

## From My Window

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I had hoped to make this a more scholarly piece than my last contribution to the *Forum*, but I am too stimulated by the view from my office window to attempt any such thing just now. The entire western wall of office No. 124 is a windowed arch, the third south from the center of Founders Hall, across the court. I reflect often on the years I raced past this particular arch on my way to class, never suspecting what it was to mean to me one day. It is safe to say that no comparable expanse of glass has ever done for me what this window has done. It has let me know more about university life, at least as it applies to Founders Hall, than either my student days or my earlier teaching years had ever permitted.

I remember a time when the Founders Hall courtyard grass was stepped on twice a year: once in the morning and once in the afternoon of Commencement Day. Students and faculty trooped in for the morning baccalaureate ceremony and again in the afternoon for the commencement exercises. We sat there worrying about the trampled grass while the college choir sang and authentic diplomas were handed to their rightful owners. The rest of the year the grass stood green and untroubled, and the fountain played for no one but the goldfish.

All that has changed. My window leaves no doubt of that. The activity does, of course, include fuchsia-seeking hummingbirds, frolicking student dogs and a seagull or two, but it is not the animal life that fascinates me the most. It is people, young and older but mostly younger, that intrigue me utterly, children of the 1970s and the budding 1980s. What a unique group. They are uninhibited. There are no hesitations at all, despite upper galleries on three sides and a precise row of faculty offices, all with windows like mine. I manage to get some work done in spite of what lies out there, but it is not without a certain amount of self-discipline. It would help if my peripheral vision were less good or if I turned my back to the window, but a window is what this office is all about, as one step

inside will reveal. To deny it is to question logic.

What is it I see? Would I blush to tell you all? You may be sure I would and, indeed, I must choose my terms carefully if this observation of university life is to find its way into the *Forum*. Let me put it this way: some of the gentlemen of my generation have been wrong about young ladies. The truth would seem to be that young ladies are as frankly fascinated by the opposite sex as the opposite sex has always been by them. If this has not been entirely clear in the past it is so now. The behavior I observe from my window is a combination of something both libidinous and maternal. The caresses of freshmen beards and sun-streaked locks, of shoulders, arms, knees, necks and ears are relentless and bestowed for the most part with entire trust and a complete conviction of natural right. The lads mostly let it happen either from sensual passivism or temporary bewilderment. They are markedly shyer in public than their girlfriends, or so it would seem in the Founders Hall courtyard in 1981.

Blond girls, blond boys, Chicano girls, Chicano boys, black boys, black girls, and various combinations of them all, pause between classes on the benches leading to the fountain or eat their lunches or play their flutes or rehearse their plays or practice for voice classes or smoke and make love. A handsome, rather diminutive Chicano couple, aware only of each other, chose a glorious moment last spring when the wisteria "tree" just opposite me was trailing its lavender blooms, to confirm an impending engagement in the most graphic tradition of old Mexico. I had witnessed similar scenes in the midst of boulevard traffic in Paris, but there was something extra here. How uninhibitedly these two adored each other between bites of lunch and sips of Tab. It was a bravura performance, improved by sincerity, which became the more remarkable for its calm conclusion as each gathered up books, jackets and luncheon remnants, preparatory to returning to class.

Not all of the embraces engage members of the opposite sex. At the peak of our Meditation season, five serious young men posed, Buddha-style, before me, closed their eyes and, for an incredible length of time, stirred not at all. I corrected a large number of papers while waiting them out. Finally, life returned to one of them. He arose with youthful flexibility, bowed and planted on each of the four remaining pairs of lips a warmly devoted kiss. Class commitments led me away before I could learn whether this was a ritual to be repeated by the others.

There is no patch of sunlit grass in the court too open for love, study, naps, daydreaming and the shedding of tears. Very few individuals take note of the professor watching them or of any other lurking eyes. They are students caught up in the mood of our lovely court, isolated briefly from classes and all that unprivate world which sometimes threatens more than they can bear. The very air of the court is relief from other air as a group of young Japanese students used to find at the conclusion of class. They spilled onto the grass as though it were salvation from an awesomely alien world. So reserved, so polite, so unquestioning in the classroom, in the court they exploded all over the cool green, hurling each other in every direction. Japanese grunts, groans, yelps and cries of delight crowded through my open window as though to challenge the supremacy of French in my brief space.

In quieter moments I am alone with hummingbirds, two or three varieties of which work the fuchsia blossoms at my window edge. Students love these blossoms, too, and parents of students and children of students and fuchsia fanciers, but mostly it is bees and hummingbirds that are bold enough to come that close to me. Dogs are fewer now as are little girls and boys swinging on a wisteria branch or dipping into the pool while waiting for father or mother to emerge from class. My most amazing friend was a limping seagull that landed at the same hour each morning. For days he came, looking cheerful enough, but apparently out

of the running for his usual fare because of his bad leg. He stumbled about in the grass, searching for snails or slugs or neglected worms. He stopped coming in time, sufficiently improved, I hope, by out atmosphere to return to a more usual routine.

There is word now of proposed changes to the Founders Hall courtyard, this court that, through the years, Pete Petrovitch, John Wynands and Bob Osborn have brought to perfection. These changes are well-intentioned, but they alarm those of us whose professional lives have almost entirely passed in the presence of this grass, this fountain, these plants, these arches. Only once in my nearly thirty years of gazing upon this court from one vantage point or another has violence been done to its beauty. One recent mid-summer I walked into my office to find the entire window blocked by a mountain of clay. Excavation for an admittedly useful elevator had created that mountain which endured for two extraordinarily depressing months. Light seeped onto my desk from around the edges of the mountain and for weeks I saw nothing of what might be going on at the fountain. A forty-year old camellia bush which reached nearly two stories and shed such blossoms as New England never dreamed of was destroyed in the process of planting that elevator.

Let's not threaten the deeply satisfying arrangements of our court. Should grass give way to cement, clustered benches, class facilities and new plantings to fit a new ecology? Youthful love and youthful antics aside, this court lends beauty to our campus, suggests peace, clarifies the air and gives strength to both body and soul. I will be retiring in a few years; for this time remaining let me enjoy my window, bemused by students and rejoiced in spirit because the Founders Hall court is there in all its present loveliness.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Those unaware of the recent controversy involving Founders Hall Courtyard and the University Space Committee are directed to the Spring, 1981, issue of *The Humboldt Stater* and the October 28 issue of *The Lumberjack*.