

The State
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Commentary

Solitude brings a quiet heart in a noisy world

IT IS VERY QUIET. No one is running the dishwasher, the washing machine, the dryer. No one's playing pirated music on a computer. No one's watching a movie via DVD or VCR.

The microwave is not ping-pong a reminder. The phone is not ringing; the answering machine is not broadcasting its mechanized "Hello."

Outside, no one is mowing lawns or blowing leaves. No sirens has sounded on the thoroughfare blocks away. No one has squealed brakes at the four-way stop. No one's bouncing a ball, jeering, jostling under the basketball hoop at the park nearby.

It is very quiet. And that is beautiful. And, almost anywhere, hard to come by.

When ordinary people retreat to Meekin Abbey, near Moncks Corner, they are getting away from their regular routine," says Brother Stephen, the guestmaster. That may mean prayer, meditation, counseling. It also means quiet.

Guests who spend the night observe, as the Trappist monks do, "the grand silence." Silence follows complete, or night prayers, at 8 p.m. and proceeds through rising at 3 a.m., vigils, private prayer, breakfast and Mass, ending around 8 a.m.

"You're really searching for God," says Brother



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Readers' Circle



Alev Lytle Croutier

'Seven Houses' and one family

By MICHELLE WHITNEY EVANS
Special to The State

THE SCENT OF OLEANDER PERMEATES THE humid air. One tastes the salty bitterness of kola-mata olives and the honeyed sweetness of baklava, hears the song of the nightingale, feels the cool smoothness of the finest silk, sees the deep turquoise of the Aegean Sea.

The world of "Seven Houses," this month's Readers' Circle selection, tantalizes the senses and enchants the soul.

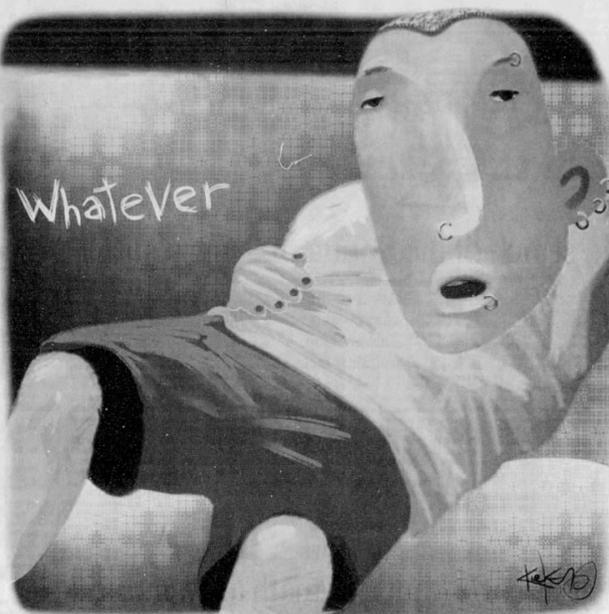
"I'm a visual writer," Turkish-born author Alev Lytle Croutier says. "I try to construct worlds that we can see, feel, taste, and through those senses, perceive a moral and emotional world."

In "Seven Houses," Croutier traces the destiny of the Ipekics, a family of "spicesters" or silk weavers, through four generations of women and 100 years of Turkish history.

The saga begins along the Aegean Sea in the ancient city of Smyrna (now called Izmir) during World War I. The family matriarch, the widowed Esma, risks family disgrace and possible stoning by engaging in a love affair with her sons' tutor, Suleyman.

Esma's brother, Iskender, discovers the affair and

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARK LITTLEHART

The lazy path to success

Can you really make something of yourself by doing nothing?

By ROY RIVENBURG
Los Angeles Times

IEVERYTHING HAD GONE according to plan, elves would have written this story.

At least, that was the hope inspired by two new books — "The Lazy Way to Success" and "The Lazy Person's Guide to Success." Both say loafing is the secret to accomplishing goals.

To back up that claim, authors Fred Gratson, a former ice cream mogul, and Ernie J. Zelinski, a Canadian writer, offer anecdotes, aphorisms and quotes from famous dawdlers.

"Hard work has absolutely nothing to do with success," Gratson asserts. If it did, "physical laborers would be the richest people in society."

Fittingly, both authors followed their own advice in writing the books. Zelinski's 286-page manual is actually half that length because every left-hand page is nothing more than quotes and large-print summaries of the main text. Likewise, Gratson's 216-page tome is padded with more than 200 illustrations.

Laziness seems to be a mini-trend in book publishing. A Chicago philosophy professor has just released "The Importance of Being Lazy," which extols the virtues of vacations and leisure time. Other titles include "The Lazy Person's Guide to Fitness," "Learn German the Lazy Way," "The Lazy Man's Guide to Purchasing an Acoustic Piano" and an updated edition of Joe Karbo's 1976 classic "The Lazy Man's Way to Riches," which focused more on positive thinking than on literal idleness.

LAZY BUT RICH

Perhaps it was inevitable that laziness would emerge as a self-help gimmick. Every other gimmick has been tried.

During the past 50 years, says motivational speaker Jack Zafelt, "We've been taught that the keys to success are goal-setting, affirmations, optimism, visualization, walking on hot coals, breaking boards, meditating, finding the inner child, subliminal tapes." Yet the search for a shortcut to success continues.

Could loafing be the answer?

Skeptics roll their eyes. "It's ironic, in this time of growing unemployment, that there'd be a market for what I think is basically bad advice," says Edward Lawler, a University of Southern California business professor. Still, the lazy method isn't totally misguided, he adds. "Like a lot of fads, there's a kernel of truth to it."

Gratson, 57, says he has been "lazy to the core" since the late '80s, when he graduated from Rutgers University in New Jersey and hitchhiked to Mexico to surf. Returning in 1970, he signed up with former Beatles guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi as a teacher of transcendental meditation.

When the maharishi later opened a university in Fairfield, Iowa, Gratson and hundreds of other meditation instructors moved to the tiny town. Not surprisingly, there wasn't a big market for meditation teachers in rural Iowa, so Gratson brainstormed another source of income.

Noticing all the cows in the area, he founded the Great Midwestern Ice Cream Co. in 1984. People

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LAZY WITTICISM

What some famous folks have said on the subject of laziness.

"Hard work never killed anybody, but why take a chance?"
— Edgar Bergen, entertainer (Charlie McCarthy)

"Far from idleness' being the root of all evil, it is rather the only true good."
— Soren Kierkegaard, philosopher

"You're young and you got your health. What do you want with a job?"
— William Fureythe, Evellie in "Raising Arizona"

"Determine never to be idle. It is wonderful how much may be done if we are always doing."
— Thomas Jefferson, statesman

"I don't think necessity is the mother of invention; invention, in my opinion, arises directly from idleness, possibly also from laziness, to save oneself trouble."
— Agatha Christie, mystery writer

"Early to rise and early to bed makes a male healthy and wealthy and dead."
— James Thurber, humorist



