To Err Is Human—To Climb Divine

Moving with Well-Connected Publicists

by Karen Feld

Social publicist Lee Anderson with her fiancé Vincente Minnelli and client Merle Oberon Wolders, for whom Lee Anderson thinned out a list of friends. Photographed by Alan Berliner.

Joyce Haber neatly polished off *The Users* in her almost pornographic novel, and there is a move afoot to expose and perhaps destroy the users peer group, the social climbers.

The latter movement is doomed to fail. As long as society news is reported and given space in metropolitan newspapers, there will be ladies and non-ladies who feel secure socially and decide to devote their lives, and in some cases considerable cash, to put their names and that of their husbands up in lights. Up in lights means, of course, in Suzy's syndicated gossip column, Betty Beale's (Washington, D.C., papers)., in Jody Jacobs's social pieces in the *Los Angeles Times*, and, in season, in Wally Cedar's, Liz Smith's, and Doris Lilly's in the *Palm Springs Pictorial*. (Note: Lilly must be "planted" with care; she doesn't always spell names right and her editors don't always catch her goofs. In one recent column, newspaper baron Rupert Murdoch's name was spelled two ways, neither correct, and when social climbing, correct name spelling is even more important than name dropping.)

Americans are born climbers, and American know-how being what it is, it was inevitable that the day would come when some new-rich matron would decide that making the Blue Book by the normal route was both tedious and time-consuming. The shortcut was cash, and the services of a well-connected publicist with social connections.

Social climbing with the help of a paid professional (fees range from $650 a month and up for Joan Luther, Lee Anderson and Richard Gully, considered the best in Los Angeles, while *Celebrity Register*'s Earl Blackwell is considered the top in Manhattan and worldwide) is a little like lobbying, and a lot like trying to make it in the movies. You may have to work your way up through a season of Allan Carr's parties and attend two or three of Grace and Harold Robbins's New Year's soirées stateside before Mrs. Robbins thinks about inviting you to her gala on the Riviera. And it may take a few more years before Rupert Allen, who keeps climbers from the doors of the palace at Monaco, approves your name for Princess Grace's invitation list for her