

Conversations from page C1

his way, at least he's lending the life that he wants to live. How many of us can say that? How many of us can unabashedly gush about being married, a father and an idealist who believes that the world would be a better place if people tried to love more and judge less? How many of us live to be the best human being we can be? This isn't a case of gushing. These are the thoughts that come up naturally in conversation with the person spending his days undergoing bone biopsies, chest x-rays and stress tests. "I figure this is all just a math problem," laughs Stew. "They'll eventually solve it."

In the next moment, however, his voice trails off. "I've come to realize that all that God gives us is a will," he said. "We are what we choose to do with that will."

There's no melody for those words. Just stillness.

Stewart has chosen. In these all-too cynical times, ladies and gentlemen, meet a hero.

A hero for living his life with the proper focus on his family and following the desire in his heart to make his brand of honest and authentic music.

A hero for using his name and popularity to help those less fortunate, who suffer from leukemia.

And, a hero for never failing to tell a friend how he feels about him.

He'll read this and probably argue with me about calling him a "Hero."

But hey, Francke, you're not my editor.

Time of faith

"I know you're scared that our time is running out.... There's something to be said for the light. Tell me when we're done with

the night"

— from S. Francke's "Something to be Said for the Light," Sept. 1998

If you know Stewart Francke, you know that this is not a time for giving up or resignation. It's a time of endurance. The ultimate gut-check.

"If I die, at least my kids will know what I did when faced with death. It'll be like a blueprint."

All due respect, Stew, there are no blueprints for this type of courage.

He prefers to call his current

predicament a "time of faith."

He doesn't have to look far to find it.

Throughout his songwriting there's a palpable sense of faith, an unrelenting reaffirmation of life. It's in the onergy of his music and the wisdom of his words.

Perhaps the most bitter irony is that Stewart Francke's latest CD, "Sunflower Soul Serenade" starkly reveals why so many people who know him, love him so dearly.

He has the guts and humility to acknowledge his fears, share his apprehensions, then look for the calming — always reassuring — resolution.

In the title track of his recent CD, Stew sings: "The only real story is in your heart's own song/The acrobat wakes a foot from the ground/We live while we're dying/We're lost when we're found/Sunflower Soul Serenade/I'm dreaming my heartache away."

It's a dream that his wife, Julia, his children, Tess and

Stewie, his family, friends and admirers are all dreaming, too. And you can bet that when that dream comes true, it'll sound like music you've never heard before.

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Witness from page C1

contention that "writers are subjective observers who witness the issues that press on his or her times."

Through power of observation and depiction, the literary pieces in "Witness" hold up a mirror of the world that transcends rhetoric and politics.

Sorting through nearly 3,000 submissions each year and choosing only 30 contributors per issue, Stine applies a simple criterion to find the best writing.

"We deliberately keep out of fashion with literary trends. I'd rather take my cues from Chekov than rely on what's in style."

Basically, it's what knocks our socks off," said Stine, referring to himself and colleague Jennifer Berne, who often assists

him in reading the manuscripts.

It's more than coincidental that the appeal of the magazine has social-activist overtones, although the writing in "Witness," in general, is distinctively personal.

In the 1960s, Stine actively protested the Vietnam War, and traveled throughout the South, joining Civil Rights marches as a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Shortly after receiving his doctorate in English from the University of California at Berkeley, Stine landed a teaching assignment at South Carolina State College. In 1967, he was the first white male teacher at the school.

One year later at the college that was located in the heart of Ku Klux Klan country, 34 stu-

dents were shot while protesting the war. Knowledge of that self-same incident, known as the Orangeburg Massacre, is usually a tip-off of a tried-and-tested 1960s activist.

Things that matter

In matter and self-deprecating style, Stine deflates any notion of the superiority of the academic world. Part of the reason he isn't teaching at a prestigious university is that he never played the political games along the road to tenure.

He calls the academic study of English a threat to the intuitive nature of literature. And unlike many of his colleagues, considers the vaunted deconstructionist school of literary criticism more of a disaster than an enlighten-

ment.

After a stint as an English professor at Wayne State in the mid 1970s, and a free-lance writing career in the 1980s, Stine was in the right place when philanthropist Sidney Lutz donated funds to start an intellectual, literary magazine in 1987.

"Witness," to me, is a way to write about things that matter to me," said Stine, who presents each issue with a compelling introduction to the theme and subsequent writings.

"In some larger sense, when you consider the contributors, it's like we're all the same person."

And all bearing witness to the issues of our times.

Now if the same wind could only blow over the Potomac.

Demons from page C1

high school in Royal Oak. From painting sets, Conlin switched to covering furniture with the designs of animal fur. The painted furniture is available at Andy Sharkey Gallery in Royal Oak, Atrium Gallery, Northville, Hip House next to Gallery FunctionArt, Pontiac, Artlot, Birmingham, and Village Picture Framing and Art Gallery, Dearborn.

From the furniture, Conlin evolved to paint self portraits where she relays her emotions in surrealist style. The works were shown in June at a Whit-

ney Garden Party sponsored by C-Pop Gallery.

"I was going through a tough time personally," said Conlin. "In the 'Tormented Soul,' where the flames are shooting from the side of her head, the soul is trying to escape the body."

The painting was the first of the self portraits after Conlin read "The Artists Way." The book led to Conlin's decision to focus on painting. But after drawing from photographs for 10 years, Conlin found her creativity blocked.

"I could never come up with

ideas, in 'Blocked,' I'm trying to relay how I couldn't think of my own ideas. I was paralyzed with fear. I was afraid of everything."

"Introvert and its Demons" and "Facing the Fear" reveal her pain as do the heads scattered on the beach of "Buried Emotions." The surreal scene is a portrait about a dysfunctional family.

"There's all this beauty in the world and they don't see it," said Conlin. "The father is red because he's angry. The mother's

green because she's envious of the man."

In "Emotional Dependence," a woman hangs suspended from a man's rib. It's Conlin's way of chastising women who depend on men for their existence. In the painting, the woman is so dependent on the man that she's physically ripped the bone from his body.

"Cheryl's work is strikingly unique," said Robert Krajenc, Wyland Gallery director. "She takes realistic drawing and expands on that with a surreal element."

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