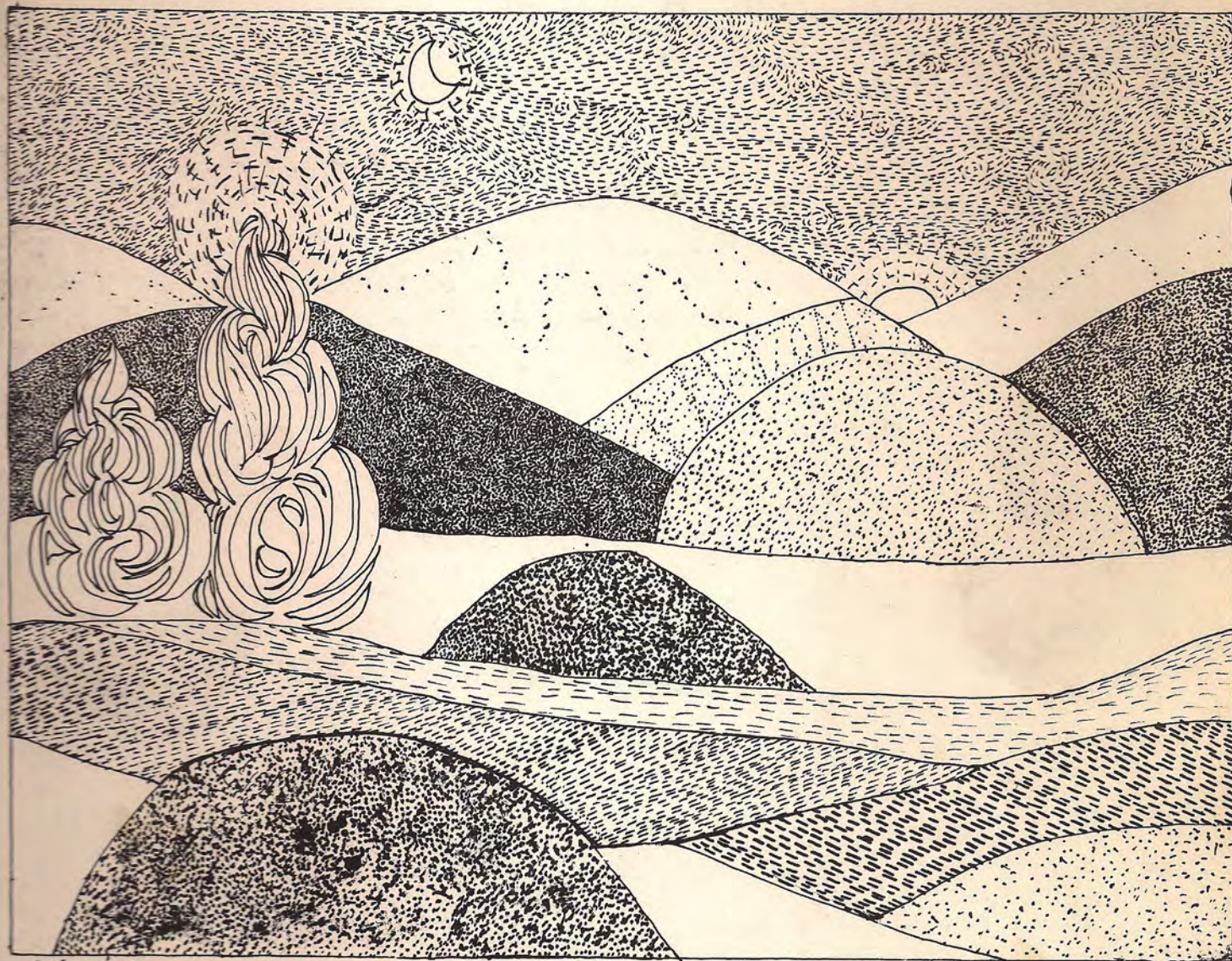


# the anthology of women writers at hilltop



Hilltop '77

Randi Spiegel

# foreword

Writing presumes connectedness with humanity, with ideas, with everything. Yet, we sit alone in the act of it, seemingly unconnected and isolated. But with the formulation of each word, we forge a link with an imagined other. Is this not true? As I sit here, writing this dedication to the Anthology which grew out of our February weekend, I imagine all of you and I speak to you and yet I sit alone.

I guess what I am trying to say has been in me for some time. I can feel it come on. I can feel them "roll"--thoughts I must have been thinking, but had not been asked to tell. Then you came along on the opposite end of the continent and you say, "Come on, Hannelore, tell us what you have been thinking. Dedicate this book. It is, after all, the result of something you created and involved us in."

Are you asking me that, or am I asking myself? It does not matter. The answer will come, though obliquely. It comes from the side. I can see it peripherally, but when I try to look at it squarely, it becomes elusive.

I think life gives us answers everyday, except our nets aren't out and so they swim away. Then we ask in torment, "What's it all about?"

I think a writer catches fish. A writer catches thoughts and impressions quickly before they swim back into the deep ocean. In this way the writer is a collector of data, which when connected to other data, fills the unbearable void. Yes, a

catcher of fish, a knoter of nets, a spinner of yarn. And, also, the writer is a weaver. Because the writer connects one piece of information with another and weaves a tapestry by tying together hundreds and thousands of threads. Our thoughts dart back and forth like shuttles, but they are invisible shuttles. And our looms are invisible, too.

To passionately pursue and nurture that which is invisible requires faith.

Ah, yes. There it is. The point. The kernel, the nugget which I had meant to extract. I apuse a minute and let it sink in. It satisfies. After rummaging and ruminating and picking up this and that, all of a sudden the thought strikes. And even though it comes out of oneself, it is still a surprise, as if it came through the self from somewhere else. From the Repository of Great Thoughts, maybe. From a pool of wisdom out there somewhere which we may tap, but only after we go through the paces, the many steps of building and connecting. Going through the steps; that's another point about writing. The kernel, the nugget doesn't make half the sense and may even go past us, without the steps that were taken to get there. I guess this is not unlike those stories we've heard about confrontations with gurus. The uninitiated say, "Tell us what you know," and the gurus answer in riddles. The great known truths are not available to us unless we go through the steps. Writing is going through the steps and then discovery. The discovery of the known over and

over again and seeing it afresh. I like this thought. The writer as polisher, as buffer. The writer who makes things shine; who makes things clear.

I am thinking about a letter which was written to a candy manufacturer. The writer of the letter wanted to let the manufacturer know that his King Tut chocolate fudget wasn't what it used to be. Yet, had the subject of the letter been astro-physics, or the church and addressed to the editors of the New York Times, or the Pope, it could not have been written with more care. The writer imbued chocolate fudge with that caring and careful concentrated though which I think is a writer's attitude. And when this attitude is present the subject grows. What was touched in this particular letter was the noble point that when quality is lost, even in chocolate fudge, something is lost all around.

We speak about 'quality of life.' I think a writer cannot help but be concerned about that.

But there is something else I particularly like about writing. It is the fact that it is always available. It isn't like milk you run out of and have to go to the store for. And sometimes the store is closed. Or like making movies which you can't even begin to do unless you have a considerable amount of money. With writing there is never a moment when we can't do it if we really want to. We don't have to wait for the weather to clear up. We don't have to have a certain type of body. We don't have to see that the

light is right, like photographers do. We're never too old or too young for it. We need not rent a theater, costumes, pianos, studios, rehearsal spaces, etc. All we need is a pencil and a scrap of paper and we can do it any time of day or night, anywhere in the world, in any situation, even in prison. I like that idea; the idea of availability, the idea of always. Which brings me to the next point, the point about everybody. If everybody can get hold of a pencil and a scrap of paper, then anyone who has gone to school, even if only briefly, can write, if he or she so chooses. I like the democracy of it. No, actually, I love the democracy of it. I rejoice in it and I need it. I need it to prove something which cannot be proven in any other way. It is that thing about art and talent and everybody and only a few. It has to do with this notion that some people have it and others don't. This is a very prevalent assumption and one which I would like to deflate, primarily because it saps motivation and robs us of chance.

When I walked into the Phoenix House Drug Addiction Center some years ago, holding a sheaf of my poems, I did not expect that anyone there would start writing. I had only been invited to read. But the residents, who were of all colors and creeds, asked me to come back and work with them and within a short time, they wrote their own poems. These were so good that they came to the attention of the Repertory Theatre at Lincoln Center which invited the group and me to become artists-in-residence. We had made it to Lincoln Center out of the basement of a drug addiction center in less than two years.

What is talent? I think much of it is burning desire, energy, and training. When watching a great dancer, for example, we have no way of telling what he or she would have become if certain things, at the right time, had not been available to him or her.

Success has to do with timing. We have no control over that. But to keep on going anyway, that's what it's all about.

And inspiration based on faith helps us go through the steps over and over again, the steps of the dance, the steps of writing, the steps of life.

An artist is an inspired person who inspires others. Perhaps not all of us can be great artists in the final sense, but inspiration is available to us all. As we are all alive, we are all susceptible to be kindled and to kindle. Which brings me to the question of what I had in mind when I envisioned the first conference and what I keep in mind always: it is to churn the life sap in each of us. To make it flow, rise, surface, bud and flower and to make it so strong and available that it will not convolute when obstacles are in the way.

The conference as a repository of energy to help nourish our creative energies. That's what I had in mind and that's what I keep in mind, always.

Thank you for asking and for caring to know.

Hannelore Hahn New York, 1977