

BOOKS

Memoir keys into limbo of undiagnosed illness

Limbo: A Memoir
by A. Manette Ansay (William Morrow, \$25).

BY VICTORIA DIAZ
SPECIAL WRITER

Growing up in Michigan and rural Wisconsin, A. Manette Ansay seemed headed toward a promising future as a professional pianist. She practiced for hours on the family upright. Sometimes she played so long and so energetically that her small arms ached, and the only way the burgeoning musician could gain relief would be to plunge them into a sink full of ice cubes after a long practice session.

The pain grew worse and more persistent as the years went by.



VICTORIA DIAZ

Though Ansay eventually entered Baltimore's more prestigious Peabody Conservatory of Music, she had to leave when she began to develop symptoms that included weakening leg muscles, blurred vision, and memory impairment.

To this day, despite varying treatments and consultations with many doctors at numerous hospitals, she has never been accurately diagnosed. (By turns, clinicians have surmised that

she suffers from multiple sclerosis, Hodgkin's disease, or an auto-immune disorder.) And because diagnosis has been elusive, Ansay's prognosis—and her future—remain blurry and limbo-like as well.

Now moving through the days of her life on a cane (she was, for many years, confined to a wheelchair), she has long since given up her career as a pianist. This is not at all to say that she gave up her life, however. After circumstances forced her to leave Peabody, she made a decision that would bring her to a new and totally different career. On New Year's Day in 1988, she resolved to write for two hours, three days a week.

"I cannot explain why I made

this particular resolution and not another," writes the Midwestern farmer's granddaughter, whose family and background were not "literary," and whose own taste in books had previously run toward paperback romances.

Make the resolution she did, though, never looking back. Eventually, she gained an MFA in writing from Cornell University and, in the late nineties, saw four of her novels (*Vinegar Hill*, *Sister, River Angel*, *Midnight Champagne*) and a collection of short stories (*Read This and Tell Me What It Says*) not only published, but widely acclaimed.

In *Limbo*, Ansay takes us back in vivid word-pictures to her beginnings in her Michigan

home, 40 miles from Detroit, where "trucks rattled over the speed bump on the highway" and "freight trains passed so close that (she) could feel the vibrations" in her bed at night. Here is the "kitchen with its chipped Formica counter . . . the picnic table . . . painted pale blue," her parents' twin beds, even "the imperfections of the swing set" in the tree-filled backyard.

Through her splendid evocations, we are whisked up in her Wisconsin childhood as well. And we experience her anguish and occasional humiliation as the years pass, her condition worsens, and no one can define her disease.

"There was a time . . . when I would have said this kind of

uncertainty was unbearable," she writes. "But the human body, like the life it leads, is ultimately a mystery, and . . . to keep moving forward . . . I have had to let go of that need to understand why what had happened has happened and, indeed, is happening still."

If you live with uncertainty—and who among us does not?—don't miss this book. Ansay's perceptiveness and deep insights, along with her astonishing powers of expression make *Limbo* nothing short of absolutely memorable.

Victoria Diaz is a Livonia resident and writes about books, theater and movies for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Correspondent says China had role in attack on America

PR Newswire -- China will use the current global crisis to launch itself as a new Super-Power and become America's new major enemy, according to Gordon Thomas, an internationally recognized expert on intelligence matters.

On Sept. 11, the same day the World Trade Center and Pentagon were hit by terrorists, a Chinese People's Liberation Army transport aircraft from Beijing landed in Kabul with the

most important delegation the ruling Taliban had ever received, says Thomas. He describes the ongoing threat from China in his new book, *Seeds of Fire: China and the Story Behind the Attack on America* (\$26.95, Dandelion Books) available in bookstores, or at www.dandelionbooks.com.

"Hours later, CIA Director George Tenet received a coded 'red alert' message from Mossad's Tel Aviv headquarters that presented what he called a

'worst case scenario' -- that China would use a ruthless surrogate, bin Laden, to attack the United States," says Thomas, who has over thirty years of experience as a foreign affairs reporter and investigative journalist.

The Chinese delegation had come to sign the contract with Afghanistan that Osama bin Laden had asked for, that would provide the Taliban with missile tracking, state of the art communica-

tions, and air defense systems in exchange for the Taliban's promise to end the attacks by Muslim extremists in China's north-western regions.

"China by 2015 will have deployed tens to several tens of missiles with nuclear warheads targeted against the U.S.," predicts a CIA briefing paper to the Bush Administration, according to Thomas. *Seeds of Fire* devotes over 100 pages of never before published official documents per-

taining to China's global take-over strategies.

Thomas also exposes the secret dealings between Russia and China. He reveals reasons for the ever-closer relationship developing between Israel's Mossad and China's Secret Intelligence Service that enabled America's ultra-secret plans to be stolen from Los Alamos.

Thomas known most recently for his international best-seller, *Gideon's Spies*. He has written over 38 best-selling books that have sold over 45 million copies in 36 countries. Dandelion Books has already sold *Seeds of Fire* foreign rights to 30 countries with two more pending. Anvil Studios has just acquired the film rights for the book.

Seeds of Fire is available at bookstores and at www.dandelionbooks.com.

Read The Observer for local news coverage

Flea market shopping is fun, without rules

BY CAROL MCCARTHY
BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS BOOKS
FOR AP WEEKLY FEATURES

A change of seasons can't stop collectors who frequent flea markets. The hunt for treasures might move inside a warehouse, thrift stores, malls or auction houses, but the search goes on.

Shoppers never know what

they'll find at sales or shows, but creating one-of-a-kind items likely will show up. With a little imagination on your part, they'll provide endless opportunities for adding character and humor to your creative decor.

If you're an equal opportunity shopper, seeking old treasures for new uses, gentle browsing might be the modus operandi. If you're seeking a particular subject matter, such as 1930s quilts or majolica pottery, you learn how to scope out a booth in a hurry.

With a little practice, it

becomes apparent that a child's wooden wagon could become a coffee table, or a baluster from an old house could be a piece of sculpture. A temple without a lid becomes a great vase.

The only rule is that there

aren't any. A doll head can turn into a tabletop sculpture, and a stack of old suitcases can serve as an end table.

Some homeowners like the

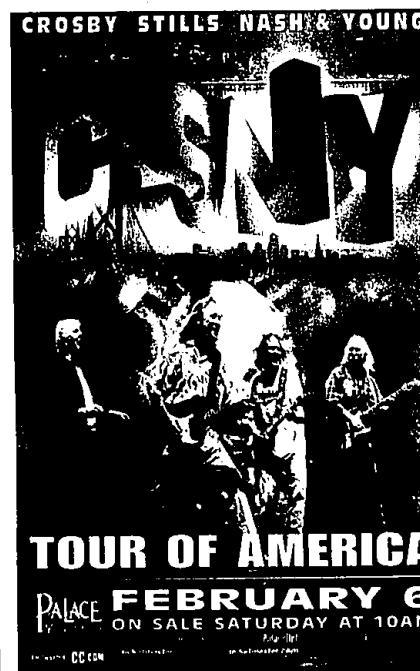
mix of old and new, while others focus on a particular era, such as

the 1950s, with retro items.

Some shopping tips from experts: Buy what you love, pieces you respond to with a passion. Be open to possibilities, but decide what you can live with. Will you consider a cracked piece of pottery, or must it be perfect? Be impulsive. Sometimes it's necessary to get the item you want, but base your final price on a limit you set for yourself. Don't buy something for its potential future value. If it does increase in value, that's a bonus, but you can't count on it. Be logical in your decision. It might be wise to take someone with you as a sounding board. Buy what you like, buy what you can afford, and buy the best you can afford.

Look for quality. Do research before you buy and question dealers to see what they know. Don't buy something just because it's inexpensive. You might end up with something you don't need and you don't love. To combine modern and antique pieces in a room, look for harmonious lines and shapes. For example, repeat curves for a workable look. Check out the condition before buying. You can refinish scuffed pieces if you like, but missing veneer is hard to replace. Check vintage linens for worn spots and holes.

For more information, check out *Better Homes and Gardens Flea Market Decorating* (Meredith Books, \$34.95).



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