'Fear of Intimacy' seminar fosters close relationships

By KATHRYN McKenzie NICHOLS
Herald Staff Writer

An awful lot of couples are singing the
"D.I.V.O.R.C.E" song these days.

Nearly half of all marriages end in divorce, and the
average marriage only lasts seven years. And even 50
percent of married folks confess to being unhappy in
their primary relationship, according to Dr. Lisa
Firestone, one of the presenters of this weekend's "Fear
of Intimacy" seminar at Esalen Institute.

In fact, the seminar — which really was intended for
psychologists and counseling professionals — has
completely filled, and there's a waiting list to get in.

Firestone said there's no doubt it's a topic that
concerns a great many people.

"Even young people, when asked, don't see
themselves as having long or happy relationships," she
said. "What we're trying to do is teach people how to
develop and maintain close relationships."

Firestone and co-presenter Joyce Catlett, who both
spoke at Thunderbird Bookshop Thursday night, use
the book "Fear of Intimacy" as their bible. The book,
written by Catlett and Firestone's father, Dr. Robert
Firestone, is a guide to understanding the obstacles that
hinder true intimacy in a marriage.

The book is available at the Thunderbird and through
online booksellers; cost is $24.95. It's published by the
Glendon Association, a nonprofit organization based in
Santa Barbara and dedicated to psychological research.

The organization has a special interest in understanding
the dynamics of self-destructive behavior and alleviating
social problems such as child abuse, suicide, violence,
substance abuse and disturbed family relationships.

Lisa Firestone, the association's program and
education director, said many of these barriers are first
put up in childhood, and getting past them often can
take some work.

The issue becomes even more complicated when
children are involved. For some years, the experts held
that youngsters were not greatly affected by parents
divorcing, and, in fact, could be better off than being
raised in a hostile atmosphere.

But recent studies have shown long-lasting effects of
divorce, and family advocates now are siding with the
idea that perhaps staying in a marriage "for the sake of
the children" is preferable.

Firestone said she thinks a better way is to
strengthen marriages and show children how good a
loving marriage can be.

"Kids learn so much by example," she said.

Response to this weekend's seminar in Esalen was so
strong that Firestone said another now is being planned
for November. The seminars also are available
throughout the year in other cities; a complete list may
be found at the Glendon Association Web site
(www.glendon.org).

For instance, "Fear of Intimacy" seminars will be held
Feb. 9-11 in San Francisco and March 3 at Sonoma State
University.

For information or registration, check out the Web
site or call (800) 663-5281.