

One woman's week

Sunday

Sundays are sacrosanct, though they've been violated all summer long by work. Today was spent in the reassuring ritual of bathing, hair-washing, and, *pace* the women's movement, shaving. I lay the blame for this latter squarely at the crotch of those hairless dollettes in the mags, and their look-no-pubes poses: creating insecurity but also, and perhaps worse, influencing our sense of aesthetics, so that I remain convinced that Ladies look Lovelier this way.

And then reading. Which is something I've only just discovered, in spite (or because?) of a degree in English. It's Doris Lessing who's turned me on. How well she understands the to shave or not to shave dilemma! And the contradictions inherent in what the French call the "female condition" (which I always think sounds like a disease). I've reached book two of her novel-sequence *Children of Violence*, and am thoroughly involved in *Martha Quest*, seduced by the easy sense-sating social whirl, while struggling with the discomfort of a nascent political consciousness. It's close to the bone.

Monday

Today, just in case you didn't know, is the Jewish Day of Atonement, a fact I wouldn't have divulged for all the matzoballs in Golders Green just a couple of years ago. So what has brought about this Pauline conversion? Chiefly, I suppose, it's the rent-a-heritage atmosphere of the last couple of years, which means that minorities are in, and anything ethnic goes. I'd have done better as a Navajo Indian or Welsh hill-farmer, of course, but failing that, Jewish and female will do.

Actually, I've rather come to value this day, with its unchanging pattern, and the feeling of calm and contemplation. And, ironically, it's guilt-free, since almost everything I should be doing I'm not allowed to.

Tuesday

After two weeks in Venice, and one sun-ray-lamping at home, back to work—always a sad reminder of one's total dispensability. A day largely of administrative matters and making arrangements, and an evening saved only from an orgy of self-pity by a flying visit plus friend to National Gallery Extension, grafted on to the back of the Gallery proper, spot-the-join style. I hated it. The hall is pure airport-lounge, and the rest so American: banners suspended from the ceiling proclaiming the theme *The Rival of Nature* (surely not art?) in that horrible pageanty way, softly throbbing air conditioning, alcoves numbered and labelled with Seminal Comments, and the paintings all looking as if they wanted to go straight back to the rooms whence they came.



ANNE KARPF

Anne Karpf is a BBC television researcher who went to Oxford after working in Woolworths

blanche so freely proffered, and all for the great god Telly.

In the afternoon a paediatrician popped his head round the door, hot from the High Court, to tell of the decision against sterilising the 11-year-old girl. Unspoken thought that there, but for the grace of Mrs Justice Heilbron, goes the Brave New World.

By six, the sterilisation story made it to the front page, vying for prominence on the hoardings with "My 16 year affair with Rank Chief." And I went round for dinner to friends squatting in Tolmer's Square—always with a slight feeling of envy, since there's a real community here. The irony is, I was here before them—making a programme on property speculation—but without thinking it was squattable. They also serve who only stand and make television programmes?

Thursday

Researching in hospital today. I'm always surprised that when people are ill, they're whisked off to join other ill people—surely the least likely thing to make them well again.

My feelings about medicine are ambiguous. Read *Medical Nemesis* by Ivan Illich in lonely hotel bedroom in December, yelping with agreement at his thesis that doctors and hospitals make you ill (and take away your capacity for self-help). But you don't watch all those years of Drs Kildare and Finlay for nothing. There still lurks somewhere in the recesses of my mind that image of the white-coated omnipotent ministering coated ministering angel.

Today we discussed abortion, though it's an age since I tried the let-me-convert-you number: if there are still people around who believe that allowing women to control their own fertility should be a debatable conclusion rather than a self-evident premise—I don't want to meet them. What's worrying is the number of people who feel that the fight against the James White Amendment is won. Far from it: the Select Committee may well be reconvened after it lapses at the end of October and the campaign of the Life/SPUC anti-abortion brigade is hotting up. Only last

Wednesday

Work proper started today: researching programme about doctor in East End, and to assuage slight apprehension that accompanies each new programme I made copious mental list of what I've to do. Was reminded of the job's attractions, as I legitimately indulged my excessive nosiness about people, without any of the limitations imposed by polite chat. Though I'm increasingly beset by twinges guilt at the emotional *carte*

week I read an advertisement of the most spurious kind, proclaiming that "feticide is homicide"—though my trusty dictionary produced nothing between *fetich* (sic) and *fetid*.

Evening: to David Hare's play *Teeth 'n' Smiles* at the Royal Court. Good and funny (except for the maudlin end), especially Antony Sher's very accurate portrayal of intense, tight-arsed Oxbridge type. Cor, did I know 'em!

Friday

Disaster day. Billows of smoke rising from car bonnet, red light comes on, temperature gauge inches its way to HOT. Nearest garage finds withering little fan-belt, directs me to furthest garage for a mend. Eventually, it's done. Suspecting a rip-off, I try a token quibble about high cost, hoping to embarrass them into honesty if I've been done (I never can tell). No such luck. To boot, the guy tells me my oil is dirty, as if it's an allusion to personal hygiene.

Would you believe, the per-