

Tales are a form of closeness, intimacy

Professor's new book subject of gossip

United Press International
NEW HAVEN, Conn. — Professor Patricia Spacks is writing a book on gossip. Today, she could almost bite her tongue. Just between you, me and the lamp post, she won't finish the book until next year. As an experienced author, she realizes any publicity now would be pre-

mature. But word got around about her topic and people found it so fascinating, she was soon in demand as a speaker. "I talked, talked, talked and talked," Spacks said. "I love to talk about my book. That's how I got into trouble." It seems Carolyn Wyman, a

New Haven Register reporter, saw an announcement of a talk the Yale University professor was going to give to a women's studies group. The reporter wrote a story that the newspaper carried on page one. That almost stopped the professor from talking to any more reporters, but she agreed to an

interview with UPI. "I think there is real knowledge in gossip," Spacks said. "There's no question but that gossip is a mode of intimacy, a mode of intimate relationship for many people. I think that's a positive value." She said gossip can be about almost anything.

It's usually the backfence variety: — Hugo left Harriet out of the will; Snidely and Debbie are getting married; Margo is pregnant; Bea told Barney she was having an affair, and he wanted to know if it was going to be catered. — Snidely and Debbie broke

up; Charlie's on the sauce again; that gear-head kid, Kenny, got a ticket for speeding; the judge said it should have been for flying too low. "There's only one subject for gossip and that's people," Spacks said, recalling a Harvard audience and a man who wanted her to say gossip could be talk

about ideas. "But gossip does not talk about ideas, it talks about people," she said. "As far as what the people do, gossip has traditionally been about sex because sex is one of the most interesting things people do." She said people gossip because it's a form of association, a form of closeness, a form of investigation. "It's the need of human beings to congregated and to hear the sound of one another's voices," she said.

Gossip has been frowned on for 200 years in most places, with parents telling children not to do it. She says that's "partly because of its association with malice and partly because of its association with trivia." She says the material of the realistic novel is the material of gossip and has been from the beginning. In the 18th century, actual scandal about people's lives was incorporated into works of fiction.

"I'm also interested in the fact that many novels are about gossip in one way or another, which is a different point," she said. "It's not that the authors use the material of gossip, but they deal with people gossiping with one another as a mode of communication."

She said the most gratifying thing that has happened since beginning her research is the avalanche of assistance she has received, some of it from strangers.

"It's extraordinary the amount of help I'm getting from all kinds of people," she said. "When I'm writing a book, I keep a running list of people I'm going to give acknowledgments to. Already, I've gotten a huge list."

Originally, gossip was a good word, meaning godparent. It moved from that to mean close friend, still of either sex. Gradually, it came more and more to mean woman friend, she said.

Dr. Samuel Johnson's first English language dictionary in 1755 gave it three meanings. The third was defined as "one who runs about tattling like women at a lying-in," or preparing for a birth. This meant the gossip was someone who talks like a woman among women.

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Savings mergers possible

United Press International
HOUSTON — State and Federal officials are likely to merge 20 ailing Texas savings and loan associations rather than permit them to close, a financial leader says.

S. Don Norris, chief executive of Commonwealth Savings and president of the Greater Houston Savings & Loan League, said Monday the fact that many state-chartered S&Ls are losing money should not come as a surprise.

"Many are losing money, (but) their net worth can carry them for some time," Norris said.

Texas Savings and Loan Commissioner L. Alvis Vandyriff has said he is monitoring the financial condition of 20 unnamed savings institutions. About 65 percent of the state's chartered S&Ls are losing money, Vandyriff said over the weekend.

He said he has no plans to close them soon, but wants to watch them closely for signs of further trouble.

However, both Vandyriff and Norris said there is strong interest by outsiders in gaining a foothold in the Texas market.

"We understand Texas and Florida institutions are the most sought-after by the big California and New York savings and loans," Norris said. "There is a real market value in Texas savings and loans charters. We probably have the best financial powers in Texas."

Last month, the state S&L commission ordered five institutions closed, and turned them over to the Federal Savings & Loan Insurance Corp. Within minutes of the order, the federal agency found a buyer in Home Savings of California, a Los Angeles institution.

Business leaders nationwide said savings institutions are having problems because about two-thirds of their deposits are in costly market-rate accounts. But almost as much of their mortgage portfolios are earning less than 10 percent.