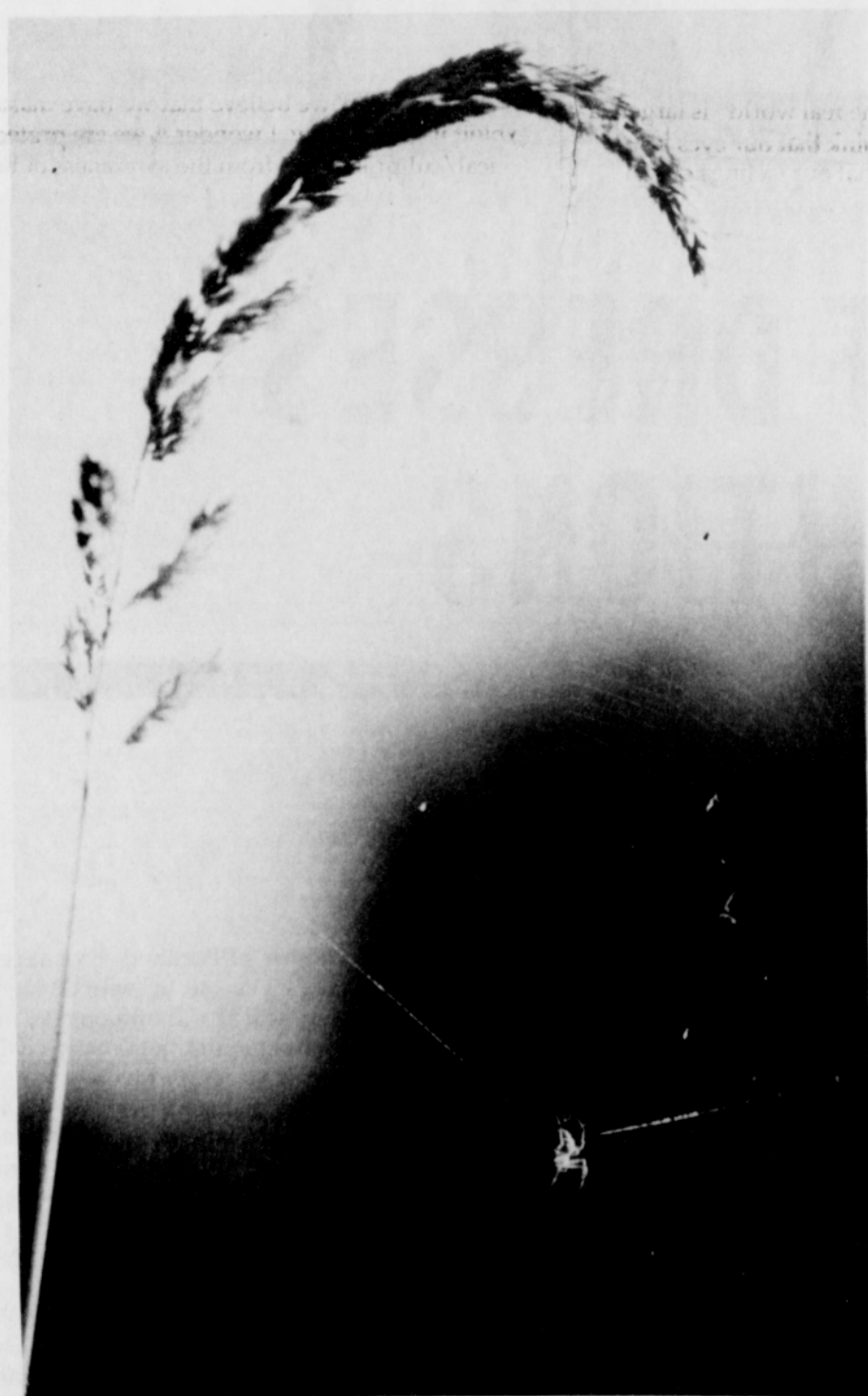


LIFE IN THE REAL WORLD



WORDS & PHOTOS BY JACK SCHARBACH



I think we just live. We pay our bills and we go to our jobs, we try not to get worked up about things we can't change, and accept life as it is, and we tell ourselves that's the way it's supposed to be. I try to resign myself and I think that I could pull it off were it not for occasional episodes when the usual perceptions drop away and another kind of reality racks into focus. And then my usual feelings are blown away and I am left wondering.

I find myself going to work and coming home, and going to work and coming home, and every once in a while I get a panicky feeling that I am suppressing something. It's not always clear what is important, but I often feel that something important is missing.

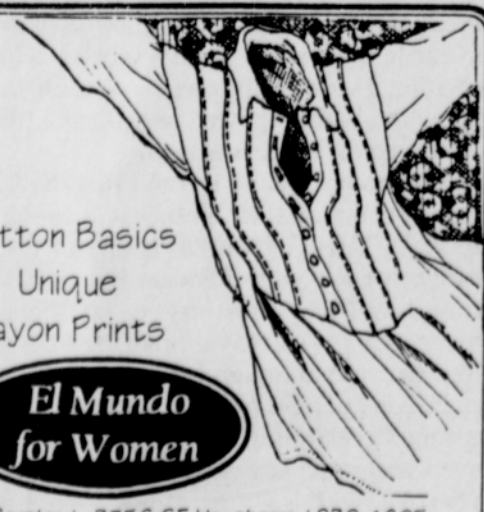
Often I go home after work and feel uneasy. I don't feel like going out to take pictures, go for a walk, or any of the things I usually enjoy. I have to fight off a mild depression. Again, it is as though something is calling, and will not be put off. Something has killed the desire to act. And sometimes I will be writing and have a glass of wine, and then two, and then the haunting feeling has been subdued, but the highlights have lost their lustre, it becomes hard to stay awake.

An old friend called this morning and I think that is one of the things that led me to this frame of mind. She has gone through the kinds of disappointment that too often read like a litany of our times: a long, boring and abusive marriage, a son with an addiction for drugs and smoldering anger, apprehensions about getting old and going to fat, but mostly the sad loss of feeling alive. I remembered the feeling of hope and adventure we once shared. I remembered teachers, authors, and friends who managed to kick aside my mental clutter and make room for something delightful and unfolding. And then I remembered what it was to have the clear, sharp, pungent experience of new hope — the crisp impressions that are characteristic of early childhood, when we were not reading into every perception our vested interest in what we assume to be real and important.

I see people doing things. I think about all the projects that people take on: restoring boats, cars, endlessly remodeling houses; searching for the "right" relationship, for novelty, mechanized recreation, manufactured fun, preconceived romance, adventure by the numbers; shopping, acting like men, acting like women, having prescribed spontaneity and mail-order lifestyles, subscribing to the culture of TV. Looked at from one perspective, it's living; from another, it's pretending to live. We are always looking, trying to recapture some of that sharpness, telling ourselves it doesn't get much better than this, but lacking the imagination to see alternatives.



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