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IMAGE



"INSIDE BIG BIRD" SEE PAGE 4



THE PHOENIX POETS

A Group of Poets— All Former Drug Addicts— Visit FREE TIME And Light Up the Night

Recently Channel 13's free-wheeling *Free Time* series had as guests a group of young people from Phoenix House, the drug rehabilitation center located on Manhattan's West 85th Street. They played and sang folk-rock music and read poems that they had written for the Phoenix House Poetry Workshop, which was founded and is supervised by Miss Hannelore Hahn, a non-drug addict friend of Phoenix House.

The visit of Miss Hahn and these attractive young people who have turned-off to drugs and are turning-on to life, proved to be more than instructive or entertaining; it was a beautifully moving experience for Channel 13 viewers, as evidenced by the hundreds of enthusiastic letters that deluged the *Free Time* office in the days that followed.

IMAGE here presents a brief history of the Poetry Workshop, Phoenix House, plus a few of the poems read that night. Some are delightfully nonsensical, some are love poems; others speak of drugs and degradation.

All were written from deep, personal experience.

A lesson of life seems to be that the things you put your hopes in can very often disappoint you, but the things from which you expect nothing often bear fruit far beyond your expectations."

The words are those of a lady with poetry in her soul and in her name—Hannelore Hahn—the founder of the Phoenix House Poetry Workshop.

According to Miss Hahn, the Workshop came about "by an unexpected invitation," which was itself the result of a chance meeting.

On a cold, foggy night almost two years ago, Miss Hahn passed a blind man on the street who asked her for directions. As it turned out they were both headed for Goethe House to attend a free concert. The man was Russell Anderson, Professor of Psychology at the Columbia University School of Social Work, and out of their chance meeting a friendship developed.

Some time later a Phoenix House resident, Jerry Cousino, told Professor Anderson that Phoenix House needed information about free cultural events in the city. Professor Anderson referred him to Miss Hahn, who sent him the Manhattan Almanac, which lists cultural events. The next day, Cousino called her and said, "I notice in this issue that you are giving a poetry reading. How would you like to read your poetry to some people at Phoenix House?"

She agreed, and the reading was set up as an experimental one-shot—no one was certain poetry would go over with the young, worldly-wise residents who, in many instances stopped hitting the books when they started hitting drugs.

"I read some of my poems," said Miss Hahn, "and after each poem, we talked about what it meant to them. The discussion was tremendous. I got a marvelous feeling of communication. Somehow the poems touched the deep experiences of everyone in the room."

"The poetry was not difficult for them to understand," she said. "On the contrary, it seemed to go straight to the core of what really mattered to everyone present. And the poems were not about drugs. They were about the pain of life, but with a tough attitude—not a self-pitying one."

The young people were so deeply impressed, that they began using Miss Hahn's poems in their drama workshop—and even asked for more.

A few months later, Joanna Merlin, the actress who conducted the drama workshop, found she was no longer able to continue the project, at which point Miss Hahn volunteered to form the Phoenix House Poetry Workshop

—which has been thriving ever since.

In addition to its appearance on *Free Time*, the Workshop has received invitations to read for NYU, the Bronx Council on the Arts, Bergen Community College and the Museum of the City of New York. And the Workshop has also been encouraged to work up a program for theatrical presentation.

"My primary concern, however," says Miss Hahn, "is to maintain the very special 'vibrations' of the workshop. No offer is worth the dissipation of this creative energy that makes things happen. We have a very delicate thing, and it could be easily destroyed by so-called success."

Perhaps the thing Hannelore Hahn is trying to preserve can be summed up in the words of Leslie, one of the girls in the group, who told *Free Time* host Joe Dennis, "I painted and had done other things, but had never written anything. And Hannelore said I *could* write, and then I wrote. It's really...funny."

About Phoenix House

Phoenix House is a drug rehabilitation center, one of 15 such centers located throughout the city and upstate New York (with a branch in England), which are supported by both public and private funds.

The 85th Street Phoenix House is "home" to the Phoenix poets. It is run by Paul Dinella, a former addict himself, who at 28 looks more like a carefree flower child than the official legally responsible for the care and guidance of 87 addicts who have either voluntarily entered Phoenix House or have been probationed through the courts.

"There's always a waiting list for admission to Phoenix House," Dinella told *IMAGE*. "We don't just take people off the streets." He said that to qualify for admission, an addict must really want to "kick" the habit. And once he is accepted he must attend sessions at neighborhood storefront induction centers for several weeks, to test the sincerity of his motivation and also to give him an idea of what the Phoenix House program is all about.

Upon entering Phoenix House the addict agrees to live under three basic rules: 1. No violence 2. No threat of violence 3. No drugs or chemicals of any kind.

In addition, there is a full regimen of work and activities. According to Dinella, Phoenix House is "practically self-sustaining," with residents doing the cooking, cleaning, maintenance and administrative work. For therapy there are also encounter sessions, as well as art classes, ballet and drama lessons and—of course—the Poetry Workshop.

The average stay is from 18 months to two years. "And, it's well worth it," said Dinella. "It helps these young people get the strong foundation they need before they're sent out on their own."

And what does Phoenix House mean to its residents? During the course of the *Free Time* program, former addict John Lewis put it this way, "Phoenix House taught me to know myself...to be a friend to myself. You know, when I came into Phoenix, I was really Honky-tonk Bud, but now I'm John Lewis..."

"I know what I *was*. I know where I *am*. And I have a purpose."



Paul Dinella (right), Director of Phoenix House, with members of the Phoenix House Poetry Workshop. Left to right are John Lewis, Jr.; Hannelore Hahn, the Workshop's founder; Gene Doyle; Brenda Weinberg, and Leslie.

Back On That 84th St. Trip Again

Five floors of empty, dark offices
You can almost feel that 9to5 thing in the air ...

The clock ticks on,
the night drags by,

It's not like the birth of something,
More like the re-opening of an old wound ...

The damn radio's no help,
Jagger's "Midnight Rambler—Let It Bleed" scene.

3:30 am—House run made. Everything is OK.

What the hell's in this coffee?
It's my third cup ...

What's that noise? Probably just a rat,
I'd better check anyway ...

4:25 am—House run made. Everything is OK.

This damn building ... what a drag it must be to work here, during the day,
Every day, 9to5. Every day.

I wish the morning would come,
The street's a weird scene, reminds me of 2nd Avenue,
Sitting, watching the world go by locked in this mausoleum ...

I think I'm going insane, NO, I AM INSANE
But even that is better than working here,
during the day, 9to5 every day ...

5:05 am—House run made. Everything is OK.

This is ridiculous. I mean who would want to break into this place?
And who would stop him? Not me, I'm too tired. The hell with it.

6:20 am—House run made. Everything is OK.

Sunday morning, nothing on the radio except for two lames
Rapping about the relativity of Time. Shit. I wish it was time to go home.

7:00 am—House run made. Everything is OK.

It's beginning to get light outside. It's cold out there but warm in here.
Phoenix headquarters has heat, but Phoenix House has none.

8:00 am— Didn't make no house run, just get me out of here.

9:00 am—John Lewis has arrived to take over the house. Thank God.

Gene Doyle



Gene



John

Love

Universal Jewel
Mother of life
I need you
From poorhouse to jailhouse
To madhouse
I pursue you
From the beds of maidens
I shout your name in vain
Passionate vibrations
Pierce the silent
Knowledge of my loneliness
Winding through depths
Of my very soul
Leaving me aloof
Abstract feelings
Leave me so utterly confused
And still I search for love

John Lewis, Jr.

There is a garden in my room.
 It is a plastic garden.
 Flowers of all colors, of one texture.

There are trees in my room.
 But they are dead.
 They just sit and say nothing, acting as furniture.

There are elephants in my room.
 Only their tusks.
 But they don't gore anything.
 They just sit on my piano in the shape
 of piano keys.

There are animals in my room.
 Two horses, a kangaroo, a mouse, a duck, a dog.
 Stuffed and lifeless.

There is light in my room.
 Clear and bright, but not thrilling like the sun.
 Just round with fine tungsten.

There are buildings in my room.
 And a beautiful skyline in my room.
 But I can't go into the buildings,
 or smell the fresh clean, air from the sky,
 because canvas just hangs on the wall.

There is cool fresh air in my room.
 But not a natural spring breeze,
 not coming from God's hands,
 but from a U.S.A. manufacturer of air conditioners.

There is a lamb in my room.
 Slightly discolored, he's a green lamb.
 He's lying on my floor.
 He feels warm on my feet.
 His name is carpet.

I sleep on a goose.
 But she can't fly, she's dead, too.
 I just have her feathers.

Adam and Eve are in my house.
 But they are a bit different.
 They lack curiosity.
 Their lives revolve around work for money
 to buy my garden, animals, light, air, geese,
 elephants, lamb and trees.
 But I could just walk outside and have that free,
 with my curiosity, with a free life,
 and my contentment.

Brenda Weinberg



Brenda



George

I've Got a Fan in my Closet

My sneakers are out the window (poor things).
 My belt hangs . . . on a hook (so sad).
 My radio is broke
 My rocker's not rocking
 And above all, a fan stares at me from
 inside my closet.

I wonder what I should do.
 I'm lying in my bed
 but I'm not rocking on my rocker.
 I'm leaning on my pillow
 but I'm not wearing my sneakers.
 My blanket's on top of me
 but my belt isn't around me.
 And my fan—my landlord's grimy fan
 just sits in the closet.

I could tie my fan onto my belt
 And hang it out of the window.
 Then I could throw my sneakers at it.
 But then what would I do with my rocker?
 I suppose I could strap myself into my rocker
 with my belt
 And throw the fan out of the window,
 But what in the world should I do
 with my sneakers?
 Oh, what a dilemma.
 I think I'll shut the closet.

George Veltri

When will I be happy?
 Even for a while.
 When will I get some good
 From living according to my ideals?
 Why are they called ideals
 If the striving for them
 Causes sadness and loneliness?
 Why not strive to be the lowest of men
 And have that warm feeling of mass company?
 I speak from experience
 I abandoned my ideals
 And lived with the lowest of men
 I was the lowest of men
 And for many years
 Lived with my eyes focused downward.

lying with the liars
 cheating with the cheats
 confiding in the liars
 sleeping with the cheats
 pushing for the buyers
 weeping with the criers
 flying with the flyers
 laughing with the criers
 dying with the diers

When I had no one to talk to
 I looked up again
 And saw I could not live
 So dissatisfied with myself
 But now I feel handicapped
 By my sense of values
 I can't be comfortable
 Among dishonest men
 So I go silently
 Along my chosen path

Waiting with the waiters
 Singing with the singers
 Planning with the planners
 Creating with the creators.

Leslie



Leslie



Hannelore

What'cha Gonna Say on Your Resume?

How you gonna explain seven years of your life?
 How you gonna explain seven years?
 Gonna say you've been in jail for something
 you didn't do?
 Gonna say you've been away?
 Doin' what? Doin' what?
 What'cha gonna say on your resume?
 What'cha gonna do when they come to you,
 Thinkin' you're seven years younger than you are?
 Gonna let them know?
 Or gonna let it go?
 What'cha gonna say on your resume?
 What'cha gonna do when it's not addin' up?
 What'cha gonna do?
 Gonna bring them up to date?
 Gonna tell it straight?
 What'cha gonna say on your resume?
 Been in Viet Nam?
 Or in Sing Sing?
 Or maybe in the looney bin?
 What'cha gonna say on your resume?
 And at what point are they gonna put that question?
 And at what turn are they gonna give the test?
 How you gonna explain,
 You were not insane?
 What'cha gonna say on your resume?
 Been peddlin' dope?
 Been livin' high?
 Joined the Mafia?
 Were a spy?
 What'cha gonna say on your resume?
 Been in Alaska?
 Or in Aruba?
 Or better still,
 In Castro's Cuba?
 What'cha gonna say on your resume?
 But you tell them the truth,
 And you say, listen here!
 I've loved someone for seven year.
 And that will be all you need to say,
 'Cause nobody's gonna believe it anyway.

Hannelore Hahn