

# Honolulu

DECEMBER 1979

\$1.50

The Ulterior Motive  
Guide to Home Entertaining



Jean Charlot, 1898-1979

**Marilyn Bornhorst: The Candid Revolutionary  
Tailing Honolulu's Private Eyes  
Maxine Hong Kingston: Now the Subject is Men**



# The Death and Burial of Jean Charlot

February 12, 1898-March 20, 1979

By John Charlot



*I will take a tender shoot,  
And plant it on a high and lofty mountain;  
It will become a majestic cedar,  
Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it,  
Every winged thing in the shade of its  
boughs.*

*It is good to give thanks to the Lord,  
To proclaim your kindness at dawn  
And your faithfulness throughout the night!*

—Psalms

In 1974 Dr. Morton Berk diagnosed a painful growth in my father's back as cancer of the prostate which had spread to the bone. Radiation treatments and chemotherapy were able to control the disease until July 1978.

My father was very busy on a mural and a monumental ceramic sculpture for Maryknoll school. He was also completing two large articles: one on the geometric composition of the popular prints of the French artist Honoré Daumier; and the other on the Mexican printmaker José Guadalupe Posada and his successors up to contemporary Chicano street muralists and poster designers.

He persevered in these demanding and complicated tasks—work which he said helped him forget the pain—despite the rapid decline of his body. Once, while we were looking at some photographs taken of him a few months earlier, he said, "It astounds me how a body can degenerate so quickly."

I stayed at my parents' house on Friday, March 16th, and left early the next morning. That evening, my father asked that a nurse stay with him through the night. My mother was able to arrange for one to come immediately.

I returned to their house on Sunday the 18th to have dinner with them and my brother Martin. My father appeared much weaker. His speech was slurred. He congratulated me on an award that had been given to the photographer Philip Spalding for a HONOLULU article on which I had collaborated. We later played bridge. My mother insisted my father bid. He made two mistakes



*Feb. 28. Ash Wednesday. "You are dust."*

*Dust: "Please, do not sweep me under the rug, O Lord!"*

but won his hand. I went over his completed Posada article with him. My mother told me later that he had driven her all day to gather the necessary illustrations for it.

I dreamed that night of him in his weakened condition.

The next morning, I helped him from his bed to his wheelchair. He was quite feeble. I wheeled him onto the lanai. The morning light was an extraordinary golden rose. He was unable to eat his small breakfast. I sat beside him, and he told me he was very tired.

I left for work at the university and Leeward Community College. I called my mother later in the day. She said my father was still unable to eat or drink. I called my brothers.

After my night class, I drove to my parents' house thinking I

should talk frankly with my father about his turn for the worse. When I entered, my brother Peter told me the doctor had been there and said my father had begun the process of dying. I went into his room. He was propped up in his hospital bed under sedation, breathing slowly and with difficulty through his mouth.

My mother and Judy Zundel, a family friend and former nurse, told me he had begun to suffer much greater pain and to experience difficulties speaking. He had not been able to eat or drink all day. The doctor had had difficulty placing a needle for intravenous feeding, and it had come out shortly after he left. We had to decide whether to take my father to the hospital to have another I.V. placed.

*Jean Charlot made india ink brush illustrations of Scripture passages used in the Sunday Mass for the weekly Catholic Bulletin, St. Paul, Minnesota. A collection, Cartoons Catholic, has been published by Our Sunday Visitor Press. The two drawings on these pages are among the last he drew. For the one on the left, he used a traffic logo of a wheelchair which he had seen and admired while visiting the zoo with his son Martin. The newspaper containing the cartoon for Ash Wednesday reached him by mail the day he died.*



None of us wanted to prolong my father's agony, but we wanted to do everything possible and especially what he would have wished himself. Judy said she had asked my father that afternoon whether he would be willing to go to the hospital. He had answered that he would if it would help. My mother decided we should take him.

An ambulance was called. The attendants were very worried when they saw my father's condition. My mother and I rode beside him to the hospital. On the way, he recovered consciousness. I explained what we were doing. He squeezed my hand and asked for my mother. At the emergency room, an I.V. was quickly placed. The ambulance driver called Dr. Berk and was reassured when told that no steps should be taken to revive my father should he expire on the way home.

My father seemed more comfortable going back to the house. We put him in his bed, and he fell into a sound sleep. I sat with him. His breathing was regular, strong, and easy. His heart beat was audible.

Later, I sat with Martin and Peter on the lanai. I told them I had been devoting a good portion of my last Meaning of Existence

courses to death, so was prepared to handle funeral arrangements. We were astonished at how strong my father seemed. We laughed when Peter said he had never left the Denial Stage, the state of mind in which a dying person refuses to recognize his situation. My father very much wanted to live. Even before he contracted cancer, he had told my mother, "I don't know how I can live long enough to get out all the things I have in my head."

I slept in the upstairs studio that night and came down several times to sit beside my father and hold his hand. It was very warm, vital. He seemed at times to squeeze mine. His heart beat steadily and very loud.

I came down again very early in the morning. Martin came in shortly after. The effect of the sedation was beginning to wear off, and my father began to move in a way which showed he was experiencing great pain. I got Peter from his room. My mother was there when we returned. The nurse was preparing another injection.

I leaned over my father and told him that the pain would be getting worse. He was lying on his side moving. He said, "Very worse." I told him the nurse was preparing a

sedation, but that we would like to speak with him a moment before she gave it to him. He said, "No shot." I repeated that the pain would be much worse and that we wanted just a minute with him before he was put to sleep again. He repeated, "No shot." The nurse brought the needle before him in case he hadn't understood, but he waved it emphatically away.

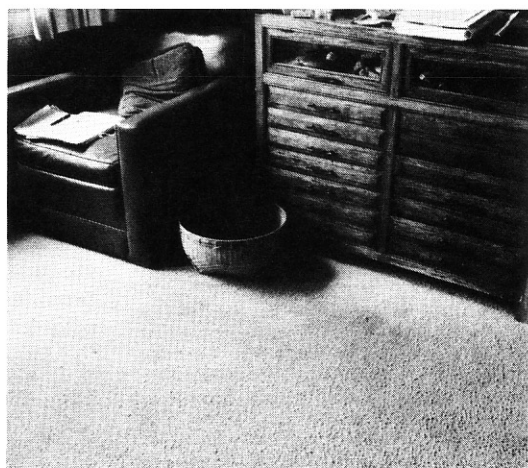
She then asked us out of the room and told us we had to consider the possibility that he was no longer able to make a decision and that we should make it for him. "If that were my father," she said, "I wouldn't want to put him through that pain."

We returned to the room and put the question to him again. When he again refused the shot, we respected his wish.

He lay for a moment in the bed and slowly brought his movements under control. He then said, "Sit up." We helped him to the side of the bed and to a seated position by holding his back and arms. He asked for each of us in turn, and we told him we were there. When he had difficulty remaining seated, I knelt on the floor in front of him and held him.

---

*John Charlot is HONOLULU's visual arts columnist.*



*"I put my hand on my father's arm and told him not to worry about such things. 'Don't pat me,' he said"*

He put his arms around my shoulders and clung to me, his cheek against mine. After a while, he said, "Window," and I turned his face toward the light. He closed his eyes as it seemed to bathe his face. Martin took my place and held him there for a long time as he seemed to gather strength from him.

Then he said, "Chair." We helped him into his wheelchair where he spent the day.

It was a day as near to others as possible. Peter was giving a play. He asked if he could leave, and my father indicated yes. I completed my May article and, with my father's permission, went to my Hawaiian Religion class where I

was to pick up the midterm exams.

When I returned, he was in his chair in his room. I went in to talk with him. We heard someone moving in the dining room, and he said, "Too much." I assured him only Judy Zundel, the nurse and family members were there. He wanted no fuss. "I must have human relations," he said.

His mind was very active, and he was very anxious to tell us very practical things. He was able to say a few words in a telegraphic style which we at times understood and at times could not. He wanted to "postpone" the work on the elevator which would have enabled him to work in his studio. He had an idea for a publisher for

a young artist. He had sorted drawings into piles for donations or for family. I put my hand on his arm and told him not to worry about such things. "Don't pat me," he said.

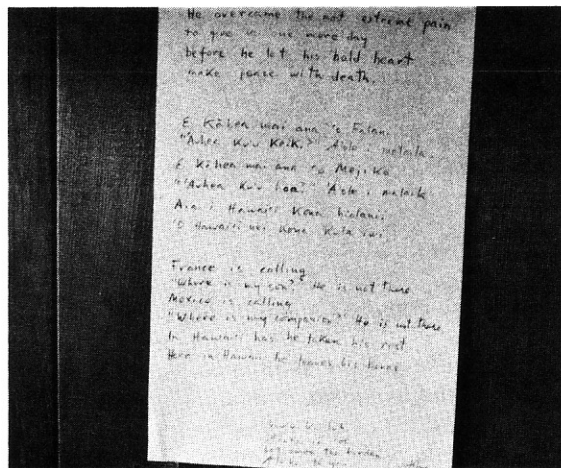
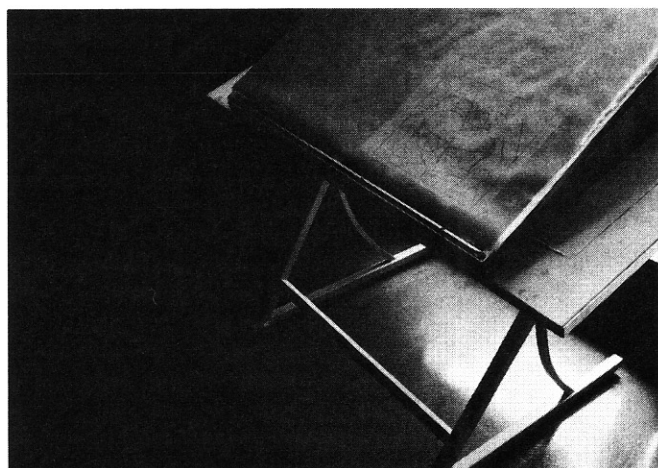
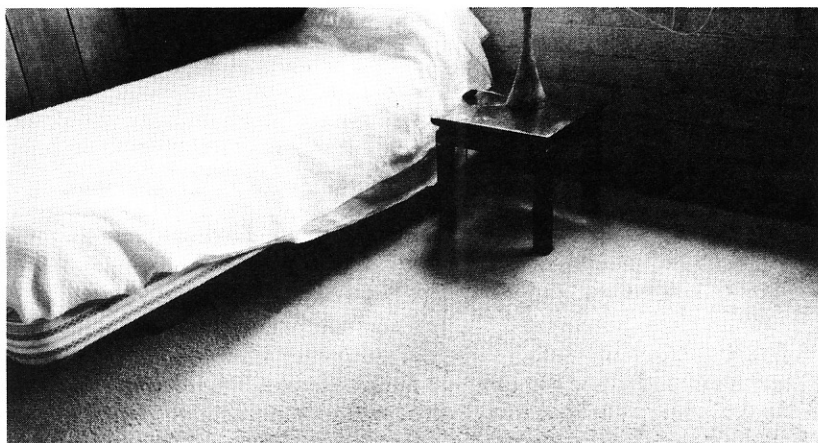
In the afternoon, I went to the hospital to pick up another bottle for the I.V. It was very hot. When I returned around 4:45 p.m., my father was sitting at the dining room table with Peter and his friend Kilali Alailima. They had been on the lanai. I went to the studio to nap.

I came down just as they were preparing to put my father into bed. He was very tired. The nurse said it would be good to ask him now whether he wanted an injection. She prepared it, and we showed it to him and asked him if he wanted it now. He nodded several times, and the nurse administered it. We laid him on the bed, and Peter, who had worked in a hospital, made him comfortable.

My mother sat on one side of the bed holding my father's hand. I sat on the other. The nurse was

*Jean Charlot's house photographed two days after he died: Passage to his bedroom. His bedroom. His work table. Inscription written by John Charlot and taped to the bedroom wall.*

*Photographs by Philip E. Spalding*



*"I feel that my relationship with my father has simply entered a new, even more intimate phase"*

He overcome the most extreme pain  
to give us one more day  
before he let his bold heart  
make peace with death.

E Kāhea wai ana 'e Etern  
"Aloha Kū Kū" Aloha : mātāla  
E Kāhea wai ana 'e Meji Kū  
"Aloha Kū Kū" Aloha : mātāla  
Aloha : Hawaii's Kū Kū  
"O Hawaii's wai Kū Kū"

France is calling  
"Where is my son?" He is not there  
Mexico is calling  
"Where is my companion?" He is not there  
In Hawaii has he taken his rest  
Here in Hawaii he leaves his bones

Alloha Kū Kū  
Alloha Kū Kū  
Alloha Kū Kū  
Alloha Kū Kū

father has simply entered  
nate phase"



rigging the I.V. bottle. As I looked at my father, it seemed to me that his breathing was becoming very shallow. The nurse said that often happened with sedation. After a few moments, I couldn't see his chest move. The nurse was unable to find a pulse. She brought out more equipment. My father wasn't breathing any more. "I think that's it," I told my mother. It was 5:45 p.m. I went to the kitchen to tell Peter. We went back into the room. I went up to my father, kissed him, and said, "Oh papa, you did that so well."

His body remained extraordinarily electric, even through the next day. His hands were warm and seemed alive. His limbs were flexible. In dying and then in death, he remained the person we knew.

I called Martin. Dr. Berk came. He was a good friend and looked shocked to see my father dead. When the nurse was about to cover his face with the sheet, Kilali stopped her. We spent a good deal of time looking at my father's face. Though it showed clearly his suffering, it had a lustrous beauty.

My mother, Peter and I conferred on funeral arrangements. We had never discussed the subject. My mother said she wanted my father to be buried. The Diamond Head Memorial Park was near, so it would be easier to visit. We all wanted it done quickly.

I called the cemetery that night. The parish priest had told us how busy they were. I asked that all be arranged for burial the next afternoon. They would do their best, but where was the body now? "Here in the house." But who would put the body in the coffin? "We will."

Alan Wilkinson, the koa furniture maker who had collaborated with my father on a number of picture frames, said he would work through the night to make the coffin. We called a few friends who had been particularly close



*Jean Charlot: Self-Portrait, etching, 1975. This print was included in the limited-edition copies of Peter Morse: Jean Charlot's Prints, A Catalogue Raisonné, Honolulu, 1976*

during my father's illness and arranged for a family Mass in the afternoon.

We began to clear the paraphernalia of illness from my father's room. I remembered the one thing he had ever told us about his funeral: He wanted to be buried in the Benedictine monk's habit he had received as an Oblate of a monastery in which he had painted a mural. I went to a cabinet where I had noticed long before a thick brown cloth. I took it to his room and began to spread it over the bed.

"Johnny, what are you doing?" my mother asked.

"This is papa's shroud."

"Don't be silly! That's the piano cover!"

The next morning we set to work. I knew the cemetery had a waiting list, but Mrs. Edna Wong assured me there would be no problem at all. The gravediggers said they would work through their lunch hour. As I drove away,

I saw they had already broken ground.

Back at the house arrived maile leis and the largest, thickest 'ilima lei I have ever seen. Judy Zundel brought a Fijian fine mat to wrap around the body as is the custom in her country. She also brought a larger mat to line the grave.

My mother put on a new white dress with a pattern of green leaves my father had liked. "Do you think it looks too summery?" she asked.

I went up to my father's studio and wrote an inscription and poem for him with one of his charcoal sketching sticks. It reminded me of one of my father's favorite ceremonies. On Ash Wednesday, the priest draws with ashes the Sign of the Cross on the worshipper's forehead and says, "Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou wilt return."

Irmgard Aluli arrived with her sister Emma Meyer. Irmgard

brought a piece of fine white Hawaiian tapa. She had originally meant to give it to my father on the day she first presented to us the name song she had composed for him.

We dressed my father in his black Benedictine robes. We put the white tapa over his feet. Under the cloth of the collar, we put the feather tie the great featherworker Johanna Cluney had given my father to wear on important occasions. We laid the maile over his body and around it the large 'ilima lei. It glowed against the black of his robe.

Our friends began to arrive and naturally and simply came into the room. Fathers Daniel Dever and John McCloskey arrived, and the Mass began. I read the psalm, "I lift mine eyes unto the hills," and remembered my father looking out his window.

We had expected Alan to arrive around 1 p.m. with the coffin, but there had been a misunderstanding. The gravediggers had agreed to stay two hours overtime, but any further delays would cause difficulties. By the time the Mass was over, we were already behind schedule. The expression on some of our friends' faces when they realized we didn't have a coffin was priceless.

We held a quick family conference and decided to bury my father in the heavy mat Judy had brought. Martin, Judy, Emma and Kilali wrapped him first in the white Hawaiian tapa next to the leis and his black robe, then in the fine Fijian mat and finally in the large one. I reached into a drawer and found a thick rope. Peter Morse, who had catalogued my father's prints, tied the whole securely. We were all struck by how beautiful the funeral bundle was and how much it seemed like my father.

We lined the bed of Peter's pick-up with more Fijian mats and then carried my father from his room. His body was very soft and flexible inside the mats.

I drove my mother in her car to the cemetery. Peter drove the truck with Martin sitting beside the body. We pulled up to the grave site—the Mercedes, the pick-up and the friends—, lifted the wrapped body from the truck and carried it to the grave.

The diggers were surprised but willing. The large machine for lowering the coffin was wheeled away. Two diggers got into the grave—after telling me they preferred I not do



so—and lined it with the mats we passed to them. Then Peter Morse and I lowered the body down to them. They climbed out of the grave, and we dropped our own maile leis and flowers over the body.

At the last minute, a friend from Waiahole Valley arrived with leaves from our breadfruit tree. He had remembered that my father had used the breadfruit as a symbol for the Sacred Heart of Jesus in his Fijian fresco. I thought of the story I had given my class to discuss on their exam: The god Ku buried himself so that the breadfruit would grow from his body to feed his family.

Father McCloskey said the prayers. Irmgard sang my father's name song. We all sang *Aloha 'Oe*. The cement vault cover was lowered. We took some dirt with our hands and threw it into the grave. Martin's little children made themselves useful at it. The men completed the job. We kissed all round and headed back for the car. As I turned on the ignition, I thought, "Boy, I can't wait to get home and tell pop about *this!*"

I had prepared for my father's death, but it was not what I expected. I did not and do not feel the sense of loss and separation for which I was readying myself. I feel that my relationship with my father has simply entered a new, even more intimate phase.

I thought that the experience and memory of his death would somehow damage or weaken me. Instead, when I think back on it now, I feel powerfully strengthened and supported.

There are several reasons for this. By following him in his death, I in a sense participated in it. As Emma Meyer said later, "He's made such a large opening for you all."

My father had always been a good and very courageous man, but, on his last day, he reached a level which seems superhuman. Also, he did it for us, to be with us one more day in our life together.

Our being together that last day was uniquely intense. My basic view is that human beings are separated from each other by unbridgeable gaps of understanding and feeling. I know my father often felt isolated. But I can say without doubt that my father did not die alone.

Because of the courage and mutual love which broke through all boundaries, his death radiates a power which helps me and can, I believe, help others.