

Pyramid Power

Gloria Swanson sleeps with a miniature pyramid under her bed because, she says, it makes "every cell in my body tingle." James Coburn, after he meditates inside his pyramid tent, puts his cat and her kittens to bed over a nest of tiny pyramids, on the theory that the kittens may grow up in a unique way. A Houston doctor put microbes under a pyramid and found that they lived 64 hours longer than ones not in a pyramid.

In New York City, Max Toth, president of the Toth Pyramid Co., claims that his cardboard Pyramid Razor Blade Sharpener (price: \$3.50) will more than pay for itself by producing blades that never dull. Evering Associates, which markets Toth's products in Canada, says they can be used to dehydrate tropical fish for display purposes. Small stuff, perhaps, but Inventor Patrick Flanagan, who sells his own pyramid line in Glendale, Calif., reports that the device has improved his sexual sensitivity.

Claims for pyramid power have yet



WINE ATOP "ENERGY GENERATOR"

to reach the mystical pitch that Wilhelm Reich created for his orgone box 30 years ago, but a semiserious microcult is gathering around the geometric form in which ancient Egyptians buried their pharaohs. Some experts have theorized that pyramids focused energy in a manner that made a better mummy.

The current fad in the U.S. and Canada spins off that theory, by way of France and Czechoslovakia. French researchers discovered 70 years ago that if they put a dead cat inside a small plywood pyramid, the body did not decay but merely dehydrated or was "mummified." Inspired by that work, Czechoslovak Radio Engineer Karel Drbal fashioned his own small pyramid and stored his razor blades in it. In 1959 Drbal took out a patent on the Cheops Pyramid Razor Blade Sharpener.

Freshen Vegetables. Toth acquired the U.S. rights to Drbal's patent, and the idea was talked up by Toth, Flanagan and Eric McLuhan, a former professor of "creative electronics" at Fanshawe College in Ontario, who is Marshall McLuhan's son. After the younger McLuhan published an account of meat-dehydration experiments—which showed that small chunks of hamburger lost their moisture at different rates depending on their placement inside a pyramid—others began trying with flowers, fish and eggs. One is also supposed to be able to freshen vegetables, restore stale coffee, ripen hard fruit, mellow cheap wines and make cigarettes taste less harsh.

The most versatile promoter seems to be Flanagan, 28, who was a child prodigy in electronics. He started a lively direct-mail business by offering items like the Pyramid Energy Generator, an aggregation of one-inch-high pyramids on a metal base. His Cheops Pyramid Tent, made of opaque vinyl, sells for \$25 and is said to be a good environment for transcendental meditation, bio-feedback and yoga, in that it surrounds its inhabitants with energy. Though Flanagan sleeps in his tent to improve his own sexual sensations, he does not advertise it as a sex stimulant. "The most immediate use of the pyramid," says Flanagan, "may well be in the area of food storage."

Flanagan hypothesizes that the pyramid effect occurs because the geometric shape "acts as a focus or lens, through which flows energy created by the earth's magnetic field." The effect occurs primarily inside the pyramid, but the same force is also said to emanate from the pyramid.

So far, no firm scientific evidence exists to prove or dis-

prove pyramid power. Laymen who experiment may be frustrated because precision is required. Pyramids must be aligned precisely on magnetic north. Being close to windows, radiators, fluorescent lights, radios, TV sets and other appliances can queer the effect. Says McLuhan somewhat pessimistically: "If you do all that, it may or may not work. If you don't, it certainly won't work."

Grand'mères au Pair

Guy and Nicole Bellanger run a food-delivery service in the Normandy village of Saussay-la-Campagne (pop. 380), and always had trouble finding someone to care for their son Pascal, now six. The isolated, rustic life was too quiet for young women. In the small town of Bohin, 125 miles away, a widow named Edmée Blin, 72 but active, found herself "absolutely alone on this earth." Her only son was dead, and she desperately needed companionship.

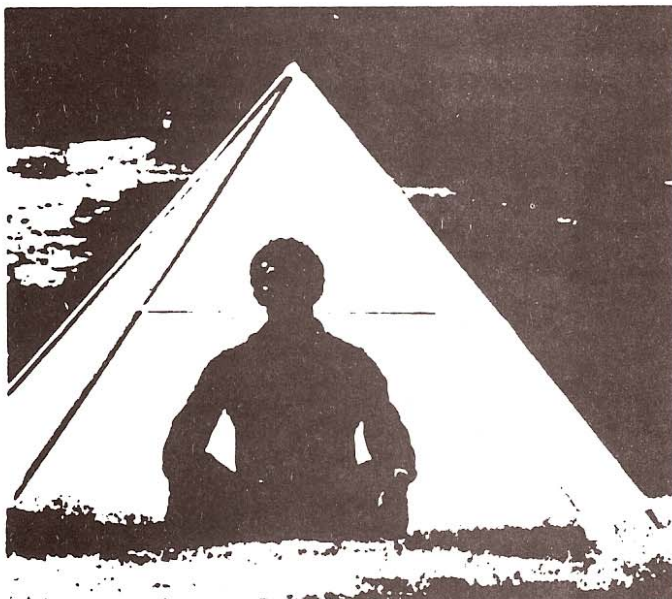
Now, thanks to a Paris advertising man, Pascal has a live-in baby sitter and Mme. Blin has an adopted family. The case is not unique in France. Since last year the ad executive, Jean-Pierre Coffe, 35, has placed 1,411 lonely old people in families that need a grandparent. Most of the matchings are temporary—lasting for a summer vacation or a holiday period—and Coffe has been able to place only half a dozen men. "The whole world welcomes a grandma," he says, "but almost no one wants a grandpa. It's sad."

Morocco Winter. The *grand'mère au pair* program started last year when a welfare agency asked Coffe to promote a fund-raising campaign to benefit the elderly and indigent. Coffe did not like the idea of a charity appeal. "It's nothing," he says, "for a person with money to drop a coin or a bill into a tin cup."

He decided to try something modeled on the *au pair* system, in which families take in students. The girls are not paid servants, but they help out with kids and housework in exchange for room and board. "Everybody thought I was mad," Coffe recalls, but he was sure the idea could be sold, substituting old people for young. He decided to handle the campaign "as I would a noodle account" and set about placing stories in newspapers and on television.

The response last summer was instant—thousands of letters from both interested families and lonely old people. Not everyone got the idea straight. A farmer wanted a worker for "gardening, tinkering and the care of 20 goats." One family took in an elderly woman and demanded that she serve dinner to 22 people every night. In another household, the 88-year-old patriarch made unrequited passes at the new granny.

Most of the experiences have worked out better. Simone Lefebvre, 73,



FLANAGAN & CHEOPS TENT
They sharpen razors and mummify eggs.