

Web

San Francisco Examiner

Critics' choice
 ▶ Bill Citara on food [Epicure]
 ▶ Tim Goodman on TV [D.I.]

**Lilith music fair:
 Women's fest
 too low-key [D.I.]**



KIRA REOUTT

The high cost of fixing a stiff neck

WARPED. My chiropractor regards my shoulders. "Out of alignment," he says, like a mechanic assessing a car's front wheels.

He puts me through the drunk driver's test.

"Close your eyes, hold out your arms. Touch our nose with your right hand. Now your left."

I have in the past closed my eyes, touched my nose, jumped up and down one leg while singing "Joy to the World" and balanced well enough to convince friends that I wasn't drunk. Stone cold sober in the chiropractor's office, I cannot pass the drunk test.

My chiropractor detects how dreadfully off-kilter I really am. He indicates the X-ray. The back is OK, but the neck has lost its curvature. I'm straight-necked. This is the root cause, I am told, of my aching hands, my tendinitis and my bursitis. Only "adjustment" will reinstate my neck's curvature.

My chiropractor distracts me from cost considerations, saying only people who live in harmony with nature have perfectly curved necks.

A vision pops into my head of a half-dressed family in a jungle. Children playing, men with wooden spears, women squatting before stones and grinding nuts into meal.

Everyone is relaxed and, yes, they have curved necks. Everyone is smiling, but then I notice their teeth. Cracks, holes, gaps. I won't trade my teeth for my spine.

trade my teeth for my spine.

My chiropractor's spiel moves to chi energy, the need for play and the MacDougal diet. These concepts fling me from ancient China to a child's playground to a nutritionist's laboratory.

I can't determine where harmonious individuals live, what they eat, much less what they do for a living. But I can guess what they don't do. They don't sit at computers eight hours a day, don't work 40 hours a week and, I suspect, don't wear leather suspenders or Italian shoes like my chiropractor.

I'm willing to bet these balanced souls have never heard of anyone named MacDougal.

We talk price. "Adjustments" cost \$35 and take 10 minutes. I multiply quickly: He costs \$210 an hour. I earn \$13.50 an hour. My insurance company won't pay, but the salesman in this health practitioner is undaunted.

He laughs, "When the pain reaches the screaming point, you'll beg a hatchet man to chop your arm off."

My arm hurts at the thought. My legs, which I had thought were fine, suddenly weaken.

I'm reaching for my Visa card, but then he says, "Not that your neck will ever have a perfect curve."

I get the picture. Since I don't live in harmony with nature, I have to work 40 hours a week. This means increasing my computer time, pulling my neck ever straighter — and forcing me to pay for still more "adjustments."

I dump my chiropractor. I develop a routine involving warm-up stretches, braces, ice packs and a buckwheat pillow. I may not be in harmony with nature, but it's been a month, and I'm feeling better.

Maybe I'm not warped.

Examiner contributor Kira Reoutt, who advises undergraduates at UC-Berkeley, is a free-lance writer.

CALIFORNIA QUOTEBOOK

EDWIN MARKHAM

It is the greatest revelation of beauty that has ever been seen on Earth.

Edwin Markham (1852-1940), the poet who wrote "The Man with the Hoe," was impressed by the