

TWO BOOKS & A PLAY

By: Lois Boemer

While some of you were away basking in the sun, many of us at Quail Run were basking in the warmth of France; Valparaiso in Chile; the California Gold Rush of 1849, and Spain. Each experience in January and February was unique in nature.

The two books read by the Book Club were from very different perspectives. "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly" is a slim book, amazingly dictated by Jean-Dominique Bauby through blinking his one good eye, his body shut down from "Locked-in-Syndrome." The second book, "Daughter of Fortune" by Isabel Allende, a saga of almost 400 pages, takes us through trials and tribulations of the life of an orphan, first in Chile and then in the United States during the Gold Rush. At Quail Run, the play, "A Sunny Morning, was nicely performed by the new "Quail Run Productions." Directed by MJ Ebens, this brought our residents a breadth of fresh air from Madrid, Spain.

The memoir, "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly," vividly captures the inner musings of Jean-Dominique Bauby's amazing mind. He never loses his spirit, dictating to his secretary/editor, Claude Mendibil, through a French alphabet with the most often used letters first. Each letter is detected with "one" blink of the eye for "yes," and "two" for "no". Bauby, during the night, memorizes his script. The reader is enveloped in his mind through his heart wrenching words and flashbacks. "The Dream Chapter," for example, describes an automobile accident (not unlike his) where police are after him, and he worries about his friends. "I try desperately to warn them" he says, "but my dream conforms perfectly with reality. I am unable to utter an word." The book and film, which won Academy Awards, are works of art. He died two days after the French publication.

In the epic, "Daughter of Fortune," Isabel Allende, a most prolific Spanish author, created another classic. An orphan raised in Valparaiso in the 1840's by a spinster aunt and begrudging uncle, Eliza Sommers, moves between two worlds. On one hand there is Mama Fresia, "with her incantations in her Mapuche tongue" and on the other her Aunt Rose, with her wealth and English background. Her "mamita" teaches her to cook and to use her sense of touch for healing, while her aunt dresses her like a little lady. There is the periodic appearance of Captain John Sommers who joins his brother and sister between his ports of call. He gives Eliza gifts which she tucks carefully away. That is, until she joins up with a young Chinese doctor, Tao Chi'en, and stores away with him on a ship to California in search of her lover. They both have to reinvent themselves to survive in a society of single men and prostitutes, creating many serious consequences.

The play, "A Sunny Morning," is a comedy of Madrid in one act, by Serafin and Joaquin Alvarez Quintero. The performance was sponsored by Curtain Call, a group of Quail Runners who enjoy area plays and productions. According to MJ Ebens, who adapted the production, this marks their first venture into sponsoring the actual staging of a performance. Residents of Quail Run provided plants for background used in the setting for the park and two "park benches."

On a sunny autumn morning in a quite corner of a park in Madrid, Dona Laura (Maria Morrison) a handsome, white-haired lady of about seventy, refined in appearance, is

feeding pigeons in the park. Don Gonzalo, a gentleman of seventy, gouty and impatient (Kent Callhan) enters. Their servants Petra, Dona Laura's maid (Janice Owen) and Juanito (Vince Picarello) come and go nearby.

"The conversation between the two seventy year olds begins sarcastically, with each accusing the other of encroaching on their private space. Don Gonzalo complains the priests have taken his bench, and says Dona Laura is a, "Senile old lady! She ought to be at home knitting and counting her beads." She finds him "an ill-natured old man!" He resigns himself to "sit on the bench with the old lady."

A pinch of snuff (the finest) helps to clear their heads, and they find something in common with alternating sneezes of three times each. Dona Laura confides to the audience, "the snuff has made peace between us."

They begin to banter back and forth in a more friendly manner. Then Don Gonzalo reads out loud from a book of poems. They begin to discuss Valencia and without acknowledging it to each other, realize he and she are two lost lovers. He was a native of Faencia and she spent several seasons at a nearby villa." He remembers her as "The Silver Maiden," and they discuss a duel involving his cousin. When the play ends, they agree to meet at the park again, still not acknowledging what they both know to be true.

The play received a warm reception from the Quail Run audience. Watch for future announcements if you wish to participate.

Production Crew for "A Sunny Morning": Members of Curtain Call. Plus:
Toby Alien, Stage Manager
Sally Mauro, Box Office, Prompter & Sound Effects
Paul Anderson, Lightening
Sally Guidotti, Music
Jeannine Bensette, Refreshment Chair
George Champine, Video Photographer (Contact for Video)
Ushers - Renee Kossuth, Helen Maarckini