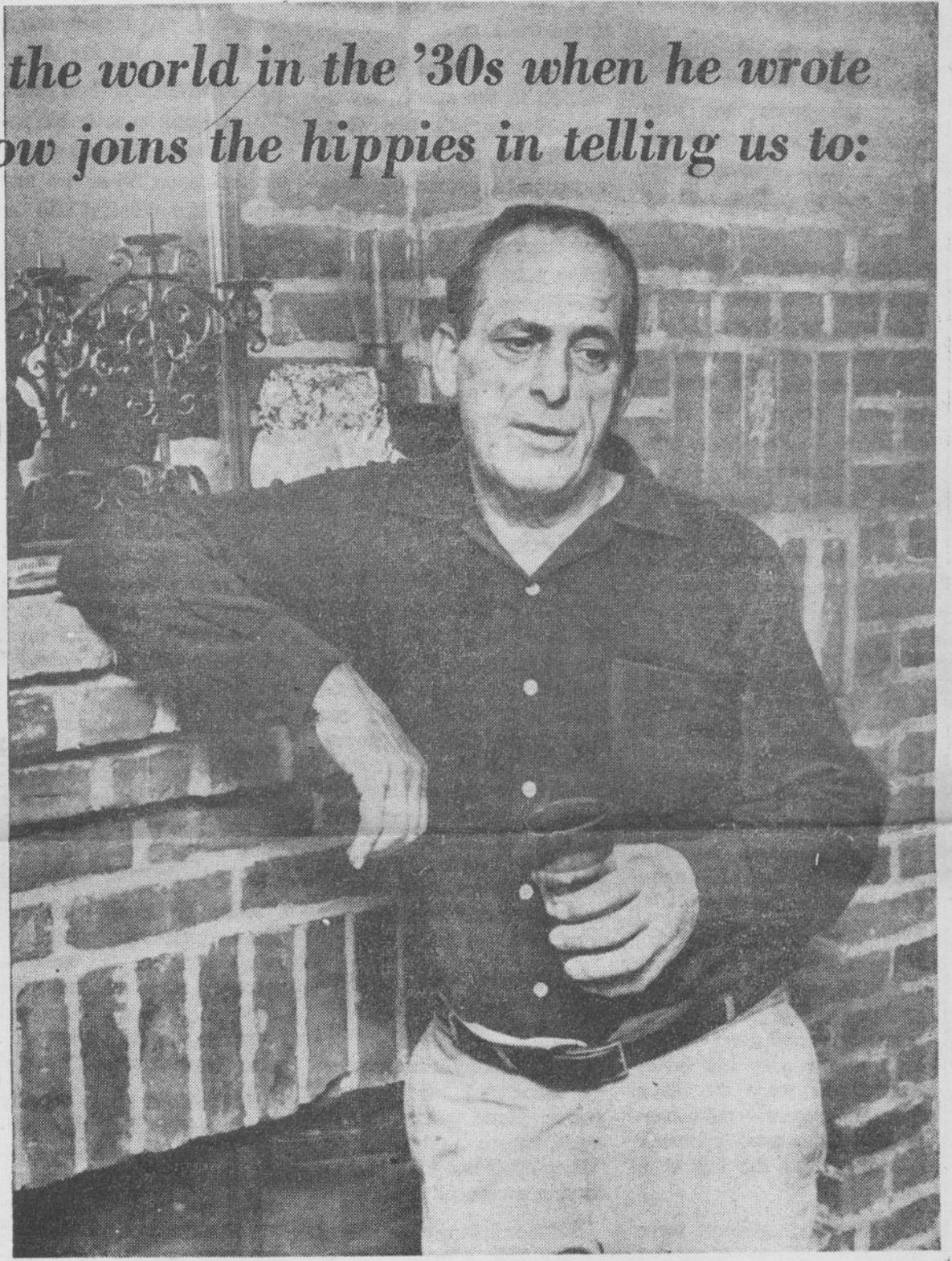




The passionate poet of Strong's Neck socks it to 'em on life and especially love

The man who shocked the world in the '30s when he wrote 'Christ in Concrete,' now joins the hippies in telling us to:

Make Love



Sunphotos by GEORGE ARGEROPLOS

THIRTY years ago a wild young man, Pietro DiDonato by name, bricklayer by trade, wrote a wild novel called "Christ in Concrete."

It was a crude passionate, bawdy, lyrical, paean to paisans in Hoboken, and it burst on the late '30s literary scene like a skyrocket.

The climactic moment came when an Italian immigrant bricklayer is buried in concrete as a building collapses, a powerful, personalized indictment of exploitation of the working man, very much in the tradition of the proletarian novel of the '30s.

It made DiDonato famous, for awhile. But he never really followed through. He once said ruefully, "I became too sophisticated for bricklaying and too confused to write."

A few years ago, he came back to life and published four books, but none caught fire.

However, Pietro DiDonato is alive and well and still a wild man in Strong's Neck. He still lays a brick now and then, and dreams long dreams of again knocking

By
Arthur
Myers

Sun Staff Writer

the literary world on its derriere.

HOW DID the whole thing get started, anyway, this writing business?

"It was during the Depression," DiDonato says, hoisting a can of beer in the living room of the Cape Cod house he built himself. "I was living in Northport. A friend got me a job laying bricks on this big estate. I thought whoever lived there must be an industrialist or a financier. Then I found out the place had been rented by a writer, Clarence Budington Kelland. He was a nice, middle-aged guy with a bow tie. He looked like a superannuated baby. He wanted me to build 10 barbecues all over the place for a party."

"If he can live like this writing, I thought, I'm going to start writing. I picked up the Saturday Evening Post and read his tripe, and I

thought I could write better than that."

A couple of years later, Kelland was one of the judges who made "Christ in Concrete" a Book of the Month Club selection.

IT'S A long time between drinks like that, but, DiDonato still has hopes. "I've

been a ——— idealist all my life," he says. "I'm going to get a few shots in before I die."

Maybe they'll be aimed at the descendants of his beloved paisans.

"The poor immigrants I cried about two generations ago," says DiDonato, "are

the destroyers of society today. I saw the whole metamorphosis from the absolutely tribal colony of my paisans in Hoboken. Today, their children and grandchildren have only one master passion — creature comforts. They're the most chau-

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'Let's forget about loving God, because God is an abstraction. But you know who your neighbor is.'



'Make Love'

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vinistic and reactionary. This is something that Marx never anticipated, or Lenin. The man with the hoe today is the guy who says, 'Damn that nigger!' The dollar has done it. Yesterday's idealist is today's reactionary. Possession is god.

"Up until the fork lift, the automatic loader, the average man was truly a vassal. He was slave labor. Now he is market, and vote.

WHAT HAS this done to art and literature? Commerce has obviated art. You can watch people getting killed on TV. What is more realistic — to put it in Italian, verissimo — than that?

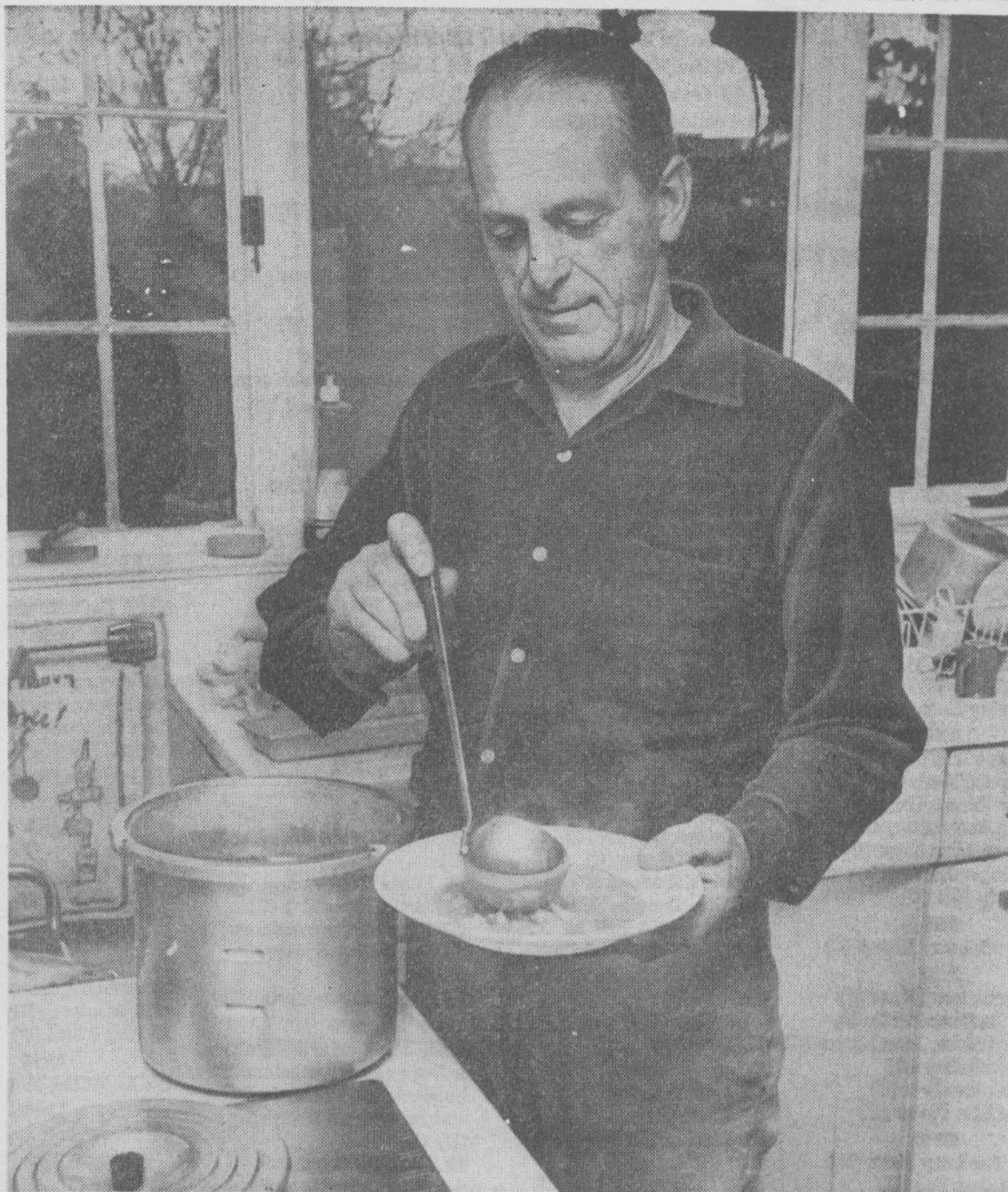
"But I'm not apocalyptic, by any means. This is all transitional. It's transitional because you cannot escape from the natural. You are ever in the beneficent mind and womb of nature. You are contained in this envelope of gas, the oxygen around the earth, and all synthetic diversions have the temporary life of novelties. You see it now with the little horns of new life bursting forth. You see it in a pretty leg, in a miniskirt. It's the rebirth of nature. Thank God for nature!"

Along the way, DiDonato had time to get married. There are two sons and a daughter. One son is a science major at Stony Brook, the other has a rock 'n' roll band in Miami. The daughter manages a jewelry shop in Florida.

AFTER HIS big splash, DiDonato went through a period of non-religiousness



'Thank God for nature!'



A son a Stony Brook science major, another has a rock band in Miami.

that he has called "the hell of unbelief." In the late '50s, he came back to religion, and published two religious books, one a biography of Mother Cabrini, the first American saint, the other about Maria Goretti, a young Italian girl who was murdered, and who was canonized in 1952.

He doesn't take those books very seriously today. "The Catholicism of today doesn't reach me," he says. "Mine is a primitive, quasi-pagan religion. I opened the old doors. They took me through the museums and mortuaries of belief and back out into the open air of nature. I had to go back through the rituals to come back to the living God.

"Those books served a function of immolating themselves. I let myth hang itself.

"You see what's happening now. Priests want to get married, nuns want to wear miniskirts. I've returned to the root, to the time of the rabbi, the master, who preached beautiful permissiveness and love. If you love, you don't kill. Now this permissiveness is coming

back in our students, so there is hope. I'm optimistic. "I drove behind an old ja-

lopy today with a sign on it, 'Make Love.' This is the message, Make Love."

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