

PANORAMA

D1

HAVING "THE LOOK" of a New Jersey girl helped model Lauri Grace Langone, Ocean Township, splash-land on the cover of some recent swimsuit catalogs. **D1**

CORNELL GREEN, a writer-musician from Ocean Grove, considers speaking out for the poor — in his newspaper column or at public meetings — part of his "mission" in life. **D1**

A COUNTRIFIED CONDO is the Freehold Township home of police officers Sean and Ginger Corman that's the subject of today's "Let's Visit" feature. **D5**

MOSCOW'S FIRST AMERICAN RESTAURANT has as one of its principals Shelley M. Zeigler, the Trenton entrepreneur who gave the Soviet Union its first taste of pizza. **Food/D12**

ENTERTAINMENT

E1

Speaking out for poor writer-musician's mission

By **BRUCE LEVINE**
Press Staff Writer

In another decade, 28-year-old Cornell Green might have been dismissed as a hippie, a radical or just an unfocused dreamer.

In the column he writes for a fortnightly newspaper, Green's is a liberal voice, speaking for the downtrodden. He's sold Big Macs, worked at a crematory and now attends to a department store's display fixtures and cash registers to support himself as an aspiring musician.

A letter he received rejecting a short story he sent to Playboy was quickly misplaced in the small, cluttered studio apartment where Green lives in Ocean Grove.

"Basically I guess I consider myself an artist," said Green, who eschews labels. "I would probably, if I had to pick one word, I would have to say I'm a

writer," he said.

"I'm a studier of people."

While devoting time to his musical endeavors, it was Green's articulation and concern for the oppressed that put him in the public eye for a short while in 1987.

When he approached the microphone to advocate rent control at the Feb. 4, 1987 meeting of the Asbury Park City Council, Green, his hair worn in dreadlocks, was wearing a fatigue jacket with a button picturing the late reggae musician Bob Marley.

His looks attracted people's attention, but his words made them listen.

Robert F. Carroll, publisher of The Coaster, was covering the meeting for the 13,000-circulation newspaper and "figured here's a wild guy who's going to rant and rave. And when he started to

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JOHN FIGLER/Asbury Park Press

Cornell Green by Wesley Lake, which separates Ocean Grove, where he now lives, from Asbury Park, where Green once considered running for office.

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Green

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speaking, the image was shattered and I thought, what a find."

"There are people here," Green told the council. "I see them foraging in garbage cans. I see them sleeping on the boardwalk. I see them sleeping under the boardwalk, 'cause they can't afford a place to sleep."

"These aren't bums. These aren't indigents. These are dispossessed people who are being robbed of their dignity because it seems that councils like this, that governments, like any municipality from here on up to the federal government, are more concerned about making sure some corporations make a profit rather than making sure some people have a place to live."

At Carroll's invitation, Green submitted a guest commentary on the subject, and has been a regular Coaster columnist ever since, writing about the travails of society's struggling poor.

"I endorse, I guess, most of the ideas I've heard him express," Carroll said. "But even if I didn't, he's such a good writer and provocative writer that he makes a nice contribution to our little paper."

Said Asbury Park City Manager Sam Addeo, "He struck me as possessing views as radical as the group he was with, but being one of the more level-headed. I think he brings a sense that he's closer to the problem."

Green grew up in Brooklyn in what he describes as a middle-class family with old-fashioned values, liberal politics and a strong appreciation for education.

He developed a love for music as a teen-ager and attended college for a while in the late '70s before making smoking marijuana a daily habit and occasionally experimenting with drugs such as LSD. But by 1980 he had straightened himself out and enlisted in the Air Force, which sent him to California to learn Russian. He lived with a group of born-again Christians and commuted to the base.

But 14 months into his six-year hitch, the Air Force honorably discharged Green after he missed classes twice. Eight months later he found himself questioning the religious beliefs of his housemates and he moved out, living in a sleeping bag in doorways and the woods of Monterey, Calif., for more than a month before asking his parents to send him plane fare to return to Brooklyn.

Green moved to Asbury Park in 1984 to practice with a local band,

but the group collapsed soon after his arrival.

Since then he's held almost a dozen jobs, from help at a fast-food restaurant, to cemetery groundskeeper and assistant crematory operator, to construction worker and delivery truck driver.

Now he works for Macy's, where he unjams computer printers, changes ribbons, assembles display racks and performs other basic tasks at the Eatontown store.

Having served two years ago as a negotiator for the Asbury Park Tenants Association's unsuccessful push

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— Cornell Green

for rent control, last year he and other members of the Monmouth County Coalition for the Homeless took their cause to the county Board of Freeholders.

County Human Services Director Louis Paparozzi remembers him "as a person who was able to speak from first-hand experience, and we don't often get someone with that first-hand experience who is so articulate."

When Green spoke at the public meetings, "I almost got the impression he was attempting to educate, not accuse or confront," Paparozzi said. "I almost get the impression that he isn't just speaking to the freeholders, he's speaking to the

world."

And that thought appeals to Green.

"Other than a writer, I guess I always felt I had a mission. I guess there are more non-intelligent people than intelligent people. . . . Of intelligent people, it seems that a good number of those people use it selfishly," he said. "A small minority of them try to do something."

He tries to be among that minority.

"I basically don't want to wait till it's too late," Green said, though he remains uncertain about what he wants to do with his life.

He toys with moving back into Asbury Park and running for City Council.

But he said he'd only run for office if he could win and empower the people on the street. But, "it also kind of scares me," he said. "It's sort of like losing control of your destiny — sort of being swept away."

Since 1985 he has been wearing the knots in his hair that make some people uneasy.

"Part of what I was thinking when I put the dreads in was now I can't sell out," he said. "Personally I think it looks really cool. So do a lot of women."

And with a slight grin, he wondered aloud if someone with dreadlocks could get elected to office.

To the casual observer, Green doesn't have a lot of tangible personal effects to show for his 28 years. Yet he's not complaining.

"I like the way I live. I'd like a vehicle. I'd like a bigger place. I'd like a little more money so I wouldn't have to live so hand to mouth. That's about it."

Would he like celebrity?

"Yes, reluctantly . . . I have stories in my head that I think are interesting, and I want people to read them. I have a message."

He mentioned his concern that fame could cost him his privacy, and added, "Sitting here in this little dive talking about fighting off adulating crowds must sound pretentious."

And then he clarified, "I'd like my art to be popular. I don't care if Cornell Green is popular."

His Coaster column generates several reader responses a month, and he was playing a weekly gig with a rock and blues band until recently in Asbury Park.

"There are a number of things I've always wanted to do and am doing," he said. "I like myself now more than at any point before in my life. . . . I feel there's less contradiction."