

Tree 'n Sea Living

Travel/Vacation _____ 10-11
Spotlight _____ 12-14
Television log _____ 15
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The weathered wonders of UCSC

By CAROLYN LEAL
Sentinel Living Editor

THE DESCRIPTION "Elders in Residence" creates a vision of ambulatory old folks dozing in the library, canes propped beside their chairs.

But the "elders" attending University of California at Santa Cruz under a special program are spry, witty and full of zest for learning and living. They spend their time hitting tennis balls, meditating with yoga, reading Victorian prose and learning Latin.

The 11 students, all over age 60, get a financial break on their three bedroom apartments at Oakes College and on fees charged for classes. (The first class is free and the next costs only \$15). In return, the elders are supposed to add the seasoning of wisdom and experience to the college environment. "It's a chance for people over 60 to actually live on campus. Older people have so much life experience, so much to contribute," says Admissions Counselor Ceiny Carney.

The idea of mixing old and young is in its fourth year and appears to be working well, except that budget constraints and demand for housing by

younger students may force the college to stop its housing subsidy, says Carney. "Future funding for the program is uncertain."

The elders pay between \$195 and \$225 each for their shared three bedroom apartments. Since only three elders occupy an apartment that would normally be rented to five younger students, the university gets less money. And it's this subsidy of roughly \$200 a month that's threatened, says Carney.

Because of the threat of having the roof over their heads snatched, the so-called "elders" are looking for a house in Santa Cruz. They're also exploring the possibility of obtaining a grant to keep the program going.

There appears to be no question in anyone's mind that the residence program is valuable and should continue.

Wrote one oldster in a school newsletter: "I may have given up knitting and the sitting. I do not bake, put down preserves or can string beans... However, maybe I can spin a yarn for posterity, narrating that grandmothers are real people, too, and not necessarily involved only with turkeys, Thanksgiving or otherwise."

This same woman notes she left "a bored, boring community of predictable, aging people who were either into investments or TV and booze" for a new beginning. "It seems my brain has been reawakened after a Rip Van Winkle sleep."

The current crop of elders gathered this week around a table at Oakes College to talk about the unique program, the only one of its type in the country, and about themselves.

Lenore Farrell, a slim blonde woman, says, "I was somebody's wife or mother most of my life. But I always remembered the stimulation and joy of school so I came back to get turned on again - recycled."

At first Lenore feared she wouldn't be accepted because of her age. But she says she has had "100 percent acceptance" from every student. "The biggest surprise is I've found I'm no longer isolated. Before, I'd watch TV and hear they're going to get a cure for cancer or they're going to work for peace and save the world. Meanwhile, I'd drink a cup of hot chocolate and go to bed. I was not part of anything."

All that's changed. "I'm learning that I can be

a part of the world and do something and make a difference. I've learned the value of protest - that we can change our lives."

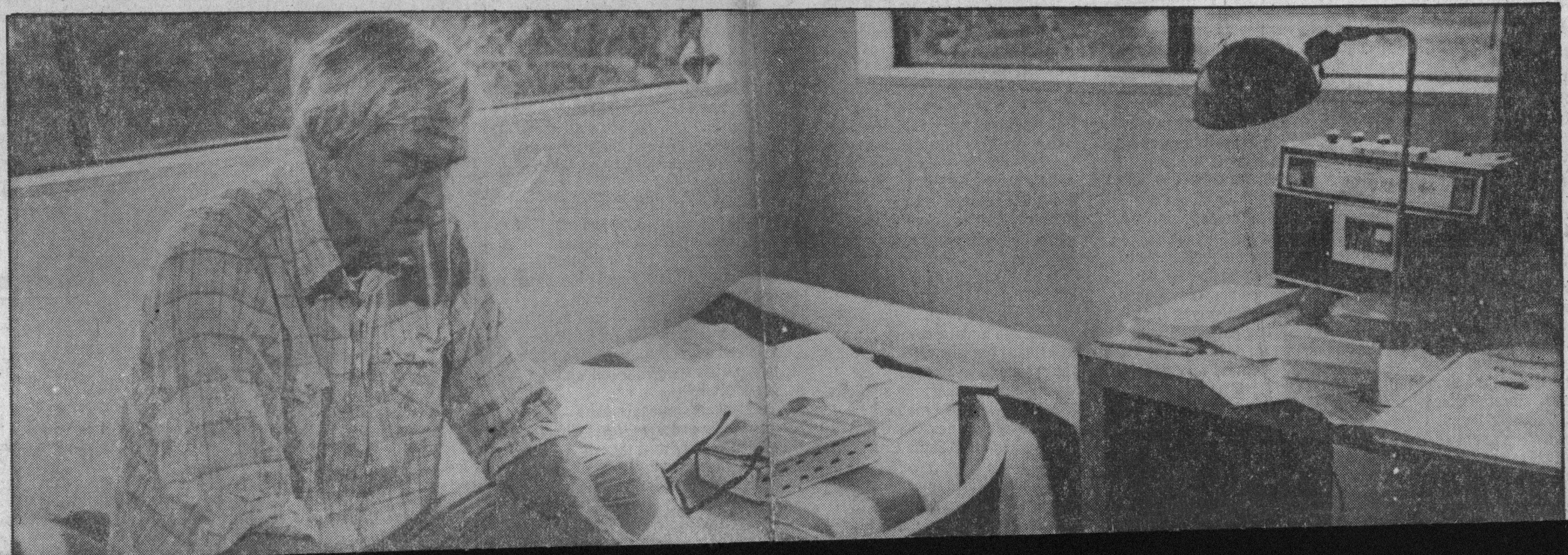
Like most of the elders, Lenore has an undergraduate degree. She was an administrative assistant at Hughes Aircraft, traveled by herself in a motor home across the U. S. for three years and lived with her daughter in Santa Cruz in a Tibetan Buddhist house.

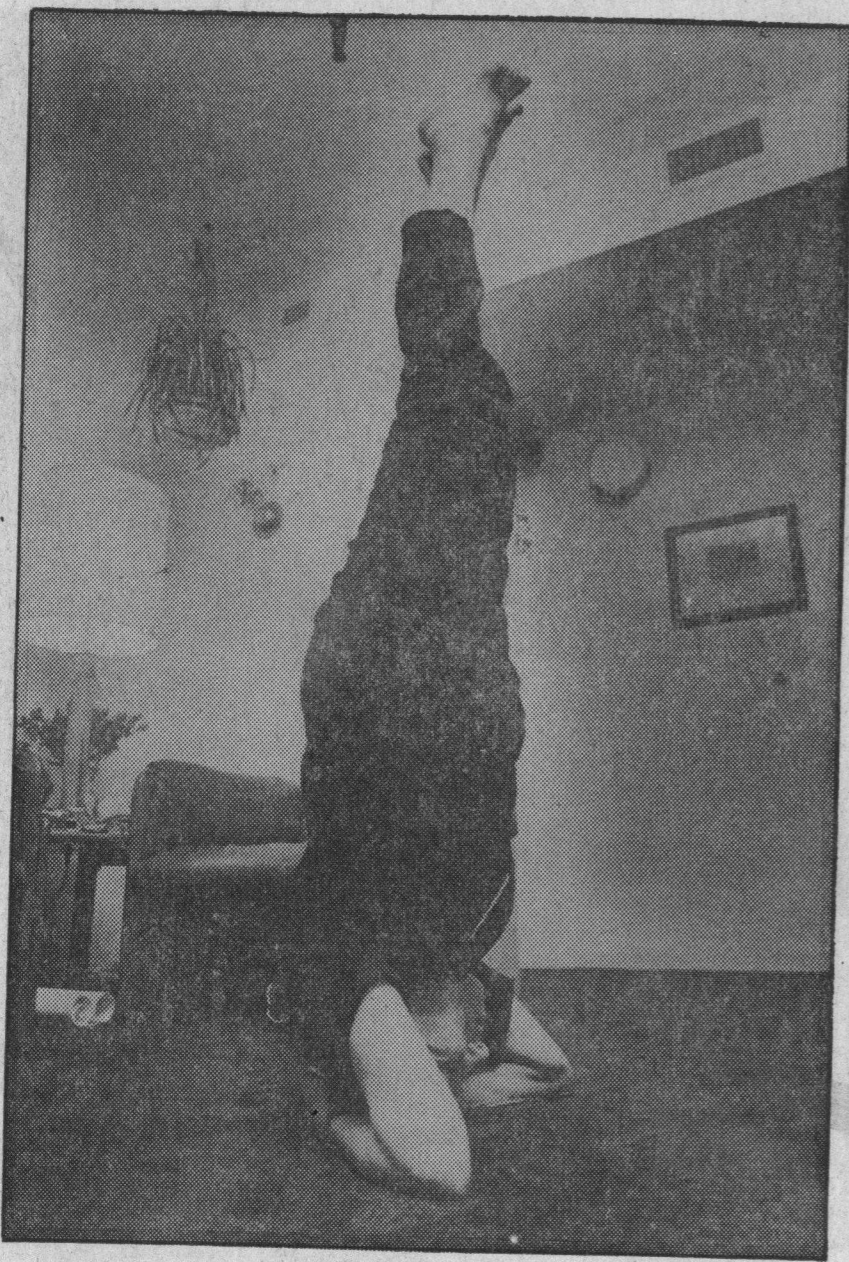
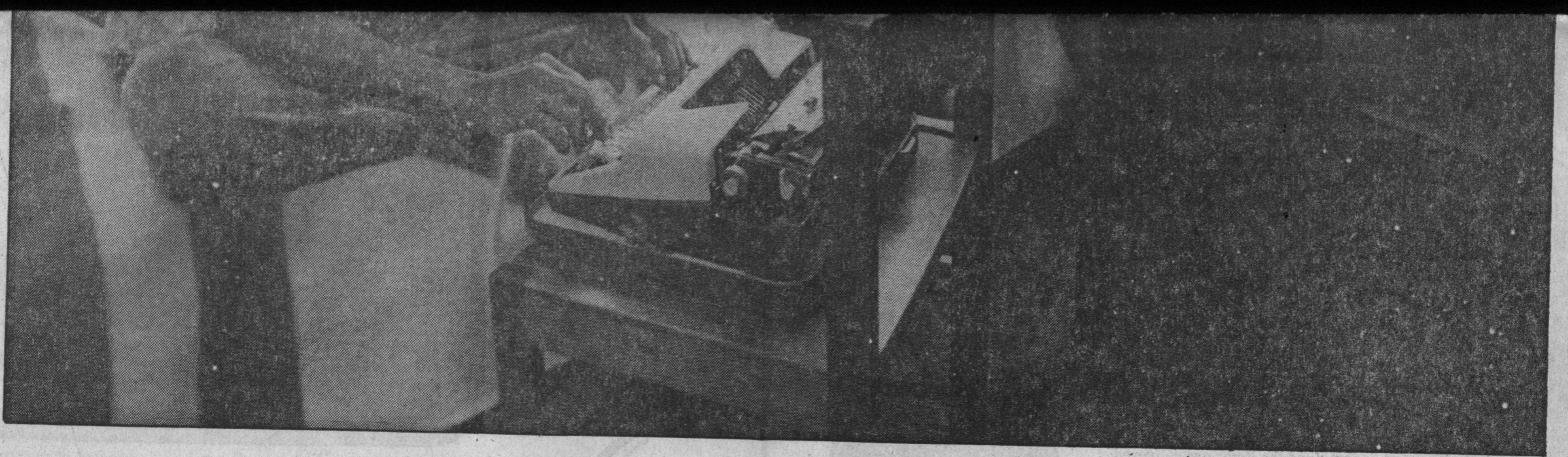
Even though she loves the university, Lenore admits to occasional attacks of anxiety. "My instructors keep telling me to stop trying to write a book and to take it one chapter at the time."

Missing from the group is Emily Lewis, a nurse practitioner, who is in Tunisia giving health care seminars. But the others describe with some pride how she rides her bike up the steep hill from town. "She just flies," says one with admiration.

The only married couple is Eleanor and Marco Meyer. She worked for years as the admissions officer for a Southern California Law School and he had two careers, as a film editor and a podiatrist. He's taking Latin and fencing, in

See page B7





Richard Heinisch (at top) works on a paper in his dorm room at UCSC's Oakes College. At left, Roseanne Shensa demonstrates a favorite posture. Enjoying a wooded walk are Lenore Farrell and Robert Rubin. Above, Ruth Chinn hits the books.

Photos by Bill Lovejoy

Weathered wonders

From page B1

addition to a required core course. She's studying art history.

"There are so many courses to be taken. It's like being a kid in a candy store," says Marco.

Virginia DeMarle, a former executive assistant at Stanford Research, says she's writing her memoirs for her grandchildren. "I've always wanted to write but it never came together before. Here, it has. It's changed my life."

Robert Rubin, who says he dropped out of the business world 18 years ago before it was popular to drop out, is reading Oscar Wilde and studying Victorian prose. "The ideas are still basic."

Richard Heinisch, described by members of the group as "a hunk" because of his gray-haired good looks, is a pilot and world traveler who has held a variety of occupations, from translating Japanese to leading tours.

"When I'm surrounded by younger people, I feel younger," he says. "I've tried the senior center, but couldn't see myself playing bridge with people my own age."

He likes the enthusiasm and idealism of the younger students. "They're less cynical. They feel there is a future."

Ruth Chinn, who retired after 40 years as a

statistician with the state of California, is relishing her first taste of college. Although she looked forward to retirement, when the time came, it looked empty to Ruth. "Work was my life. I thought, gee, what would I do? Others retired and spent their time shopping and having lunch." One Sunday, she read about the elders in residence program in the paper.

"I fell in love with it," she says. "My objective is to get a college degree if I can make it."

At first, Ruth says she didn't know if she could keep up with the reading and writing and she worried her vocabulary was lacking. But she's gained confidence from the encouragement of the people around her.

Now, she says, "I'm being educated for living, not educated for making a living. This quarter has opened up everything for me."

Roseanne Shensa is in her second year. She has a masters degree in counseling and served in the Peace Corps. She has taken courses in sculpture, oral history, yoga and Japanese.

The only thing the elders don't like about the program is their name. They suggest alternatives. "Weathered Wonders," says one. Other ideas: "Honored Wise. Elder Scholars. Old Folks at Oakes."

"If you come up with a better name, we'll take you out to dinner," says Virginia DeMarle.