

Carnegie Mellon

FEATURES

The Internet: kids on-line, families on-line, researchers on-line

A three-part look at the aging Net and how its users are using it.

By Mary Ann Pike E'80

12

Alumna learns about more than her roots

With a post-graduate study grant, Shannon Gibney went to Ghana, West Africa, to write fiction but deals here with divergent views on fact.

By Shannon Gibney HS'97

18

Mark Seltman: a work in progress

From candle manufacturer to idea salesman to furniture designer to hand analyst and astrologer proves a logical progression for alumnus.

By Judith Trojan

21

A sampling from "Pittsburgh Revealed"

Alumni and faculty photographers picture Pittsburgh in a popular exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art.

By Charlee Brodsky, Aaronel deRoy Gruber (A'40) and Mark Perrott (A'71)

24

Level three: a place of their own

Out of sight on the third level of the University Center, some 50 student organizations base their operations in expanded quarters.

By Jessica Strelitz

26

The Lakeshore Limited

Carnegie Mellon University Press, known for its poetry publications, ventures into short fiction. A selection appears here.

By David Lynn

28



Want to protect your kids from the Internet no-nos? See p. 12.



You have to hand it to Mark Seltman. He keeps his finger on the marketing pulse, despite adversity, p. 21.

DEPARTMENTS

Between the lines	2
Mail	3
News, etc.	6
Sports	7, 10, 11
Classes	34
Direct Quotes	48

COVER

Illustrator Michael Knapp captures the Wild West flavor of life on the Internet, where even the humble mouse can buck as bad as a bronco.

AS A CHILD, HE
DREAMED OF BECOMING
"A FREE SPIRIT."

MARK SELTMAN:

A WORK IN PROGRESS

He approaches astrology, Tarot and hand analysis as science.

By Judith Trojan

"If you feel passionate about something, if you really believe, then go for it! Because your time will pass. You'll look in the mirror one day, and you'll be too old to do the things you wished you'd done."—Mark Seltman, industrial designer/chemist

There's no doubt that Mark Seltman will live as many lives as Shirley MacLaine. Unlike MacLaine, Seltman (A'69) has managed to squeeze all of his lives so far into the last half of the 20th century. He turned 50 in 1997 along with high profile baby boomers Hillary Rodham Clinton, Elton John and Arnold Schwarzenegger, but Seltman seems content to be a work in progress.

His degree in industrial design and graphic arts is but one of many points of light in his burgeoning universe. He's filled many other niches in his half century, including child prodigy, fine artist, entrepreneur, Guru of Garbage, environmentalist, teacher, writer, Mr. Mom, astrologer, Tarot reader, hand analyst and occult scientist. At this writing, he likes "chemist" best.

"Alchemy is the science of the mystic," he says. "It teaches the regeneration of the spiritual man, the purification of mind, will and thought and the ennobling of all faculties of the human soul."

No surprise that change is a constant in Seltman's life—he's a Gemini with Scorpio rising after all—and that such adjectives as versatile, intuitive and resilient fit him quite well.

By the age of 30, Seltman had won and lost a substantial chunk of the American Dream. A series of business reversals—a warehouse fire, impending bankruptcy and partners incapacitated by drug and gambling addictions—impelled Seltman repeatedly to reinvent himself and develop new ways to design, manufacture and market household tchotchkes. First there were decorative candles; then plastic, molded products like translucent mushroom lamps. There were fashion window shades, and upscale wood cutting boards, rolling pins and knife racks.

"In the year-and-a-half after college graduation, I went from zero money and no business experience to having almost 20 employees, 30,000 square feet of space, a fleet of trucks, forklifts, tons of credit and inventory," he recalls. "At the time, the candle business was votives, columns and tapers. We innovated beautiful candles sculpted like ice cream and sand castles."

Photos by Jon Carlson

The candle factory burned down in 1971, leaving stockholders and creditors in the lurch. "Ultimately, I paid back 10 cents on the dollar and got zero for myself," he says. "I didn't want to go bankrupt; it just didn't feel right to me."

From selling candles to selling concepts

Still determined to do industrial design his way, he rolled up his sleeves and segued into subcontract manufacturing.

"I thought I'd let someone else do the manufacturing. Why should I be tied down? I just chose another kind of prison," he admits matter-of-factly.

Crediting his Carnegie Mellon course work in plastics and injection molding, he swapped paraffin for plastic and got somebody else to do the molding, assembly and packaging of his designs. The plan backfired. "It turned out to be police work," he says. "Unless a company's work is proprietary, they put it on the bottom of the pile when anything else important comes in."

Next, he decided just to sell concepts. "I had lots of ideas for new products, so I figured I'd hook up with someone who'd purchase my ideas and pay me a royalty."

He met with presidents of large corporations throughout the country and, for one reason or another, was rejected. "I think my ideas were ahead of their time," he sighs with resignation.

Seltman's business reversals taught him many lessons, most importantly that his determination to succeed as an "industrial designer" didn't mesh with his childhood dream to be "a free spirit."

"I was afraid of being a starving musician or artist, so I decided to become an industrial designer because it seemed like the sensible thing to do," he says. "I thought if I could combine the practical with the aesthetic, I could do very well in the world." Not so. Not then.

Growing up in Pittsburgh in a happy, supportive family with two younger siblings, Seltman was something of a child prodigy on the piano. He couldn't read music; but at age seven, he was playing the piano on the radio and giving recitals in piano stores. Drawing and painting also came easily. By the time he reached high school, he had won many art awards. When Seltman was 29, his father Cy died unexpectedly. His mother Miriam, now a psychiatric social worker at Pittsburgh's Children's Hospital, tried to fill the void. "My dad was Superman and Tarzan to me," he says. "I lost my hero and my momentum." It was then that his interest in astrology jelled. "Because of all the catastrophes—and my father's death was the biggest catastrophe of all—my consciousness began changing. I started caring less about the material world and more about the spiritual and esoteric."

Dipping into astrology, Tarot, palmistry, psychology

At first skeptical—he remembers his disbelief when middle-class Jewish kids went to India, got a guru and came home with an Indian name—Seltman seriously began studying astrology, Tarot, palmistry and psychology.

His new consciousness was freeing: "Astrological symbolism showed me that I had fulfilled my natal promise. I was not going to be another Howard Hughes or Donald Trump and make a lot of money. My purpose was to come to some kind of higher knowledge

of myself and share it with others. I could see myself spending the rest of my life satisfying my curiosity about people and helping them look at themselves in an entirely new way."

Seltman's self-discovery impacted his craft as an industrial designer as well. He took a new look at his raw materials and didn't like what he saw.

He recalls that during his four years at Carnegie Mellon there was very little consciousness of the Earth in the design process. "At the time I graduated, being an industrial designer was really about consumerism and how to save money for a manufacturer. It had nothing to do with saving natural materials or resources."

Seltman began designing furniture and decorative accessories out of recycled materials. He taught classes on the subject at Parsons School of Design and Cooper Union in New York City, and joined the Manhattan Citizen's Solid Waste board.

"I hoped to influence New Yorkers to be more conscious about consuming less and creating less garbage," he says. "I wanted them to pay attention to what they bought, that they could reuse and recycle." In fact, Seltman's own tiny New

York apartment works for his family of three thanks to his genius for turning recyclables into functional, space-saving furniture and storage containers.

He tried to sell his environmentally friendly furniture designs and garbage receptacles but hit a brick wall.

"Trash is unsightly. People have to separate it, so I figured why not come up with attractive recycling containers for people who have space problems. A manufacturer was excited by my designs, which he called 'Yuppie garbage cans,' but he said I had to advertise in high profile magazines. I just didn't want to make my own investment in marketing; so I told him, 'If you want to invest, great; if not, I'm going to give these prototypes to friends who can use them, and I'm retiring.'"

The press descended upon Seltman's provocative college lectures and forays into landfills to recycle trash—from plastic to pallets—into usable goods. He was crowned the "Guru of Garbage" by Metropolis, New York's leading design magazine, and suddenly became a media star in New York and venues as far-flung as Germany and Japan. "The Japanese are more interested in recycling since they have less space to bury the stuff," he says.

Seltman, the eco-maniac, soon began to feel a lot like Don Quixote. "It's easy to convert the converted," he says ruefully. "I was trying to convince the unconverted to do the right thing and not doing a very good job of it. Everybody was trying to convince me to do something for nothing. I designed a corporate conference room out of recycled material and was asked by another client to give them a price on a similar room. They immediately questioned why it was so expensive, since it was 'just trash.' I was getting poorer and poorer, even though I was more and more devoted to making things happen."

Explaining palmistry to Barbara Walters

Currently, Seltman channels all of his energy into metaphysical pursuits. His career as a hand analyst, astrologer and Tarot reader is booked solid with private readings, corporate and fund-raising

parties, museum and university lectures, writing and TV gigs. Last fall, he appeared on Barbara Walters' daytime talk show, "The View," where he explained the principles of palmistry.

Seltman is quick to distance himself from tearoom Gypsies. "Gypsies are all scam artists," he says. "Even if they could really help people, they choose to embrace the bottom line to get your money. They know enough to take advantage of your vulnerability."

He sees astrology, Tarot and hand analysis as science, noting that, next to tongues, hands have the strongest link to the brain.

"The laws of scientific hand reading are just as valid as traditional science," he stresses. "Basically, our minds are creating, but our hands are doing the work. Our character is revealed through the shape and proportion of our hands, nails and individual fingers, how we hold our hands, and the lines on our palms and fingers. Throughout our lifetime, our hands change as our thinking and circumstances change."

He uses astrology and Tarot as tools to help him help his clients. "Astrology gives you an understanding of timing and life cycles, while Tarot is a good way of getting at the unconscious," he claims.

Fine-tuning his intuition

Twenty years of study and hands-on readings of thousands of individuals have enabled Seltman to formulate his theories and fine-tune his intuition. While working at New York's Forensic Psychiatric Hospital designing vocational programs for 150 violent criminals, he managed to study their hands and astrology charts as well. A charming pastel that bears a remarkable resemblance to Seltman, hangs on his apartment wall. It was drawn by an inmate who slit his girlfriend's throat from ear-to-ear.

In an earlier life, Seltman was a successful New York advertising executive who created award-winning Alka-Seltzer commercials. With everyday clients, Seltman tends to see the same scenarios played out repeatedly. "Within five minutes of examining a person's hands, I can tell his or her current major life issues," he asserts. "I find a lot of people with propensities in their hands for battling with truth and struggling to give the appearance of what other people need them to be. Procrastination is a common problem that manifests in the hands. Why is it that we're always waiting for the right time and circumstance to deal with what means the most to us? Fear is another critical issue that appears—what individuals fear and what's holding them back from whatever it is that they really want."

Seltman's life took on added dimension with the birth of his late-in-life daughter Cassie, now six, to whom he became Mr. Mom until she entered kindergarten. His wife, dancer/choreographer Joanna Brotman, teaches dance at the Dalton School in Manhattan. As Cassie embarks upon her own life's journey, her dad is not far behind.

Making sense of life lines, Mercury retrogrades and the Eight of Cups may seem a frivolous pursuit to some, but Seltman defuses naysayers with his genial, wholistic approach. "People ask me if I rule my life by astrology and hand analysis, and I say, 'No way!'

Basically, I like to see how the symbolism fits; and if it fits, I wear it. There's always something challenging coming along. Maybe timing would be better at a later date to deal with those challenges, but you've got to live your life. If there's something you want to do, just do it. Shit happens. It's how you handle it. Life's about thriving, flourishing and blossoming. That's what's important."

He tried to be "a little outrageous"

"I was always rebellious and had trouble following directions. My design professor Robert Lepper [A'27, now deceased; see p. 7] was a leading sculptor who worked with aluminum, which was a new material at the time. He pretty much gave me free rein and support for whatever I wanted to do. I built a motorcycle for one class and photographed him on it."

"My industrial design professor Dick Felver [A'40, now deceased] came up to me at graduation and said, 'You know, I don't think for the three years that I had you in class that you followed one single assignment; but, I want you to know that I like you.'"

"I always tried to be different and a little outrageous. I did the assignments, but with a twist. In my drawing class, I was supposed to do a portrait of somebody famous, so I worked all night on a gigantic portrait of my professor Bernie Sachs [of Boca Raton, Fla.]. It covered the whole classroom wall! He completely ignored it, and after he looked at everyone else's work, he said, 'It's just as bad as your little ones, only it's big.'"

Mark Seltman's metaphysical design workshops exploring the meanings and uses of solar symbolism in various cultures will run at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum Smithsonian Institution at the Carnegie Mansion, 2 East 91 St., New York City, Friday, June 26, and Saturday, June 27. Call (212) 849-8380 for more information.



Mark Seltman, right, has a look at photographer Jon Carlson's life and other lines.

Judith Trojan is managing editor and writer in the corporate communications office of an international publisher. She won two 1997 NY/IABACE Awards and two 1997 APEX Awards of Excellence for feature writing, including awards for profiles of Cherry Jones (A'78) and Richard M. Hughes (A'66) written for this magazine.