

Joe Matthew Singer (November 22, 1950 - June 25, 1993) was a writer, printer, and publisher from Powell, Wyoming. He was an active figure in the small press and independent book publishing community of the Pacific Northwest through the 1980s until his death in 1993.

Singer began publishing in 1970, buying out a literary arts zine called *Grok*, which he renamed *The Village Idiot*, which he would edit and publish for the rest of his life. Interested in radical and anarchist politics, Singer printed a number of local underground newspapers, before dropping out of college to wander the country, working various odd and low-level print jobs in California, Colorado, Missouri, and New York. In 1980, he purchased his first printing press and founded Mother of Ashes Press. In a 1992 interview with Jerome Gold, Singer recalls the origins of the imprint:

“I bought a Kelsey letterpress. A six-by-ten Kelsey. You know, these tabletop letterpresses. And that’s when I started the press. ‘Cause I finally had a press. And so I named it. [...] It started out as a poem but that’s all I got written of it, was ‘Mother of Ashes.’”

In 1984, he relocated to Harrison, Idaho, where he settled down with “Darlene,” his prized Multilith model 1261 offset duplicator, on which he would carry out the bulk of his printing work for the next decade, focusing primarily on periodicals and limited edition runs of books, chapbooks, and broadsides related to poetry, stories, and local activism.

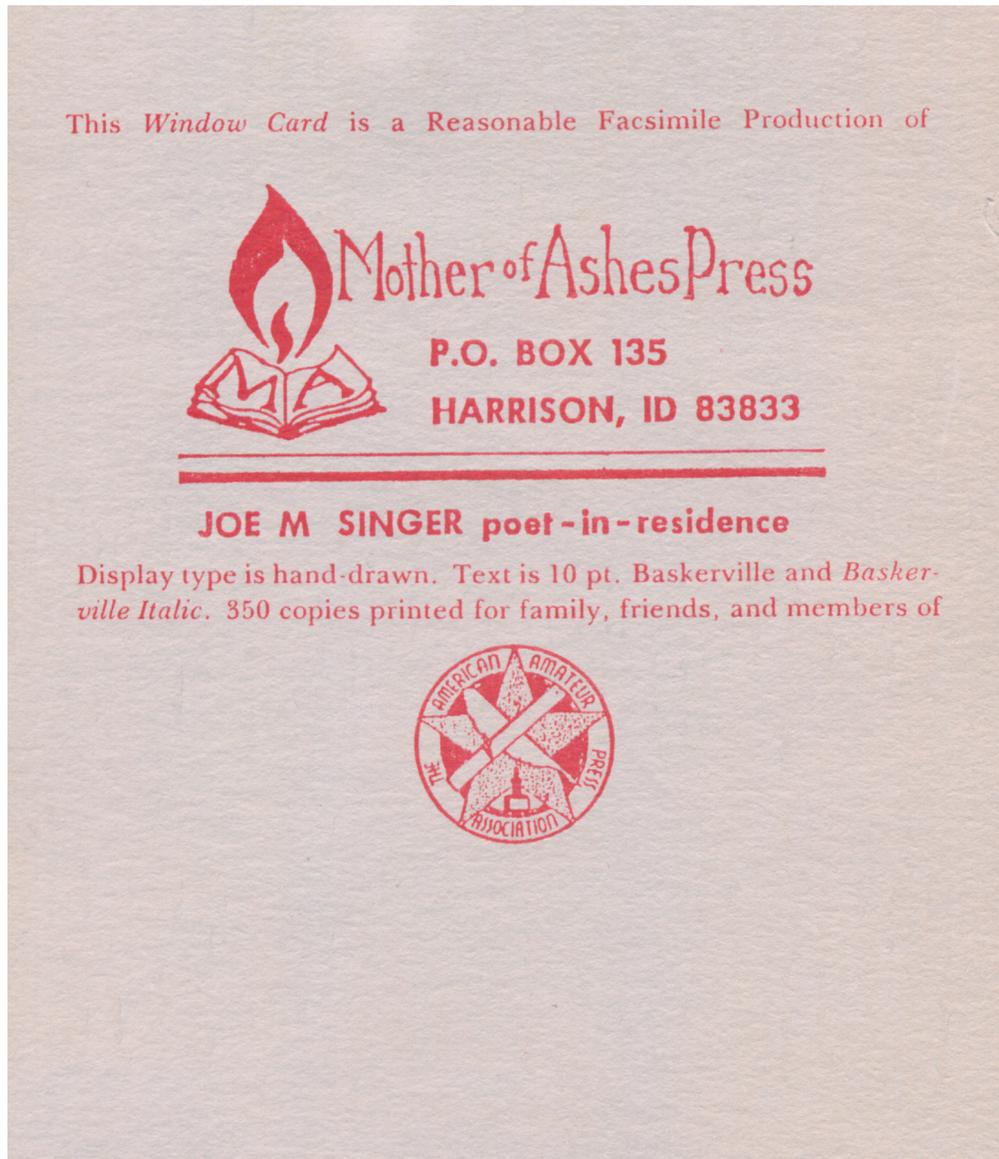
Singer had a particular fondness for the technical aspects of printing. He enjoyed talking shop, and carried on several lengthy correspondences with other printers and publishers, such as Penelope Reedy (*The Redneck Review*) and Fred Woodworth (*The Match!*). In 1987, he started another periodical called *The Printer’s Devil*, which he dedicated to “well-written articles on graphic arts for small presses” with an emphasis on “technical how-to pieces.”

Singer struggled with alcoholism and depression for the majority of his life. In his correspondences he often wrote about his isolation and loneliness in the very small town of Harrison. In the early summer of 1993, he was found dead in his car by self-inflicted gunshot wound.

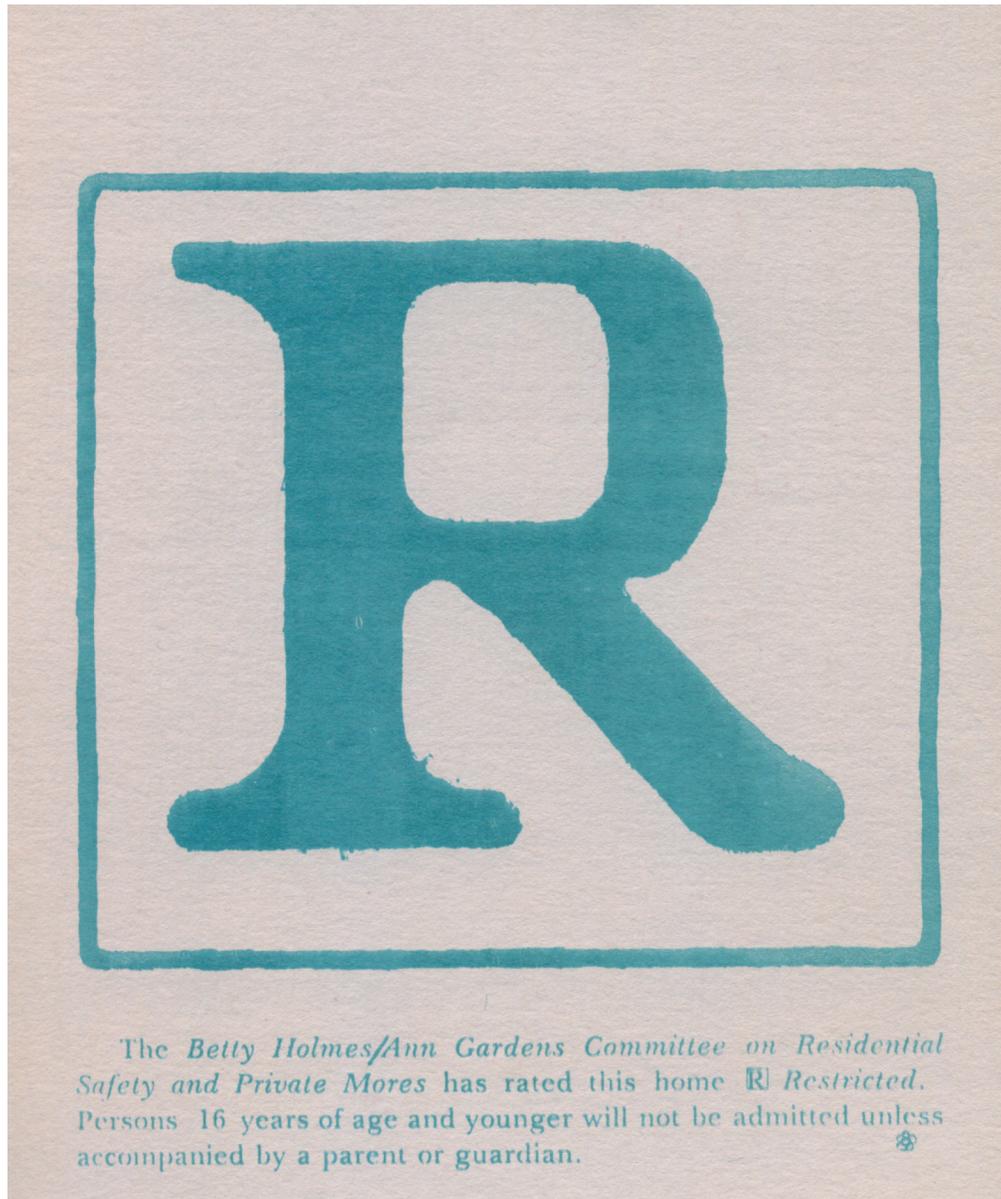
Most of his papers were lost or destroyed after his death. This PDF makes available for the first time some of the surviving ephemera of the Mother of Ashes imprint to which Singer dedicated his life.



Joe M. Singer's "Landscape w/ Trees," a broadside printed in an edition 69. Although Singer single-handedly ran Mother of Ashes Press, he always referred to his role as "poet-in-residence," frequently putting out his own projects under the imprint.



Mother of Ashes Press window card printed in an edition of 350, also indicating Singer's membership in the American Amateur Press Association.



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Mother of Ashes Press

Publishers & Printers: THE VILLAGE IDIOT, The Printer's Devil, LIFE & TIMES

P.O. Box 135 Harrison ID 83833 Joe M. Singer
poet-in-residence

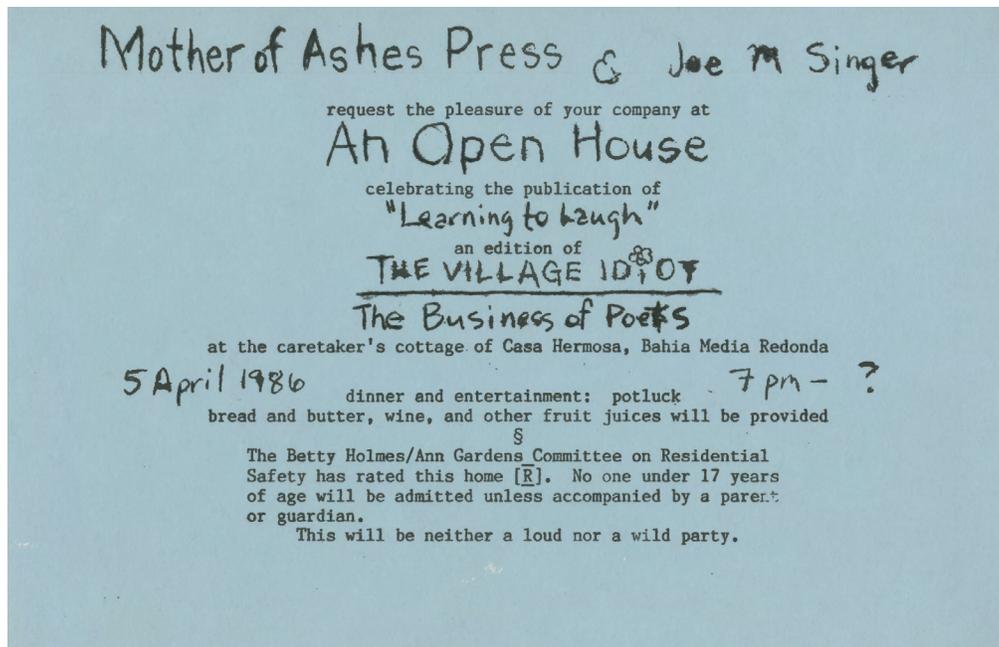
Authors' Guide

THE VILLAGE IDIOT wants first use of poems, pictures, and stories which "breathe" and pays a nominal fee for one time use of material. Authors also receive a contributor's copy (two on request) of the edition in which their work appears. Contrary to popular belief, humorous and/or light verse receives no special consideration (see LIFE & TIMES). Illustrated poems and stories, and annotated pictures, however, do. The magazine appears irregularly, depending on the material received and the press' financial viability.

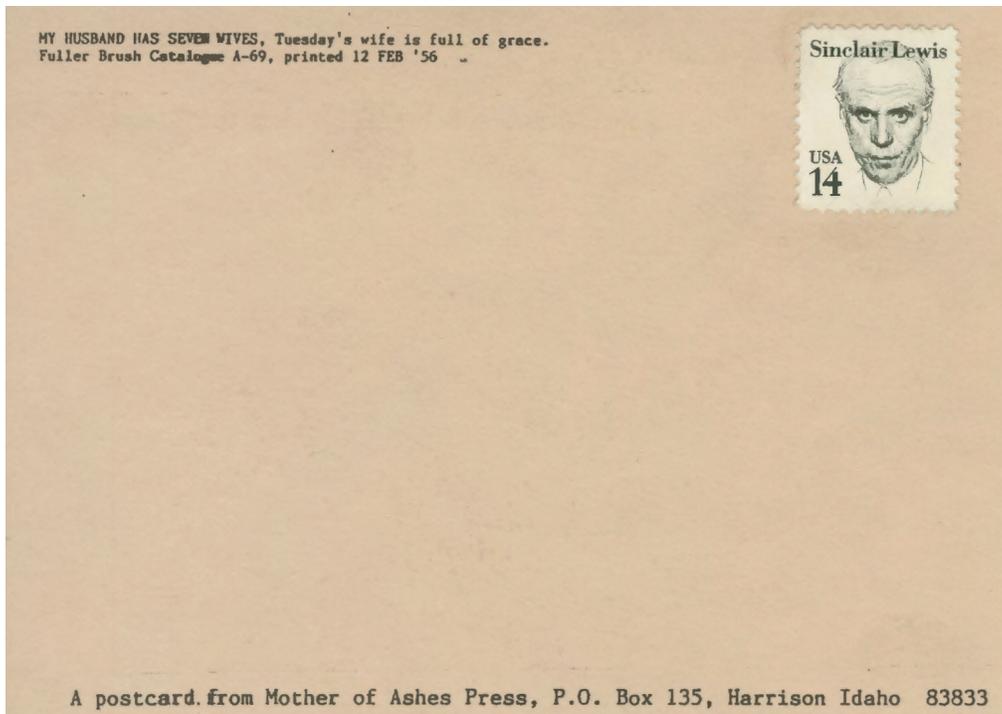
The Printer's Devil is published as a supplement to THE VILLAGE IDIOT, though copies are available separately. It needs short, well-written articles on graphic arts for the small press. The emphasis is on technical how-to pieces. Payment is a subscription to the newsletter. The Printer's Devil is not copyrighted.

LIFE & TIMES will consider anything not suitable for the press' other periodicals including but not limited to articles, editorials, essays, recipes, sheet music, reviews, light verse, humor, maps, and erotica. Contributors receive two copies of the issue in which their work appears.

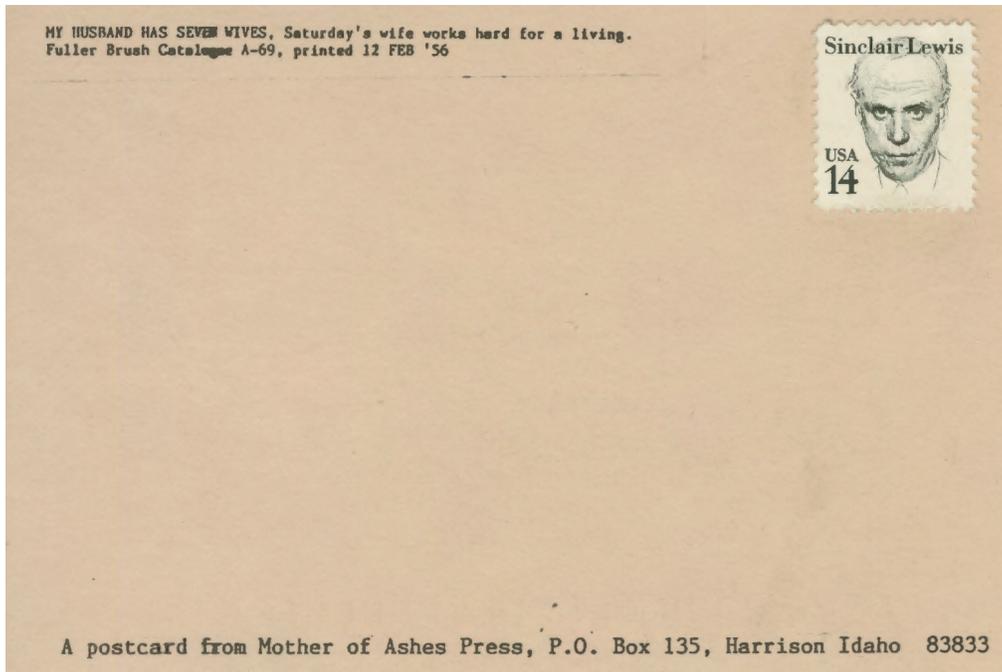
Excepting The Printer's Devil, all publications of Mother of Ashes Press are copyrighted with all rights reverting to the original artists. Manuscripts must be legible; pictures must not require detailed half-tones or color separations. Unaccepted material will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope sufficient to the task. Please allow three months for reply. 



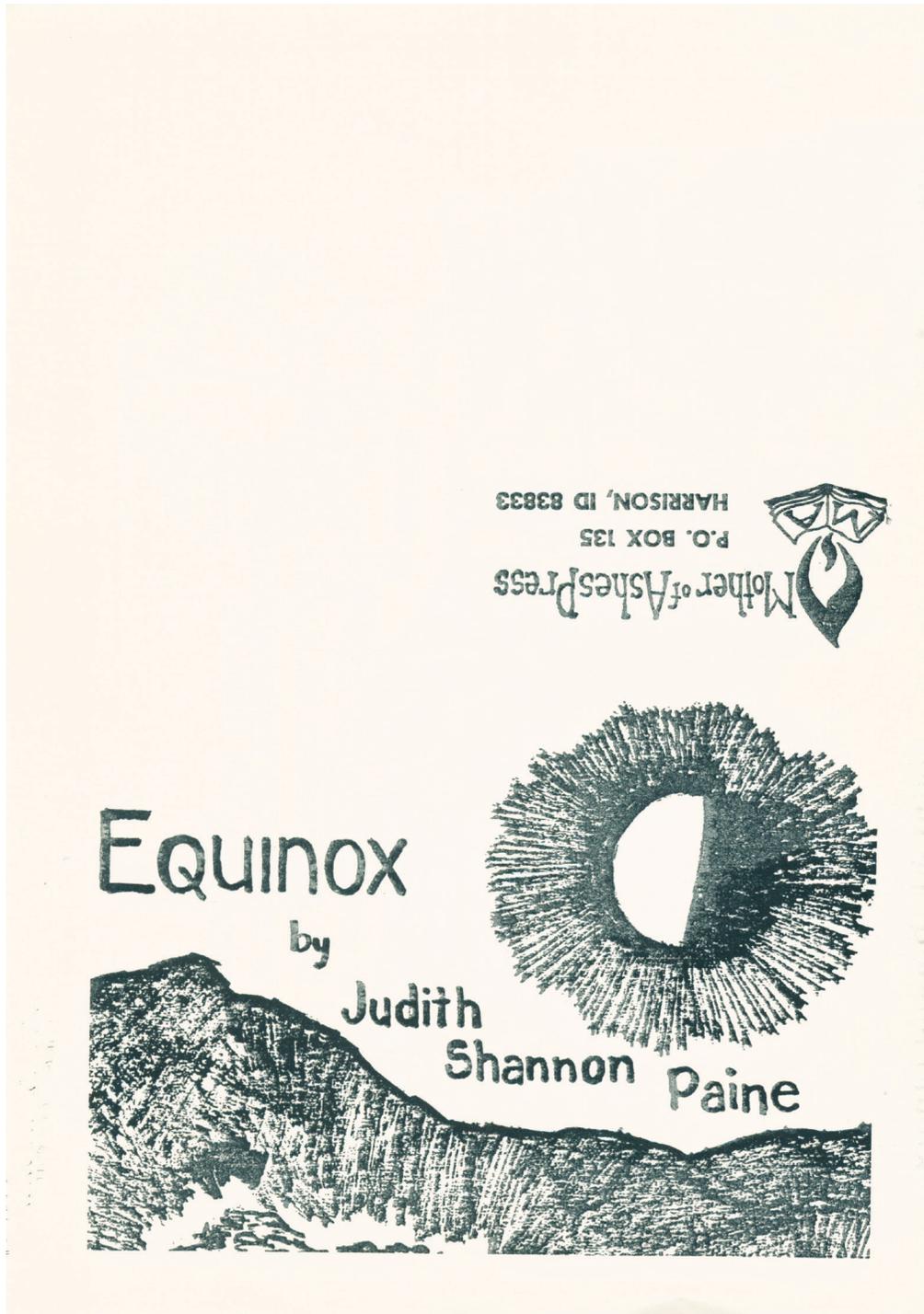
Invitation to Singer's residence for the release party of *The Village Idiot* #9 "Learning to Laugh," published 1 April 1986.



The second ("Tuesday's wife is full of grace") and sixth ("Saturday's wife works hard for a living") installments from a Singer mail art project entitled "MY HUSBAND HAS SEVEN WIVES."



The second ("Tuesday's wife is full of grace") and sixth ("Saturday's wife works hard for a living") installments from a Singer mail art project entitled "MY HUSBAND HAS SEVEN WIVES."



Promotional materials for the work of Judith Shannon Paine (1942-2019), an Idaho-based poet who was a frequent collaborator of Singer's during the 1980s.

I CALL YOU FREE

How can I compare you?
Thoughts, messages, memories
and images wheel in my head,
even as you wheeled on feathers
deceptively clever.
High. Higher still and then away.
I Loved the way you flew that day.

Hawk they call you. I call you Free.
You call the shots.
'PREDATOR' they name you. I see you as
Survivor. Or, are we all predators, perhaps?
I see you as a balance in the total scheme
of things. Your very existence, red-tailed bird.
Your habits. Your magic wings.

I would be free like you — Balancing
on the currents, riding the updrafts,
sailing like a leaf before a sweet, cool wind,
settling to rest when you choose.
Hawk they call you. I call you Free.
Oh how you tug when you fly;
At the tethered captive that is me.

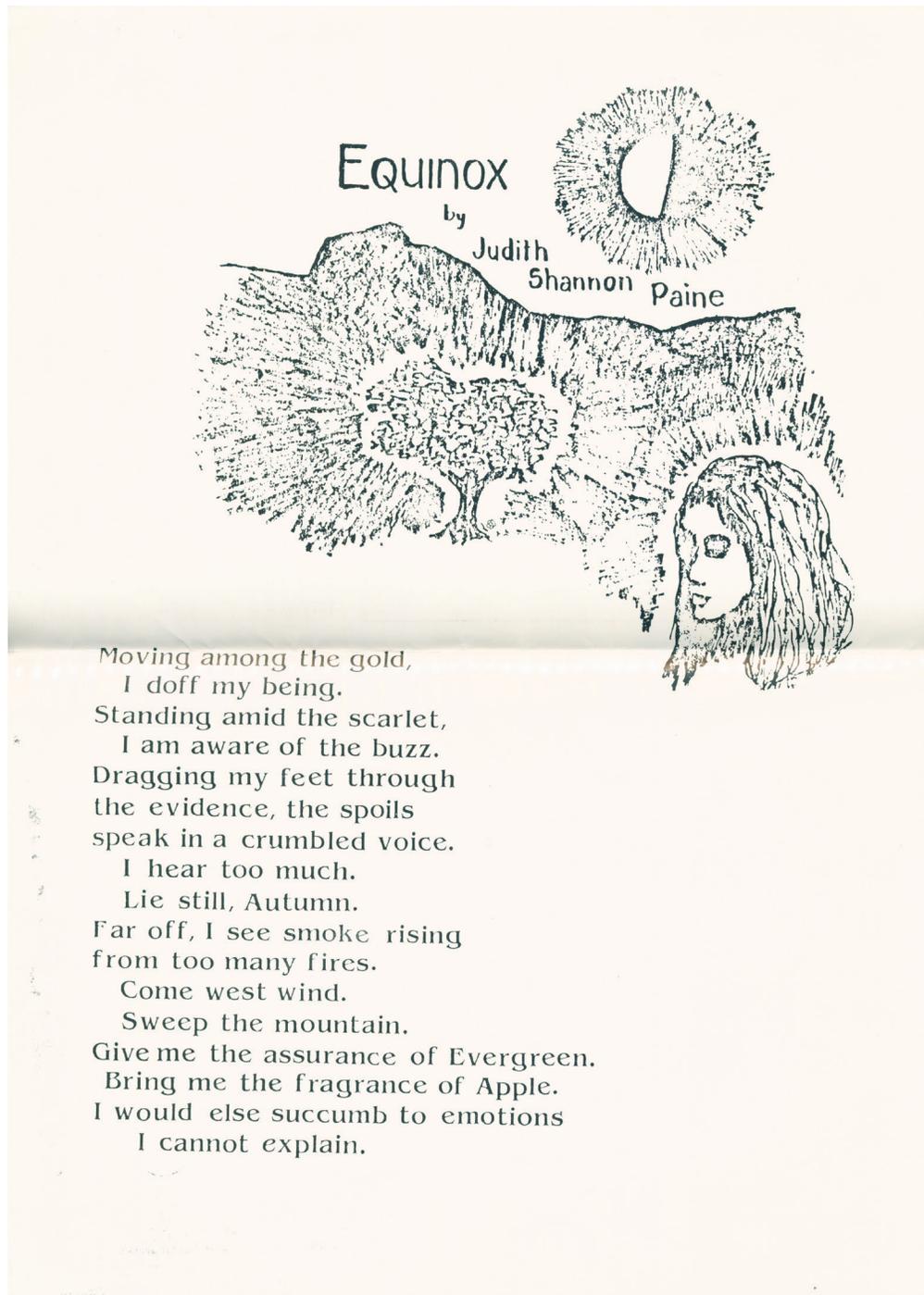
Judith Shannon Paine

Judith Shannon Paine is a recent North Idaho resident and is happily setting down roots in the country. Married to Richard Paine, she has a daughter, Nancy, and a son, Shawn. She enjoys working as a substitute teacher at Kootenai Jr./Sr. High School. Among the literary honors that Judith has received is World of Poetry Press' Golden Poet of 1985. Her poetry has appeared in numerous anthologies, chapbooks, and literary journals. Judith is currently at work on her first novel. She is a member of the Idaho Writer's League, Coeur d'Alene chapter.

Two of Judith's poems appear in "Learning to Laugh," the 1 April 1986 edition of THE VILLAGE IDIOT. This magazine, the first in The Business of Poets series, is available from Mother of Ashes Press for \$3.00.

This is a LIFE & TIMES broadside.

EQUINOX, and I CALL YOU FREE are copyright © 1986 by
Judith Shannon Paine. Spring 1986





Mother of Ashes Press

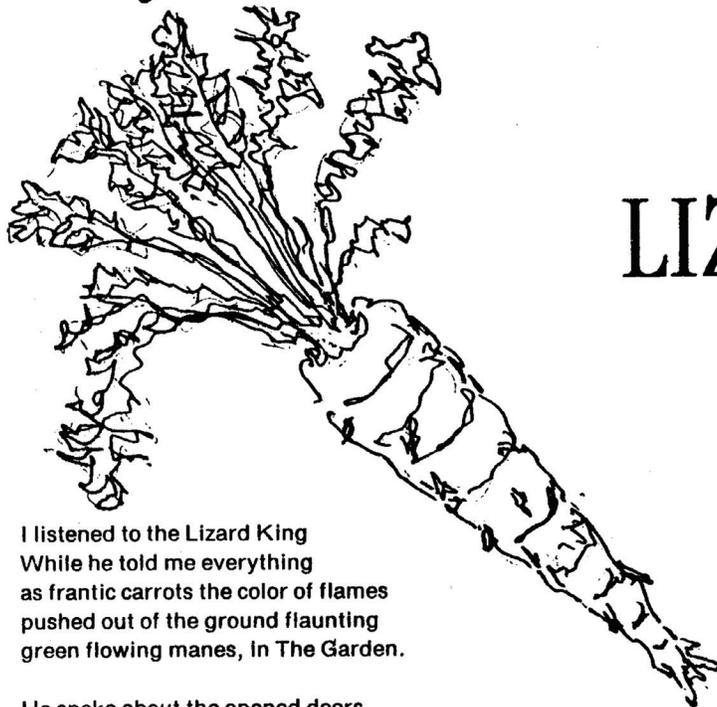
P.O. BOX 135

HARRISON, ID 83833



Judith Shannon Paine

THE
LIZARD
KING



I listened to the Lizard King
While he told me everything
as frantic carrots the color of flames
pushed out of the ground flaunting
green flowing manes, In The Garden.

He spoke about the opened doors,
a freeing of the trammeled soul and songs
so few of us have heard; lyrical forgotten
words from times more old than they are now
and when I dared, I asked him, "How?"

He shed his tail, He shed his skin, He shed
his lizard blood and then, He left
in such a blast of flame, I stood amazed.
Nearby came a flash of heat, a curl of smoke.

I heard the final word He spoke; a hiss half-crazed:

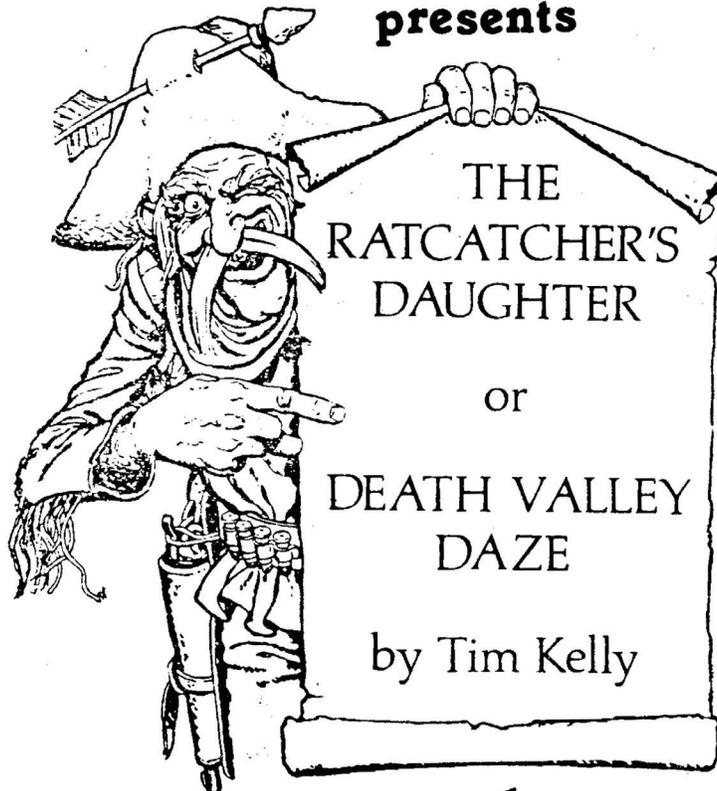
"LISTEN!"

31 poems
\$3



THE
HARRISON OPERA
TROUPE

presents



and

MUSICAL GUESTS

**Sun., 1 Sept.
Harrison Idaho GYM
8 PM**

Printed materials for The Harrison Opera Troupe. Singer was active in the local theater community in Harrison and also served as a stagehand for numerous productions.

❧ **PROGRAM** ❧

Tom Lamb
tunes
and the poetry of Rob't Service
Torline, Liming, & Thysell
folk music

THE HARRISON OPERA TROUPE

production of

**THE RATCATCHER'S DAUGHTER
OR
DEATH VALLEY DASE**

An old time melodrama in two acts
by Tim Kelly

Scene: An orphanage in Death Valley.

HARRISON
OLD TIME PICNIC, inc.

presents

THE
HARRISON
OPERA
TROUPE



in

the
DRUNKARD

by raymond hall

Printed materials for The Harrison Opera Troupe. Singer was active in the local theater community in Harrison and also served as a stagehand for numerous productions.

HARRISON COMMUNITY OLD TIME PICNIC

INC

presents



27 July 1985
Harrison Elementary Gym
8 PM

PROGRAM

THE GOLDEN BELLS

sing a musical montage

A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY THRU THE 40s

Arranged by Hawley Ades

THE HARRISON OPERA TROUPE

production of

THE RATCATCHER'S DAUGHTER OR DEATH VALLEY DASE

An old time melodrama in two acts
by Tim Kelly

Scene: An orphanage in Death Valley.

HARRISON HOTSHOTS

KITCHEN BAND

play

"Tijuana Taxi"
"It Happened in Monterey"
"Spanish Eyes"
"Mexicali Rose"
"La Cucaracha"
and
"Mexican Clap Dance"

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Kootenai School District #274
auditorium
Harrison Senior Citizens
costumes and props
Mrs. Allene Kimes
wigs and costumes

THE RATCATCHER'S DAUGHTER is
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the illustration on the cover
of this program.

Donald Heikkila
sound system

printed in USA by  Mother of Ashes Press

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In the mid 80s, Singer served as the printer for Citizens Against Nuclear Weapons and Extermination (CANWE), an anti-nuclear group in nearby Coeur d'Alene.

page 8

ART SHOW REVIEWED

Disarming Images: Art for Nuclear Disarmament. Yellowstone Art Center, 401 N. 27th St., Billings MT 59101. Free admission. Runs through 8 June.

A lunchhour browse through this currently touring show rewards the viewer with a healthy idea of how contemporary artists are incorporating the nuclear crisis in their aesthetic consciousness.

This major show includes 44 works by 46 artists; including Laurie Anderson, Hans Haacke, Robert Longo, Ed Paschke, Joan Brown, and William Wegman; selected by curator Nina Felshin. It was organized by Bread and Roses (the cultural project of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees), the AFL-CIO, and the New York City Physicians for Social Responsibility. Touring Under the auspices of The Art Museum Association of America it is visiting museums throughout the United States.

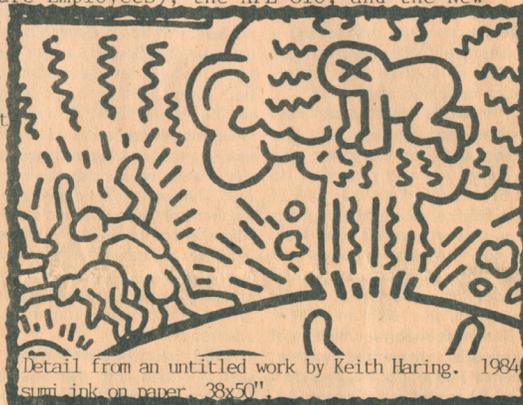
The works are done in a wide variety of media, from oil on canvas to cast bronze sculptures. Bold colors seem to predominate. While most of the pieces address nuclear holocaust, some are concerned with the danger of nuclear energy and hazardous waste. Others, still, are more general, often expressing concern with the uses and abuses of nuclear power in allegorical and evocative terms.

Barbara Calling III provides the brightest ray of hope in the show. This large oil painting shows disarmament advocates massed in front of the Congress. The most arresting work in the show is Father, a sculpture largely constructed of clear plastic tubing. Memorable, also, is a bronze of a severed, mutilated head laying on an anvil. The balance of power is graphically depicted in Atomic Pull Toy. A wood sculpture, it has Reagan and Gromyko shaking hands as they balance on a ballistic missile.

Very few of the works fail to address the nuclear crisis or to provoke a response. Seven Photographs and an Orange Ball seems more concerned with the dangers of cigarette smoking.

Readers outside the Billings area are encouraged to watch for the show in their area and to write this newsletter when it is scheduled to appear. The catalog accompanying the show is available from the gift shop of the Yellowstone Art Center for \$4.95 plus \$1.00 postage and handling.

reviewed by Joe M Singer



Detail from an untitled work by Keith Haring, 1984, sumi ink on paper, 38x50".



In the mid 80s, Singer served as the printer for Citizens Against Nuclear Weapons and Extermination (CANWE), an anti-nuclear group in nearby Coeur d'Alene.

Joe Singer

1951 – 1993



PRINTED above and on the following page is a letter from my friend, Joe Singer, who died this summer in Harrison Idaho of what has been termed a "self-inflicted gunshot wound". Joe was the editor and publisher of *The Printer's Devil*, and he and I had corresponded for many years on printing topics. We met in 1990, when he passed through Tucson and stayed overnight at my office. He and Iris and I went out for Mexican food that night and talked about writing, do-it-yourself publishing, and other topics—too briefly, I'm sorry to say. All too briefly.

—Fred Woodworth.