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## A con man who just wants to communicate

By Tim Reiterman

Frank J. Moore is a most unusual con man. He uses his oil paintings, his plays, his writings and his counseling workshops to con people into becoming close to him and to each other.

Perhaps the most unusual thing about the 30-year-old Berkeley counselor is that he can't talk or walk, and never has.

Cerebral palsy has confined him to a motorized wheelchair which he guides with a pointer strapped to his head. He "speaks" through the same pointer by painstakingly spelling out sentences on a lap tray painted with letters, common words, numbers and for frustrating moments.

But he communicates with such clarity that 22 people attend his weekly workshop and come to him individually during the week for counseling in a storefront loosely called "The Church of Interrelations."

"I started the workshop just to be with people whom I wanted to be with in an intense and intimate way, those with whom I wanted to play," Moore typed with his pointer. "I demand of everyone who comes to see me that they can fly among people, fly naked and free. Flying means getting close to people without being afraid you will lose yourself, or get trapped or get used or get hurt."

To accomplish this, he directs the group to do various "exercises." These range from one in which the people are naked and press their palms together to another in which people demand that a group member do something such as sing or dance.

"Frank directs it, but he's part of it," said 24-year-old Mary Sullivan, one of the workshop members. "It's fun to watch him do it and move. We usually are clothed, but you never know what's going to happen."

"He does things usually with a

lot of humor when he points out sensitive things in other people. Last night, someone got so angry at him that the person called him an xxxxxxx. Frank just laughed."

The members of the group get so familiar and comfortable with each other that they sometimes tease him more about his handicap. That closeness is exactly what he wants.

"I'm doing exactly what I've always wanted," Moore related in an interview at the carpeted workshop. "We try to break taboos, particularly the idea that being dependent on other people is bad."

Since his brain damage at birth, Moore has known what dependence can mean. The Ohio-born son of an Air Force career man, he was often unable to attend schools for the handicapped, so his mother tutored him at home. And when he was 16 he conceived of his "talking board," but it took him a year to get someone to build it.

Armed with that and his own ingenuity he went off to college. "I was a journalism major at Cal State San Bernardino," he related.

"I graduated from the University of New Mexico in 1972. To get class notes, I gave classmates carbon paper and got copies of theirs. For exams, I sometimes took a typewriter to class, and sometimes I was allowed to take my tests home."

Moore hitchhiked to the East Coast where he met his wife Debbie at a Massachusetts commune and put

### 'I demand of all that they fly among people'

on the first of his ritual plays in New York.

The Moores, who now have a 2-year-old son, migrated to Berkeley where Frank earned a masters degree in psychology and built a



Examiner Photo by Mike Musura

Frank Moore types out a message to his assistant, Nina Feldman, at his storefront "church"

counseling clientele, charging anywhere from \$2 to \$24 an hour depending on ability to pay.

"I recruited people for the workshops, by just starting conversations with them on the street," Moore related. "I was admitting my need for people. But I screened the

people for openness, slowness and softness, for the workshops and for the plays."

Group members even recall that Moore sometimes sat outside the plays sizing up people and

charging those with inhibitions \$3 and those without inhibitions only \$2.

Generally using actors from the counseling workshop, he has put on about nine plays. About a month ago, one was performed at the Cat's Paw Palace for a Berkeley theater festival.

Here's how a play called "Arrangement" begins:

"Everyone lies silently on the floor. Then they rise one at a time and move in slow motion to the highest places in the room. As they move, they say many names very quietly — their own names, names of others in the workshop, mystical names, names of the dead, names of friends or enemies. They speak in slow motion as if they are under water...."

Although there sometimes is nudity in the plays or exercises, there never is sexuality or aggression. In fact, one of the "commitments" that workshop members must make is celibacy outside marriage.

"Almost invariably sex confuses a relationship and makes people feel closer than they really are," said Moore's assistant, Nina Feldman, a 30-year-old with a masters degree in psychology.

"And in the workshop, if people are on the make, it destroys the feeling of trust and openness."

"There's nothing sexual in the workshops but we surrender ourselves in a physical way. People get past Frank's weird looks and get physical with him; they get past conventions."