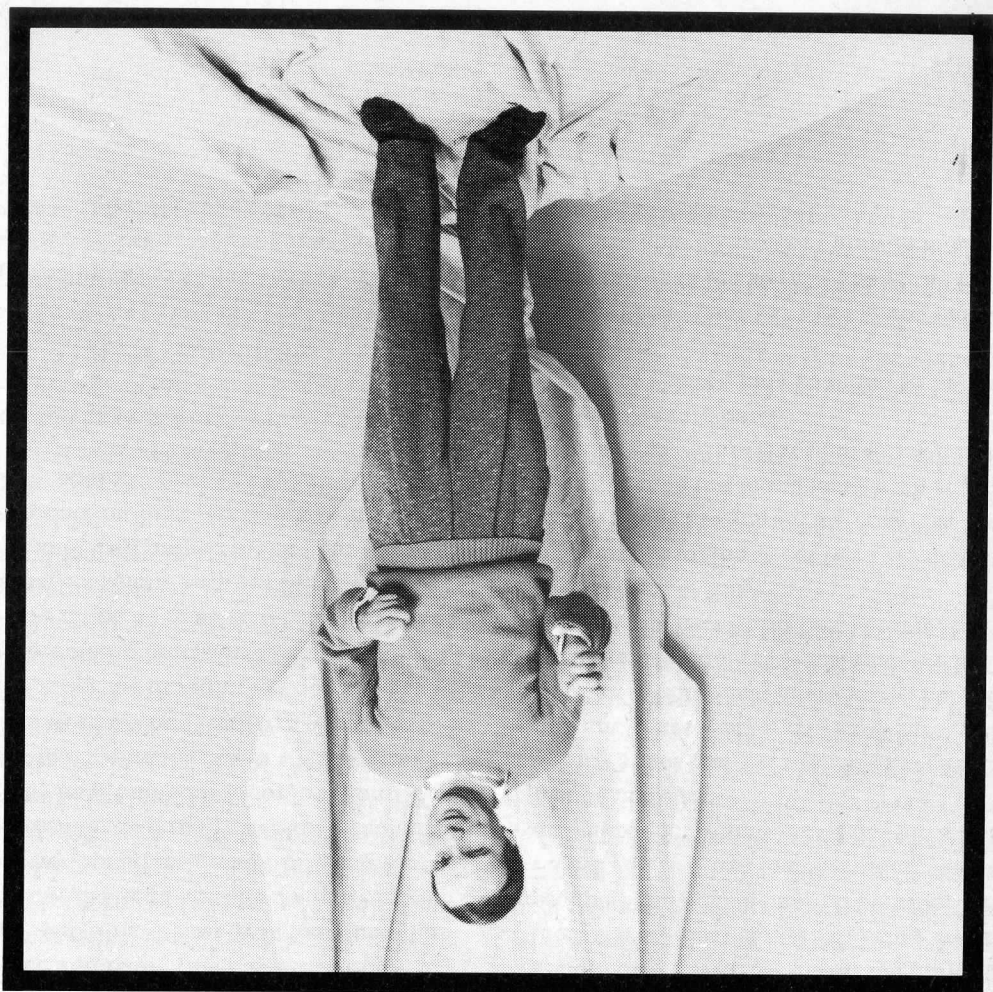


ANDREW J. PATERSON



PASSPORTS OF LOVE

ONCE YOU'VE BEEN CLOSE TO SOMEONE, you will never be alone for the rest of your life. With each footstep, with every closing of a door, you hope, and are disappointed. Sooner or later you'll look out the window, because that's what windows are for. And if you don't have a window, you'll suffocate. Walls have eyes as well as ears. They can see you but what you see in them is more important, a lot more claustrophobic than having somebody always there with you, never leaving you alone.

Now your passport can only be designated CRIMINALLY INSANE. You needn't bother applying. You are not registered. You are a non-person.

The title, PASSPORTS OF LOVE, oddly enough did occur to me while waiting for my number to be called out in the Passport office. Because I had been something of a recluse prior to the meeting that changed my life forever, I hadn't renewed my passport as soon as its predecessor had expired. So, by being in that office, it occurred to me that I was redeclaring myself a person. I was committed to someone else. Wherever that someone chose to go, I was eligible to go there too. I was free to go anywhere in the world where my passport would be recognized. I was registered, therefore I existed.

WHEN YOU'RE TRULY IN LOVE, there is only one pair of eyes that you can look into. You may think you can watch yourself and your partner from the point of view of a third. But you can no more do that than stop watching your neighbours from behind your window. You have to make a choice: to remain an observer or become a participant. But if your eyes command you to become a participant, then what choice is there?

Now some people may think that kind of commitment spells the end of their personal freedom, but they're wrong. The kind of commitment, the kind of eye contact I'm talking about spells freedom. Your passport says you are free to travel anywhere, whether individually or together. But since that freedom is derived from

mutual eye contact, then you should see the world together. You look at the another person or object, then you look at each other, then you both look at the person or thing. Then you either laugh or cry, but sometimes you do both at the same time.

TO PRESERVE AN ACTIVELY FUNCTIONING INTERNATIONAL PASSPORT requires a specific relationship between one's travelling fantasies and realistic income possibilities. Of course the money to purchase the tickets is essential, but so is the money you can theoretically earn by working in different parts of the world. The starry-eyed tourists, having on hand all the time in the world, are restricted to their innocent obsession. When the honeymoon is over, you have to worry about either the rent or the plane fare. So you set it up that either you get paid to travel beyond yourself, or that you can always find work in any place that you decide to spend some time in.

THE OBSESSIVE ROMANTIC always starts the new day hoping this day will be the happiest in his life. When one has been operating through the first few hours and everything has been going perfectly right down to the smallest detail, the first thing that goes wrong is destined to become exaggerated out of proportion. Every minor incident which converts the sublime into the banal, every hint of commonplace reality that intrudes upon that ideal state which the romantic is devoted to maintaining, every nagging reminder that your relationship is not a perfect one, all of these phenomena critically wound the heart. It becomes all too apparent that this particular day is not going to be the happiest day in your life.

Once this fact has settled in, the obsessive romantic must decide whether the stakes are simply too risky or whether the peaks are worth all those sagging valleys. But, the rush of perfection is worth all the heartaches, all of the pain, misery, trauma, depression, whatever.

YOU CAN LOOK INTO THOSE EYES FOR A LONG TIME, but you can't do it forever. Sooner

or later the present tense comes to an end. History. You think you can ignore it and keep on living as if that were only yesterday, but yesterday is what we're all looking forward to. We're trying to recreate yesterday when we looked into each other's eyes and didn't ever want to stop looking. Today enters the frame and we feel threatened. It's my privacy that's at stake. People can't stay together forever, they have to breathe. But breathing safely by yourself is not the rush you get from breathing dangerously together.

I HAVE TO GO SOMEWHERE ELSE IMMEDIATELY. CLAUSTROPHOBIA KILLS. We may have signed passports to live dangerously for awhile, but do you really want to suffocate?

I HAD A PREMONITION THAT IT WAS ALL OVER, but then I don't always take premonitions at face value. When she told me that she had to go somewhere else for an indefinite period of time, my reaction was delayed. After all, we've both needed privacy from each other on many occasions. Everybody needs privacy from each other.

Then I realized that this time was different. She was going to leave me forever. And the only way for her to do that was not to tell me where she had gone. Well, there are ways I could find out. I could hire a private investigator, but that would be both expensive and futile. Her passport says that she can go anywhere she wants to; mine doesn't. My passport only has meaning to me in terms of wherever she might have gone. And it is also invalid wherever I may choose to try and locate her, because she can see me coming and then fly somewhere else. Her passport gives her the power to reject me. To label me invalid. I've really blown it this time. From an obsession to a relationship back to an obsession. A vicious, inevitable circle.

I don't ever want to see that passport again. Because I don't need to. I have nowhere to go. My passport is on the shelf gathering dust and that is where my passport shall remain.