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NONFICTION IN BRIEF

LOWENSTEIN

Acts of Courage and Belief.
 Edited by Gregory Stone and Douglas Lowenstein.
 Foreword by Arthur Schlesinger Jr.
 Introduction by James A. Wechsler.
 Illustrated. 369 pp.
 San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Cloth, \$18.95. Paper, \$9.95.

By RICHARD J. MARGOLIS

The world could use a measured biography of Allard K. Lowenstein, that remarkable reformer remembered as the instigator of the Dump Johnson campaign that led to President Johnson's bowing out of office. Meanwhile, this collection of Lowenstein's writings, along with tributes and reminiscences from his friends, will have to do. The sampling in "Lowenstein" of his own speeches and articles is rather thin. As James A. Wechsler notes in an introduction, "Too much of what he said or did is not engraved in any official record or document."

Lowenstein's friends, however, afford us an affecting glimpse of both the man and his times. "A rare combination of generous passion and acute intelligence," as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. characterized him, Lowenstein became "the supreme agitator of his day." He appeared to have tapped some untapped reservoir of perpetual energy and hope until that moment in March 1980 when he was shot down in his Manhattan law office by a deranged young rotégé.

As national chairman of Students for Stevenson in 1952 and then as an aide to Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, Lowenstein lunged into mainstream liberal politics without forswearing his maverick credentials. By 1963 he was traipsing around Mississippi, riskily registering lack voters. He spoke against the war in Vietnam. Jimmy Breslin reminds us, "at a time so early that the nation thought any such stand was treasonous."

A eulogy from The New Yorker recalls that Lowenstein

"shifted the boundaries of the possible so that other, more 'political' men could bring it into being." That was certainly the case in 1967, when he started the Dump Johnson movement, an idea, all the experts said, whose time would never come. Not all of Lowenstein's campaigns yielded victories. He ran for Congress in the unlikelyst of conservative districts, winning only once (in Suffolk County). Two years later the Republicans gerrymandered him out of office, but he kept right on crusading.

Lowenstein's enemies came from the left as well as the right. "Lowenstein is always ebullient," David Halberstam observed in a 1968 profile. "Probably that's one of the reasons the New Left doesn't like him, just as a lot of liberals now dislike Humphrey for the optimism of his tone, in what is to them an essentially dark time. Lowenstein is no Humphrey. He sees all the darkness . . . but he is resilient, optimistic and keeps saying that the system can work." "Resilient" and "optimistic" are the words that keep recurring in this affectionate anthology.

GRUNCH OF GIANTS

By R. Buckminster Fuller.
 98 pp. New York: St. Martin's Press. \$8.95.

By PETER ENGEL

No, the title of R. Buckminster Fuller's book, published shortly before his death, is not a misprint. "Grunch" stands for Gross Universal Cash Heist, a new addition to his many coinages. "Tensegrity," "synergetics" and "spaceship Earth" have already found their way into at least some vocabularies as part of Fuller's effort to circumvent ordinary language. In his "synergetic" approach to life, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and each object or process must be regarded as part of an enormous system. A new way of thinking requires a new way of communicating, and so biological organisms are now "locally interregenerative functions," weapons are "killingry artifacts," and dollars are "real-life support units." The last two are manipulated by an invisible

ral fine articles on musical subjects. Mr. Rorem, a Pulitzer prize-winning composer, uses his diaries as a record of momentary observation intended for later release. "I always hesitate to speak my own name, feeling somehow that I am dropping it," he writes. But hesitation is a long way from abnegation, and Ned Rorem continues to be the author's favorite subject. Whereas in the past he wrote tributes to his good looks, now he observes the inexorable damage of time: "Slim thighs have turned skinny, though my shoulders remain good shaped."

"Setting the Tone" rings with pinpointed descriptions of others. W. H. Auden is "the poet whose bourbon dribbled from an unshaved chin onto a maculate napkin, from there into his lap, and thence down to his humid socks." He is kinder to Noël Coward, whose "chief barter" is charm, "the ability to inarticulate without cloying." But he is not kind at all to Truman Capote, who, he writes, looks like "that extraterrestrial embryo from the end of 'Close Encounters.'"

In the essays reprinted from various publications, Mr. Rorem's imagery is fresh and arresting. When he looks beyond himself to such subjects as Cosima Wagner as well as the role of providing canny insights, and he offers a particularly luminous essay on the music teacher extraordinaire, Nadia Boulanger.

Why Mr. Rorem, with his considerable gift as an essayist, continues to publish the diaries is a puzzle. Editing a diary for publication can only sap its most intriguing aspect — the picture of a man with his guard down. Only for brief moments does the guard slip here. He is hurt by the criticism of his past diaries — pale invective next to the vituperation at which Mr. Rorem himself is so adept. "I cannot bear to have my sarcasms taken sarcastically," he writes. Well, he could keep them to himself. ■

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