

Divorcee explodes macho myths with poems

By JACKIE KLEIN

Mid-life divorce is a kind of dying and then a painful, slow, gradual rebirth.

Howard Krohner expresses these feelings in his poetry. He knows because he's been there. The pain is easing, but the scars and memories linger.



HOWARD KROHNER

Krohner, 49, and his wife were divorced last September after 25 years of what once was a happy, fulfilling marriage. Because of the emotions burning in him, he said he has a compelling need to pour them out in poems.

"I'd love to publish a book of my poems because I have something to say," Krohner said. "But publishers are cold toward poetry. It's a shame because there are so many singles out there who need to air and share their experiences."

MID-LIFE divorce isn't sudden, Krohner maintains. It's a culmination of unfulfilled dreams, outgrowing one another or growing at different rates of speed. It's often a need for identity after weighing each other down. Krohner expresses these emotions in his poem, "Bauble."

When they ask me why I tell them

It wasn't hate exactly nor was it love altogether.

But something akin to both, yet different really

As a desert flower to cactus.

You knew that too and cried about it at first.

The weight of you upon me and me on you.

Krohner has two daughters, a son and a 6-year-old grandchild. He's on a health food kick and he's into natural Oriental cooking. He describes these interests as "survival mechanisms."

"For me, writing poetry is another way to cope and find strength," he said. "Divorce is a dying and you must allow yourself time to grieve and mourn and not expect too much of yourself."

"Too many divorced persons close up if they've been hurt in a relationship. But people who build walls to keep pain out let nothing in. You can't appreciate pleasure if you haven't known pain."

THERE is a creative quality to loneliness, Krohner believes. Sometimes the world doesn't make sense and has little meaning, he said. The crying, the anger and the need for fulfillment is evident in excerpts from his poems.

Now I like alone in a smaller bed in a smaller room

Angered by death and grieving for 25 years

And by next year, I shall know if I have grown smaller or larger in this world.

It is almost over now

Just a hint of pain

One leaf of regret

On a winter's tree.

Divorced women struggle for survival, Krohner maintains, but men lose their families and feel isolated when a marriage ends. He has a fear of dying alone in a small room.

"Men have been culturally conditioned to be ashamed to show their feelings," he said. "They must learn to be open and to get over the hurt and agony of rejection. The macho, block-buster image is a facade. Men are vulnerable and human."

"Divorce is ego-damaging but it offers a chance to learn self-esteem and to accept and express weaknesses and anger. It's hard to face life alone, but you learn to do more for yourself and others."

I wanted to think of myself as just a man

Free of the dust of marriage, free of loss, free of fear

Free of alone, free of beds and strangers.

Mornings I awakened smothered by wet leaves

Making life is making trouble, Krohner believes. Some dreams are worth the pain, he said. Persons who don't take chances aren't open to life or its opportunities, he maintains.

"It takes guts for women to face life on their own but maybe they have a need to find their identities and reassess their values and way of living," he said. "We leave a marriage with a certain bit of love-end relationship which is hard to accept."

"My wife and I are two good people, but the we of us didn't work. There are good memories even in bad marriages but they're hidden in cardboard boxes with the rest of the memorabilia. There's a sense of uprooting and a tearing apart bit-by-bit."

It's impossible for divorced couples to be friends if they weren't compatible in the marriage, Krohner contends. Good friends don't get divorced, he said. If love goes, there's no liking and resentments build up, he said.

"Where do you find 25 years?" he

questioned. "Some of it is in my poetry because I understand the nature of sadness and loneliness. I want to be a voice for sufferers of mid-life losses."

"Poems pour out of me and releasing a lingering shaft of feeling helps every part of you. We're tested and we get through it. Somehow we find strengths and use energy to create a new life."

Excerpts from Krohner's poems express a new awakening and hope.

Now you are distant like a fading memory

In an old dream, a shadow without darkness anymore

I am over you now but it wasn't easy

At first I couldn't stand the thought of you with another man

I ran it in my mind with pain

The touch and feel of you empty now, vanished like spring

You were gone, your face in a glass mirror after I closed my eyes.

You are amputated from my body

Out of the wound a butterfly emerges.

Bedside manner rare?

The doctor who has an old-fashioned "bedside manner" is rare today.

Equally hard to find are lawyers who deal with the emotional well-being of their clients, in addition to the cold, objective facts of a case.

So says a University of Michigan psychiatrist who points to deficiencies in education and professional group attitudes which fail to emphasize the humane, ethical and interpersonal aspects of the law and medical professions.

"Both doctors and lawyers have great conflict about looking at information relating to emotions," says Dr. Andrew Watson, a practicing psychiatrist who holds professorships at both the U-M medical and law schools.

And, he says, it has been difficult to initiate programs at law and medical schools in which serious consideration is given to psychological aspects of professional ethics.

Dr. Watson discussed these questions in delivering the 1978 Isaac Ray Lectures at the University of California, Berkeley. He is recipient of the American Psychiatric Association's Isaac Ray Award given for "outstanding contributions to better understanding between psychiatry and law."

He is involved in a program at Michigan Law School in which mental health professionals teach law students, helping them focus on ethical and other professional problems which they are likely to face.

Noting the absence of peer "feedback" within the law and medical professions, Dr. Watson said that performance standards and ethical values need to be constantly reinforced during a professional career.

"Failure to do so risks the possibility of a person falling back to the less complex more instantly satisfying activities of self-interest and pleasure," he warns.

Dr. Watson says that in both professions, there are major loopholes in grievance procedures, because colleagues are reluctant to report unprofessional behavior.

"The working assumption of ethics or grievance committees is that complaints will be filed by either the aggrieved or by fellow professionals," he says. It is his impression that most of the complaints are filed by dissatisfied consumers. Unprofessional behavior must reach a very high level before it will be reported by colleagues.

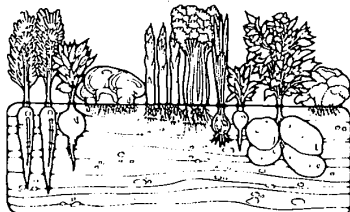
"Both these sources of reporting are psychologically demanding upon the person who would file, and probably many people also begin with a presumption that the grievance committee will be defensively resistant toward them."

Dr. Watson suggests that a challenge for the professions is "to find a way to positively reinforce the reporting behavior." Such persons must know the group not only approves of their behavior but actively solicits it.



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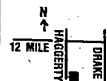
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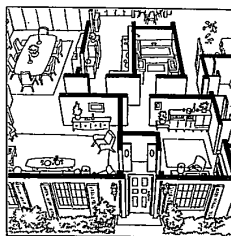
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