

profiles

David Oaks, at 26, has impressive credentials.

He graduated in 1977 from Harvard, where he studied government and economics, but "feels a little weird about having been at Harvard."

He earns what money he needs doing temporary typing work... at 100 words a minute. "They even gave me flowers during National Secretary Week," he added.

Aside from these accomplishments, two things motivate David Oaks — personal growth and anti-psychiatry movement work. Combined, these have led to his support of larger issues, like the recent peace march on the United Nations.

"When you get locked up, you realize that a lot of other people who say they were wrongfully locked up or drugged or oppressed may be right. So you're willing to think and act differently about these things as long as you know how to do it carefully.

"Seven years ago I ran into a problem. I'm manic depressive. What happens is I suddenly start going without sleep, thinking a mile a minute, and having ideas, weird philosophical

David Oaks: Anti-psychiatry activist

BY CONNIE NEIL

beliefs, ideas about religion, technology, love. These are things everyone thinks about, but I tended to act them out, and so I got locked up.

"Usually the Harvard school authorities pressured me into going to the institution, so although technically I went voluntarily, there was a lot of heavy coercion. During my time at Harvard I was inside about five times for periods from a few days to five weeks.

"In the institution they would give me drugs, sometimes forcibly injecting Thorazine, and put me in seclusion which made me really angry. Thorazine totally wiped out my thoughts and feelings for the period of time they

were giving it to me. While you're on that drug, you're unable to think, can't concentrate or make your thoughts articulate. I have a feeling that still follows me through the years, not as intensive as with ECT people, but I think it affects me still," said Oaks.

While Oaks completed his Harvard education, he was only permitted to stay on there provided he received injections.

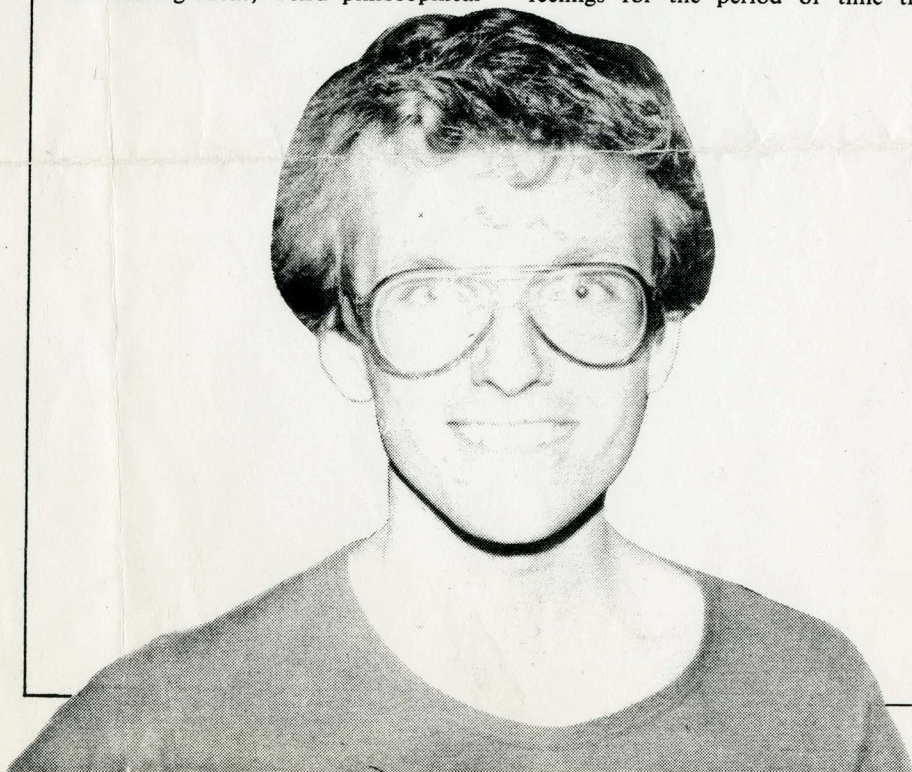
"Basically what happened was I totally fell in love with this woman at Harvard, absolutely, ridiculously. I really made an idiot of myself. I was totally fixated on her, couldn't get her out of my mind, wandering the streets, walking by the river, her face always in my memory, always in my mind. I just suddenly realized that this was it.

"Anyway, every time I went crazy I would call her up. At the time I think she just tolerated me and it wasn't really a problem for her. Although in a way I guess she was frightened or intimidated by me, I don't think it was a really heavy thing.

"I was cooped up in a small dormitory room, listening to the stereo and coming out of the closet in terms of being alive. I burst out of there at a million miles an hour. And you're not supposed to do that.

"Another time I went crazy publishing a poetry magazine called 'padan aram' whose motto was 'all experimental art is to some degree reckless' — and these poets had me locked up," said Oaks.

His last day at Harvard was the last time he took an injection. Oaks has not been hospitalized or drugged since then.



"After graduation I did about four years work with the Boston group Mental Patients Liberation Front (P.O. Box 514, Cambridge, Mass. USA 02238). They taught me many things. I wrote my senior paper on the organizational structure of MPLF to analyze how it was organized. Looking at how things are organized has helped ever since in my work for the movement.

"Harvard didn't teach me a thing compared to MPLF who taught me backpacking, friendship, anti-sexism, radical politics, community organizing, grant writing, press releases, dealing with the press, handling meetings, finding that trusted people can filch from the treasury, that your office can be ripped apart — that these things can happen and that you have to go on, that it's all human.

"I gained a lot from all the wonderful people there. I think ex-mental patients are fascinating, a great minority with their own culture, all unusual people. For me, different kinds of people is where it's at. A novelist today could not write about the corporate world because they're all the same. He'd have to write about ex-mental patients because they're willing to be different," explained Oaks.

After eight years in Boston, Oaks left a year ago.

"The reason I left was because I'd been thinking a lot about ways people are controlled. I drew up at my office job, (where I didn't have to do any thinking work) a list of goals in order to get me past the controlling influences of society.

"I decided that society, my past, having to earn money to get by, problems, oppression, media — all these different influences control our minds and the way we think.

"I sort of built a 'space suit', set my goals for everyday life and now I check how they're doing from time to time. The suit makes it possible to walk freely from the mind control.

"My goals are seven: spirituality, expression, thought, health, friends, anti-facism, and nature's beauty.

"I never let money influence me unless it's necessary for a particular goal. If your goal is to be happier about yourself and you need a car to do that, then you need a job. But perhaps you can bypass the job and car and still feel happier about yourself. I support myself, but money is a problem if I'm going to do it on my own terms," said Oaks.

During this last year on the road David Oaks has contributed his work to other anti-psychiatry groups like the Alliance for the Liberation of Mental Patients in Philadelphia.

"I also helped out a little with *Madness Network News* and the Network Against Psychiatric Assault, who share an office in Berkeley, California," said Oaks.

For the May '82 Conference in Toronto, Oaks arrived early to help with last-minute details and planning. He wrote some press releases, facilitated some Conference meetings and actively supported the Sheraton Sit-In. After the Conference he stayed on to write his impressions for the *Phoenix Rising* Conference issue.

Oaks uses his skills in other political groups — anti-nuclear power, anti-nuclear war, feminist issues, progressive leftist politics — to name his favourites. "I've helped organize a lot of demonstrations," he added.

"For my improved health it is very important to get enough sleep, eat the right food, not take any harmful drugs, have a network of supportive friends, and do political work so you can change a bad system and turn your experience into a positive thing so it won't happen to you again or to other people," said Oaks.

After the peace march, David Oaks returned to his parents' home in Chicago where he is currently working on freelance anti-psychiatry articles for publication.

