

H omeopathy

Believers, including the British royal family, swear by this alternative form of healing. But nobody can prove that it works.

*Do you like rainy days or sunny days?
Do you sleep on your right side or left side?
Do you curl up or lie straight in bed?*

The doctor's questions didn't inspire trust, admits 41-year-old Barbara Nelson. Still, she swallowed her doubts. A hepatitis infection had ravaged her liver, and a specialist had done little more than monitor her deterioration.

When Nelson arrived at the clinic of William Shevin, M.D., a Connecticut homeopath, she was in almost constant pain and so jaundiced that she "matched the color of French's mustard," she says.

Dr. Shevin took out three tiny tablets of a highly diluted mineral salt known in the homeopathic pharmacopoeia as *natrum*. He placed them under her tongue one at a time.

"Within a few days," recalls Nelson, "the pain started to subside."

Within six weeks her color had markedly improved. Today, two years later, she is feeling fine, and tests indicate that her liver has returned to normal.

Score one for homeopathy (pronounced hom-ee-AH-pa-thee)—a controversial medical tradition based on the premise that infinitesimal traces of certain substances can stimulate the body's natural healing powers.

The practitioners call themselves homeopaths. Of the 5,000 or so in the U.S., half are licensed physicians. Among others who prescribe homeopathic remedies: acupuncturists, dentists, veterinarians, chiropractors and naturopaths, or holistic healers (see "Homing In on Homeopathy," page 168).

Homeopathy specializes in the treatment of chronic conditions such as allergies, asthma, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and migraines. The field also claims success with women's health problems like cystitis, yeast infections, premenstrual syndrome and postchildbirth complications.

Part of homeopathy's appeal is that it is low-tech and high-talk in the era of the medical readout and the hurried office visit. (Of course, if you've just been in an auto accident, you don't report to a homeopath but

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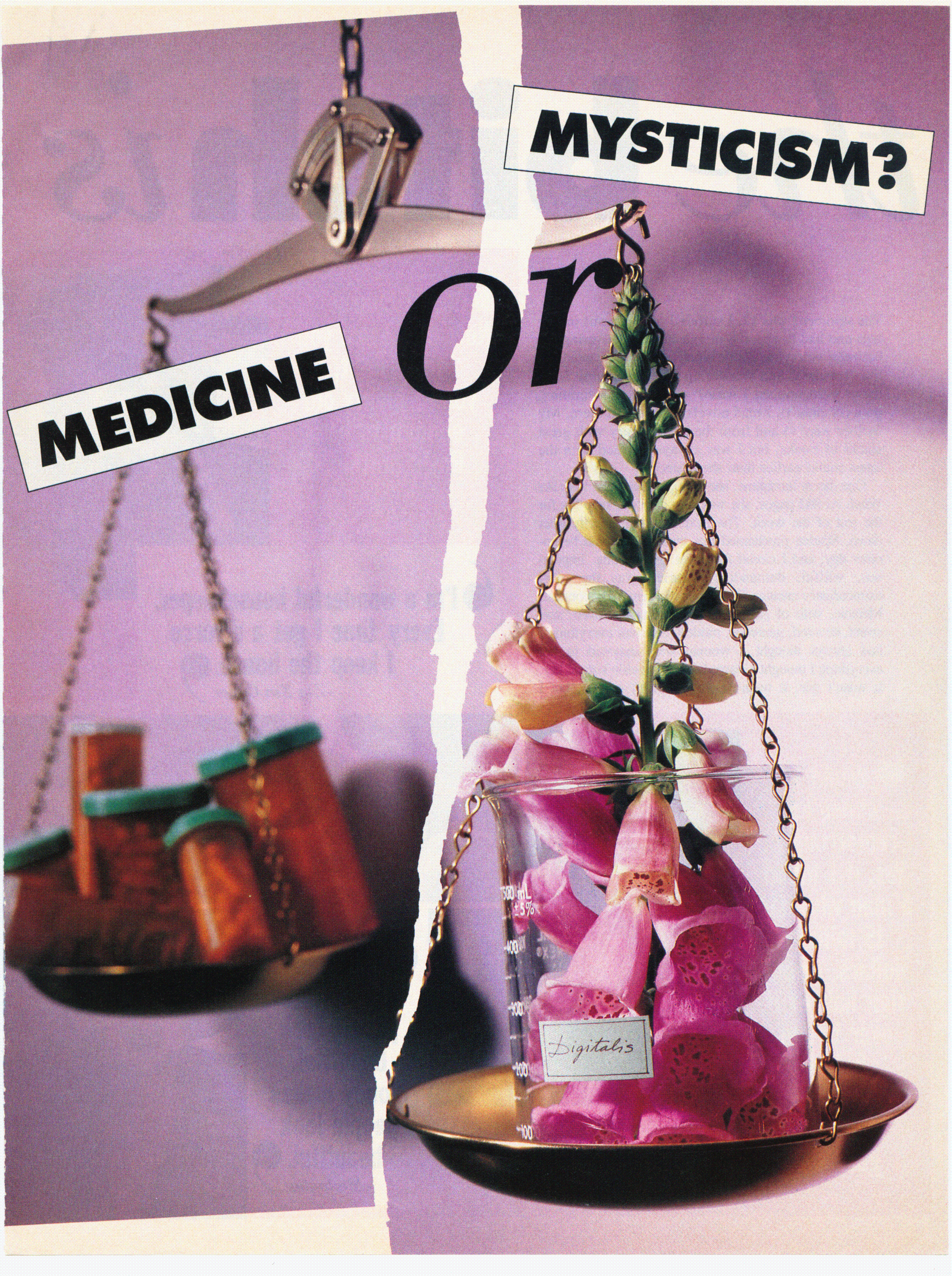
When ailing, Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, Prince Charles and Princess Diana—and their children—all visit homeopaths.

BY KATHLEEN MCAULIFFE

MYSTICISM?

MEDICINE

Or



HOMEOPATHY

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to a trauma-ready hospital emergency room.)

Homeopathy aims to tailor a treatment appropriate to the *whole* person, as homeopaths say; that is, to your mental and emotional as well as physical self (see "Pulsatilla and Sympathy," below).

The American medical establishment, however, dismisses homeopathy as vintage quackery akin to phrenologists' efforts to link personality traits to bumps on the skull. To skeptics, homeopathy is a fancy placebo—an inert treatment that occasionally improves symptoms by raising expectations of a cure. (Actually, in some studies more than 50 percent of patients have improved after being given a placebo.)

Abroad, homeopathy gets more respect. France, Germany and Britain all have many practitioners. For generations, the British royal family has sworn by homeopathy.

Between the believers and the skeptics, where's the scientific proof?

Homeopathy's progenitor was the German physician Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843). Disillusioned by the medical practices of his time, such as blood-letting and purging, he rediscovered the Law of Similars, first mentioned by Hippocrates. Substances that cause symptoms similar to a disease's can be harnessed to cure that disease, according to the Law. Hahnemann borrowed from the Greek roots for *similar* and *suffering* to name his new approach: homeopathy.

In hundreds of tests that Hahnemann called provings, he and his friends consumed a variety of plant, animal and mineral substances and noted their reactions. They compiled these symptoms into the *Materia Medica*, a compendium that remains homeopathy's bible.

A person with a cold, for example, might be treated with a diluted extract of red onions, which similarly produces symptoms of runny nose and eyes.

The logic seems loony. But Hahnemann pioneered the use of pollen grasses to reduce the symptoms of hay fever—today a standard allergists' treatment. He was tapping a principle that later was adopted by mainstream doctors: Immunity can be boosted with

a vaccine that contains a tiny dose of the disease.

To Hahnemann, tiniest was best. To cut down on side effects, he began diluting his medicines in water or some other inert solvent. Eventually his thinking crossed over into the mystical. He believed that the more dilute the dose, the more powerful the impact. He speculated that the "spirit" of the medicine somehow transmits itself to the solution it's in.

Almost obsessively, Hahnemann and his colleagues diluted their medicines to the nth degree: One part of a substance—such as digitalis (or foxglove)—would be dissolved in, say, 99 parts of a solvent, usually water, and vigorously shaken. Then the process would be repeated—often as many as 30 times.

The less-is-more view prevails in today's homeopathy. Many of the preparations are so dilute that they no longer contain even a *molecule* of the original substance.

The dilutions make critics splutter. "The theory violates every dose-response study known to pharmacology," says William Jarvis, Ph.D., president of the National Council Against Health Fraud.

"Homeopathy just isn't scientific."

Adds magician James ("The Amazing") Randi, a famous debunker of science fraud: "The 'dilutions' are equivalent to dissolving an aspirin in a body of water the size of the Pacific and then removing a drop to treat your headache."

The principal evidence of homeopathy's curative powers seems to be the cures themselves. "We're empiricists," says Dana Ullman, author of *Discovering Homeopathy*. "All we know is that the treatments are effective in practice."

The respected British medical journal *The Lancet* published a clinical study on patients who were given either a homeopathic remedy or a placebo. Of 487 flu sufferers, the remedy group reported 70 percent more recoveries within 48 hours than the placebo group.

A team of Dutch epidemiologists surveyed a series of such studies of homeopathy. They summarized their findings in the *British Medical Journal*: "[W]e would be ready to accept that homeopathy can be efficacious, if only the mechanism of action were more plausible."

Recently that mechanism came under

(continued)

Pulsatilla and sympathy

The doctor's diagnosis is charming—and alarming

I came down with the flu while writing this story. Since homeopathy has a reputation for conquering the flu, what better occasion for me to play guinea pig?

I was referred to Wyrth Post Baker, M.D., M.H.D., a homeopath in Chevy Chase, Maryland. I imagined that inside his office I'd see an apothecary's chest stocked with multicolored pills and quaint herbal concoctions.

Instead, I found a thoroughly contemporary clinic with an electrocardiogram machine, a blood-pressure cuff and the usual high-tech medical equipment. The jars of white pills bore cryptic labels: ARNM, SULPH, CAPH.

Dr. Baker had forewarned me that before I could be considered for homeopathic treatment, I'd have to submit to a full-scale physical. Homeopathy, he explained, is an adjunct to, rather than a replacement for, modern diagnostic techniques and therapies.

Baker asked me questions—many of them. Before I knew it, three hours had passed—and I'd spilled out my life story. No doctor had ever seemed so fascinated by my complaints. I won't deny I lapped up the attention.

The doctor prescribed a homeopathic remedy: tiny pellets of pulsatilla diluted one part by volume to 1,000 parts lactose.

Pulsatilla, says the *Materia Medica*, "is preeminently a female remedy, especially for a mild, gentle yielding disposition....The patient seeks the open air....Likes sympathy."

Who, me?

After several weeks of repeating this dosage three times a day, was I any better? Not appreciably. Perhaps the problem was my lack of faith in the remedy. I refuse to accept that I'm a pulsatilla sort of person.

COCO TALKS

(continued from page 126)

attractive, be she tall or short, dark or fair, athletic or feminine? Because she knows *how* she wants to walk, *why* she wants to sit down and *to what* her gestures are related. She is herself.

If a woman wants to keep her figure, let her be employed, let her work. She will be happier, less self-conscious, and this state will be reflected in the figure. Men like capable women. She has no fear in her as she did when she was economically dependent, therefore she is even more beautiful.

Work, then play, relax, swim, fish, do a turn at golf or tennis, get out in the open, enjoy the air and the sun....

Think for yourself, even in the matter of fashion. A woman should not be a mannequin, which she will be if she follows the mode too slavishly.

You cannot maintain two destinies, that of the fool or the intemperate and that of the wise and the temperate. You cannot keep up a night life and amount to anything in the day. You cannot indulge in those foods and liquors that destroy the physique and still hope to

have a physique that functions with the minimum of destruction to itself. A candle burnt at both ends may shed a brighter light, but the darkness that follows is for a longer time.

In the matter of what diet to follow to maintain the perfect figure, I can only repeat what I have said of every other function of life — be moderate, be simple, be honest. Eat less than you think you want, eat with your intelligence, not your stomach.

Sleep well, seven to eight hours if you need it; sleep with open windows. Get up early, work hard, very hard. It won't hurt you, for it keeps the mind busy, and, in turn, the mind will keep the body interested.

Don't sit up late. After all, what is there in this so-called social life of such worth that you leave your pillow to follow it into the early morning? Bad air, bad food, bad liquor, ugly surroundings and stupid people do not gladden the heart.

Save something for yourself. Save your ears, save your eyes, save your thoughts, save your nerves. What have you heard after midnight that you count worth sitting up for?

Personally, nothing amuses me after 12 o'clock at night! □

HOMEOPATHY

(continued)

scrutiny in the laboratory of Dr. Jacques Benveniste, a respected French physician and allergist. Benveniste reported that white blood cells in a test tube altered their functioning in response to a homeopathic antibody preparation that contained *no* molecules of the original substance.

Homeopaths lauded Benveniste. James Randi, *Nature* editor John Maddox and Walter Stewart, a National Institutes of Health physicist and sometime fraud investigator, descended on Benveniste's lab to observe the experiments firsthand. They concluded that the results were a "delusion."

Until rigorous proof prevails, a belief in homeopathy remains just that — a belief. Medical science doesn't understand how substanceless pills can cure.

Can it be dangerous to choose homeopathy? "Only if it delays you from getting proven effective treatments," says Stephen Barrett, M.D., a medical fraud investigator from Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Maybe alternative healers really are tapping a mysterious force of nature yet to be plotted on the map of the known universe. Admittedly, it's a long shot. More likely, they're administering TLC in pill form. Still, if a treatment poses no apparent risk, severely ill patients don't think too deeply about the science of it all. As Barbara Nelson puts it, "I'll settle for a cure."

Homing in on homeopathy

If you're considering homeopathy, choose a practitioner who's also a licensed physician — or see an M.D. first.

Homeopathy is not stringently regulated in the U.S. Only three states — Arizona, Connecticut and Nevada — license practitioners. The Food and Drug Administration does not screen homeopathic remedies for safety or effectiveness.

For referrals to homeopaths, contact the National Center for Homeopathy, 801 North Fairfax St., Suite 306, Alexandria, VA 22314; 703-548-7790. □

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THE BITCH

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she is mean, unfair, nasty and, well, bitchy.

But she is also in control. In control of herself, her situation, her emotions, her life. No, she's not playing the game according to the old rules; she's tossing them out the window and playing the men's version. This can be confusing, disturbing and disorienting to everyone, men and women alike. But it can also be empowering, strengthening and — let's be honest — enjoyable. Fun as hell, to tell the truth. Why shouldn't women have the pleasure of shooting from the hip? Why shouldn't they call the shots? And why shouldn't they feel damn good about doing so?

For a long time I waited to hear good answers to these questions. Finally, I got it. The reason for the deafening silence is that there are no answers. Or rather, there is just one answer to all of them. What we need is more bitchiness in the world, not less. □

Gwenda Blair is a free-lance writer. She is writing a book about the Trump organization.



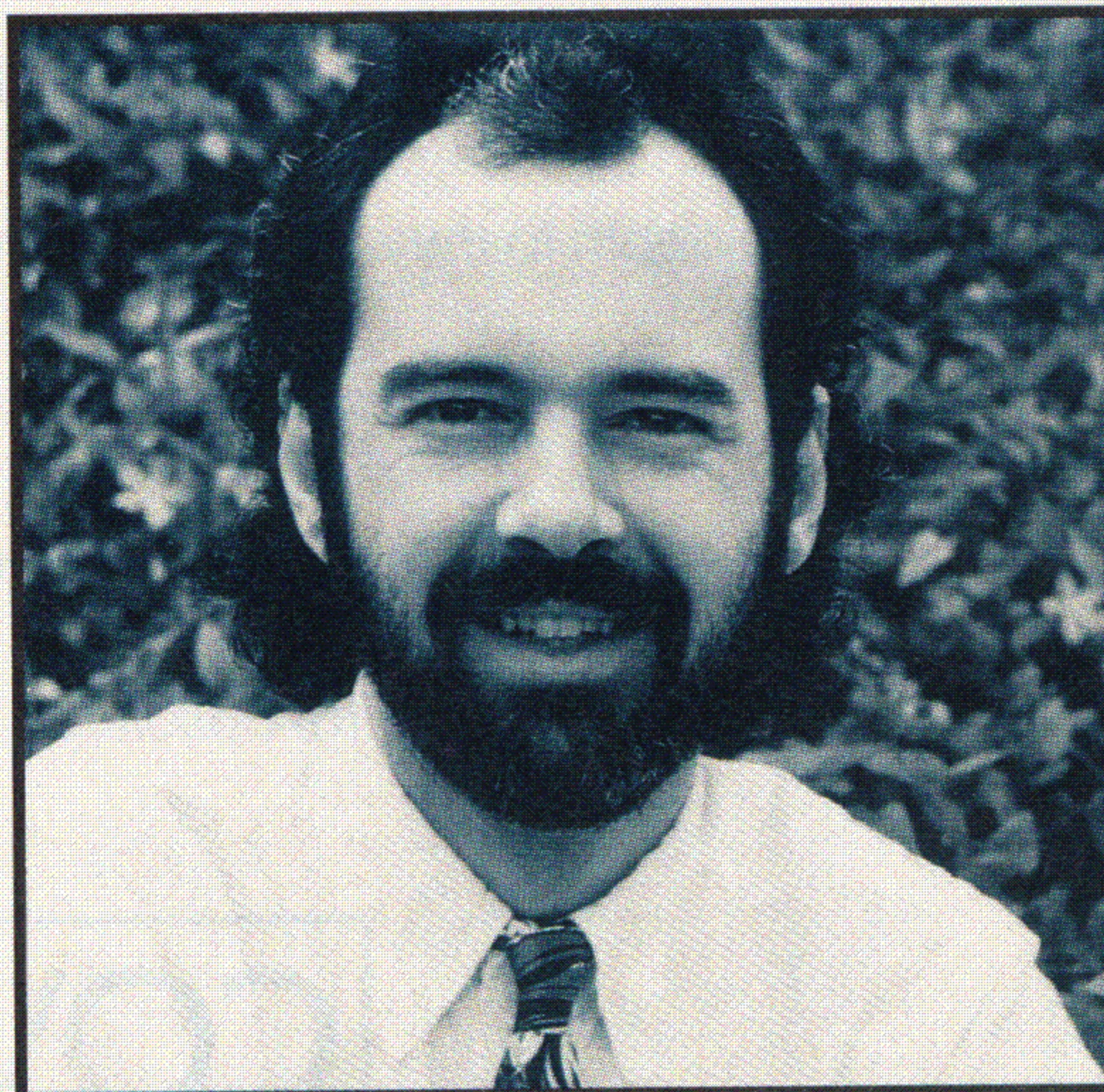
Djuna Barnes



Kathleen McAuliffe



Bico and Otto Stupakoff



Michael Walker

Djuna Barnes (1892–1982), the playwright and novelist best known for her dreamy masterwork, *Nightwood* (1937), belonged to a literary circle whose members included T. S. Eliot and James Joyce. In “Coco Talks,” (page 126), a 1931 interview adapted from *Interviews by Djuna Barnes* (Sun & Moon Press, 1985), Barnes chats up legendary designer Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel, whose views on femininity influenced a century’s fashions.

Otto Stupakoff’s fashion photography has long graced the pages of *Glamour*, *GQ* and the European editions of *Vogue*. More recently, the work of **Bico Stupakoff**, Otto’s son and former assistant, has appeared in *Elle* and *Mademoiselle*. This month, SELF features the work of three Stupakoffs: Bico for our “Workout in the Park” (page 100), Otto for “Waves of Color” (page 110)—and Otto’s latest assistant, Sef, who took this picture.

Kathleen McAuliffe (“Homeopathy: Medicine or Mysticism?” page 140) writes frequently on science and social trends for *The New York Times Magazine* and *Longevity*. A veteran investigator of “the far-out claims of fringe science,” McAuliffe caught the flu just in time to research homeopathy firsthand. “The doctor had the best bedside manner I’ve seen in years,” she says, “but I wasn’t helped by the treatment.”

Michael Walker (“Rockin’ Robbins,” page 122) ran across hot coals while profiling the motivational guru Tony Robbins, “your prototypical nice guy who willed himself into achieving massive wealth, success and fame.” Robbins’ secret, says Walker: convincing impassioned followers that “they can change their lives—instantly.” And the coals? “If you can make that leap of faith,” says Walker, “you can do anything—theoretically.”