

UCSC - 1970-1979

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Spring And Autumn Alliance Unites Young And Old

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Some real understanding between area college students and local elderly persons is bound to blossom in the newly formed "Spring and Autumn Alliance."

The appealing title of the project was chosen by a group of UCSC students who say they find elderly people make fascinating friends.

Patty Nelson, 19, of Banning, a junior at Cowell College, is spark for the project, which, she says, "brings wisdom for us, and enthusiasm for them."

About 10 weeks ago, Patty mentioned to Provost Paige Smith that she thought there should be a course in gerontology. He suggested she take independent study on the subject, and said he would sponsor her.

Patty worked out her own reading lists, and read extensively on the aging. She

had a friend who was working with some people in Garfield Park Retirement Village, so she went there with him. And, she started making visits to the Casa Del Rey Retirement Hotel.

"I started listening to these people," she says, "It's incredible to hear people who were married in 1910—and lived through history!"

Someday, she wants to compile a book of philosophies of life and anecdotes from old people.

"I think its a neglected field," she says. "All the books are on children—and here is an incredible resource of knowledge and life histories that is being wasted."

Patty, and her friend, Lee Komito, also 19 and a Cowell College junior, told me they think many old people often are physically afraid of young people.

"One boy who works with

us is unbelievably peaceful — just what a mother would want in a son," Patty relates. "But he has a full beard and long hair and he's very tall — when the older people get to talking to him, they see him as a person.

"I have an elderly friend whom I have to call on the phone before I visit her — her husband won't let her open the door to any young person because he is afraid of them. They keep their door locked," Patty says.

Just visiting is the theme of the Alliance, and Patty and Lee are quick to say there are no political motives behind the project. They often talk about gardens, or the oldster's grandchildren.

"It takes no effort to listen to the old people," Lee says.

At one retirement residence Lee says he always seeks out one particular man whom he feels is a good friend now and with whom he enjoys conversation.

"At one place, a man showed me a couple of handwritten lists of what he didn't like about young people—and he wouldn't stay for our visit," Lee says, "Gradually, he moved into the group, and now we're good friends.

"People ask me often, 'Why do you throw fire bombs?' — I always answer, 'I don't throw fire bombs, and we oppose the throwing of fire bombs here, and in Vietnam,'" Patty says.

She feels that some radicals are naive when they talk "power to the people," when they don't have the sensitivity to work with people.

Patty and Lee agree that the generation gap is at its strongest between parents and children — and there can be more understanding between young and old people.

"Nineteen is not the wisest of ages," Patty says, "But it has enthusiasm, intelligence and curiosity."

A literature major, Patty says she would like to be an actress, and adds, realistically, "but I'll probably end up being a high school dramatics teacher!"

Lee, whose home is in Encino, is a history and anthropology major.

Some 50 students from all five UCSC colleges have participated in the Spring and Autumn Alliance, and have ambitious plans for an expanded program in the fall.

So far, they have made friends in many of the area residential and residential care units, and are referred to individuals by the Welfare Department.

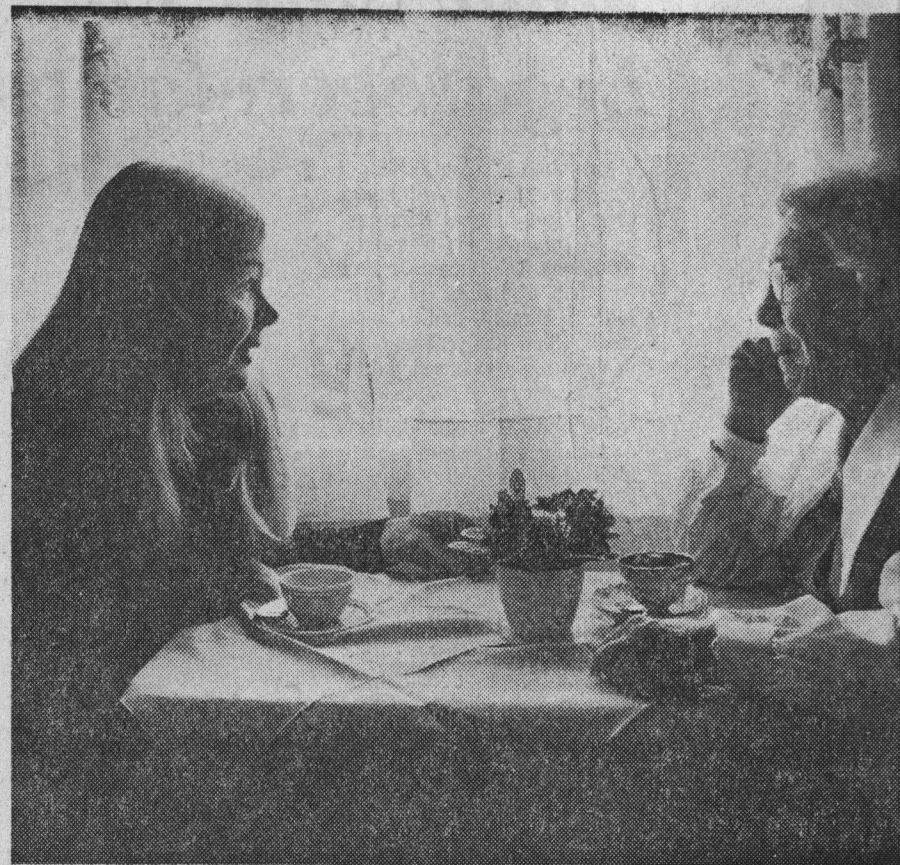
Besides visiting, the young people have arranged campus tours for their older friends, provided transportation, and taken them to dinners on College Nights.

Patty plans to keep the Alliance going this summer, since she will remain on campus.

"Any individuals who want to air complaints about students (I'm used to listening to that), or help with requests or campus tours, can call me at 429-4426, ro 423-8146," she says.

And Lee adds, with sincerity, "We're doing it because it's enjoyable."

So perhaps the spring of youth and the autumn of age can reconcile with the summer of middle age into a sort of trilogy of understanding. It seems worth a try.



Patty Nelson, UCSC junior, and Mrs. Beatrice Palmer, resident of Garfield Park Village, visit over cups of tea in Mrs. Palmer's cheerful apartment. The two are very good friends, and participate in the Spring and Autumn Alliance.