

BACK TO THE CITY

There's A New World To Explore Along The

URBAN FRONTIER

"We can have neighborhoods that raise much of their own food by recycling streets into gardens and returning organic wastes to soil productivity for food and fiber. We can restructure our housing and transportation to reduce the need for fossil fuels by 90 percent. . ."

--Sim Van der Ryn, California State Architect

by Gar Smith

Thirty years ago there was a "back to the land" movement in America as people fled to the pastoral comforts of the suburbs. But by the 1960s the idyllic image had been shattered and backyard barbeques became just one more source of air pollution. Today America's sprawling metropolises are at a crisis-point, with the East's major urban centers already beginning to self-destruct. In California, however, history is turning in another direction.

A guiding force behind the West's new urban designs is California State Architect Sim Van der Ryn. A one-time UC architecture professor who liked to pack his students off into the woods on spontaneous encampments to become "outlaw builders," Van der Ryn has become a visionary state official. Like his boss Jerry Brown, Van der

Ryn can comfortably drop a Zen koan into the midst of a hard-headed technical discussion, and like the governor, Van der Ryn has ideals but no illusions.

"For the first time in several generations," the state architect recently observed, "the culture has no powerful shared image of the future. Materialism and technology do not offer a vision."

"What we need," Van der Ryn argues, "is a lens to focus what we know in order to create some working examples which in their fully developed form can be whole systems of such mythic and logical elegance that they will replicate themselves."

If it's a lens that is needed, the Bay Area provides a major focal point for viewing the transformation of urban life. The Integral Urban House at 1516 Fifth Street in Berkeley was one of the pioneer undertakings of Van der Ryn's Farallones Institute. It continues to serve as a working example of solar-powered, waste-recycling self-sufficiency.

Elsewhere around the Bay, cities and groups of urban activists alike are turning abandoned lots into flowering gardens and inventing technologies. And increasingly, truck stores, farmers markets and food conspiracies are getting chemical-free produce from surrounding farmlands to consumers.

And home gardening, too, is on the increase.

According to syndicated columnist Sylvia Porter, if you are not now tending a garden of some sort, you are in the minority! Community gardens are now organized and producing in

towns from Santa Cruz to Santa Rosa (see Resource List).

With news accounts of pesticides in produce, sawdust-filled "fiber" breads and new plans to permit cement-dust as an additive in cattle feed, there are more reasons than ever to con-

sider growing at least some of your own food. And it's economical -- according to the New York Times a family of four can save more than \$300 a year raising its own vegetables.

This week the Barb takes a **Continued on page 6**



Feeding the chickens down on the farm -- at 4th & Harrison, Berkeley

Gardeners' Group Takes Root

Community gardeners throughout California met this past January to form the first state-wide community gardening organization. The non-profit California Council for Community Gardening (CCCCG) will serve "as a coordinating and networking agent for participating organizations," according to an announcement in the Berkeley Ecology Center Newsletter.

The Office of Appropriate Technology has given its support to the Council. Eight committees have been created to handle education, resource exchange, social services, legislation action, public relations, publications, research and ways and means. Bay Area activists are

well-represented on this first Council Board of Directors. They include: Mark Malony of Walnut Creek's Eco-House, Bruce Haldane of the Organic Farmers of Berkeley, Art Carranza of the Council on Aging in Santa Clara County, Charles Wilson of the "Back Forty Acres" in East Palo Alto, and Beverly Rudolph, an urban agricultural designer from Los Altos Hills.

John Dotter, community garden facilitator for San Jose's Parks and Recreation Department, was appointed executive secretary of CCCC. For further information watch for the next Berkeley Ecology Center Newsletter or call John Dotter at (408) 277-4661.

--Gar Smith

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HOMESTEADING

Beneath The Skyscrapers

ITY



One of the houses rehabilitated under Oakland's homestead program.

Dave Patrick

by Bill Wallace

In an imaginative attempt to merge the urban renewal programs of the Sixties with the current recycling rage and nascent "back-to-the-cities" movement, the City of Oakland and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have teamed up to create the first urban homesteading program in California.

The program, which was created in 1975, allows families to take possession of run down and abandoned homes for a nominal \$1 fee plus closing costs. The only condition is that the homesteaders rehabilitate the house in accordance with city health and safety codes and live in it for at least five years.

The program was patterned on the rural homesteading programs of the Old West, under which thousands of farmers moved onto government-owned land and were given the property

by virtue of having lived on and developed it.

Here's how the Oakland program works: eligible families sign up for the program; when a house becomes available through HUD repossession, those prospective homesteaders interested in it are allowed to examine it. If they decide they like the home, they put in an application, and the family which gets the house is decided by lottery.

To be eligible for the program, the head of the family must be eighteen years of age or older, a U.S. citizen or resi-

dent alien, and able to pay the rehabilitation costs on the property. In addition, the applicant must not be an employee of the city of Oakland and must own no other real property.

The houses eligible for homesteading are mostly located in East Oakland in the part of the city bounded on the North and South by 35th Avenue and Durant Avenue, and on the East and

West by San Leandro Avenue and MacArthur Boulevard.

As anyone who has driven through that area knows, HUD owns a vast amount of repossessed housing there: hundreds of homes acquired by the government during the urban renewal movement of the Sixties sit boarded up in various districts. The houses are basically sound -- though many need extensive repairs and renovation -- and those urban homesteaders who have participated in the program so far seem pleased with

Continued on page 8

-- Urban Gardening

Continued from page 5
look at some of the organizations that are working to make urban America liveable again.

Organic Farmers of Berkeley

"Most of us are urban people who dream of being farmers," says Kathy, her red hair flying as she shoulders a flat filled with soil.

Kathy and Harvey are two of nine CETA employees working to transform a former steel-mill site in West Berkeley into an eight acre non-profit community farm. The property, located adjacent to the Berkeley Youth Hostel at Fourth and Harrison, is leased from the University of California for a token \$10 a month. Even with a growing population of chickens, geese and rabbits, however, the "farm" is still in a state known as "hard-scrabble."

"We'll save the willows and the scotch broom," Harvey says gesturing north toward a small stand of trees. Nearby, Cordones Creek --cemented over

and dank with rat poison-- runs through the land.

Organic Farmers of Berkeley (OFB) has pioneered nine community gardens in West and South Berkeley neighborhoods. The group is run collectively with "brigade leaders" who direct work parties at tasks and locations agreed upon at the twice-monthly morning meetings (10 a.m. at the farm, all welcome).

The West Berkeley farm is the only OFB site to include livestock along with herb gardens and vegetable crops. "Egg production is up," Kathy beamed showing off a multicolored collection of blue, tan, pink and yellow eggs. Fifty over the weekend and 37 the day before, according to entries in the books.

Nearby OFB accountant Vigi Molfino is dealing with books of a different kind. "It'll put a noose around your neck," Vigi says of the government funds and the reporting requirements that come with it. "But we need it." The city gives the OFB \$95 a month, "for consumable supplies--feed, seed, gas, office supplies," Molfino sighs. "That doesn't go very far."

The farm will need lots of donations and volunteers if it is to succeed. Meanwhile organic farm veteran Bruce Haldane is busy with plans to run several long pipes through the farm's sweating bins of decomposing waste and hook up a water-flow to a huge donated water tank. If everything works out Berkeley will have the world's first compost-powered hot tub!

Tom's Market

"Why do people shop here?" The manager of Tom's Market, an open-air truck store at the corner of Grove and Dwight Way in Berkeley, ponders the question as a winter storm drops rain on customers and produce alike. "It's a combination of the charm of shopping out of doors and the prices," he says. "Take those mushrooms. They cost \$1.89 in the supermarket. Here they're \$1.05."

Why are prices so cheap? The friendly fellow behind the plywood counter at Tom's Market has two answers. First there are the occasional windfalls from "produce bootleggers" who show up with loads of peaches or cherries, and then there's the incredibly low overhead. "Our only overhead," he says, grinning up into the eye of a Pacific cold front, "is the open sky."

This open-air produce market is one of the oldest in Berkeley and it has now become the first to remain open all year. Originally commissioned as "Jessica's Movable Feast" it was sold two years ago to Tom and friends. During the winter a staff of nine runs the shop, while in the summer season ("when prices will

average 25-30% below the supermarkets") the staff will nearly double.

Its not all peaches and cranberries, however. A bunch of bananas from Tom's cost twice what they were going for at the Co-op. Sic Semper Utopia.

Integral Neighborhoods

"The magic of dreams is that they move us but seldom take their whole form in reality. When they do it is time to dream some more." Those are the words of Sim Van der Ryn in the forward to the annual report of the Farallones Institute.

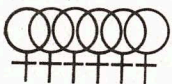
In 1973 the Institute opened the Integral Urban House in West Berkeley in an attempt to demonstrate that you didn't have to be a dreamer to live "in an ecologically sane" manner in the cities. Since it opened, 50,000 visitors have walked through the two-story home, learning how to use the sun's heat, how to recycle waste, how to raise fish, chickens, rabbits and fruits in one well-planned backyard.

Now the plan is to take the demonstration up a quantum leap. "We are calling," says David Musnick, "for neighborhood development with an integral systems approach." On March 7 Musnick, representing the Integral Neighborhood Project, made a dramatic offer to the Berkeley City Council: Provide two blocks of vacant land in the West Berkeley Industrial Park area and a coalition of neighborhood people, professional architects and designers (including members of the Integral House and the Arcoogy Circle, an urban environmental group) would attempt to develop the site into "a community in which the various parts and systems (ecological, economic, architectural, social and political) are consciously connected...."

It would be a radically different neighborhood with single family homes and apartment units clustered around shared open spaces. Community gardens, workshops, recreation facilities would encourage both self-reliance and community interdependence.

We expect that people would very much enjoy living in such a neighborhood," Musnick says. "They would be more in charge of their own living environment...a sense of place and community would prevail."

If the area can be rezoned and if the necessary federal and state grants can be arranged, a Community Development Corporation could begin garnering the low income housing financing and the appropriate technologies to create this next step on the road to Ecotopia -- "a self-reliant and socially cohesive urban neighborhood."



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*Taught by Clare Cooper Marcus, of U.C. Berkeley

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BACK

GUIDE To Greening Your Block

Compiled by Gar Smith

Want to try your hand at "greening" your part of the Bay Area? These are some of the folks to contact to get involved in community gardens or to get assistance (much of it free) for raising crops and livestock in your own backyard:

BERKELEY:

Berkeley Parks Department, 1835 Allston Way, 644-6544 (Doug Perry). Free "garden plot" lots available. Also free gardening expertise. The city is also operating a "compost trust" at the Berkeley dump near the Marina--i.e. people who leave organic rubbish to be composted can return and claim a share of the resulting "good earth."

Berkeley Ecology Center, 2179 Allston Way (soon to be relocated at 2701 College), 548-2220. Bookstore, library, helpful pamphlets and bulletin boards for swapping plants, land, solar skills. (One recent card announced: "Want to borrow your sheep for two days in exchange for bathing.")

Organic Farmers of Berkeley, 525-8239 (Bruce Haldane). Has land; will till. A wealth of first hand experience. Needs volunteers.

UC Oxford Tract, Oxford and Virginia Streets. Two city blocks under cultivation courtesy of university student volunteers. Open to the public during weekends. A good place to learn what crops, animals (and insects) thrive in the Bay Area.

Good Earth Organization, 525-8602 (Bob Switzer).

Integral Urban House, 1516 Fifth Street, 525-1150. A combined vision of the future and the past. And it works! Solar heated and self-contained, this refurbished New Age Victorian recycles nearly everything, turning dishwater into irrigation, waste into compost (check out the Clivus Multrum composting privy in the basement!), grains into animal feed, animals into entrees and so on. A windmill pumps water through a backyard aquaculture pond as well--algae, crayfish, perch and Sacramento blackfish provide a tasty alternative to rabbit and chicken stew. Books, classes and tours (guided tours Saturdays from 1-5 p.m.).

People's Park Project, Dwight and Benvenue. Despite Ronald Reagan, the regents, the National Guard and the "\$3-million fence," People's Park lives. The property that once housed low-cost community housing was razed by the university in an attempt to weed out "radicals" in the mid-Sixties. The result was a vast, muddy eyesore which became an even uglier ad hoc parking lot. The community turned the abandoned land into a garden in a people's action which had repercussions worldwide.

One morning the UC Regents sent in tractors to crush the trees and erect an expensive fence to keep the community off the property. A march to "re-take the park" resulted in bloodshed when Alameda sheriff's deputies opened fire. One young man died, an artist was blinded by buckshot and scores were wounded by police bullets.

Today the park is once again in the care of the neighborhood

people. A "native plant demonstration garden," replicating the original range of East Bay flora, is maintained by volunteers.

The ultimate fate of People's Park is still up in the air. The regents would like to build a huge recreation building on the open space. The Berkeley City Council may be able to stop this with enough community support. Call David Axelrod for an update at 654-4128.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY:

Upsprout Community Gardens Project, 1142 Thompson Street, Martinez, 372-2287.

OAKLAND:

Oakland Inner-City Gardening Program (The Trust for Public Land, San Francisco, 495-4014). **59th Street Community Garden**, North Oakland District Council, 6149 Shattuck Avenue.

RICHMOND:

Richmond Community Garden Project, Southside Community Center, 745 South 14th Street 236-0543.

MARIN:

Community Gardens of Marin, 1010 "B" Street, Room 421, San Rafael.

SAN FRANCISCO:

San Francisco Community Garden Project, 375 Laguna Honda Blvd, 566-1340. Public Works Department provides seeds, lots, compost and even a greenhouse.

Northern California Land Trust, 330 Ellis Street, Room 504, 771-5969. Part of a nationwide, eight-year-old program to form trusts for the protection of farming lands. The local chapter operates the New Life Farm in Acampo, is putting together plans for an integral agrarian community in Sebastopol and works as a contact for other small alternative farms such as "Freedom Farm" and "Scratch Patch." Educational and activist. Donations and volunteers welcomed.

Earthwork, Center for Land and Food, 1499 Potrero Avenue, 648-2094. Publishes information to encourage cooperative production and distribution of food and analyzes the economic and political issues surrounding current land-food policies. Meeting space, community action projects, educational materials, library.

San Francisco Ecology Center, 13 Columbus Avenue, 391-6307.

People's Food System, 3030 20th Street, 285-8817. A newsletter collective, publishes the monthly resource-sheet "Turn-over."

SAN JOSE:

Food Bank, 1460 Koll Circle, 998-3020.

First Step Project, San Jose State (408) 277-2189.

Mi Tierra, Community Garden Program, 801 N. First Street, (408) 923-7381.

PALO ALTO:

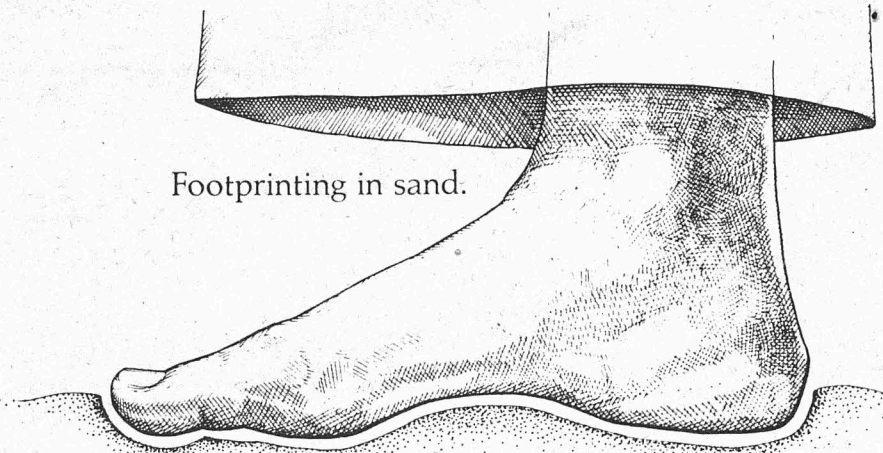
The Growth Group, 1671 Bay Road, East Palo Alto, 322-1818.

Info Center Farm Project, Nairobi Shopping Center, 1671 Bay Road, East Palo Alto, 322-1818.

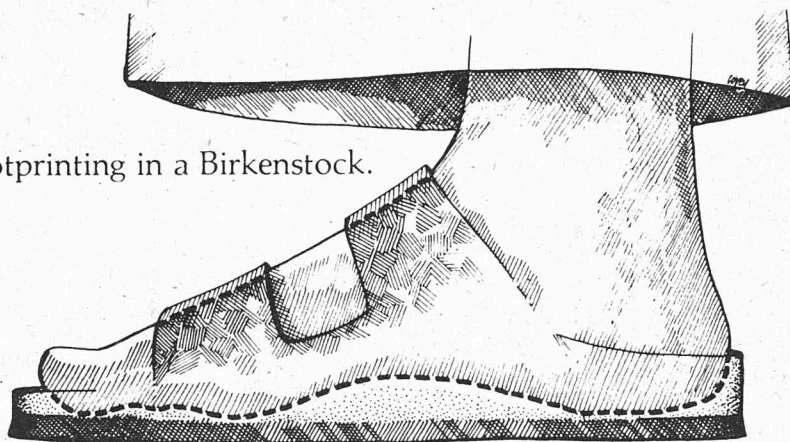
Common Ground (Stanford Industrial Park), Ecology Action of the Mid-Peninsula, 2225 El Camino Real, 328-6752.

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Stride Rite Bootery
161 Eastridge Center

BACK TO THE CITY

- Urban Homestead

Continued from page 6
their new homes.

"We've awarded 63 urban homestead houses so far under the program," Adrian Brian, the woman in charge of Oakland's program, told the Barb. "It's been extremely popular. Why, in the first few months the program was in existence we had between 1500-2000 applicants sign up for it."

"So far most of the people are satisfied. Of course, most of them are first-time homeowners so they are happy just to get their own home. Needless to say, they are certainly glad to get a home for only the price of repairs!"

Homesteaders lucky enough to snag a house through the program pay only the closing costs for acquiring the home -- be-

tween \$200 and \$500 -- plus the \$1 homestead fee. The city also offers to help them obtain standard bank loans or low interest financing if bank funds aren't available.

"There's been nobody who backed out of the program yet who actually has been able to get into a house," Brian told the Barb, "although there have been a few people who withdrew from the program before getting a house -- mostly for personal reasons."

Unlike their forerunners in the old frontier days, Oakland's urban homesteaders don't face the brave new world of property ownership alone: Oakland's Community Development Department Housing Counseling

Services Division, offers classes in searching for a home, financing it once you find it, home improvement and maintenance and the legal responsibilities and liabilities you face as a homeowner.

If they run into serious problems, the city can aid homesteaders with counseling in such areas as avoiding repossession, dealing with mortgages and how to handle loans.

If you are interested in finding out more about urban homesteading or any of Oakland's other housing services, contact the Housing Counseling Services office at 577 14th Street, Oakland (834-2010), between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. daily.

by Jayson Q. Wechter

It would be something to tell her husband when she got home, the woman on the sidewalk thought. Even in San Francisco, you don't usually see this sort of thing.

"Over on Franklin Street, while I was coming back from the market," she would say, "there was this man climbing up a wall. Right on the bricks. Straight up, like a human fly!"

He wasn't a human fly though. He was a builderer.

Builderers are city-bound rock climbers who scramble up urban edifices because there just aren't any mountains nearby. They practice the complex, often acrobatic moves -- which others use to scale thousand-foot mountain peaks -- on the walls of supermarkets, office buildings and apartment houses in the Bay Area.

Their pastime is an old one, going back at least to the turn of the century, when Jeffrey Winthrop Young, a student climber at England's Trinity College who later became one of Britain's most famous mountaineers, wrote two underground pamphlets, *Wall and Roof Climbing* and *A Climber's Guide to Trinity*.

Thirty years later, lads at Cambridge followed in his footsteps, scaling the Gothic, ivy-covered towers of academia in the dead of night, since detection usually resulted in being "sent down" or expelled. Their exploits produced another volume -- *The Night Climbers of Cambridge* -- which inspired students at Stanford and UC Berkeley to scale buildings there 10 or 20 years later. Nick Clinch, executive director of the Sierra Club Foundation and a member of Stanford's Alpine Club in the early Fifties, can recall nighttime assaults on the campus chapel and other buildings, with teams of climbers sneaking through stream tunnels to avoid detection by police patrols.

Author and photographer Galen Rowell is credited with climbing the Campanile at UC Berkeley, although he denies the feat. The UC stadium, library and Greek Theatre were frequent targets of builderers in the late Fifties, he says, and recalls that someone -- not him -- did climb out onto the Campanile to paint Mickey Mouse on its clockface.

Today's builderers are less interested in pranks, however. They're dedicated, with almost zen-like devotion, to the exacting, rigorous ritual of climbing.

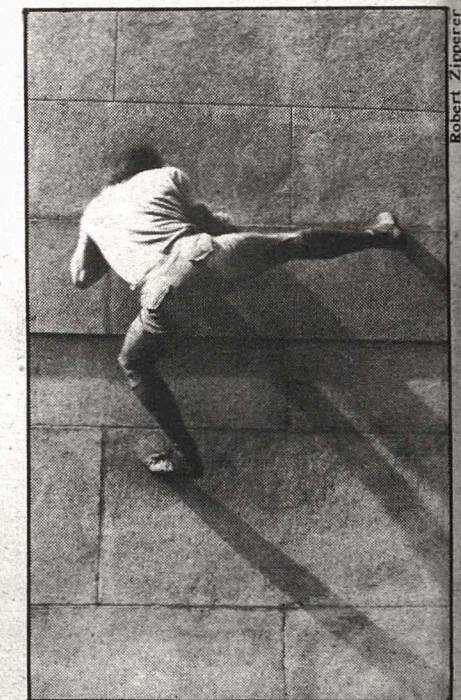
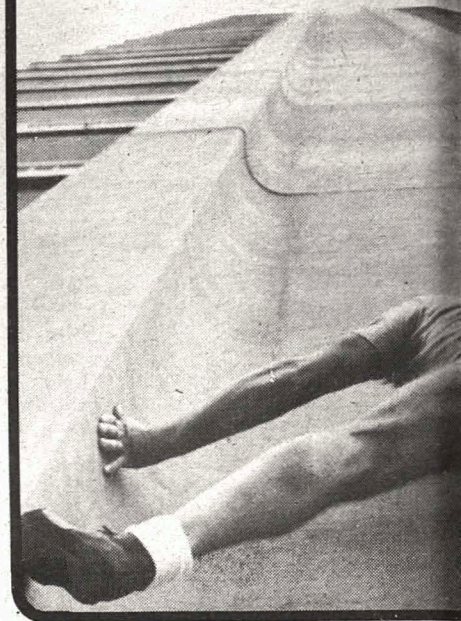
Almost all builderers have been scaling rocks for years in a style called free climbing, which eschews all artificial aids (though safety ropes are used), relying entirely on the climber's strength and stamina to take him where he wants to go.

Nearly every day on the Berkeley and Stanford campuses and even in downtown San Francisco, builderers are scrambling up, down and sideways on surfaces that seem to offer hardly a fingerhold. Yet they manage to cling -- precariously it seems -- with their limbs crooked, wedged and contorted, their faces cast in profound concentration, entirely oblivious to the urban bustle 10 or 20 feet below.

Difficulty, rather than height, is their chief concern, and they constantly seek new "problems" -- as these urban ascents are called -- to challenge their climbing ingenuity. At Stanford University, these generally take the form of long, often difficult transverses on the roughly hewn sandstone block buildings. The routes bear names like "Finger Fryer," "Nutscratcher" and "Stairway to Heaven," and many a surprised student exits a doorway to find a builderer perched on the wall just a few feet above.

The Stanford Alpine Club, which once published a guide to campus ascents but had been dormant since the early Seven-

Straight Like HUMAN FLY



"There's a sense of beauty to holding your own life in your hands."

ties, was resurrected last year by Jim Collins, an applied math major and rockclimber from Colorado. It now has 60 members, 10 of whom builder.

Collins is a tall, lithe, healthy-looking kid who's been scaling rocks since he was 13, when his step-father made him take a climbing course "because he thought I was spending too much time on my books and needed to see what the real world was all about." Now, seven years later, he runs his own climbing school in Boulder and wants to scale everything he sees.

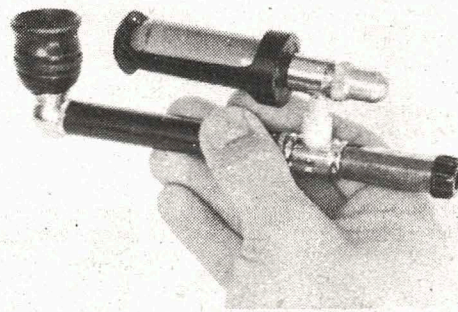
"During my freshman year I worked very hard and missed climbing. I got sick of too much work and too little exercise, and simply decided to start climbing buildings," he said one afternoon just before his daily workout on the walls.

Stripping down to a t-shirt and shorts, and chalking up his hands, he mounts a wall called "Torture Chamber," going no higher than three feet (a university imposed limit to avoid liability in case of falls) and moving slowly, gracefully, arching his arm up high to grasp a slight, barely visible handhold, swings his leg wide and rocks slowly, back and forth; until he's certain of his balance. Then he shifts his weight.

"The challenge in this comes in two things," Collins explains, "Figuring out where and how to move, and in being able to make that move. I've got to know where to move my foot, and I've got to do it smoothly. Rhythm is all important."

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