

# A Case of Knowing Yourself: An Interview With Carol Stubbs

Late last spring Phoenix members Coreen Gilligan and Patricia Urquhart spent a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon talking with Toronto painter and writer Carol Stubbs. The following is an edited but still informal version of their conversation.

**CAR.:** What happened . . . I was married when I just turned 17, and by the time I was 21, I had four children. I'd gone to university *and* had my fourth child. I spent two years there and found the load of having four kids . . . Well, it's self-explanatory because I was pretty worn out, I was pretty tired, I wasn't well, and then I had a miscarriage while at school. Stupid me, I went right back to school after the miscarriage! I collapsed—that was about it.

So I landed in a psychiatric ward where I was given about 86 shock treatments within three months. I was given regressive therapy which put me back to the level of a five or six-year-old. Sometimes I had three shock treatments a day. And then, I really didn't feel the shock treatments did me any good. My memory was gone, actually for about a good year of my life. During that period I don't remember having one shock treatment.

**PAT.:** Did the "regressive therapy" mean that they were giving you so much shock that it made you incapable of functioning at anything more than a very elementary level?

**CAR.:** Yes, that was the method of doing it. I know I was on medication, too, but that's what I understand was the main method of doing it. They certainly did get me to a very basic level, too: My mother came to see me after awhile, and she found me sitting on my bed sucking my thumb. I said, "Hel-l-o, Ma-ma!" Later she told me that she'd just walked out into the corridor and cried, wondering what she'd done wrong.

**COR.:** There wasn't interaction with the psychiatrist, sitting down and talking about the kinds of things in your life?

**CAR.:** Well, they must have talked with me. Like I said, my memory left me at that time, and I have no recollection of that period in the hospital. All I know is that I woke up one day and said to the nurse, "Oh, I've been here a long time. My husband's going to be mad at me." And she started to laugh because I was feeling guilty that my husband was wondering where I was. Something told me it was a long time.

I lost my memory for that whole period—the time in the hospital and also the time just before—about a year and a half altogether, I guess. For example, I don't remember moving to the place we were at when I went to the hospital; to this day I can't remember anything about that place, or how we got there, or when—even though I've seen the place since, and seen pictures of it. I just can't remember.

And once I was allowed to go home to visit—it was Christmas so I got to come just for dinner. I walked in and I saw these four little boys and I said, "My, what lovely boys! Whose boys are they?" They were my own boys and I didn't even know them, you see.

**COR.:** You didn't have any memory of how you got in the hospital either?

**CAR.:** No—I was told how I got there. I'd come home from school one day, and I was very upset. Apparently, I told my husband there were birds in the house, and I was very panicky about these birds being in the house. And he had told me

there were no birds in the house. Then I just sort of fell to pieces, and I got on the phone—this is what I was told—I got on the phone and said to my very good friend, "Maureen, you better come over and take me to my doctor, because I'm having a nervous breakdown." So she came over and took me to the doctor. He put me to sleep and sent me in an ambulance.

**PAT.:** Neither you nor your husband knew that you were going to be put on this regression therapy?

**CAR.:** No. I guess they discussed it with my husband, but like me he was really quite ignorant of the psychiatry and accepted everything. I have since asked him who gave permission for me to have all those shock treatments, and he said he doesn't know whether he was formally asked, or whether he signed anything. He doesn't remember; he didn't see any significance in it.

It was as if they were saying, "This is what we have to do, we're going to do this for her," and we just said, "YES, YES, YES," to everything.

**COR.:** They never presented you with any options? It was just taken for granted what they were going to do?

**CAR.:** I think so. I don't know for sure, because like I said my memory was gone for that period. I remember my girl friend, Maureen (who had brought me into the hospital) came to visit me, and she had a very good friend of mine with her. This woman had been a close friend of mine through university, but I didn't remember her at all, and I still to this day cannot remember her before she came to visit me in the hospital. I told her, "I'm sorry but I don't recognize you." She just sort of laughed, and they were glad to see me.

**COR.:** How does it make you feel now—the whole aspect of memory loss?

**CAR.:** Well, I don't like the feel of it, but I feel that it was the least torture I went through.

**PAT.:** Did you mention it to your doctor when you found out that you couldn't remember things?

**CAR.:** I don't know. It was all so foggy. It was all so disarrayed—nothing was organized within me. I just went along. It was either sink or swim, and I just went along. I wasn't even very conscious of any organized effort. If I was led in for a shock treatment, I just went.

**COR.:** And the method, then . . . ?

**CAR.:** I understand that they didn't use pentathol back then. I know they do now, but they didn't at that time. So it must have been quite harassing. It's amazing how we accept things—that's the problem. We're sort of led to accept, whereas I think that people should have control, should feel a little bit of control over what happens to them. . . .

I don't think the shock treatment worked, and I'll tell you why. I literally lived in a blanket of fear, then—I couldn't get away from it. Whether it's better to feel that you have something to be frightened of, even though you've probably blown it out of proportion, or whether it's just fear and you can't pinpoint any source—I don't know. I think that not to know what you're afraid of is a harder burden to bear, because you don't know what to grab at—you don't know what's going to comfort you. If you *know* the fear, you can *do* something to get away from it.

**COR.:** Maybe back then if they had had groups like ON OUR OWN, where people can talk about how they're having problems and about different ways of supporting each other and

that kind of thing . . . ? If you had had some support of that kind, not so much from your family but in another sort of caring or healing atmosphere—do you think it would have helped?

**CAR.:** I wasn't ready for that. I was too low for that. I mean I recognized when people were nice to me and wanted to talk to me, but I couldn't accept it. I just felt *alone*, totally alone with my problems. I felt nobody could solve them. In fact, after the shock treatment I was so askew that I didn't even know . . . I wasn't even aware that I had to get rid of any problems! The confusion was awful.

**COR.:** And that was after the three hours at home?

**CAR.:** Yes. I lasted three hours, and I phoned the doctor, and he said, "OK, I'll phone Selkirk (Psychiatric Hospital, near Winnipeg), and you get your husband to take you out." And that's exactly what happened.

**COR.:** Did you know anything about Selkirk at all?

**CAR.:** No, I'd never even been in Selkirk. The first thing I said when I saw the place was, "God—this place is *awful!*" The nurse who was with me, when she heard this, said kind of outraged, "What do you mean, 'This place is awful!'"

I will say that I recovered better in Selkirk, simply because it was a hospital that was a little bit more basic in your needs. It was very basic, in fact, but it gave you a sense of reality. You were looked after but you weren't pampered. You had a sense of the ground below you—it gave you an incentive: like you better fight, kid!

But one thing I do feel is that during my two-year stay in the hospital, it was the other patients that helped me come around more than actually talking to doctors or nurses . . .

**COR.:** So you had the shock treatments at St. Boniface, and then at Selkirk they started the insulin shock?

**CAR.:** Yes, I had nine months of insulin shock . . . All I remember is that about 5:30 or 6 in the morning they came around every Monday to Friday. They put a hypodermic in your arm with a lot of fluid. I got so used to them I wouldn't even bother

opening my eyes or looking up. And I knew I had to go into a deep coma, and I had to have so many deep comas before the therapy was finished. I always felt like I was in a deep coma when I'd come out of it. (They'd bring you out with another hypodermic of some solution.)

They did that five mornings a week for nine months, although a few days might have been missed—I can't remember.

**COR.:** And you gained weight?

**CAR.:** Yes, a lot of weight. You eat an awful lot; you have to drink glucose . . . I went into shock a couple of times but they forced glucose down me and I came out of it. I'd see other women go into shock—we'd just call the nurse. You get so that you're in a little world; it's your world there and you make the best of it. You learn. You're streetwise. I also had medication at the same time. A lot of medication: Librium, Stelazine—others. When I left the hospital, I was on about four or five different pills, and altogether I took about 18 pills a day. But it was gradually cut down and some were cut out. Now I'm on a very minimum dose—one and a half pills a day.

**COR.:** When you came out, were you still seeing someone?

**CAR.:** Oh, yes. I went back to Selkirk once every couple weeks or each month to see my doctor. I had a lady doctor whom I had an awful lot of respect for, and I believe my best interests were on her part.

**PAT.:** So you felt you could really talk to her?

**CAR.:** Well, some of the things she said to me are so very significant. Part of my problem was that I didn't believe that anybody understood me, so I wouldn't even listen that closely . . . That's probably why they gave me a lot of shock treatments: "We can't talk to her, so we better . . ."

I've said to my husband a couple of times, "You know, I knew I was breaking down. I knew I was. I should have walked away and left everything to save myself." I should have but I couldn't. I was with my children. I felt duty-bound. I felt that to leave was an awful, awful thing to do, to leave—to leave your children or to leave your husband.





**COR.:** Before you actually had the breakdown, you were having these anxiety attacks and you were aware that there were things happening because of the anxiety and so on. Did you feel that because in part you were a woman, that you had the amount of pressures and all the work, all those kids, etc.—so you couldn't say, "I can't handle this"?

**CAR.:** But I couldn't verbalize. No, actually I shouldn't say that. I said once to my girlfriend, "I couldn't verbalize back then." Do you know what she said to me? "You could verbalize. Nobody would listen." That's the truth. Nobody would listen, because everything I did back then was a sign that I was breaking down. My husband said he knew. Do you know what he told me? He said, "I knew that you were breaking down two years before you broke down . . . But somebody had to look after the kids."

**COR.:** He was working full-time, and . . .

**CAR.:** He was a musician in the Army band at the time. His hours weren't long, and he was very good to look after the kids while I went to school, but he wasn't that good about wanting to do the housework or the dishes or the wash or keep the kids clean and so on. It wasn't because he was mean or anything like that. It was just because he didn't . . . I mean men's roles and women's roles were different then, and he felt he was going out of his way as a man even looking after the kids.

I think the whole thing was a misunderstanding.

**PAT.:** I don't know. I think there's a difference between men taking family responsibility—it's usually much more piecemeal.

**CAR.:** I was very impeccable, I was very much a perfectionist and like things right. I found I was using an immense amount of energy trying to make things right, which was stupid, because when I came out of the hospital, I was the worst slob in the world! But you know what? I realized when I came out of the hospital that when I did keep everything impeccable and spotless, I would get very upset if the kids would spill something or if the kids would drop some food down their front. And I thought the best thing to do was to let them create some mess. And if I don't worry about doing it, then I'm not going to worry about when it gets dirty! And that was better (laughing).

**COR.:** But you realize that was part of just being able to cope?

**CAR.:** I didn't want any more worries, and I wasn't going to worry about whether the tablecloth was clean or there was any dust under the chair. And I *didn't* worry about it, but I got a lot of criticism and flak on account of that from my husband and members of my family and people that would come to visit who would turn up their nose and probably go away talking. I didn't care. No, I can't say I didn't care: I felt guilty. But I also knew I couldn't handle it. I learned what I could handle, and I managed to raise five kids, because I got pregnant three months after I left Selkirk. I managed to raise five very active boys. I don't know whether it's my fault they all turned out well, but they all did turn out well. I wish I was as secure and knew myself as well as what my boys do now, when I was their age. I wish I did. I don't think any of them will see themselves in the position that I was in—they know themselves too well. And I feel that when I got married at 17, I had a very insecure upbringing. I was the least prepared of any 17-year-old girl to be a wife and mother.

**COR.:** Did you get married because you wanted to get out of the situation that you were in, or . . . ?

**CAR.:** No, I got married for one reason: I loved my husband and I wanted to be with the man I loved, and I didn't even have any plan or rhyme or reason for what was to follow. All I knew was that I wanted to be with the man I loved, and when I married him I bought the package. But the package — it didn't suit me, I didn't suit it. The "package," I mean, of being a mother inside with her little kids, looking very clean and proper, doing the right thing. And I just wasn't that type; I hadn't been raised that way. But you see, I gave into it, and that caused me a lot of distress, and worst of all, I lost the armour that I had built up to survive during those years until I got married. I

relinquished it which left me with no defense. I lost my edge and, believe me, no one should give up their edge.

I knew a woman who had four kids and was tired—she didn't break down. With me, it was a conflict. Like the way I was raised—I raised myself pretty well. I learned defence mechanisms, and I became very streetwise, but I wasn't really part of that very nice society out there that does everything the right way. I never got in trouble with the law or anything, but, I mean, Carol made her own rules, which were generally fairly moral and quite sensible—but were a little different from other people's. You see, when I got married, I let them go very quickly, because I thought, "Now I'm on the right side of the fence, I'd better be right, too"—but they weren't right.

**PAT.:** Yes, you adopt a model, wholesale, for security. But to do that is to give all your survival mechanisms up. I think it was the biggest mistake of my life, too.

**CAR.:** You know what it was—the same thing with you and me? We became dependent.

**PAT.:** Yes, I think I listened to others and let my own critical abilities sleep, just gave them up for awhile . . .

**CAR.:** I gave them up for a long time, because as a child, to get through a childhood raising yourself on your own for a good many years, you learn a lot of tricks. They work for you. And if you let them go, what have you got working for you? You are pretty defenseless. You see, when I was in the hospital I was a very confused young woman. Very confused. The last doctor I saw, I guess it was 9 or 10 years ago, read my case history over and said to me, "Carol, I'm very impressed with you. I'll tell you why. Very few people that were as sick as you ever made it back." That's what he told me.

**PAT.:** Sometimes I can't help, when I'm thinking it over, wondering about alternatives. What could have been done, instead. When I look back, I think that I took on too much, especially when I assumed a whole new, utterly new, model. And I shouldn't have abandoned my critical abilities so fast or so completely. But if the responsibility of the children had temporarily lifted *and if* I'd had understanding people to talk to to sort things out—then I wonder if that "breakdown" needed to happen . . . ?

**CAR.:** I feel exactly the same way.

**PAT.:** But it's a matter of society, individuals—whoever, picking up on it, picking up on it earlier and not just leaving you to do it all, yourself, and not, on the other hand, coming down on you with things that drive you, further . . .

**CAR.:** Yes, people to just talk to you and let you get it out, at least to say, "Well, listen, your ideas aren't so bad, you're not really crazy. What you're thinking is quite rational. It may not be what everybody usually thinks or says but there's nothing wrong with the way you're feeling. You have a reason to feel this way."

**COR.:** To make you feel that your reasons are valid—or even that you do have reasons at all. I know that when I went to see the very first psychiatrist that I ever saw, he sent me to have all those tests—association tests, etc. I felt that something must be really wrong, I must have some very serious problems or fears or I might have brain damage—I didn't know what. But afterwards when I thought about it, my God! You didn't need to be a psychiatrist to see that I had a whole bunch of problems.

I was 17 when I got pregnant for the first time. The man I was with was physically and emotionally violent. But I thought that because I was a woman I had to be really strong, I thought that because I had chosen to live with him at that age and to leave my parents—I had to take it all. I had to do the grocery shopping, I had to make the meals, and I had to take care of *his* ego, *his* emotional needs. I had been conditioned to accept this. And then when I became pregnant without really wanting kids yet, everyone around me said, "Well, of course you're going to have an abortion; you're not going to have the child." Even though I could imagine this nice little baby and loving it, I saw there was no way I was ready for that, so I just let my life be put into other



people's hands, friends and other people I knew who made these decisions for me—and I floated along. The breakdown came a few months after I had the abortion. I realized that I had no control over my life and saw all these things coming down on me. So I started to get really suicidal, and that's when I went to see the psychiatrist the first time and was given all those tests. I mean he never once said to me, "Well, after all, look at your situation: Of course, you might have problems . . ." It was always something in my psychological testing, there must be something there—something medically wrong. There was nothing *medically* wrong. It was just living . . . I mean—it was my life.

That psychiatrist sent me to a woman when he finally didn't want to deal with me anymore. And, again, her whole thing with me was that I should be able to handle that kind of stuff as a woman. I shouldn't be complaining that I didn't want to cook the guy's meals, or didn't want to take his violence when he was angry at the world or whatever. "That's your problem," she said, "You have to learn to cope with that, you know."

**PAT.:** It's awful, I can't help feeling, to notice how often it's the serious, well-meaning women who are trying to be responsible that this kind of thing happens to . . .

**COR.:** And yet the only "concern" that it seems the doctor had was to keep writing out the prescriptions! I mean one time I said, "Why aren't you talking to me more and finding out more about my problems instead? What are the pills doing? I mean, I am sleeping 18 hours a day on them! Why?" I started questioning what he was doing, and that's when he said he had too heavy a caseload and he was going to have to switch me (laughter).

**CAR.:** You realized that he thought what was important was the drug you were on . . .

**COR.:** I was aware that this wasn't right, but I still had been conditioned to believe that he, a psychiatrist, of course *knew*. He's God! I put all my faith in him. Anyone who's in any position in the medical profession—you just don't question these things.

**CAR.:** That's the point where we all make a mistake. It was 25 years ago when I had my breakdown, but it wasn't very long ago when this dawned on me: you have to help yourself. Because there really aren't that many people that are interested in you, other than clinically! I'm not saying they won't help you and support you, they will to a point. But when it gets down to the nitty-gritty, especially when you're being discharged from hospital and you're on your way up, you have to realize that it's up to you, that you do have to try and help yourself. I know there are a lot of patients out there who will probably read this in the magazine and say "Well, I can't help myself. I'm not capable of helping myself, so if nobody's going to help me—I'm finished." But it's not true, you *can* help yourself. Be patient. It's all struggle, for everybody.

And as I said to you the other day and to my husband the other night, "I believe that the world is an insane asylum for some other planet!" (Laughter) Really, I don't think I'm far wrong, because I don't think there's anybody who's . . . I don't even know *what* the definition of normalcy is. Is it when you don't create a disturbance on the street, and you don't dress too freaky, and maybe you conform a certain way to society? Is that what normality, and the so-called very normal have a way contradicted themselves it seems to me.

**COR.:** Do you think when you were seeing all the doctors and having shock treatments and drugs and so on that they were trying basically to make you "normal", trying to make you able to cope with the situation that you left?

**CAR.:** Yes, they wanted me to cope. I believe they didn't want to solve the problem of what happened. I believe they just wanted to get me to the point where I could cope. When I left hospital, for a good ten or twelve years I didn't reflect to much, because I guess it was too heavy to reflect on. But lately, the last four or five years, yes, I have been going back and trying to sort

it out—simply because I want to deal with it in my mind, and then to let it go and be free of it. I want to *learn* from it. I feel a lot of it was my own stupidity, my own indulgence, stupidity and childishness that used up all this energy and caused me all this anxiety and acting out. Like not so much violence but rather frustration, screaming confrontations and so on. I think we all are a bit childish and do stupid things. Let's not feel guilty or bad about it.

**COR.:** When did you think you were acting childish?

**CAR.:** For example, my husband would criticize me because, maybe, there was a piece of dirt on the floor, something like that, and I would start screaming and crying that he was no good. It was completely irrational. But you see, as a child the only way I was ever heard was if I screamed. My favorite act as a child—and this was a real attention-getter—was to lie stiff as a board on the streetcar tracks, and they would pick me up like a board and carry me out. But it got attention, it got attention! And that kind of attention is better than no attention, you see. I was a brat, and the only way I ever got anything was by being a brat and acting out and screaming or holding my breath. If I hadn't done these things I wouldn't have survived—I would have been completely ignored.

**COR.:** Were you an only child?

**CAR.:** No, I was the third child in the family. My father left when I was born, and my mother had to work. My mother wasn't a very secure woman, and she had to work very hard to support the three of us. My brother and sister are about eight and ten years older than I am, so I was like an only child. They've even told me, "You were left alone," alone in a house where there was no love. None. I don't dwell on it too much, a little bit, sometimes I indulge in self-pity, which is another ridiculous, stupid waste of time. But my sister phoned me one day a few years ago and said to me, "You know, we were cheated as children, but you know something? You were cheated worse than all of us." You see, it was the pattern of the way I grew up: I learned how to survive by being a brat. I could be a beautiful brat!

But I also suffered a lot of humiliation as a child. And I did feel very, very inadequate and very inferior. Then, I started the temper tantrum bit, which got their attention, because I really could have been swept to the wayside, I really could have been forgotten.

**COR.:** But then you went from that situation to just taking on a totally new one . . .

**CAR.:** Taking on a normal society, right? I remember when I was 11 or 12, I used to spend a lot of times being overnight at girlfriends' houses. I don't think anybody even knew where I was. Yeah, I'd go to the dance and I'd stay all night—that sort of thing. And I remember seeing the family, mother and father sitting by the table, and saying to myself, "Well, this is very nice . . . It's idealistic to see what a nice family is like. It's the way it should be."

But I could never conform to that at the age I was then, at 11 or 12, because I'd been on my own. I'd had that freedom, you see, and that's what I gave up when I got married. That freedom was very, very important to me and I gave it up.

**COR.:** There weren't a lot of alternatives back then for women, though?

**CAR.:** If I had known myself better and if I'd been more secure, I probably would have realized I was too young to get married. There's no reason why the relationship couldn't have continued without marriage until I was ready. Why make decisions after you've just turned 17 or so? I don't know what happened. Sometimes I think maybe I wanted a drastic change, or maybe I wanted to have a nice little house with a nice little car and all the nice little things. When I bought them, I couldn't stand them, I couldn't feel comfortable with them. I still wanted to be free. When I saw my girlfriends going down the street with their boyfriends to the school dances, I was sitting there with one baby and another on the way, and trying to cook dinner and keep a



house clean. I felt an awful longing. I felt like my life was over.

**COR.:** Did your husband understand how hard it was?

**CAR.:** Yes. You know what my husband tells me now? Understand, my husband came from the opposite type family. His father was a policeman, and he had a very tight-knit family. They were very strong conformists to society, to the law and right and wrong. And my husband had this awful sense of right and wrong. He used to inflict it on me, and often since he has said to me, "Carol, you know when you married me? You should have run."

**COR.:** Do you think that you'd ever have a nervous breakdown again?

**CAR.:** I know myself well enough now. I know the danger signals, and I know what to do for them. Sometimes I feel a little out on the limb. Sometimes I get bouts where I get very temperamental and I get angry with my husband and all that, but I have control to a certain extent. I'm more detached than I was. Back then I was very emotionally involved with everything. I took everything very deeply.

**COR.:** Did you ever go to a support group? You and your husband have a very close relationship now and help each other, but if you didn't have that, would you . . . ?

**CAR.:** If I didn't have my husband for support, I feel I would need a close friend. I'm not crazy about being in groups. It doesn't fit my personality, but I think it's a good thing for a lot of people: there's a lot that do enjoy it. But I'm very comfortable with a one-to-one.

Certainly, I feel I would need somebody that I was able to talk to. If that somebody were a psychiatrist, that's OK. If the somebody was a layman, then fine, as long as I felt the person really understood. Actually, the thing I need in my life more than talking with somebody in the area of my problems: I need to be active. I like to walk, I like to swim, I like to ski, I like to participate to a certain extent—and I like a reasonably balanced day. If I do all those things, I find it keeps me at a pretty reasonable even keel.

**COR.:** So now, you've learned how to live in a way which you can cope, on your own . . .

**CAR.:** Certainly. I don't take anything I can't cope with, unless it's something I have control over.

**COR.:** Well, you've learned a lot!

**PAT.:** You were talking about the importance of knowing yourself. Perhaps it's rather judgmental, but do you feel maybe that you have learned about yourself to a greater degree *through all this* than you might have otherwise, or than other people do?

**CAR.:** With the help of my husband. Our relationship is not 100% but it's a good 80%. He's my best friend, so we have a good relationship in practically every way. It's a mystery. Like I told you the other day, anybody that believes that life is not mysterious or awesome, I'd like to talk with them. It is, it is a mystery and it is awesome. I believe that men's horizons are unlimited. I believe the creative force is almost unlimited and it's a matter of tapping into it. I feel I've tapped into it a smidgen with my art. I want to tap into it more—it's very important to me.

**COR.:** Is your art really a contributing factor in your getting well again, too?

**CAR.:** It was a desire that never left me. I can't say that when I was in the hospital and under the influence of shock treatments and drugs and had lost my memory that I even thought of it. But although I wasn't conscious of it, my desire to paint and to draw and to create never left me. My creative life is painting. I've done about 350 or 400 paintings, which isn't a lot over 25 years. It's just something I find necessary. I'm not really out to impress anybody. Criticism doesn't bother me—I'm happy to hear anybody's criticism, whether it's good or bad. And I've never felt jealous or envious of anybody that's better—and there are people that are better, of course—they're much better. Because I like to see good art, and I like to see people do well, so

when I see people doing better, really doing well—I enjoy it. I don't feel threatened. I feel there's a place for me, but it's never discouraged me ever from painting to see somebody better. In fact, it encourages me.

I just feel very comfortable painting. It's part of my life and has been for a long time.

**PAT.:** You were saying before about being uncomfortable somewhat . . .

**CAR.:** I feel medication is a sedation. And I think there are times in your life when you need that sedation. I mean just to keep you from harming yourself or anybody else or just to keep you from being in hell. You know, to calm down. But I think the long use of drugs—I feel that it kills your spirit. And I think that you have to have your spirit, that's what keeps you going, it's what makes life interesting and exciting and peaceful. Everything that life involves is your spirit. Like if a person has a very depressing feeling and becomes aware of it. It dawns on you, "Hey, wait a minute. My spirit isn't what it should be." Sometimes you compare it, the way you thought before to the way you feel now. Years later, you think, "Uh-oh, uh-oh. I don't like that." Now, as I told you, I'm on a very minimum dose. I feel super since it's been cut down, because I feel the spirit reviving. And I'll tell you something: For years, there was no light at the end of the tunnel for me. Now, I see a light at the end of the tunnel, and I ain't letting go for nobody. So there, you know!

**COR.:** And you're still gradually getting off of your medication . . .

**CAR.:** Yeah. I'm not hurrying it, I'm not rushing it. I think too many things are done in haste. I mean that's another quailm I have of society today is what the hell is all the rush for? I mean, is the world going to fall apart if the pace slows down a little bit? Why *should* people be expected to work under pressure? And I see these ads in the paper, these jobs that say, "Must work well under pressure." Well, what right have they got to inflict pressure on anybody? Sure, the person will last under pressure—for 6 months. And then they'll burn out. And then the boss will just hire somebody new, so the person's ignorant or a fool or the boss is a fool—or they're both fools. Who's got the right to inflict that on somebody else?

**COR.:** Yes, there's the whole idea of having to handle pressure. A lot of people that I know have had experiences of a breakdown of one sort or another, then going into a hospital or seeing a psychiatrist, and the whole thing of trying to get you "normal" again, trying to get you to cope with life, instead of maybe questioning the way life is and what's happening. Instead of questioning the fact that people don't *want* to work under pressure, people don't *want* to handle such situations.

In other words, they're setting up standards for us—they're telling us how we have to be, or else we're inadequate. Or else get something else that's for wecklings. I know a lot of people just within our group (On Our Own) end up in hospital, not just once but a number of times. A lot of them I've seen over the years: they come out of the hospital, they're caught up in a situation, and they immediately think what they've got to do is get back into the mainstream and cope with all that pressure and . . .

**CAR.:** They think that'll prove they're OK if they can handle that . . .

**COR.:** Sure.

**CAR.:** That's not a measuring stick.

**COR.:** No. Also a lot of people have to deal with this whole question of, "Well, what should I put on an application? If they find out that I've been a mental patient, I'll never get the job." And employers respond, "Oh, they've had a psychiatric history. They won't be able to handle pressure." They psychiatric profession which is supposedly healing and helping us cope with life—but they never say, "Maybe the world . . . ?"

**CAR.:** They set up standards for us and we don't question them.

**PAT.:** It's short-circuiting that very process of learning about yourself, and learning about the world around you.

**CAR.:** Yes. Oftentimes, I've heard people say to me, "Do you have any idea now that your kids are grown up what you want to do or be?" And I say, "No, I don't have any idea of what I want to do or be, but I know how I want to feel. And I know when I feel that way, and I sort of start examining what steps make me feel that way." I don't demand a whole lot. My needs are very simple.

**PAT.:** I don't think it's any accident that you've got five fine sons!

**CAR.:** Thank you . . . They've had problems, and they've handled them half-decently. They seem reasonably together and reasonably whole and that makes me so happy. I'd be so worried if they weren't, you know, but they are.

**COR.:** It's a close family?

**CAR.:** Yes. They're all very loyal to each other, even though they're very different . . .

**COR.:** Well, I think you have a lot to be proud of in yourself.

**CAR.:** I marvel at people I see. I see a lot of their stupidities because I see them in myself. You learn somehow. But as I say, I now can see the light at the end of the tunnel, and I'm not planning on letting go. It took me too long to get it. But I do have a feeling that there is a superior power. I do have a lot of faith in it, I feel the energy from it. But I feel that we given the power to make a lot of the decisions ourselves.

**COR.:** Yes, and the responsibility . . .

**CAR.:** Yes, that's exactly right. We have been given some responsibility.

**PAT.:** And a lot of that is surely to know who we are and not to submerge ourselves, not be something we aren't . . . ?

**CAR.:** I guess the whole thing boils down to the fact that we have to heighten our awareness, to be able to see . . .

**COR.:** And a lot of people seem to go through life without even realizing that, without ever tapping into that. I remember your talking last time about how you see the tombstones in some people's eyes!

**CAR.:** But they can sometimes surprise you! If you actually get along with some of these people and you talk with them, you'll be very surprised that they feel a lot, the same way you feel; they think similar things, but they have a different way of coping with it. What works for one person doesn't always work for another.

Do you know what I was conscious of when I was raising my children? Allowing them their freedom. I did, I allowed it. I didn't want to kill their spirit. Also, I didn't want them to have the humiliation or torment that I felt as a child. But I did want them to feel freedom and abandonment as a child, and they still carry it with them. I think that's one of the reasons they're rea-

sonably happy. See, I had that freedom and abandonment as a child by having to raise my self, but I always thought that people that lived their little, tight-knit little lives were the right ones.

Nobody told me, "You're bright, Carol, you're going to be an artist!" I always thought that I was wrong, because we were criticized, our family, we were very gypsy-like, we moved every month—all that nonsense.

You know, everybody's got a good story. Everybody has. I love to see people's stories, as long as they're not too dull. And I like to hear successful stories. I don't care what leads up to the success—I always feel good if somebody comes out the other end in one piece. I feel good, I like that. I feel bad if they don't. But you can't take the troubles of the world on your shoulders. You have to be detached to a certain extent, because it'll overwhelm you, the problems of the world—it'll get you.

**PAT.:** I was quite struck by some themes in your poetry. The sense of freedom and abandonment that you write of is something I feel I've had to strive for all my life. I feel I was *too* serious. I *had* to be serious to survive—I wasn't supported—but then I took everything on and that became self-destructive in turn. Then the most important thing to learn—still is—was to lighten up . . .

**CAR.:** Yes, there is self-indulgence—in being too serious. Everybody has an indulgence of some kind. Some people indulge terribly in self-pity. Some people indulge terribly in their self-importance—they can't forget themselves for a minute. We've got to get over that and start looking outward and instead of inward all the time. One of the things that has pulled me through is I have a bit of a sense of humor. It's helped. Sometimes I am so devastated by something that has happened that I get to the point—it's either laugh or cry. I usually laugh.

Women carry a burden. But you know, I've never regretted being a woman. As a matter of fact, I've never really thought of myself so much as a woman. I just think of myself as a person. When I'm talking to men or women, I don't really think of talking to a woman or a man—they're just spirits or people. I only really think of people as being men or women or children when I immediately meet them unaware. But when I get talking with somebody, their identity leaves—they're a spirit or a person. And I always figure they feel that way about me. I think that somebody that looks at me as a woman is narrowing me; they put me in a very tiny little slot. I would rather be looked at as a person, because that's broader than being categorized as a woman. I think women are great—I've never regretted being a woman. I think it's been an advantage. I'm not formally a women's libber by any means, but I believe in nearly everything they say. For myself, though, I have felt that the only thing I've had to be liberated from is my own stupidity.

