

Invisible Lion

Awakening

1/10/85

"You're too much of a man to be a taker," my friend said.

It's been six days since my last drink, and I'm still toxic. I'm sitting in the cafe called La Boheme, on the couch at the wall. My face is hot, my eyes bloodshot. I'm not about to tell tales of drunkenness, nor am I about to begin the saga of a drunk.

I'm about to tell the tale of a lion man, a poet, an exciting, frightening, and dangerous creature, who has chosen to be so without the confusion and death threat of alcohol. I choose to be as drunk as any man, but I will do so without another drop of alcohol. This will be a journal of fulfillment. The excuses and abuses are behind me.

Lions know about fear, their own fear, their own awareness. Drunkenness has become everyone's excuse for his or her fear of this one lion. I know other lions. This one is busy at being this one. The others will take care of themselves.

The 49ers will or will not win the Superbowl in ten days. It doesn't matter to the realization of my life. I'll be 43 in a month and a week. Today, the lion lets the pussycat grow up, despite the fear he has always had of his. own strength, the fear of others, his sense of their need for protection, and the challenges that will come to him.

This journal will proceed day by day, without regard for any misconceptions I have had about my duties in the past. I can almost guarantee you're not reading this in my lifetime. Four men sitting near me are discussing the meaning of being. I'm no longer seriously concerned

with the words and lives of all the other creatures who come to the pond in the forest, the oasis in the desert, the watering hole in the jungle. They have their lives, and they'll tell their tales. I'll tell mine.

I'll tell what an awakened lion thinks, feels, sees, and does. I'm excited about this time ahead. Right now, I don't give a shit what you think. By and large, you are incapable of grasping my life. I know your life far better than you can imagine mine. I've spent years listening patiently to your tales of achievement and woe. I understand them.

You've heard me roaring, and it was a blast furnace, an airplane's takeoff, an incomprehensible garble. Even when I articulated as a poet, even when I held your heart in the hands of my words, you stared dumbly, in awe, or in anticipation of flight.

We are all the same. You don't get it. You think that means we all get C+ at life, and we should all earn \$40,000 per year. All the animals come to the watering hole. In the animal kingdom, they all know who they are. They are what they are. Only among human beings is there obfuscation, denial, pretense, and posturing.

I'm tired of this line of thought. I won't do any good if I try to lay out some philosophy of human behavior. As human animals, we are what we are. It is somewhere deep within us, beneath our bullshit, or it's apparent. Let it become apparent.

A Hundred Bottles

1/11

I'm living on a friend's back porch. His wife's son lives there, too. The kid is a Punk. Leather jacket, torn jeans - written on. He wears three shirts, or four, with one tied around his waist. His hair is cut like he was caught sleeping overnight in a hardware store. He reads Rimbaud and Lautremont. He uses his room like a crash pad. He offends his parents. He dropped out of school. He's going to live in a house with several others, or on the street.

I like this kid. He's my kind of kid. He joined the Communist Party. The Reds will never know what to do with this kid. He wants to be a bike messenger, spend his time going to demonstrations and getting arrested. He's a ringleader. Never talks among his friends. They crowd around him.

His father is attending Med School in Granada. He wants Chris to go to Harvard or Stanford, What? And sleep in the basement of the Poly-Sci faculty lounge and plot the overthrow of absolutely nothing.

I'm sitting in the Picaro Cafe. The kid behind me in line was a ringer for Chris. The place is full of gay men. What has prompted this mini-invasion? Maybe it's the movie across the street at the Roxie.

I'm not going to drink anymore, so it's time to affect some other manifestation of my aberrant responsibilities. I'm growing a mustache and goatee. I don't like my nice shirt, nice Levi's, nice boots and nice leather jacket.

I rewrote some of Rimbaud's poems, ten years ago, before he became fashionable. I suppose what I'm doing now will be fashionable in ten years. I don't know what I'm doing now. Didn't know then. Only when it is the fashion, and you participate in the fashion, do you believe you know what

you're doing. I could get a bizarre haircut, but what I have was once a bizarre haircut.

I believe in the timelessness of good writing. On the other hand, it's interesting when some segment of good writing becomes *au courant*. The seemingly narcissistic, self-indulgent, nihilistic, chantlike, raving, demanding, clarity of Rimbaud deserves a moment, from time to time.

Rimbaud was a Punk. He believed the end was near, on the backside, a *fait accompli*, past. And it was, for that *enfant terrible*. Dried up at 19, he went slaving and gun-running, caught a bug in Aden, and died in a hospital in Marseilles, busied over by his sister.

I could take my shirt off and tie it around my waist. Sit here naked. Or wear my jacket inside out and slit-rip my Levi's. Or write poems. What rebellious son of a bitch ever did that for 20 years? A few. As few as there are few of anything.

You are in on this early transformation manifestation completion fulfillment business-as-usual whoever you are.

I'm looking at the hundred bottles of beer on the wall, re-imagining their images. A hundred chipped coke bottles full of dirty river water. An old man, teeth rotted, sits near them. He says, "Hey, mister, pssst, want some dirty water? Full of maggots. You'll like it. Tastes good. Ten for a dollar. Great, huh?"

I look at all the people. Fuck 'em if they can't take a poem. "My lover's red, red lips, like the busted-open belly of a rat run over by a truck on the white highway." (See Jack Spicer's advice about writing.)

A poet who is a lion. A lion who is a poet. The poet is invisible. The lion must take a back seat to the poet when the invisibility is necessary. He looks like a lion, for all those who will look at the poet, but he looks at the world through invisible eyes.

The Punk bounces up to the counter like a mating waterfowl and dips his peacock-tail head, like the counter-girl at Macy's showing off a new perfume to a matron with sinus problems. Maybe the manager is watching.

I'm practicing sitting like I've always imagined I'd sit if I ever managed to believe what an absolutely incredible life I'm living. It feels right. It feels good. It's going to be fun to watch people try to rise up to this flesh and bone apparition. This is being drunk without getting drunk. It is having the right by having the right.

A Curious Vantage

1/14

I am free. The monkey is off my back. The unspoken motto of America is "You're on you're own." Once understood, it's a freedom. Dependencies of many colors. All gone. Freedom. The reality comes indoors.

This is the third in a series of self-describing books. **Savage Amusement**, then **Dear Nadja**, also called **Borderwalker**, and now **Invisible Lion**. I am continuing my practice of being a lion. Wherever I begin to lower my head in shyness, embarrassment, or fear, I raise it. I am free.

All books can be reduced to a statement. The first was, "I am a man." The second was, "I am a poet." Of this, it is, "I am free."

Like all my writing of this sort, there are two other untold stories running simultaneously. The events of encounter with others are left largely to themselves. I don't live in order to write about it. And the poetry lives independent of this narration. This writing is in and of itself, a different kind of communication.

There's a great deal taking place on the outside. Outside this. Dave called me about painting. Peter talked to me about his maturing. He's beginning to write again. He thinks it's still two years off. He's so much more of a man when he's at his work. Paul and I are talking of writing a play, called **Goodnight, Irene**, about two terrorists who invade a cafe, armed with song, poetry, love, laughter, and truth. It happened to us, two years ago.

I was painting for Ian and Dave. Ian's greed drove Dave off, says Dave. Dave wants me to get my painter license, and then we can make some good money, do good work, and talk about Thomas Merton and theater. Dave was a Yale actor and did some New York work. He's now in a religious community. "Without the dogma," he says.

Last night, I prayed. It just came out. "Lord, please help me." Simple. That's all it was. I tried to elaborate, but there was no need. The prayer was complete. God doesn't require much. Just the pure expression of my spirit.

"This hesitant revolution," I called my life ten years ago. I knew it was true. Taking away the hesitancy is kicking the monkey off my back. I've stopped helping people deal with Steve. They're on their own, now. From now on, they get the full-shot Steve. Or they get nothing. Invisible eyes. I used to engage everyone's eyes. Everyone. So many eyes. Looking for the soul behind the eyes. Now, they show, or I go.

Gia Cresci said, "Steve, you sit in that cafe (The Owl and the Monkey) and you give them everything, and they give nothing back." I used to help them all, worrying about their miserable, lonely, boring lives.

I sat, talking to Peter this morning, in his house, and I stopped carrying him in my mind's eye. I looked. I saw. I thought my eyes were cold, but they weren't. They simply weren't supportive of real or imagined weaknesses. When there are moments of pleasure, a warm smile came into my seeing. Compassion needs no words, no actions. Showing sympathy is painting a mask on a real face, a beautiful face, the true face.

It's Monday afternoon in the Picaro. A few people scattered about. Reggae on the radio. A tall, pretty, too-painted girl reading. Man in trench coat strides out the door. The pretty girl taps her cigarette as if she's measuring a pinch of tarragon.

It's a good mood Monday. I talked at length with Dave tonight. Jack is coming by in a moment or two with my Rimbaud-Breton-Lorca poems, **Let Me Burn**. Poems written as if they were translations, without knowing the French and Spanish. I invented new poems. I had an idea this generation would understand them.

Being a poet for all time is a curious vantage point. I see generations as if they were different towns on the map, each with a different set of prejudices and possibilities.

Back to a recurring theme, my potential at an end, I am fulfilled, filled to the full. Now is the time to empty out the bottomless urn. I've urned it. Let Me Urn.

A Blind Crime

1/14 On the Bus

Riding on the 22 Fillmore bus. Half a dozen blind or legally blind people got on. They came to the back of the bus. As they were sitting, the bus lurched, and they fell all over each other, laughing. The guy next to me was holding a paper bag with a Dos Equis in it. He took the last swallow and handed the bottle to another guy by the back window. "Hey, toss that out the window, would you?"

I was amazed. A blind kid, tossing a bottle onto the street. Ten minutes later, as we rolled down 16th St., he still had it. He was, sic, looking out the window, waving the bottle. I figured he never wanted to toss it, in the first place. The group had spent the twenty minutes since getting on, talking, inside their circle of shade, about gossipy stuff, relationships and friends.

At Valencia, past the corner, the bus stopped. I had moved to the door, to get off, to go visit Paul. A guy got on, waving his wallet like he had a Fast Pass. He was clean-cut Chinese. He looked like a guy getting off work. He strode quickly to the back of the bus. "All right, the party's over." He flashed his badge at the blind and near blind, as his partner got on at the back door. A white guy, like a welder.

Plain clothes cops. Good at it. They looked like a couple of guys. The group was stunned. They started to get up. "No, not you. Your buddy. OK, buddy, let's go. Off the bus. C'mon." The guy looked flabbergasted. If he was blind, and I couldn't tell for sure, he hadn't thrown the bottle. He was either looking for a patch of grass or a trash barrel. For ten minutes, leaning out the window. Maybe he was listening for the silence that indicates a free zone.

The cops pulled him off and led him to the side behind a parked truck. The bus pulled up to Mission Street. One girl said, "C'mon, everybody, we got to get off. We've got to help him."

I could only imagine the chagrin to the cops. **MUNI COPS END BLIND CRIME WAVE.** "All in a day's work, your honor." "Thanks for the medal, Madame Mayor." I love it. If you're ever low on funds, and you want to take in some theater, ride the bus.

Sooner Than Never

1/14 Later

It's 8PM. Dave is stopping in, sometime between now and ten. I'm always curious how circumstances prompt imagination. Whatever happens while I'm waiting will be as if for free, gratis.

Last year, I began to get a message. As if. Living a life as if. I began to suspect it was common. I had done it. As if a poet. As if a father. As if a lover. As if a housepainter. This is no longer as if. This is as is. Like the used car lot, full of as is cars. The new ones are all as if cars.

Savage Amusement was written as letters to a friend I hadn't seen in ten years. **Dear Nadja** was written as letters to my imagined sister, Nadja. This one is being written as is. No need for as if. Any action begins in conception, before realization. Feel, think, do. Do, think, feel. Do, feel, think. Feel, do, think. Round and round. Leaving nothing out. Think, feel, do. Think, do, feel. I feel as if I think I've done that. Don't you?

I'm beginning to suspect all the lion stuff. It's made me as concerned about others sense of me as much as when I was afraid. "Well, Mr. Proust, you write long sentences. And you, Mr. Gogh . . . oh, sorry, Mr. VAN Gogh, you use a strong brush stroke and a lot of color. And you, Steve, have a tendency to be theatrical and irreverent."

I began to notice that this heads-up attitude was inclining me, (ouch) to think of the stage again. I have performed. I have, with my head down. The Chronicle, calling it an off-hand manner, decried that my eyes were riveted to the boards six feet in front of me. True, and not successful as a style. Heads up. Invisible eyes on the proverbial audience. And leonine presence. Now, that has appeal.

Downtime is productive. I backed off from the lion for a short while. Lost sight of the presence of possibility. This is not a posturing for fun. Being

aware of being. Cutting out the middleman is living fully. It's **being** on stage, not being **on stage**.

Who knows, I may end up painting Broadway, the Great White Way, with Dave, who, by the way, is not here yet, at 8:45. He has to get out of some house activities, but he doesn't worry me. If he doesn't show, he will, sooner or later. (How can you show up sooner than never?)

I just looked out across the Picaro at all the tables and people and felt a calm come over me. A relaxation. A sense of surveying one's dominion, or is it domain? Not dominion over people but over the tendrils of being. The domain of belonging to a vast, interlocking chain of life.

This afternoon, Peter described, in rich detail, his sense of the Platte River in Nebraska, before the white man came. Wide-water land, teeming with the interwoven lives of creatures. The Dominion of the Imagination, Founded on the Real. Clear water, full of life. Clear skies, full of life.

All I have to do is take a deep breath, and I'm drunk. I don't have to get drunk. I was born drunk. It's a selfish high that includes anyone willing, or everyone unknowing.

Here's the lion's downfall. The thorn in the paw. I have made eye contact with an attractive woman. Which is to say a woman has looked back at me. Shit, I look at them all. When they don't return my notice of them, I politely fold my tent and steal off into the night.

She's shown a couple of qualities I like. She's in thought, pen above paper, and she looks at the room with open eyes, a kind of curiosity. Nothing can tame the lion but a lioness. Frizzy blond hair. Baggy sweater. A contemplative slouch. She draws out her words and paints them on the paper.

9:25. No Dave. Funny how circumstances prompt imagination. Now, she has a giant latte. She hands her half page of writing across the table to her

more mannish sister. (And when the equality of the sexes has been made final, that mannishness will be womanish, as well.)

9:40. I'm beginning to feel a strain in waiting for Dave. Godot to Hell, Dave. Nah, I don't really mean it. I just like the play on words. Which is better than a play on MacDuff. Ah, my first joke. I love it when I make my first joke. It's like being told a new joke. A gift from Orpheus Marx, the sixth brother, the inspiration for them all.

Going to the movies with Beatrice and Morgan, the other night, I made this one up, "And then there's the orphan who bought a horse that runs in the rain and a bag of feed, because he always wanted a mudder and fodder." Beatrice said she'd heard it already. It was new to me. Where's Dante when I need him?

The woman across the room is smiling in private thought. We must be leading parallel lives. Maybe she's got a joke too. "Hi, can I buy you a cup of humor?" "No, thanks, mine's full." She's beautiful, sometimes, when she throws back her mane of tangled locks. Hmm. That's an eerie canal.

She looks up from her papers, directly at me. Then, seeing my eyes looking back, she throws her glance at the far wall and knocks a couple of books into someone's swordfish dinner.

9:55. Stay away, Dave, I'm having a good time.

10:30. If Dave shows up now, he will be in a state of grace. Let the night linger another hour. I know that when she leaves, I will follow soon after. I am feeding off the energy of a woman's glance. I'm overcome by the image of lying in a woman's arms, through the night, on the island of the bed. Floating time, free from the world.

What I want to know is, how do I go about meeting this woman? She keeps staring at me. I catch her at it. She catches me at it. Any fool can see we are both curious. She puts the same intensity, the same concentration into her

writing that I do. Like little kids drawing, twisting their lips and opening their eyes wide, then narrow, then wide.

She's putting on her sweater. She's tall. This time, looking at her, I show my shyness. It's better than being cool all the damn time. She and her friend are leaving.

Nice jacket. Not a big ass like I feared. But gone. Another time, perhaps. She's too young, I fear. Fear. Fear. Fear. I feel as if I've done that.

Quiescence

1/15

The difference between illusion and reality is that they are partners. I am a warrior. I've been hiding the fact, and hiding from it, for years. Whenever I wanted to risk my training (as a clean-cut All-American boy) I drank. I shrank from the risks of strength and chose the risks of weakness.

Explorer of the Darker Side (as I've been called) became Explorer of the Broken Heart and the Broken Spirit. My training would have me cold and capable. I am choosing, now, to break free on the strong side. Whenever I feel myself constrained by social training, I move to act with more heart, more strength, more belief, more knowledge, more control, and more abandon.

Warriors don't abuse their power. Abuse of power is contrary to presence in it. A warrior knows his enemies and his allies. Alcohol is this warrior's enemy.

Well, that's enough of a treatise on being a warrior. It's not a discipline, a religion, a caste restricted to any people or place. It is a state of knowing. Sami Farhat says the next step after poet is prophet. That's Sami's word for warrior.

Renegade Christians went into the desert. Indians go into the hills. I live in the city. Paul and I spent 40 days and 40 nights in the devil's cave, the bottle. Demon Rum. Raising our hands like a water line in front of our eyes to keep each other awake and alive. We survived. Barely. There are no dead bodies. There are many paths to enlightenment. No one ever gets to the Golden City.

When I was 30, my wife said to me, in anger, "You're 30 years old!" I said, "I'm not 30 years old, I'm Steve." Now I'm a 42-year-old housepainter/poet from Illinois and Nebraska. But I'm not. Those of us who cling to our

personal histories pull it around in a little red wagon, and we are known by the wagon we pull.

I used to throw my poems out to someone as if to say, "There's the real Steve Brooks." Take them and make them yours and leave me alone to write some more. But the poems are only the poems. They may be the finest thing about the red wagon, but there they are, right on top, in a nice blue binder.

Anyone who has the revealed truth in his back pocket, and acts accordingly, is a liar. A trickster. Watch out for him. Or he is frightened and hangs on to his pockets as if they hold the last dollar bill on earth.

All knowledge is available to all people. It lives in an old man sitting in the back seat of a junked '57 Pontiac, behind the Seed and Feed Store in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. Unless he died. In which case, it's being kept in a shoebox, underneath the bed of a blind old woman who lives above a taqueria in Boise. Shit, it's been shredded and blown all over the Rockies. Oh, well, better luck next life.

A man climbed to the top of the Himalayas and asked the wisest of the wise if the old man would tell him the secret to long life. "Don't hold your breath," said the old master. I'm scared shitless of being a warrior; the inevitability of it and the separation from all the shit that goes to make up a successful, normal life. I want to incorporate my spirit into daily life. I don't want a cave, a cell, a hermitage of any sort. Why go away from what's available everywhere?

The other day, Beatrice said, "Now, people won't think you're drunk, they'll think you're crazy." OK. I can deal with that. I like the idea of being thought crazy. I never liked the idea of being merely fucked up.

7PM. I was sitting with my 18-year-old son Jack in the Picaro looking at women and others, and I began to want a drink. Wait. What's the true desire? I realized there was something to do, and drinking was always the

avoider, the gap filler. I jumped up and called Dave. He's coming over after eight. Result; no need for a filler, a killer, a waste.

Quiescence. That period called nothing, boring, dull, inactive, that falls between, and is not to be taken as a crop. It lies fallow. So be it. Let it be.

Major Concerns

1/16

Warrior of the Heart. I'm catching a little warmth from the sun in the window of La Boheme. It's a cold winter. Heat is hard to come by. Cold streets. Cold nights. Cold houses.

George Tsongas just sat down at the next table. There's a poet even older than I am. Damn, it's so nice to sit in the sun and take my coat off. In the 12 days I've been sober, for the first few days, I kept my coat on, 24 hours a day. I sit in Peter's kitchen with my feet in the oven door and my coat on. In public for 12 days, I haven't been able to take my coat off and stay warm. It's not that I've got chills. Everyone has. There's an iceberg in the bay.

My god in heaven, I rolled up my sleeves. Will winters never cease? I'm shy about saying hello to George. I've been in his general company for 10-12 years, but I've never spoken to him. It makes me wonder if I engender the same fearful respect from others. Probably.

I'm making eye contact today, as of yore. Either I like people or I like my idea of people. When I feel strong, there's nothing not to imagine. People are worth imagining about. People are like exotic fruits with husks, rinds and skins. There's no telling what's inside. Even as I say that, I know that, generally, the pulp is little more than that. Succulence is unlikely and rare.

Nothing humbles a poet like another poet. I have enormous respect for these warriors of the heart. By not talking to George, I can write about him. As I write, I regain my invisible eyes. I just startled a woman across the room by turning my invisible eyes to hers. This is not self-serving. This is my honesty. I will speak to George. Either when I'm finished writing, or as he is about to leave. I'm sitting in a pool of well-being. There's Dante for you. The Pool of Well-Being.

I've still not spoken to George. I've sat in a bar, half in the bag, for hours, still unable to speak to the person next to me, man or woman. This is not a condition solvable by booze or clever, social patter. This is the recognition of another's right to an inviolability of their own. George has made no indication of his willingness to make contact. He is invisible. The borderwalkers spend so much time inviolate on the far ramparts of their sensibilities, their senses and sensations, that it's no wonder they slip in and out of town unnoticed.

The only effective rule of thumb I've had for meeting people is to let it happen. It either pops out of one's mouth or circumstances make a meeting. It popped out of my mouth, as George was about to leave. We talked with the ease of people who know what the other is about.

A lovely woman just took the chair opposite me at my small table. She's getting her coffee. This should be interesting. She sat for the sun, which is ten minutes from the rooftops, going down. Same conditions prevail. Meeting someone is always the same. Best left to God's little gestures.

Nuclear Winter. Endless. The woman is part of an organization called Major Concerns. She is carrying a poster. At first glance, it's one of those love the earth portraits of our verdant planet, green and blue against the black backdrop of space. On second glance, the hemisphere has been largely encrusted from top to middle with ice and snow. Central America and the coasts of North and South America nearest the equator are green.

George's son is part of a group called Squatters. George is being evicted. What a lovely city. Lovely is the word for the day. The Squatters are attempting to protest the gentrification of this once open city. The real estate interests, a lovely euphemism, have won the day. Despite all, it's truly a lovely day.

Trace It Back

1/16 Later

In a work of fiction, one creates a character and stays with him. In real life, one has many sides, and no one face will carry through the entire time. I feel sad and lonely. Lost. Confused. Depressed. Low. Unsure. Disappointed. Undirected. I'm running out of money. But that's not it. There's no work. Maybe Monday. I want to move out of Peter's house by Friday. 2 days. Nope. Not it.

Finally, I realize a place for all this multifaceted sadness. Dave came into the Picaro to meet his girlfriend Beth. When she came in later, and before I knew it was she, I looked into this woman's face, and for a moment, I felt a bonding. Love, if you want to call it that.

She looked like my mother 40-50 years ago. That's a psychological truism. I felt intimate bonding. Not just an attraction. Not lust or desire. I suppose, if I had my druthers, I'd pick someone entirely different. I'd pick someone full-breasted, dark, funny, exciting. But bonding is involuntary. It happens, and you're stuck with it.

Of course, she's Dave's mate, not mine. I'll leave it at that. Good ideas don't make mates appear, and bad ideas don't work, either. Well, I feel better now, thank you very much.

Trace it back. Feelings always have a root somewhere. A locus. Whenever I'm overwhelmed, I know it's about some recent word, deed, or person.

Today is Wednesday

1/16 Even Later

"God. Don't leave me." A prayer from last night. Said quietly, calmly, directly, and innocent of fear. God is in me. I speak to God as a statement of, to, and from God.

Practice saying, "God don't leave me," until it comes out like a simple statement, like "Today is Wednesday." It's difficult to erase the fear and the cry, the demand. Once the anxious emotions of normal life are gone, the prayer becomes the answer to the prayer. Well-being is assured by the presence. The simple presence we are inside of is God, and it is God's answer to the prayer.

Outdrink the Devil

1/17

All the times that feel like wine times or beer times, whiskey times, gin times, Pernod times, they already are. A French chanteuse whispers in the ear. Lamps glow. It's a cool night after a warm day. Futures open. White whiskered old man reading and eating soup with a spoon as big as his mouth. Pocket books 5 for \$1. Bald guy with two black eyes, collar up, stuffing alfalfa sprouts in his cheeks. Dirty dishes on the table, fat bellies gone down the street.

So there we are. On an evening at a time when the image of drinking asks pleasantly for its rights. The warrior of the heart asks himself what will replace it. Better, what will better it? Or best it. Only the heart itself can out drink the devil. The heart that wants to drink is not drunk yet, has not drunk yet, owes itself a deeper draught of itself.

Pasts and futures drain the heart. Forgetting pasts and futures is no easy task of avoidance. And it's too easy. Being in the exact moment works, like a charm. Do it as if it is a charm. It is not.

Jack is sitting at the same table, with his eyes vacant, his head down on his arm. I imagine concern or anger. I worry. I turn away. Fuck off, Jack. Go away. Do something. Poor baby. Lean on me. Steve, stop carrying people. Stop carrying yourself. This kid sucks my brain. My brain is suckable. I suck my brain. I suck. It sucks.

Damn. I am battling not myself and my son but the demons that pull me from myself. From my perfectly empty power source. Years ago, in torture from the loss of Roxan, I walked up the street to my empty apartment, and all of a sudden, I felt the center of the moment. The neither past nor future moment. The no-thought, no-feeling moment, and I was blown to smithereens. Nothing. There was nothing there. Absolute vacuum. It was the gap between the sparks, between the breaths, between the heartbeats.

Then, as quickly as I was horrified, I was brilliant. As quickly as the sun went out, it came back on, bathing me in total, wraparound brilliance. There was vacuum, and around the vacuum, there was EVERYTHING.

It is the only place to go. The most frightening place of all. Because it is the only thing that is nearest to everything.

One hour later. I did it. I stayed as-is and got as-if drunk. Well, high. My brain is pleasantly drifting from one delightful, connected image to another. It's 9PM and I'm going to TAKE the next two hours.

I had a full day, and I got too excited. I wandered into a residence hotel downtown, the Harcourt, looking for a job on the day they were taking applications for a painter. It was a sunny, warm day. Jack and I strolled 24th Street, and I found a wallet for 35 cents and I bought my two favorite pens. This afternoon, in La Boheme, I ran into Jane Terry, who may have a studio/loft sublet in Berkeley for me in a couple of months.

Barbara Englebert just stuck her face in mine. I haven't seen her in a year and a half. She was a strong figure in the last book. We hugged and grinned like we always do. We exchanged numbers, and she went back to speaking foreign tongues with people.

There's an old man, a science writer, sitting nearby, taking the name of a nurse practitioner from a strikingly attractive woman in order to combat some stress ailment. A guy plows through the chairs and stumbles across the old man's feet. The old man says, "You're not very careful. Do that again and I'll tell my mother." The woman's boyfriend shows up, and she said, "I'm making the acquaintance of this very interesting gentleman. Jay, this is Ed. Ed. Jay. Jay's a writer, too."

Everybody's a goddamn writer. I love it. Karen is her name. I've been coming within inches of some of San Francisco's finest women, lately. Inches. Close, but no cigar. Cigar, but no lighter.

Jay says he writes when he has to. He's an editor. Ed is telling a story of being jerked around as a writer of particular perceptions. Either he's totally full of shit and a practicing paranoid, or he's right. It's hard to tell. Aberrant perceptions are a dime a dozen or they're worth a million bucks.

This old man's ego, suppressed as it is, is slopping all over Jay, and Karen is avoiding the mess by concentrating on Ed's Xeroxed writings. Age is not an automatic indication of wisdom. Generally, it's a good bet to be a sign of hardening of the artistry. Karen calls his article a preface, an introduction. Ed says, "Yeah, looks like that, don't it, but not to the trained criminologist."

When I was riding the bus over here, I felt dangerous, a word I use to describe a state of heightened power and expectation. If it is in fact dangerous, isn't it only so in my mind? It's the notion of being out of the norm of ordinary social behavior. Like drunk, for instance. Now Ed is squelching his own story, because of "professional confidentiality," he says. I'm sitting here, casting myself against Ed by comparison of aberration. Am I crazy, wise, dangerous, powerful, self-serving, pretentious? Am I a warrior or a pitiful idiot? A master of the world or a master of self-deception? Don Quixote AND Sancho Panza?

A true warrior is humble. Ed is not humble. Ed is pissed. 60 years of pissed. It's time for a poem. Lacking that, it's time to pick this old fart up by the stink and toss him into the street. Pity the street.

A Carload of Plums

1/18

It's 1:30 in the morning, and I'm as happy as a plum on the back porch at Peter's house. Chris is watching an old movie on the little TV in his loft above me. "Americanizing" himself, he says.

The absolutely wonderful cookies Chris' mother, Peter's wife, Sharane, baked yesterday, are all gone, they were so good. I'm reading the Playboy interview with Gabriel Garcia Marquez and the latest New York Review of Books. The junky little elbow lamp above my left shoulder flickers and hums like a patio bug killer.

I'm in the house of a literary man who wants to go to Italy and never come back to the USA, but he loves the land just like I do. If I could figure out how to keep myself, while I love everything as much as I do, I'd be as happy as all the plums in the world combined, generation after generation.

I'm lying in a blue sleeping bag with my shirt on so I won't get cold shoulders and my new mustache is beginning to feel like spikes. There's a box of Cheer on the window sill, a pile of clothes on the bed, a pile of clothes on the floor, a pile of clothes on the old hide-a-bed by the door, punk posters and the St. Pauli Girl on the walls, you can hear the people upstairs talking and walking around, my pen sounds like an assiduously organized hen, scratching out her last will and testament on the ancient floorboards of the chicken coop, and I'm as happy as a carload of plums.

What a life! I wouldn't believe it if circumstances didn't force me to believe it. My saliva tastes great at 1:50 in the morning, and I'm convinced that great tasting saliva is absolutely one of the finest sensations given to a member of the human race.

What can I say? No plum ever knew such joy. You may think I'm joking, but I'm only playing. This joy is real. I don't need it forever. Joy is always

forever, even if it only takes 25 minutes to write about it. Somewhere above the Spanish Steps in Rome, where he died, Keats is smiling.

Great America

1/18 Daytime

Got a car. Didn't catch-cold. Saw some people. Ate dinner. Took a ride. Sat down. Went places. Looked at people. Thought about things. Like a thought stroll. Everyday I don't drink, I beat the devil. Feels good. Everyday I write a page I like, I get a smile from somewhere. Almost said I beat God. Don't want to beat God. No way, Haysoos. Life is available for simple pleasures, abiding joys. Some rent due on the space. Upkeep minimal.

I ran into Josh. He says I can crash at his place if I need to. Josh is from the New York City street scene many years. Crashing is no big deal. At 42, crashing is a **big** no big deal. I never did much of it. Just a long, sustained, ten years of crash.

Ian finally coughed up his old Pinto, after I leaned on him a little. Jack has driven off to visit his new punk, stoner, preppy friends. He was like a kid with a new toy. I had Ian sign the car over to Jack. Cars are fun I can live without. They're like a day at Great America. A free ticket entitles you to endless rides and the chance to spend a lot of money on seeming incidentals. That's business. Now let's see if I can crank it up or down and do something unheard of, yet, so far. This is peculiar writing. It just is what it is. No glory here.

That old man, Ed, really got to me last night. I opened myself up to him. Empathy has its pitfalls. The old bastard had me reeling with my own notions of being full of shit. Half my impulse is to be a lion/warrior. The other half is to keep it to myself, be an observer, a contemplative. Being humble is the crucial link that cannot be lost.

My lifelong habit is to explain and apologize for being, believing and knowing I'm about different work than most, being more than we are called on to be, as humans, in the ways we are proscribed to be, the ways we are expected to conform our boundless souls to a bound spirit in

chained lives. Knowledge is so powerful it frightens even those of us who seek it, even those of us who experience it.

I don't know where the path leads, even as all other paths are defined and offered. The definition and the offer of all other paths become the demand to follow them.

That's why I toss about in this writing. Part of it is the warrior's need to play the fool. Part of it is feeling inadequate to the task. Part is seeing the charlatans of true knowledge and fearing to become one of them.

"What if it's more than me, which it is, and like a great pouring into a small vessel, the vessel is broken, and only in my ambitious idealization is the vessel broken into spirit and made clear, and not, like clay, into broken pieces of earthenware."

And so, I toss about, not new at the challenge but new at becoming its fulfillment. I suspect, all of a sudden that this dilemma will always face me. And I suspect that this is a cop-out, and I'm only adhering to hesitancy.

Like Hamlet, revolutions can be procrastinated, mulled over, considered from every angle, but at some point, the shot heard round one's heart must be recognized. I reread Hamlet last year, to see if I could take it for literal truth instead of as drama.

Actions fulfill the posture. If I were my parent or my god, I would see the growth, but from the inside, only a massive transformation in the mirror would convince my fear and skepticism. I'm still shy, reluctant, unsure, doubting. Don't leave me, God.

I've come many years from the dreamer I once was. Every one of us is a Walter Mitty. Keats used to flog himself, not long after he had counted himself among the greats.

There is a certainty that alleviates this vacillation. I know it. I know of it. It eludes me. Then it pervades me. There is a higher power, a power other

than that evidenced by people dominating other people. I aim to be, in that power, neither leader nor follower.

This is the last sheet in this notebook, and at 9:30PM, there are precious few places to find any like it.

I walked across the street from the Picaro into the tiny grocery/liquor store and found one last writing tablet to my taste. Truth be known, I like poetry better than this kind of writing, because I think poetry lifts the ordinary to flight.

The Anniversary Special

1/19

2PM. Reading **Down and Out in Paris and London** by George Orwell, in the Blue Danube Cafe on Clement, listening to casually fashionable young women, i.e., girls, discussing skiing at *Squaw* and some model resume *thingee*. This kind of talk is a mind-warping *thinkee*. Sitting at ease in comfort, reading a book about poverty gives it a pleasant distance, as if it's a fiction to be delighted in.

Ashley and her friend quarrel over a cupcake. "PLEASE eat HALF of this. ASHLEY! Please!! Oh, God! I can't believe I'm EATING this! I'm SO MAD!" (MAAAAD!)

4PM. In La Boheme, it's a different story. Here, there are poor, those who are in poverty, and those who've known it. This. is my Paris, my Bohemia, and yet it's not mine. I am a part of it, only as I am here. There's rarely any camaraderie in this struggle. Particularly in the United States of Good Luck. "I need a job." "Good luck." "I'm out of money." "Good luck." "I'd like a little respect and recognition." "Good luck."

The wanderers and seekers have a gentle, haunted look in their eyes when they're drifting in poverty, like newspapers in a fitful gust. Headlines, articles, advice columns, turned to refuse.

As I read, I glance over at a woman I met in AA, a year and a half ago. She's talking to a gray-faced man with active, sad eyes and slicked-back hair; a man caught in the miserable self-pitying, self-deceiving reaches of the disease, when the juice does the reasoning for you, and any other kind of thinking is alien. Poverty has the same effect. It becomes the world. Incidentally, so does working for a corporation and having babies.

I'm in good shape, as that goes, but as I read about poverty and look around, I feel it as if I am destitute and hung-over. I'm neither, and it's to

Orwell's credit, as a writer, and mine, as a reader, that I empathize. His ability and my character. I suppose I could read pretty stories about pretty people, but there's a cleanliness here. Whenever something lovely happens to the down and out Orwell, it's luminescent. When nothing is taken for granted, everything has clean edges.

I'm sitting here, with my eyes welling up with the tears of broken men. I catch the eye of the owner of the cafe and I look away abruptly. Then I put a look of secure confidence into my eyes and look back. Then I erase the look. I have the right to share this misery across an ocean and fifty years, haven't I?

It's a dilemma I have faced often as a poet, assuming some character or condition for purposes of understanding, then having my identification mistaken for my identity. If Keats could pick about the gravel with a sparrow, I can certainly pick about the coffee-house, mean-streets, table-scrap with another human being.

My imagination is quick, alive, at the ready. I have to guard against the magnet of imagination. I went into the toilet and began to think what a sponge bath in a public toilet could be like. Paper towels and a sink. How long could I stay in, without arousing suspicion? I thought of the black T-shirt I've been wearing 24 hours a day to keep warm. Does anyone suspect it's not for its appearance that I wear it? I tell all this to give the tale to what goes on in the identifying mind. If my thoughts have frayed cuffs, then so be it.

In conversation with Dave, Beth, and their friend Bev, who's a dwarf, Bev said she didn't care for Nathaniel West, preferring the books of a woman, who says she cares so much for her characters she can't bear anything bad to happen to them. She doesn't like stories of degrading and degraded people. I can understand her particular interest, but I believe there's something elevating in Nathaniel West, and in art like it, if only in the art itself. On the other hand, I'm naive. I'm a sanguine fellow, and those I know who carry anger and bitterness distress me, they seem lost.

6PM. I have \$5. I went into the Pioneer Chicken and ordered the Anniversary special. \$1.59. About half price. Still reading **Down and Out in Paris and London**, the book propped up between the tray and the napkin holder. On leaving, a guy asked me for a quarter. I gave him a look of apology. In the next block, a young guy came running by me, followed by a heavysset security guard and two other guys, chasing.

I don't have a resolved attitude about these things. I refuse to believe my own poverty, and therefore I keep myself unresolved, not quite believing anyone else's poverty, either. Jack wants to have a roll of quarters and give them out, when asked. It's either that or nothing. It's impossible to justify the real need. No one who begs money is well off. Some are worse than others and only resort to it in crisis. Some have it as a livelihood. Some only want booze. Some need booze. Some need food.

If I'd been told to stop the thief, I'd probably have leveled the poor fool. As it was, silent Keystone Kops version, I moved out of the way and stared, as if entertained. They turned the corner, one, two, three, four.

7PM. Ah, 'twas ever thus. The Picaro is populated like cows at a distance from each other, grazing in a field. I've come out of my identification in poverty because Orwell has found a place to honor the human spirit. At work in the bowels of a hotel, scrubbing 14 hours a day, he sees the spirit at work in the pride of his fellow employees. Their cuds are properly chewed, their grass properly digested, their milk properly given.

Despite the unbelievable folly under its misuse, I continue in my respect for the magical human brain and its manifestations. The malignant organ. Malign 'em up and shoot 'em down.

Tomorrow is Superbowl Sunday. The hometown team is a slight favorite. San Franciscans will go, have gone, properly and improperly, ape-shit. If the Niners win, this town will be a madhouse. Bedlam. If they lose, the sore losers will be legion.

I, on the other hand, am looking for love, or its equivalent in sensual attention. It's the crapshoot that keeps me closest to notions such as fate, karma, serendipity, destiny, hope, and the divine right of wishful thinking. If I didn't have a lucky history, I might despair.

The Grand Piano

1/21

The 49ers won the Superbowl. It was too cold for San Franciscans to go berserk in the streets. There was limited pandemonium.

3PM. These are the last days of The Grand Piano. It's a big, sprawling, ugly, filthy, grab-bag coffee house. Haight Street has not yet been successfully boutique. It's a raunchy street, and The Grand Piano is its parlor. It's being closed down soon, to be replaced by a Round Table Pizza.

The walls in the back room are yellow. Yellow gets dirty worse than any other color. The decorations, such as they are, run from the talented to the grotesquely incompetent. Paintings, hangings, prints, mosaics. The sense is of found art, stumbled-upon art-like objects, donated, left on the doorstep, stuff stuck up to appease a debt, to cover a hole in the plaster, or because someone chose it, out of obsessive bad taste. What's truly good gets lost in the overflow, like a gold ring in the garbage.

And yet it engenders freedom. The only problem with freedom is excess. People run amok with freedom. And yet, the adventure, the possibility, the rare moments of the exception, are given a place.

I'm ill at ease in The Grand Piano because of the bums, the street dodgers, dopers, ancient hippies, panhandlers, the homeless, the wretched refuse. And yet, the room is full of smiling, grinning, engaged people. There may be precious little greatness here, but there's room for it. Even greatness need a place to fuck off, to kiss off the demands, great and petty, that plague civilized mankind.

The front room is a *mélange*, a *menagerie*, a great lot of people sitting around in the luxury of idiosyncrasy. Some more crass than others. Here, I feel even more foolish than I did in the backroom. I'm doing something.

Worse, I'm describing the crowd on the park benches of the indoor public square, the town pump.

The sun is shining on Haight Street. The Sun. The great god of blessing and disguise. El Sol is shining, this particular afternoon. I've got three shirts and a jacket on, feeling bedraggled, and yet, I'm going back to work, tomorrow. The man next to me is out of work. "Not having a job in this country is like committing a crime." He offers to buy a cigarette from me. "Nah, just take it. That's what they're for."

"Care for another," I say, upon leaving. "Thank you. Maybe I can do you a favor some time." "Could be," I say, without elaboration, without telling him I know exactly how he feels. My discomfort in the Grand Piano dissolves with a glimpse of the true human being. God protect me from the delusion of comfort.

7PM, in The Blue Danube. Wanting to write is like wanting a drink. One listens politely to conversation, all the while eyeing the cabinet where the booze is kept. Everything that blocks the act or doesn't encourage it becomes despised. One steals a line or half a page, hoping it will carry, until there's a bottle, a chapter, then total immersion in the book, the drunken binge.

The more one writes, the more one is inebriated. All thinking changes. A selfishness takes over. The do-gooder concern of others is lost, a denial of what you know is best. The other life, of caring for responsibilities and looking after one's well-being, subsides to a faint echo, recedes to a distant point on a receding horizon. People who love you call your name, and you look up in a rapture. When there is time, room, and encouragement, a kind of joyfulness bubbles up and you hand out glasses for all to share in the celebration. Ah, drinking. Ah, writing.

Years ago, the great romantic love of my life, Roxan, predicted that I would (could, she said) end up like Krapp (Samuel Beckett's **Krapp's Last Tape**) alone, in my room, playing and replaying my tapes, the unsold remainders of my not-quite-best-sellers stacked in the corner, like emergency kindling

for a gradually-freezing-to-death old man. She was talking about the booze of the private imagination. She could see me going into the bottle of thoughts and words and never coming out. It's a common perception among those without the same thirst. She didn't know how equally seductive was my love for her, how I would have thrown over the habit for her, or perhaps she knew too well and pitied me. I would have given up my life for her, and tried to. She saved me by leaving me. No woman since has had that power.

I'm looking, casually, with that awful secret fear of fate, at such a woman, as I write. She's beautiful, in that way that pulls me like a black hole. She's made herself homely against the world with chopped hair, no makeup, and baggy clothing.

She is the kind of woman that tempts me. I suppose it is an equivalent succubus to writing. Nothing short of everything is enough. The risk is not great enough, unless it is total. Here is your abyss, come closer, my love.

Wine, Women, and Song. I've recognized the wine for the demon it is. It will always remain so, but song cannot function for me unless I come to strength in it. Having said that, I admit there is a level of the imagination close to overdose that tempts me. My writing has ruined more love affairs, lost more jobs, than booze ever did. I have to laugh, not heartily, when I think of those who might believe it's only drinking that's gotten me to 42 in poverty and estrangement. Drinking was a parallel state, a corollary, an analogous state more easily perceived, more readily blamed, more quickly to be pitied, and more conveniently dismissed.

I crossed a barrier last night. I went to The Little Shamrock at 10PM, the night of revelry, in celebration of the 49ers' victory. I drank four pints of Coca-Cola. I put myself in the relaxed posture of having had my drinks and spoke frankly and openly, moved like a tiger, a dancer, a much-loved man, and finally, after many years of drinking, and a couple of years of testing the new life of the non-alcoholic drunk, men and women grinned at me.

I grinned back. I'm not sure how to describe this passage. Without trick or excuse, I felt like a lion. I felt gentle and strong, sure and unafraid. I had a great time in a bar, where I had, for years, pretended to revel.

I was right, a few nights ago, when I thought it was a night for the women. I was off by a couple of days. A very attractive woman just approached me with that gleam in her eyes, the magic set, that comes out on the tongue as, "I've seen you, somewhere. Do you come here all the time? Well, the next time I see you, I'll know your name."

When the women go on the prowl, it's the turning of the tables, but it has a glow about it that men wish they gave off, and would, if theirs wasn't so common and so constant.

I will call her Elaine, because that is her name. (Don't you just love it when writers talk like that?) Say, do you read here, often?

I'm sitting in the fullness of the sexuality of either my life or my imagination. Elaine, talking to a scrawny little guy who leans into the conversation, his nose pressed against the glass, has propped her high-heeled feet up, on the chair between us, aimed at me. Her feet swing slowly, sensually, twisting against each other.

And then . . . and then . . . "The Blue Danube is closing early, tonight. We thank you for your patronage."

Elaine gets up, walks by, grins, says, "Bye-bye." I grin, say, "Bye-bye."

10PM. I'm beginning to suspect, like the faint traces of a suspicious odor, that I have truly manufactured myself in this life. I've taken the clay that God gave me, that my parents manhandled, and sculpted something truly original, perhaps obscene, if not downright ludicrous, but goddamn if it isn't sitting in the Louvre of my heart, praised all around, with a bank of lights on it, and a velvet rope for a garden fence.

42 years in the making, chip, chip, a giant sheet over it, with a cord attached, and one day, off comes the sheet, and voila. "My God, aren't the folds well done," and "What an expression. If only he could speak, what tales he could tell, what magnificent music he could make," and "What a dong. I sure wish my George had a dong like that," and "Look at the eyes. They speak worlds. They seem to look right through you, if only . . ."

"Move along, please. The exhibit is closing in fifteen minutes. Move along, please."

The Ear of an Elephant

1/22

1AM. Let's imagine, just for the heck of it, what would happen if a totalitarian state were to spring up right here, in the good old US of A, and not just the pathetic oligarchy of greenbacks we've got now, but a genuine police state, which is really nothing more than the triumph of the camaraderie of fear. Who among my friends would rally to the cause of Joe X's freedom, saying, for example, that Joe X has been stripped of his dignity, position, freedom of movement and voice, and will soon be imprisoned and/or murdered by the state.

M would look the other way and pretend to feel real bad about it. D would supply information. R would throw himself on the pyre and just as surely die with Joe X. His world would allow no other response. K would go underground and with skill and calculated abandon, secure Joe X out of the country, or a lot of rotten bastards would die in the effort.

What would I do? I would talk my way out of it, or something unknown would happen, and I would happen right along with it. It's easy enough for me to paint myself into a corner, of words, with words. It's my paint, my corner, and my hypothetical reality.

What would I really do? Damned if I know. And I'm surely wrong about M, D, K, and R. Maybe not R. He's tied down by his ethics as surely as Joe X is doomed. M, D, K, and I are probably just as doomed, but we don't know it yet.

America is the land of celebrity. The surest route to fame in America is to cartoon yourself. Celebrity cuts about as much shit as anyone would ever care to eat. The only true meaning of need is in the true need. Nobody ever finds out what they're made of until the true need arises. And guess what? All the rest is window dressing.

2AM. Peter thinks I came to his house, two and a half weeks ago, broke and dead drunk, because he would take care of me, but I didn't come here because he takes care of me. If I wanted someone to take care of me, I could have solved that problem years ago. I've passed by, or walked away from, so many chances to be taken care of, it seems equally certain that I'm self-destructive and willfully self-abandoned.

I came here because Peter is a writer, and no matter what else he accounts himself for in his life, or how long he may be between creative spells, I believe he's a writer. And no matter how else we may differ, or whether or not we may be diametrically unlike each other, the fact is that he's like me, a writer, and I'm drawn to it.

And what that all means is that I can count on a mutual recognition, like twins from Elkhart, Indiana, separated since birth, running into each other in Jakarta, Indonesia, one dressed as a car dealer from Tallahassee, and the other as a disciple of an obscure Indian guru. Something in the eyes, in the way the heels hit the pavement, or a gesture with the soft pads of the palm, and a union is rejoined.

It's a sliver of sanity in the confused garble of an overly busy world, the way we imagine a policeman knows our criminal intentions. It's Something, at a time when Nothing has taken pre-eminence.

And yet, that is being taken care of. My only desire is hoping I can return the favor, a favor impossible to do intentionally. It's a favor, it's help, it's being saved, in the same way that turning a corner and seeing a color, or inhaling the aroma of an odor, helps, is a favor, is being saved.

8PM. It's an elephant's ear. It's the ear of an elephant. It's near an elephant. It's irrelevant.

Let me attempt to explain the phenomenon of the night in The Little Shamrock. When I was a young man, I was innocently arrogant. I believed the world was mine for the taking. All things were possible. I was talented, intelligent, and passionate. I did everything I wanted to do, and I did it

well. I didn't feel arrogant, nor did I act arrogantly. I simply saw things come to fruition. I was shy and shy of ego. There was no ego to erase my shyness. I was innocent.

Then I became un-innocent. The garden gate slammed shut behind me, and I wandered the frosty streets, ashamed. So, with an abundance of lack of anything better to do, I sought knowledge. And still, talented and intelligent, I gained knowledge. Innocence kept up a clamor in my heart. I gained more knowledge. I became silly and scary, oversexed and scared shitless, arrogant. Arrogance is a strong wind to blow a weak man. I wore a parka of worldliness against the cold. And innocence kept up a cry in my heart. And I drank. And drank. And then I drank.

"The azure blizzard of wanting to know every goddamn thing there is to know drowns out the innocence, but innocence returns, remembering nothing of the storm."

And innocence began to re-inhabit my heart. The knowledge did not go away, but where was the arrogance? Gone forever? What's a new word for arrogance? It's a simple feeling. It is the enjoyment of the sense of oneself, as a lion. Last Sunday, it came back. Not like the dreams of a lion in the zoo cage, not like the manifesto of caged lions, not the "other life" of Walter Kitty, but in the fullness of being, it simply was, and is, and ever shall be.

For all you Biblical scholars, even you Bible scholars, mankind is not supposed to feel like a lion. Having suffered the fall from grace that knowledge initiated, we are supposed to feel like donkey shit, and damned glad for it, thank you very much. God is supposed to clean our donkey shit souls, to the point where we are cleaned into pure spirit, adios donkey shit, hello eternal bliss.

I don't have such a view of salvation, the way it easily dismisses humanity in one fell swoop of forgiveness. I know from experience that my life has not been a simple one, and for many years, I would have preferred to be born a ham sandwich. But some stubborn survival of the virtue of being, of

being human, kept a drumbeat in my soul, like an endangered species heading up its own Greenpeace.

Call me irresponsible, call me unreliable, but being a human animal is so fucking fascinating, there must be a god somewhere who's been waiting around for us to dump this ages-long guilt trip and get on with it. OK, so now you're finally convinced I'm off my nut. Good, now maybe you and I can have some fun. (See rest of book.)

The Party's Over

1/23

7PM. Jim Muchmore says, "The women have gone home to sleep alone, with their arms wrapped around themselves, the plush of their breasts against the baby soft skin of their arms."

"As quickly and forcefully as they came out into the world of sensuality and recognition, they have gone back into hiding, where small fires flicker gracefully and the crackling wind is exiled behind the walls."

"The party's over when the hostess goes upstairs. 'I must read,' she says, 'I must wash the mirror, I must cut strips of cloth and hang them on the mirror, I must read until I dream. I must dream until I sleep, I must sleep away the day into the night into the day, and she is gone, and the party is over.'"

"The empty shell of the party. Someone walks the shell across the room and puts it back on the table where it always sits. And that's it. When the party is over, there's nothing more to say about it. Any talk about parties, that occurs after the party is over is a long way from the party and too close to be called recollection."

Jim Muchmore says, "Talk about the party is not party talk, and it stinks, even though everybody does it. What's the point?" says Jim Muchmore, and flicks on the TV and howls at the lame comedians.

"Muchmore," says his friend Les, "Grow up, get a job, get a haircut, get lost, and while you're up, get me a beer."

"Meanwhile, the hostess, no longer a hostess, has finished draping the mirror with strips of cloth and returns to her reading. What is she reading? 'The Party's Over' by James Davenport Muchmore. due in the spring from Harcourt, Brace, Janovitch, \$17.95."

"She's reading it in manuscript, and she thinks Muchmore is cute with his new mustache, but the book, my god, the book is pure idiocy. What a fool JimJim is to believe everything he imagines. And these silly rich publishers who will sucker for anything that's written with just the right tone of self-indulgence and self-pity, masquerading as intelligence, masquerading as truth about women."

"She knows, of course, that saying anything to JimJim about his foolish book is a mistake, so she'll forget to mention it, as if her reading matter is strictly her business and no big deal. She reads only for entertainment, slightly more diverting than watching TV and almost as embarrassing."

"One day, when James Muchmore is drunk and follows her into the bathroom, she will turn to him and say, "JimJim, sweetheart, did I ever return the manuscript you loaned me? No, of course I didn't. I loaned it to Priscilla. (A woman James Davenport Muchmore despises and desires even more than he despises the hostess.)"

Enough said. Any more, and one of us is going to be stuck with our curiosity about one of these people. I personally am curious about Les. Les seems to be the only one with half a brain, and he's already on his way to Aspen, to go skiing, for the first time, with his new friends, the, Qualens. I've never been skiing so the story ought to end here. And it does.

And thereby hangs a tale. If I'm going to write fiction, gag me with a silver spoon, it had better have something more to it than that.

I think what I mean by fiction is romanticism. That's a condition of perception that alters people and events. My imagination, linked with sensuality, equals a kind of fiction that becomes inseparable from reality.

I have no desire, as much fun as it can be, to create an imaginary world, populated by characters manufactured out of whole cloth and the transformed details of experience. My own brand of romanticism is more fun and seems more real. I'm a romantic, small R. I belong to no school, no

grouping, please don't call me a Romantic, capital R. A true romantic parks his motorcycle on the sidewalk only when he feels romantic. A Romantic thinks parking his bike on the sidewalk is a crusade. Being romantic is as sensible as being sensible, and it doesn't need an academy. Novelists live in an entirely different realm. It's alien to me, but I'm glad they're around.

I'm tired. My back hurts. I wish I wasn't tired. I don't feel romantic tonight. I feel like hitting the sack early. I won't, out of a sense of duty to the few remaining hours, and because 'she' may decide she's tired of playing hostess to everyone's fantasies and come into The Blue Danube for a late cappuccino.

Elaine is her name, and she's a schoolteacher. All schoolteachers are half mad. Who else would presume to teach young minds, who didn't think it was essential for the survival of the tribe, as in canoe building, fishing or weaving. All other teaching is half-mad. Romantic, even.

The First Chapter

1/24

5AM. The first chapter of this book seems much too harsh. This, by the way, is not the first chapter. This is being written following Chapter 28, and could be, but is not, Chapter 29. I'm abandoning the inclination, the assignment, the demand of literature, to rewrite the first chapter. The first chapter is, in a sense, my favorite, because it comes out of nowhere, in this case, after three years of the silence of this kind of writing. It came like a positive rabbit test to this eager mother.

The first chapter foretells the time spent in the creation of another being, a child, a book. It's got all the ingredients of the final product, which not coincidentally, is delivered by the publisher to the public.

The first chapter is harsh and raw, like the baby at delivery, and screams bloody murder. In short, it is a phenomenon. You can't put a bow tie on it and clean it up. Well, strictly, you can. That's the inclination in the tradition of published writing.

In the first chapter, which follows, sort of, you'll see what I mean. After Chapter 28, I yell at the father, the reader, the co-respondent. All of this effort is done so that a book can be handed over to the reader for his or her care and enjoyment.

The process of gestation is mine, and it has its own pains and rewards, but once completed, the baby/book must be given up, handed over, released, lost, to the reader/father/public/world.

It's a strange relationship and, like a simile, good for what it's worth and not much more. By the time you've read the book, the first chapter is inaccurate. In it, I describe the reader as an idiot who doesn't exist. By the last page, the reader is more real and more alive to the book than the book is to me.

By now, it's as much your book as it is mine. I'm grateful, you bastard, for getting me in this condition in the first place. Thank you, and pass the pickles.

The Warm Glow

1/24 Later

7PM. An old man is waiting for the movie to start. A woman, with an elaborate hairdo, sits down in front of him. The old man leans forward and tells her to move. "Who are you to tell me to move? You've got a nerve," she says. "Madam," he says, "I'm 82 years old. I've got a right."

Tina looked at my beard, when I was in The Little Shamrock, the other night. "You should shave that off," she said. "Why?" I said. "Because it's got so much gray in it," she said. "So what?" I said, "I'm 43 years old. I've got a right." A right to be gray. To have a salt and pepper beard to go with my youthful face. Gray rights.

As I've gone around town lately, I've had place memories of women I've known over the years, erotic memories, remembering being eroticized, aroused, romantically enraptured, from back in the days when almost any naked woman was highly erotic.

With all that history, one might assume, as I have assumed, I would continue to be eroticized. I'm not. It has subsided to imagination, on the level of merely remembering erotic times. I'm still capable of putting myself in my own shoes.

I'm at that time of life when blessings become curses and curses become blessings. Like the propeller on top of a beanie, spinning, red blade, green blade, blue blade and yellow blade, spinning to a blur. Everything well defined and then suddenly gone to a blur.

It makes me want to take a drink, get drunk, and say fuck it. To kiss it off and feel like shit. There's fixity and assurance in that. Something to define the world in absolutes. I won't, because my curiosity has not yet shaken down. I haven't yet gone through this particular period in the life of a human. There are unknowns that interest me. I don't know why they

interest me, except that I suspect there's a genetic curiosity that opens up each new year.

My imagination is still playing leapfrog and climbing trees, while I watch, bemused, enjoying the dumb-show. "Run and play, children, Daddy's going to sit right here and watch. And, I feel like the man who holds up a foreign object, pops it into his mouth, swallows, and says, "This too shall pass."

8PM. Goodnight, Irene. I'm standing outside a cafe. Inside, all my friends are laughing. They're telling stories on me. "Remember when he..." and "Wasn't it something when he..."

I'm despondent, leaning against an old yellow fence, looking across the street, through the windows, at the scene, glowing from the warmth of lamplight, wooden floors, cappuccino, wine and ale, and people not lonely in their camaraderie. I debate with myself about entering. I'd be greeted with shouts of joy, welcome, recaptured belonging. I wouldn't shout joy. I'm a ghost. I lean against the fence and dream myself returned to a lost life.

It was a mistake to return. But I'm here, and the longer I stand here, the colder it gets. The colder I get, the less warm the glowing cafe seems. The cafe lives on like a dream of a lost love, every episode of reunion turns to stone, ice, death, or pain. A beautiful face melts, cracks, rots, becomes ugly. Beyond wanting it to, the dream answers itself.

Waking from the dream is cruel, less cruel than the dream, but less fantastic. Sleep crawls out of the eyes, and the eyes look at things other than the fantastic. Beauty presents itself, and the eyes begin again to see. Beauty is a simple thing and, shed of the fantastic, beauty is not cruel. I have broken all the bones of the fantastic, and still beauty smiled. Beauty is in the eyes. Never consider beauty the enemy of the eyes. Beauty is waiting for the eyes to shed their dishonesty. A simple cataract operation, done with mirrors of light, doesn't hurt the eyes, but the dishonesty will claw in and screech, beg for mercy, and promise the world.

Dishonesty is pretty but holds no beauty. Dishonesty will tell you that truth hurts. Dishonesty knows how much truth hurts. Smash ALL the bones of dishonesty. All of them.

Then read Keats. Read Hamlet. Read Jeffers. Go for a walk. Watch the tiny moments open up like Genesis. Every story I tell is a song to the end of stories. Exorcised out of stories, the only one left is the untold story, the one just ahead, unknown. Pajamas, I will wear you anew, tonight.

I will turn autobiography inside out, junk the past like an old pair of Dr. Denton's, gone in the heels, make rags of it, reinvent the future, remember deeper than the details of any one man's life, remember into the laughter that keeps us all alive.

I went to a wedding, years ago, held at New College, in a building that had been a funeral parlor. "It's appropriate," I said, "because marriage is a kind of death." No one laughed. So few believe in death as the opportunity for birth.

I don't dislike my past. I don't dislike my stories, but remembering the past is like reading someone else's story. If it instructs us all, it has its rights and uses. If it locks up the heart, it's like a stone that leaps out of the lake, sucking up the ripples with it. And the propeller spins. Round and round. Earth-bound feet. Heaven-bound wings.

I'm trying to sound as impossible as I can. The spirit wants it, and who am I to resist the spirit. It's a power greater than I am, and it hasn't failed me yet, even if I do feel like an idiot half the time, a genius the other half. Round and round. Spinning.

Poet's Wife

1/26

4PM. When someone smiles for true, it bursts on his or her face with as much surprise for the one who sees it as for the one who feels it.

It's Saturday afternoon in La Boheme. Dave and I worked today, but he was sick with the flu and got worse and maybe I'm starting to catch it, so we knocked off at two. Last night was significant, I think, and I'm warming to talk about it, but I'll have to let it be and come out as it does. Here's one theme. One of the reasons I drank was to weaken myself. I enjoyed hangovers, because I felt as weak and frightened as I had felt powerful and unafraid the night before. With the end to false weakness and false strength, and the opening up of true strength, as of the lion, there is no need for the bottle.

There's a woman nearby with a sculpted face, Aztec or Mayan, no makeup, could be Lesbian, unintentionally seated at the same table as two fashionably painted and draped women who chatter amiably with each other. The Aztec woman glances up occasionally in near amazement at the two. The three women are seated at a small table with no place for an intelligent, unusual woman to hide. She fidgets a bit and redoubles her concentration on her reading. Given the human averages, she probably admires them and wishes she could be like them. To them, she's the custodian of an empty chair.

I ran into Evelyn last night. I adore Evelyn. We almost had a baby together, five years ago. I was still in fantasy-love with long-gone Roxan, when Evelyn and I met. We were together for a year. We still like each other. I see her about once a year. She's married now and living in New York, going to London, then to Moscow. She produces television. There was a live hook-up recently via satellite between performers and audiences in Moscow and New York, that ended with the Americans and Russians waving at each other. Evelyn did it.

She asked me why I didn't ask her to marry me. "Because," I said, "I'm looking for a poet's wife, and you're not a poet's wife." True, but no longer sad. She said, "I've become everything you abhorred." That's no longer true. Back then, in my extremist bohemian days, I would have liked Evelyn to throw over her TV career. Not anymore. If there's anybody I want running American television, it's Evelyn.

When I imagine Evelyn talking to the Ruskies, I smile. They won't know what to do with her. And Chris is a Commie. We're going to destroy them from within. I feel sorry for the poor little Commissars. Idiosyncratic innocence will bring down the Iron Curtain like laughing termites in their wooden hearts.

For three hours, in *The Blue Danube*, Evelyn and I eagerly renewed our affection. We've reached the stage of the everlasting hug in our relationship. I considered making love.

"Do you have affairs with ex-boyfriends?" I asked, pointing at myself. She and her husband had an affair each and disposed of that. I was happy to be her always friend but, "Will I ever find a mate?" I asked her.

"Maybe when you're 50 or 55," she said, and that shocked me, but I kind of liked hearing it. I'm content with my single and singular life. I'm not lonely, but, "The presence - of loving someone else - opens up the memory - of someone one once loved - and the hope of someone - one might love."

What's missing in my life is only what's not here. I have love in me with no particular place to put it. I put it all over the place, which is fine, but it's felt scattered, occasional, and limited.

Evelyn is immersed in her work, and I'm glad. She's hyperactive, quick, and volatile. My empathic nature makes me act like her, and I have to counsel myself to take a deep breath and regain my own rhythm. We are opposites, and I'm fascinated, stimulated, and nourished by her, but my obsessive desire to possess Evelyn is gone now. It didn't work then. What's

replaced it feels rich and long-lasting, but if I find a mate, I'll know it. She'll belong here beside me, and I'll belong with her.

8PM. As I turned the corner going to The Blue Danube, I heard, "She says she has a friend who collects elephants, except their trunks have to be up."

Evelyn wants me to begin to write to her, and she wants to read my writing. The problem I have with her is trying to think of her as the poet's wife. There's something unbroken in our feelings for each other. But there's something unfulfilled, too. I wasn't serious when I proposed an affair. It was a fond look back at the dimming past. I was surprised when she asked me why I hadn't proposed to her. We were close to a match, but we were on different trains at crossed schedules. Now we pass in the night, and there's a feeling of life's little tricks, how what could have been is a hair's breadth from never was, and a chasm apart.

The Final Man

1/27

1AM. I'm sitting within earshot, and too close for comfort, to a couple more miserable than the hardworking dogs of Hades. If there's any proof that I must be doing something right, it's that women find me attractive, and no marriageable woman will have me. And now I've gone and grown a mustache so prickly that it makes kissing like diving in a briar patch. But Br'er Rabbit may have a sister. I told Dave that if he sees me without my head, he'll know I've fallen madly in love. Uh, oh, man the lifeboats.

As I was coming out of **Dimanche Dans the Compagne**, I walked past the storefront office of I.L. Ferguson, Psychologist. There were hand printed signs declaring "Retirement Sale." The shop was covered with everything in a man's possession. 3,000 books for sale. Silverware. Two suits, one tuxedo, cap and gown. No couch. Toaster, chair, ties. All his etceteras were for sale. Cheap.

An artist need never retire. Only failure in his own eyes kills the artist, and failure to an artist is the nightmare of small vision, no courage, and poor ability.

7AM. I'm the central character of whose life I identify with, as I read.

It is so cold on this back porch that, once in, I never leave the cozy confines of the sleeping bag. I put anything I want around me, within a foot of my edges, and I never disturb it during the night.

Poets are peculiar people. They take themselves and their lives and use them as a kind of laboratory, as a globe to circumnavigate, a terrain to traverse, an ocean to explore, a tree to climb, a playground, an adventure to relate, a patient to analyze, a lover to marvel at, an instrument, a life, by precept and example, by experiment and curiosity.

They find themselves to be a population to govern, an audience to challenge and entertain; they find themselves on the road to Damascus, lame and alone, and they offer succor. They treat the least of these, the sparrow of themselves, the same as they do the King of themselves.

They go astray, but there is no wrong path, to those whose eyes are always open. There is someone to meet wherever one human soul goes, and wherever they go, they meet that one soul that is the human soul, in themselves.

Down south, they say, "Ahm hungry," and in France, they say, "Ame mange," and to the poet, there is no difference. Whenever the body hungers, the soul feasts.

Noon. The Final Man. There's a title. It came to me in a dream. In some manner, my life is a fiction. My job is to be as honest as I can be about my fiction. Whenever I try my hand at fiction, which seems completely within my capability, at some point, I stop, stymied, unable to continue, disturbed by the fictitiousness of it all.

I marvel at the craft of fiction. I admire the sustained manufacture of alternate worlds. It is no less an art, no less true, no less real. It's probably little more than the difference between inductive and deductive reasoning, metaphorically speaking, of course.

The confusion for me in the past was my ability to perform in arenas other than poetry. But I did so, as a poet. Poet-writer, poet-actor, poet-playwright, poet-painter.

2PM. I'm in Cafe Commons. On the bus, I overheard a man and a woman commenting loudly on the world and its mysteries. She said, "I wonder why they put cuffs where they do." He said, "I wonder why the numbers are so big on that gas station sign."

I thought, "If my poems take a while for ME to understand, they must be total gibberish to the average person." I laughed at the thought. "I wonder what this means." "It's gibberish." "I wonder what gibberish is."

Mason Jar Pickles

1/27 Later

My demon is alcohol. Peter's demon is anger. Whenever he's angry, there's no dealing with him. He's off somewhere, inside a bottle like a bottle. "There's so much hatred in the world," he says and then plans to get the garden hose and hose down Chris's bed if he, ever again, smokes in his room.

His anger has lost jobs for him, it has fucked up relationships, and it has spoiled his output as a writer. His anger inhibits the free flow of his love. Awareness of his demon is the missing ingredient in his perception of people and events.

I left the house in a hurry this morning, skipping the usually terrific Sunday breakfast, "Because," I said, "I've got a lot to walk around and think about." Truth is, I fear Peter's anger, which began last night, triggered by Chris's negligence, and by what Peter calls Chris's anger. But what about Peter's anger?

I went to sleep, with Peter banging around the kitchen, singing hard, mournful rock and roll blues, trying to be lighthearted. I dreamt about a friend who was angry and had no place to live. Peter is worried Chris will burn the house down, and Peter will have no place to live.

I want to talk to Peter about it, but I'm afraid of his volatility. And I don't have a place to live if he burns up and hoses me down. I called Joshua, who offered me a place to crash. But I don't want to run out on Peter, either. I'm making money, I'm healthy, and I understand these addictive obsessions. I kept my remarks low-key, last night, and I try to be a decent houseguest. It's a tough situation, and maybe I'd be better able to talk about it, if I weren't an added concern.

The only thing I allow myself to take from Peter, these days, is his pickles. Laid up in mason jars, they are terrific, and every slice I take is a delight. Even though he's quite generous with food, it always feels like taking a quarter out of a jar full of quarters. They're never missed until the jar is half empty, and then it's too late to hide the theft.

I suspect that Chris is also afraid of Peter's anger. Shit, if I'm afraid, all 200 pounds of me with my own anger when I'm threatened, I'd bet the farm Chris is, too. And Chris, at 15, now 16, had to be defiant just to believe in his own incipient manhood. Peter is, after all, the man that his mother chose over his father. And even if Chris despises his own father, with just cause, he has a son's mind to resist the interloper.

I called the house an hour ago, to check in, for Jack's message, and Peter's voice was angry. It's his day off, and that means there's no outside impetus to put on another face.

I'm inclined, by my nature, to placate, to conciliate, to be a peacemaker, but sometimes it isn't peace that ends the war. My non-judgmental nature allows the long, slow development of reasoned judgments, and in the process of my own slowness, I'm treated as, and often believe myself to be, uninvolved, or self-involved, or a patsy for abuse.

It's a misconception I seem to be able to live with. I prefer it to abrupt, unconsidered retaliations. My anger, my hurt, my sadness at the actions of others is only an ingredient in the kind of response I choose to make. I'm a positivist, and negatives can be integrated into a positive attitude and its actions. I prefer it that way. It doesn't make me feel good to act otherwise. A short-term limited response may have its appeal, but it short-circuits a better, fuller life.

On the Bus

1/30

7PM. I've gotten myself in a functioning frame of mind, working everyday, taking care of business, getting along with people, planning for the future, taking reasonable steps, sleeping, eating, buying new socks and underwear, and . . . I don't write. The process goes on hold, gets put aside, and nothing happens. Nothing bad happens either. I become a solid citizen, but . . . I don't write. The time goes by, pleasantly enough, and all the ideas that form in my brain drift off, images come and go like passing buses, and then . . .

A gradual aching begins, an irritation, the desire. Time was, this is when I'd get drunk. Throw the monkey wrench. Bring the pragmatic, satisfactory, everyday success to a grinding halt. Throw my brain in reverse, drive it off the road, flip it over several times, and wake up in a ditch, fucked up, but definitely not in the routine.

I have a lot to say, having been moved and struck by some things, but they're sunk, like treasures in the briny deep, and I need to resurrect them, and get on with the voyage.

Most don't understand this process. Most would think fucking up a perfectly charming and workable routine is insane. It may be, but it's also calculating, and even ruthless. Peter can't write because he can't be ruthless with his obligatorily sane life, but of course the need doesn't go away. It continues to bubble to the surface and comes out in petulance, anger, and rage.

I feel like having a drink. Having a drink, I feel like having a bottle. Instead, I will get as if drunk. As if drunk, when it works, is drunker in freedom than being chained to the bottle.

Giving up booze is like giving up salt. Nothing has as much flavor, at first. Until you lose the taste for salt, and then all the flavors are intensified, not obliterated by the salt.

First, read a book. (**On the Road** by Kerouac) Then, feel like a sexual magnet. Then, soon . . .

9PM. Americans, get out of your cars! **On the Road** is not about cars. It's about people. I left The Blue Danube, a cafe of inner suburbia, and got on the bus, eschewing the automobile (a white '74 Pinto). I'm now in La Boheme, which is as bohemian as can be found in this city, Baghdad by the Paycheck. On my way here, I bought some "Brown's Mule" plug tobacco and watched the people of the city on the bus and on the street.

I saw a half-naked woman, a family with a baby, a punk with his skateboard, an old woman in a black leather jacket with a cane, a young woman with a clean, lively eyed, sculptor's model face, carrying a giant tube, two gay men telling jokes, an old Rastafarian carrying a tattered cardboard box, a girl in clown white makeup and red lips, laughing, a young wino pestering an older man who knew him, but to no avail. No dollar.

The guy in the corner store said, "Tell me what you think of the Brown's Mule. I've been wanting to try it, but I'm chickenshit. It'll knock you on your ass." It's good stuff, my friend, and I like being knocked on my ass. Even by Mr. Brown's mule.

I'm getting drunker. No work tomorrow. I'm going to The Rite Spot, later, and pay Steve the waiter the five bucks I owe him. I love paying off loans.

I may have found a place for me and Jack to live.

On Sunday night, I went to see The Rolling San Francisco Renaissance Show. I also went to witness it, to see who might show up to see a two-part retrospective on the beatniks and the hippies. Gerald Nicosia did the Beats,

based on his bio of Jack Kerouac, **Memory Babe**, and Alan Cohen did the hippies, based on slides of his newspaper / magazine **The Oracle**.

What remains in my mind of the night was a scene from a documentary Gerald ran, interviews and writings from a dozen of the Beats. In the film, Alan Ginsberg is shown, a few years ago, recently, standing on the grass at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Something or Other, in Colorado, talking.

I've seen Ginsberg many times over the years, and one time I stood next to him on the street outside Mooney's Irish Pub, while he eyed me to see if I was acceptable meat for his grinder, and he always seemed to me something of a buffoon, always playing his Alan Ginsberg character to the hilt.

Here was a different Ginsberg. He was just talking, and it wasn't what he was saying, it was the way he was saying it. I thought, "He's not talking to me, he's talking for me. He's not playing a role. He's not being an alien. He's not playing the oddball poet that he lets people gawk at. He's not talking at an alien audience. He's not talking to the people. He's talking for them."

Immediately, I began to consider the possibilities. I began to think about, as a poet, moving beyond being the peculiar, the alienated, the outsider, the inspired, the insane, the genius playing to a bunch of yahoos. To speak for the audience, for readers and listeners, to become their voice, speaking for the human heart. Not speaking the poet's heart to a frigid tin ear, but the human heart to the profound and heart-pounding human soul.

This may be the province of aging, the result of aging. I'm gradually assuming a new position in the panoply of earthwalking beings. I don't know yet what effect it has on the product, but I know how it feels, and it feels good. It feels connected and part of, integral. It feels suitable.

Let's watch this one play out, shall we?

I Am Joe

1/31

4AM. A quite young, quite beautiful girl comes up to the man's table, as he is writing. She says to the man, "I am with you. I am yours. I want you for mine. We are together. We are the same. We are one."

He says, "Tell everyone. Tell everyone you know, until it cannot be otherwise."

Over 40% of your body heat goes out through the top of your head. Wise men wear nightcaps. I crawled deep into my sleeping bag and tried not to think about it.

"If I asked you to marry me, would you say yes?" I walked into The Blue Danube at noon, and bumped into Connie, Mike's roommate/lover, and standing next to Connie, was a beautiful, young woman. Ah, prophetic dreams. The line at the beginning of this paragraph burst to my lips, but hesitated before leaping to her ear. And so I sit, after taking lunch with Connie, across the room, still madly in love with a beautiful young woman who must, or I'll bust, fulfill her part in the dream.

We had eye contact to reinforce my desire, but she's busy, hunkered over her book and tablet. I catch sight of a graph chart on one of the pages. Now she must throw the book down, in disgust. It's probably a chart of the hourly incidence of male aggression. I've retreated to the far corner. "That's the wrong direction," Connie says as she leaves. "That's my technique," I say.

It's become important, born of shyness in me, for women to make a move. If I were a rock musician, it wouldn't be a problem. Because I'm a poet, there's no great public demonstration for me to make, to pass for the first move. As I write, I'm beginning to calm down. It's like an artist and model. At first impulse, he simply wants to jump her bones, but he takes that

energy to the paint and canvas. He lets his eyes do the devouring and the brush do the loving.

Her lines, her bones, her movements are beauty to my eyes. My eyes feast. My eyes need to be fed as much as my hands, heart, brain. I love her long-boned, sinewy hands. She has a vitality that activates her shapes and forms. A woman, whose face intrigues me, can have just about anybody she wants. I can't chase after some woman. Chance must do its work. She's not going to come chasing after me. Kismet has to turn into fate.

5:30. Jack came in and interrupted my writing. I kept up the trance, but it's four hours later, and I'm not back on track. I feel like I have a hangover.

8PM. I feel rotten. I feel like the hangover is wearing off, and now I just feel let down and crummy. The parallel between drinking and writing holds up. I was just getting a real buzz on and somebody took away the bottle. I went sour. I crashed. I still had the energy, and we ran around town and did a bunch of shit, but I was progressively on a bumner.

I'm acting out Peter's frustration at not being able to write. It forces a kind of rage. The woman disappeared. I had to pick up with Jack. I went into a largely lesbian coffee house near my last girlfriend's house, and I got angrier and angrier.

Now I'm back in the place I started from, after driving Jack to the top of a lonely trail above Baker Beach, so he could meet Chris and his friends. That felt good, actually.

I like living my life with Jack, but I still wasn't writing. It's time to do NOTHING again.

Noel just wandered over and laid \$12 on me. He borrowed ten about three years ago. Noel is usually a street person. He's good at hitting up cabbies in the hotel lines, Paul tells me. He hangs out in Winchell's Donuts, reading and writing, like a regular intellectual. He shaved. I didn't recognize him. He's decked out in spiffy new duds, looking pretty good for a gaunt-faced

old buzzard, in his safari hat, corduroy jacket and wool sweater. Jesus, it's Noel, sitting in The Blue Danube, taking the soup and salad. He says he's got a job. I suspect it's actually money from home. His family comes from a posh suburb down the peninsula.

And two bucks for interest. I almost pushed the two bucks back, but as I said to Steve the waiter, last night in The Rite Spot, when I gave him five bucks, and he tried to refuse it, "Take it. It makes me feel good." "Well, shit," he said, "Feel good. Feel as good as you want." Noel always calls me Joe. I love it when he calls me Joe. To Noel, I am Joe. I got the bread and cheese plate, with Original New York Seltzer Natural Vanilla Cream, on Noel. Thanks, Noel.

Some of Chris's friends came in and said that Chris was at home. So I finished my Brie, got up and went to see if Jack was there. Chris wasn't home, so I drove out to the Golden Gate Bridge, and then down to where I left Jack. No Jack. I almost got out and went down the trail looking for his mangled and mutilated body. That's silly. So, so, so, I'll just sit here and wait for the boy. He'll show up, with Kerouakian tales of fires on the beach and cosmic raps with nubile Einsteinettes. Or he won't.

Out of Somewhere

2/1

2PM. The problem with this book, I'm acting like it's all settled. Like I know something I got it all figured out, it's smooth sailing from here on out, I won't be an idiot anymore, an asshole, confused, crazy lost, when I know deep down, half the time, always, in a sliver sort of a way, that's all bullshit.

Take women for example. I know I love women, I love them for as long as I love them, on the level I love them. Whenever I try to love them forever, on that level I'm full of shit. I look at every woman I fall for, and I ask myself now how would it be to love that woman forever, all by herself, just her, and her alone, that's bullshit. I'm a poet, I love like a poet, total, absolute, all things considered, everything in one, for as long as the poem lasts, and then it's done.

The only kind of woman who can ride that out is like the Muse, the always wife, no matter what, a part of yourself, inescapable and relentless, sustaining and inexorable, like riding a bicycle, you never forget how.

I am Cassidy and Kerouac rolled up in one, I just wrote a page like both. Yesterday, I went crazy, like I do every few weeks, I got a heat on, with or without booze, I thought I was going to accomplish Everything In The World, I did and I didn't. Today feels quiet, gentle, contemplative, sweet, good, and the nasty trance is gone out of my eyes, I'm not confused about the energy, believing it's in the writing, in the women, when it's only in me, burning, it probably doesn't burn on the page as much as it burns up the page writer. I'm settled into a corner chair, my imagination is free to go out and play or stay in and play the piano.

If you're a sane American, you're fucked. If you're a non-sane American, you're in real trouble.

"I am waiting. I am waiting. I am waiting for someone to come out of somewhere."

I'm not going to lure him out with booze. This time he comes out un-lured and unmasked. I feel as if I've been drinking or should be drinking. It's raining outside in the Mission, it's terrific, lovely, glistening up everything, making the lights glow, turning the inside life cozy, people more interested in each other because of it all.

I got a bunch of money yesterday but no guarantees of work and the place Jack and I want is uncertain, I have a great urge to spend all the money, I've been spending it on carry-over stuff, new heels for my boots, a new Salvation Army shirt, a month FastPass for the buses, gloves, notepads for this writing, pens, god knows what else I can think up.

Sail Away

2/1 Later

8PM. In America, land of the free, home of the brave, the ideals of frontier and pursuit of happiness don't stop with cars, space ships, airplanes, and invention, but slop over into spirit, knowledge, wonder and imagination, into exuberance and joy, making all of us prey to the magic of any sort of personal power.

A Muni-driver-trainee was sitting up front on a 22Fillmore, and the old-timer driver was clueing him in about the facts of life. The trainee thought he'd never get good at the job. The older driver said, "Listen, after you've done it, day after day, for a long time, you'll get good at it. Hell, you do it, day after day, you bound to get good at it. You make love to your woman, day after day, for a year, you bound to get good at it. Don't worry," and all us three passengers laughed. It was a swell laugh. It was a good laugh. It was a clean, well-lighted laugh.

And then they went into Harry's Bar, and I went over the river and into the woods. It was a good river, and the woods were swell.

I was eager to try such a year as the driver described. I was up for it. I bounced across the street, light-footed, my heart was singing, that aint bullshit.

I feel like dropping down gears in this narration, because I'm beginning to believe what's happening. I felt like drinking a river today, I think I did. I'm getting drunk without drinking, I'm going to get 86'd from some place for being SOBER, I'm going to take it for what it's worth.

I'm discovering, one after another, the inclinations I used to attribute to, and excuse as, being drunk. I'm sober pushing a month now, without hesitancy or apology, I'm going for it. My sober self is facilitating, guiding and protecting my drunken self. Gun it, Steevee. The road is long and wide

ahead. Put it to the floor. Don't depress that accelerator, express it! It's odd the combo of feelings. Slowing down is actually speeding up. More attention to detail. Walking is flying. Sail away!

9PM. I'm back in the Blue Danube drinking Awinna Ragtime Sarsaparilla with the active ingredients, sarsaparilla essence and Yucca foam. Kerouac convinces me it's time for me and Jack to go to Mexico and there write another goddamn expatriate American novel, all about the crazy Americans who go somewhere, get crazy, write about everything that happens, crazy as shit, profound as shit, like Americans believe everything is, like this crazy sass-per-illy, the cowpoke says to the dogie.

On the Lam

2/2

1PM. Two people nearby discuss what they might give up for lent. One finally speaks up, mournfully, "How about life?" The other thinks a moment and replies, "No, you're supposed to give up something you enjoy."

Amazing what you can pick up in a cafe, listening to other people's conversation. I never quite relax in a cafe like most people seem to. Cafes are workplaces for me. I try to imagine just where it is I do relax. Maybe in the park on Sunday when the band plays.

Peter just came in and asked me if time would come when we could exchange jobs, "So I can write," he said. "I don't know," I replied, half-afraid of the subject, "I'd hate to give up mine." I was about to advise him to get ruthless, when he spied a woman of his acquaintance and went out on the sidewalk to talk.

It's a glorious San Francisco winter afternoon, a sunny Saturday, full of bustling people on their day off. I don't take days off. That's another good substitute for booze. Booze always served to shut down the engines. I remember Christine telling me I never relaxed. Paul never relaxes. All part of the job, Peter.

The woman who was telling the Lent joke was alternately laughing and very subdued. She told her friend about the newscaster in Florida who shot herself on the air. I shot myself on the air. I fell into the earth, I know not where.

Across from me is a table of male models, talking to an older gay man. The models are striking human beings, not quite real.

Peter grouched, bitched, sarcasticized, and then, on the other hand, praised his beautiful daughter, Geraldine, who works behind the counter, for her sultry intelligence, good looks, ability to do a good job.

I predict Peter is going to explode soon, and some of it is going to get all over me. Brains, blood, guts, flesh, the whole unholy mess of a man tormented by the opposite pulls of his life.

These ingredients go to make up an afternoon in the warm sun on a cool day. Actually, occasionally, when the wind is right, often, most of the time, I relax inside the writing. I'd like to take up a new hobby, start relaxing like a normal human being on his day off. After I finished **Dear Nadja**, three years ago, I cruised for a few days, and then I stopped and chastised myself for not doing anything. "Wait a minute, "I reminded myself," I just wrote a book," and started up writing again.

5PM. Every time I see a tall, extremely good-looking woman, strong face, air of self-possession, I think of my lost love, Roxan. I imagine her walking in, after looking for me and finding me, sitting down as if no time has passed, she's just been round the corner for smokes or brunch with a friend. "Hi," she says, with a big smile, total self-assurance, as if she owns me lock, stock, and barrel. She does. Always will, until, unless some other woman jumps her claim and I yield up my mother lode of love?

It's all crap in my head, it's been there for nine years, nothing, absolutely nothing has dislodged it. I imagine, for my own sense of wellbeing with the rest of the Sisterhood, I ought to assume the best of it, let my lost love remain on her throne, and let the pretenders take their shot. Shit, the throne for Roxan was there before she showed up, it isn't so much that she's the queen, but that I have to think someone is, with just as much majesty and noblesse oblige.

I'm in a state of heightened expectation, tonight. Partly, it's because I think Peter is about to blow. I'm going to load up the back of the car with my few belongings, ready to take it on the lam.

Partly, it's the woman thing. There are a lot of attractive women out, tonight, on their own, alone, and I sense attractions. I have sad, wild eyes tonight, vulnerable and searching. The gods punch up my mood and my aspect. These things are hard to disguise, I like the theater of it, anyway. I do my usual nothing, in response to the gods' program, and we'll see.

Peter is making me fearful. He argued all day with Sharane, and with Chris, or so Jack tells me. And when I saw him in the bathroom, grooming himself to go to work, waiting tables at Ernesto's, he had a wild, mad look in his eyes. Not merely angry, but possessed, obsessed. He needs to go to R.A., Rage Anonymous. I wonder why I let myself in for this stuff - except, what frightens me intrigues me.

"All I want is a room, somewhere, far away from the cold night air . . . and baby makes three."

9PM. Now I get the itch. Now I'm close to the heavy. Now's when I get long in the bottle. When it's time to be gone. I called my old buddy, Christine, in Many Apples, Many Sodas, and I could hear it in my voice. Cool, steady, lodged in determination. Punk Commie Chris told me tonight that Peter is boiling, rumbling, about to toss the top off the pot. I got Jack, and we loaded up the car.

Normally, I'd get swacked. Tonight, I bide my time and bite my tongue. I lay low. I'm in La Boheme, it's rockin', people are bouncing around under a new show of paintings on the walls, by a woman named Nina Whelan, pretty good stuff, rich, dark, and thick paintings of people heavy into each other and themselves.

I'm going to stay out tonight and run some joints, just to see. Could be a lot of noise, tonight. I'm going to keep my eye on it.

That Person

2/3

10AM. There's only one good reason to write the way I do. Everything else is going the wrong direction. I dropped out of group ethics a long time ago, it seems, fairly recently in real time, a few years, ten years maybe. Without knowing why, I sat down in one place and began to take on the world one at a time. One person. Only one. No big show. No mass appeal. No audience. No readership. No more than one. Making an ethic of my condition. It's just what I do. I'm writing this book to one person. I've always been connected to the arts that affect one person at a time, even though I've had the tools to become a public artist.

The world changes for fair, for true, in one person. Mass actions lead to mob rule, nationalism, the destruction of the planet. Inevitably. It's time to go entirely the opposite direction. Singers, actors, writers, painters, composers, all get rich when they get mass approval, and then the mob wanders into the marketplace and buys their product because it's been approved. Irrelevant to true value.

I'd like to have my books published so I could have a good copy to give to one person at a time. Two years ago, when Paul and I went on our magical mystery tour of beer, beds, and bards, I got a kick out of his trick, selling his books for whatever they'd bring. He'd hand over a copy, inscribe it with whatever words leapt onto the flyleaf, and we'd eat or drink, according to whatever that one person would throw on the table. One book, one person, one dollar.

It's me, too. It's the way I'm engaged by one person across the table or the bed. It's an even exchange. When I walk down the street, get on the bus, go into a room, I'm always thinking of the individual. That person there. That person. That person.

Years ago, I sat in The Precita Park Cafe that my friends ran, it was packed. My God, I thought, an entire room full of Centers of the Universe. Every single person the center of the universe. In every room, on every corner, every bus. Centers of the Universe. The Final Man and the Center of the Universe. 125 handwritten pages, and I've finally gotten down to brass tacks. Let's see where this goes, my friend. You and me. Me, as I write. You, as you read.

The Naked Jaybird

2/4

11AM. I go to the Richmond District Library on a sunny Monday morning, and I walk out of where Brautigan used to write, carrying Kerouac's biography, thinking of Keats,

However I should like to enjoy
what the competencies of life procure,
I am in no wise dashed at a different prospect.
I have spent too many thoughtful days and
moralized through too many nights for that.

I crossed the street where Paul and I woke up and walked drunken into an altered world where the sense of freedom was palpable and constant. A pang of remorse at those lost moments crossed my mind, I sunk a hook into the feeling and reeled it in, ate it, became it, and walked free down the sun bright morning street, among the young Chinese buying \$3.00 Hallmark cards, the painters soaking a storefront yellow as fast as they could, the cars turning in absurd circles chasing their own bumpers.

One moment I was broke again and hating it, the next moment I was free as a naked jaybird.

I drank to live more and be free. Drinking was the feather in my Dumbo's trunk. The last few days, I got stiffer, harder, tougher. The more I became rigid, the more I wanted a drink, to get loose from the noose.

My career has been a gradual, calculated derangement of my senses, to get myself to a place where all the groundwork has been laid, where I could rest on the assurance of solid rock and then proceed with the adventure of building a wild house of love, a brothel of intellect.

My day-to-day fears of being thought crazy are coming to a head. I anticipate trouble. Dave is telling me he likes me but I'm crazy, whenever I

let out some blurb from the brain, some piece of absurd profundity, just a joke, really, but calculated to test the waters.

I've taken away everyone's excuse for my thoughts and behavior. Every indication I have for breakthrough, in any perceptive art form, has come by some breakdown in the vast spectrum of control and propriety.

Now I've seen it all. One gets used to seeing old Chinese women, and some not so old, Groucho-Marxing down the street, carrying large shopping bags hung from their arms like dead water buffalo. Well, this one particular old lady comes by, like the Powell St. cable car, dragging her bag by on wheels. Rattle, rattle, screech. She does a block in nothing fact. I imagine her route in the neighborhood being reproduced in the next MUNI catalog.

4PM. I'm in The Trieste. Bob Sims proposed to me, a few years ago, that he and I divide up the world, as writers, and take over. That we make it our little secret, The Big Secret. We would set out, Poet and Fiction Writer, build ourselves a reputation as house and home busters and rouse up in the populace, an admiring, jealous, vengeful curiosity, thereby ensuring the success of our books.

I was intrigued, but finally pulled back from the idea. I didn't like the secrecy and the manipulation. There are no secrets, there is only secrecy.

One night, we went to a sedate party. Bob gave me the high sign. We got stinko. He ended up puking blood in the bathroom, and I ended up beating on his hunched back, disappointed in the stupid result of our grand design.

He left a note, promising to kill me if I ever pulled any shit on him, and I wrote him a note telling him to go ahead, if I ever did, because I was out of the game.

Jack is next to me, heaving sighs of exhausted anxiety. Time for a break.

6PM. I'm dying for the effects of alcohol. I'm equally determined to ride this out. It's as bad as a hangover. I'm waiting for a breakthrough. I have to believe I can live freely without the tricks and the hurt.

It's passing. Sarsaparilla helps. I calm down. The malevolent urge subsides. It's amazing. The urge to kick ass, kick the legs out, kick over the apple cart.

I called Joshua about crashing with him. I only got his machine, but doing anything helps to break the shell of frustration.

(A little later) I'm going nuts again. I have to blow it out my ass. The pressure builds and builds. I feel constrained, restrained, strained. Strained. Goddamn it. I'm so damn calm on the surface. This coffee house has gotten boring. I need a change of scenery.

8PM. So I came to Rockridge in Oakland, to a corner coffee house called **The Edible Complex**. I wrote a bunch of poems here, last fall, when I was courting Judy Baldwin for the second time. Here I sit again, feeling somewhat liberated.

I stood at the counter a good long time before anyone noticed me. They shook themselves and wiped their eyes, when I finally came into focus. "I'm in my invisible stage," I said, but of course they didn't get it.

Good paintings on the walls. Goddamn. I want a home I can make poems in, make food in, make paintings in, make music in, make love in. In which. In and among. In and around. On top of. Throughout. Front and back. Side to side.

"Perhaps," he thought, "I might do well to take time out in the course of this writing and write a few poems. When I pose the question, poems seem a different language, foreign, even extraterrestrial.

9PM. I feel a different freedom in Oakland. It seems you can make something here. I always have to battle San Francisco. It's complete. It's all

been done. What's the point of dressing up San Francisco, or showing some beauty, or shaking down some truth? What the fuck. Everybody's smug and complete or working on it.

I copped the corner table in the back by the toilet, jammed up underneath two good paintings of Oakland, and the women seem to have bigger tits in Oakland, and even the lesbians seem friendlier.

As I was walking by the woman who was sitting here, she said, "Excuse me, do you have the time?" I turned, but she was asking someone else.

This table is like the captain's table, below decks, the hub of the ship's activity, you can hear the ropes and decks creaking, and the first seagull cawing, and the shouts of men, "Land Ahoy!"

I thought about calling up good old Judy Baldwin, but that's stupid, the idiot woman doesn't even like holding hands, but I do like her, what the hell, anyway.

A Famous Artist

2/5

3:30PM. I'm in the Channel 25 studio, with Josh, waiting for Simon Dray to tape his show called **The San Francisco French Connection**. Josh met Simon when they were both street singers. This is a break in my life. Josh ran me around town after getting me keys to his place. We went to see his girlfriend Marja, just back from home, in Sweden and New York. We did a fast U-turn on Market Street to pick up Sherry, another old girlfriend of Josh's. I just found out I'm TV-photogenic. Josh says I look like a famous artist. Put that in my back pocket and forget it.

Atomics Anonymous

2/6

3:30PM. After an hour in the soon to be defunct Grand Piano, I'm back in The Blue Danube. I wondered why I come to this sort of cafe. Bourgeois Boutique Cafe. It has pretty girls and women, but that's only part of it.

I come here because I'm a child of the middle class, and it gives me the comfort of familiarity. I'm initially uncomfortable in the places of the upper and lower classes. Class is the last barrier, the great separator. My true associations are with those who've broken free from class structures. Poetry is an elitism open to everyone.

For a long time, I resented the turn to conservatism in this country, as I saw it represented by the movement to eliminate drunkenness. I saw the strictures as the suppression of creative, individual, anarchic vitality. Now, I see my own sobriety as a challenge to act on those principles without the crutch or the excuse of the drug.

Early on, in this phase of my resolve, I feel paranoid about condemnation. I walk down the street like a criminal about to be exposed. I want to do the exposing myself, but I want it accompanied by a joyfulness. That joyfulness has gone away, right now.

I could have had drugs other than booze, the last few days, and I stayed away, feeling a curious annoyance. I was tempted, but I'm not habituated outside booze, so there's no compulsion. I feel the desire for substances to enhance action, clearly as the desire for the action, and it isn't complicated by years of habit. The original appeal of booze has been drowned by physical and emotional habit.

I'm watching Josh and his woman-habit. I feel like I'm beginning to break that one. Long after the awareness has cleared, in any compulsion, the

habits continue to enslave. The habit has to be broken. Time is the only tool.

I used to hold a beer bottle, stare at it, and wonder why I was still holding it, it held no appeal, had come to represent only negatives. It's simple, really. That beer bottle had grafted itself to the palm of my hand.

First you rip the bottle loose, then the skin heels, then the hand moves freely, then the hand functions anew. Then, and only then, and it's a long-term then, does the hand forget it's old partner.

I suppose it's like the amputee who still feels his legs and believes they are still there, even though all the evidence is to the contrary.

Having been a drunk is more like having been a Siamese twin, and the twin brother is gone. But this surviving twin is taking all the good blood and dominating all the talking, the living, the eating, etc. Freed from such a worse half, it still takes time to stroll around unfettered. Shit, even Elvis Presley had a dead twin to overcome. I think it's going to take Peter ten years to beat his devil, anger, and that's if he starts today.

A country can eliminate racism or sex discrimination, and 25 years later, it's just beginning to function as a habit of freedom. The world must stop its addiction to warfare. It's at the point of self-annihilation. The awareness of change has begun. It'll take many, many years of one-day- at-a-time in Atomics Anonymous for the world to build a new habit. The children of the children of the Nuclear Age may have the potential for a drug and bomb free life.

To write a love story, tell the positive truth. Nothing is more powerful, more frightening, more romantic than the truth. The reality of it doesn't pluck the heart strings, it sings in the blood.

8PM. "Jack," I said, "I don't think I'll ever get over it, or get used to being in a poetic frame of mind, when I'm around someone I care about. Everything tells me to be sociable and talk, when all I want to do is drift and be all

eyes, without worry or concern for any person, place, or thing. What can I do?"

"Well, Dad, I can't help you. I'm going over to Chris'. Bye." And he strides off, his long, gliding stride erasing the intersection of Haight and Masonic, and I turn and look at the pretty girl on the bus bench. My, what a lovely world.

So, here I am in the Picaro, on my way to La Boheme and The Rite Spot. I'm working tomorrow. That's good. So, I get to La Boheme, and the bus-stop girl is sitting a table away. I smile. She leaves. I still smile.

I'm fitting myself into a very old suit, a birthday suit. I'm turning, in the four-way mirror of feelings, and damn, it fits. Nice material, too. Looks good. Feels good. This particular personality goes way back.

It's time I was myself, instead of exercising my empathic identification with everything and everyone else. Intense gentleness, I remember telling Barbara, a few years back.

The Enema Within

2/8

Before I left Peter's, he asked me if I ever feared for the loss of my soul. No, I thought. It seemed impossible.

But booze came close to erasing my soul. Last night, Susan asked me if I had no soul. I'd just met her. She was with a group from AA. I told them I was constitutionally unfit to be an AA member. She said she couldn't let me take a leak in her house. "If I let you in, I'll never let you out." I expect to see her tonight, over coffee, at my suggestion.

Lee told me today what a wonderful person I am. Barbara just grinned her love at me. Josh wants to be like a brother. I'm confused by all this attitude shit. "Everybody has advice for Steve, but Steve doesn't take anyone's advice," I thought, carrying it to the extreme.

I ran into Peter on the street. He was chatting lovingly with his daughter. When he saw me, he went cold and stood there like I was a thief. He had his hands in his pockets, fingering his valuables, his dick and his asshole.

I thought, "Fuck you, Peter. You love your daughter, because she's the perfect fruit of your loins. You've never felt gratitude to anyone for anything. Your self-professed idealism is only ego. You don't like people who are doing well, because it reflects badly on your misery. You are a petty man."

Leaving him, I vowed to put an end to our fourteen-year friendship. It feels like an albatross. The last night, before leaving his house, he said, "Well, you know, Steve, this could mean the end to our friendship." He was referring to his going to Italy and never coming back, but it felt more like him telling me to stay out of his life.

I'm dissolving bonds again. Fragmenting before unifying. I stopped reading **Memory Babe**, in sequence, and began skimming for various scenes and relevancies. It's sad to watch the gradual, inevitable dissolution of a man as the booze takes over and cancels out all the propensities of his vision. It's also sad to watch a man's growth die, as he reverts to the worst regressive pulls of his past.

Kerouac was right to see the tie between work, self, voice and the world, the soul in life, but he was unable to take the soul-making life, as Keats saw it, into the workshop of daily action.

We are, each of us, mad and sane, good and bad, strong and weak, tragic and comic, and it can be brought into sympathetic balance. I've been walking the borders of the mental and emotional limits we've been told to avoid like the plague, for years now. It's time to draw back and develop the realizations and intuitions of all that time and experience.

Boy, am I glad I quit reading **Memory Babe**. It was depressing the shit out of me. Depressing the shit into me. Blow it out your ass, Steve. The enema within. It's time to write a poem.

Feel and See

2/11

7PM. Nothing is more romantic than the truth. It's been my unconscious intention, since beginning this autobiographical-journal-narration, to write without pyrotechnics and keep it clear, honest, simple, and still interesting for both of us.

It's a revolution. No bullshit. To write without bullshit. Henry Miller hyped himself, shaped and shaded the truth. So did Kerouac. After all those years of four letter words and self-incrimination, it turns out they were still bullshitting, called style, i.e., editing the truth for someone else's pallet, ear, eye, education.

I continue to think of myself as a Spy in the House of Everything Under the Sun. Aren't we all? Never, it seems, does any human being get to the point where they feel, say, and believe, "Now, I am completely at home in my skin," and stay that way, forever.

There are plenty of people who say, "Aha! Now, I have risen above my pitiful humanity, and heaven is just around the corner, in sight, in hand. I say, "Watch out for anyone with the Revealed Truth in their back pocket. The next pocket they reach for is yours."

Susan dragged me to an AA meeting, last night. "Wasn't it a wonderful talk?" Shit, it was the same talk. Only the speaker was different. I think AA is another pseudo-religion, a true WAY OF LIFE that can handle all your problems "because you can't."

She tried to draw me into the fold. It's hard to hold onto a good idea, when someone else has a good idea that they believe is far superior to your good idea.

Afterwards, walking, she told me that despite her almost UNCONTROLLABLE desire to fuck my brains out, she has realized her occasional friend lover, Keith, is special to her, and "We can't." Also, she had a strange, sudden recurrence of herpes, after ten years.

Later, at Josh's, he started a joke about "a woman named . . ." and Susan said, "I don't like anti-female jokes." So he started another, "What do you call a dog . . ." and she said, "I don't like anti-dog jokes."

So I said, "How about an anti-male joke? I bet you really like anti-male jokes." "Oh, yeah," she said. I waited for her to laugh. No laugh.

After she left, Josh said, "Well, Steve, God is teasing you." So he is. So he is. Which means the same as, "So be it."

It's strange. I was reading over some pages, 30 or so back, about my decision to direct all I do to one person at a time, and it triggered a memory of Sherry Hamilton saying to me, six months before I began my first book, "Steve, you always talk like you're speaking to a roomful of people."

That was a defensive pattern of my early adulthood that never stood up under the needs and joys of the poem. Or of love. Sherry and Evelyn were my finest girlfriends. Friends, female. There was love, and it was quiet and reassuring, simple and direct. Smallish women, attractive, but not screwy-gorgeous. Smart, but using it for their own growth and not for the manipulation of others.

Nasty women are not women but little girls. True women don't manipulate, dominate, jerk around, or avoid men. They live in and of themselves. They don't want to save or be saved. They are few and far, I say FAR between.

Now, back to AA. AA is a wonderful organization that aids and serves people, and does so, beautifully. I like it. I like the people. I feel warm and protected in their rooms. But, finally, I get the same feeling going to my parents' church, where I grew up, or any church that sees me as a welcome

newcomer. It feels terrific, and I go for it, like toward a good-looking woman with a bed. It is solace, security, protection, and peace, unless you have any sense of aloneness or individuation or creativity, if you believe that god is the big whatever that created all the gods that humans worship.

Susan is that little girl in 4th grade who wore glasses and got all the answers right and kicked the shit out of all the little boys. I mean she would walk up and deck some poor Charlie for having parked his bicycle too close to hers. And I mean she'd DECK him. Then she grew up and invented her absolutely UNCONTROLLABLE urge to fuck any guy who struck her fancy. I mean she'd walk up to some poor Charlie and FUCK him. And I mean she'd . . . You get my point.

I've changed, again. And, as I change, I see everything I've seen before with new eyes. When I felt and believed I was weak, I saw everything and everyone in that light. I taught myself to trust in, and rely on, others. I trained myself to accept the helping hand of others. But trust is something like love. It cannot be dished out like a big spoonful on everyone's plate. It is a connection between two people who share the sense of it. It transmits back and forth like a completed circuit.

I told Lee today about my encounters with Susan. I was deeply affected, and he warned me not to be so affected. I said, "Shit, Lee, it's my job to be affected by people, and I don't like it when I'm not affected. All I want is to pay attention, the whole while. To be a poet is to feel and see. Feel AND see. And then, and only then, to write.

I'm going to end up with one of the most chronicled lives ever, and even then it's only notes on a life. Life is utterly fascinating, and it goes on and on, nevertheless fascinating for it.

Zen Time

2/12

I can make things move, just by putting certain marks on a piece of paper. Proof? Did your eyes move as you read these two sentences? I can make objects move simply by making certain sounds with my mouth and throat. Proof? Please pass the ketchup. I love Zen fables and parables. See the truth marching. It wanders. God is prick-teasing me. I went to work, today, painting with Lee, and the new painter, Kristin, showed up. She's 23, bright, sexy, a true androgyne. She's a good worker and a young writer. We collaborated on her film script, in conversation. Of course, she wants to meet for coffee and talk. She has a boyfriend, a Nicaraguan, who supplies her sex fix. I'm barely an alternative source.

It must be time, at my age, for me to begin to chase women. I can't. Josh is the past master at it. He's as accepting of my presence in his house as Peter was the reverse.

A Great Sad Face

2/14

Just beginning to read William James **The Varieties of Religious Experience** convinces me that I'm better off going through a very simple process that consists of staring at the wall, thinking of nothing, recognizing a word or image, writing it down and following it through to its own ends. In short, writing poems.

"I'm planning to defend feeling at the expense of reason, to rehabilitate the primitive and unreflective, and to dissuade you from the hope of any theology worthy of the name. I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion and that philosophic and theological formulae are secondary products, like translations of a text into another language."

I sat in La Boheme, the other night, and stared at Jean's face. Jean is Susan's friend. Susan is Jean's sponsor in AA. Jean's a painter. Herewith, is her poem.

The greatest sad face since Shakespeare invented soul,
turns downside up, like sun on a rainy day,

She'll chew cigars in her nineties and bake cookies
for the road crews, their dogs, and their wives,

She can sense the heartbreak behind a hubcap,
rolling by at five hundred yards, dented ten years ago
when Johnny kicked it, instead of himself, in grief,
because Frankie married a drunken sailor and shipped out,

She'll lie down on top of paintings and novels and
twelve-string guitars for a bed of a lifetime she made herself,
never took a lesson, ate rutabagas for fun, because that's
all she had, and the watch on her wrist drops down her arm,
until she leans on it, elbow to second hand, having the time

of her life, and everybody thinks she's sad, shit, sad aint nothin'
but a good feeling in the downpour, and a life full of downpour
hasn't been dry since 19 and 53.

A Stainless Steel Dog Dish

2/14 Later

8PM. Now, as continues in regard William Jims.

"Feeling is private and dumb and unable to give an account of itself. It allows that its results are mysteries and enigmas, declines to justify them rationally, and on occasion is willing that they should even pass for paradoxical and absurd."

Like poetry.

I'm certain there must have been hundreds of women whose paths I've crossed who are, or were, pissed and disappointed that I did nothing about it. (It?) It's Valentine's Day, and Jack is the closest thing I have to a Dear Valentine.

Feeling is everything, and everything that results from feeling is everything else. Everything else is a lot of stuff and varies from alpha to omega. There's good alphas and bad alphas, and the same goes for the omegas. There's a lot of different kinds of in-betweens, too.

The girls from the Mission come into La Boheme to use the can. Can is a word for pot to piss in. The Chicanas of the Mission have a pot to piss in, thanks to La Boheme. Or The La Boheme. As in The El Camino Real.

An aging, flashy woman, in silken black and platinum blond, with laryngitis, on the Mission bus, turned around and gave me a heart-shaped piece of chocolate, wrapped in red foil, surprised me, and I said, "Thank you, I surely do appreciate it."

I feel like drinking tonight. I feel wonderful. I feel healthy happy. Now is when people who drink, drink well. In celebration. It's easy not to drink, because I already feel great, but it would be easy to drink, because it doesn't feel negative in any way. It's odd, it's easy to fight, but it would be

easy to forget the fight. This is the frame of mind I was in when I went off the wagon the first time in '83.

I have ulterior motives. I want a woman, and I'm so reluctant, sober, to do anything about it. Women seem remarkably unwilling to make any gesture. Either they don't, or I'm blind to it. I'm going to stay out. Go to the Rite Spot and see what.

Christine wrote me from Minneapolis, said she would miss the drunken Steve, the outbursts of affection, the fascinating monologues. I wrote back that if she'd pay bail, then nurse and protect and guard the recovery, I might go for it, but I feel so free from the psychology of the drinking life that I'd have to risk a great deal to get into it. It always takes a collapse of some sort to end it. It goes on and on, as long as the drinking self thinks it can get away with it. I have a considered awareness that knows it's progressively destructive, but that is matched by the virtues of destruction.

The Anarchy of Determination. All things built must be broken down and rebuilt. It is an eternal cycle. It's been forty days of sobriety, and I like it like I always did like it, especially when it came every day. Heaven was waking up sober every day and getting a heat on at night, and that not even every night.

This rap is sobering me into a sadness. Fuck that. I re-determine to get drunk without drinking, bring back the twinkle and sparkle in the eyes, the chuckle in the throat, and the jackal in the closet, where he belongs.

I'm not smart, I'm brilliant, the sun glinting off a stainless steel dog dish.

Tongue in Pen

2/15

7PM. I want a drink. I want to change my brain after the workweek, go into a different frame of reference. It will happen by some unforeseen development this night, Friday.

Drinking is not one drink. It is a long time in the bottle, and it doesn't stop when the goose is out of the bottle, it only stops when the goose is dead. I need a new environment. Like Oakland, for instance. Hmmm. That's a thought.

But first, I go the other way. Sit still. Be quiet. Do nothing. Draw the bow back. I'm on a secret mission to be dry for a year, until next January 4th, to witness the changes in my life under such a particular reordering. My Forty-third year. Clear.

OK, so I did 3/4 of a crossword puzzle. Big deal. Even dog dish brilliance has to take a break. So the clouds drift across the sun, and the glint doesn't glint.

Sitting in this cafe, any cafe, on a Friday night, pen in hand, dick in pants, tongue in cheek, hand in pants, dick in hand, tongue in pen, waiting for the muse of the moment to arise and arouse, is partially ludicrous, and I begin to lose the inherent will to believe in the creative mind's power to elevate circumstance into anything like magic.

Magic of the Ordinary

2/16

10PM. I am still trying to maintain my amateur standing as a human being. I've been reading my friend Andrei Codrescu's book **In America's Shoes**, reading about times and places and people I've written about in my own books, and damn, he does the same thing all the autobiographers do. He makes his fellow poet-travelers into demi-gods. Shit, I know these people. It's a trick of hyperbole. What he says is mythological truth.

Creativity is magical, but it isn't my magic. I'm not magical simply because I can tap into something most people only witness. It is the SUN that glints off the dog dish. I'm only the damn dog dish. I'm not the sun. Poetry is the thing that makes the poet. So far, I've managed to stay clear of, or instinctively thwart, the egocentric notion that elevation to the status of Poet is a good thing.

Whenever anyone puts THIS dog dish on a pedestal and enshrines it, I somehow manage to tip it over and slop bloody ground horsemeat on the marble.

The great adventure left is the final discovery of the absolute magic of the ordinary. Shit, my dreams are better made than any movie I've ever seen, and I like movies.

Mike and I are going to some AA meetings and begin to explore why we don't like them. I don't, because it's a limited growth situation. They help you get over booze, but they don't help you get over AA. All levels should be designed to be surpassed. A good parent raises adults, not children.

I plan on being 86'd from a bar for not drinking booze. It's a subtle plot to undermine the entire booze support system. Mike and I used to hang out in the same bar, The Little Shamrock. Since then, we've both gone back, sober.

We've found out that drinkers will spot a non-drinker and, at first, get a kick out of it. They spontaneously tell you about their own drinking and the problems they've had with it. Eventually, however, they turn on you because you're undermining their mutually reinforced support system.

There's a lot of false celebration, false camaraderie, in bars, even in the ones where the communal links are genuine. It's hyped up. If you enjoy yourself, without the help of the booze, it's contradictory to the program.

Sober is a poor word for not-drinking. It implies some dreary leaden self-imposed restraint. It implies unfree, when all it is the wide-open space of being free or unfree. People who are unfree in their sobriety imagine juice-freedom but only get an imitation of it, however liberating it may feel.

11PM. I'm in the Sham. The Rock. There's a sweet sanity that, once it gets hold of you, hangs on. It starts when you're a little kid, and if nurtured, it grows in you like an alien monster, and eventually it aims to take over your entire being. All the better parts of humanity love to play. All the rest is test and negation. Fun to play with.

I like the waitress, Carrie. She hasn't been unfriendly to me. I suspect if I make myself present and unaccounted for, she may open a little, each time. I ran into her on the street the other day, and she was genuinely wide-eyed glad to see me. Now she has on her glazed waitress look. Still, her glaze broke a few minutes ago, and she actually recognized a Human Being and not just another "May I take your order."

Jungle Vines

2/17

5PM. Today is my birthday. Coincidentally, I read Andrei say, "Life is, in fact, a series of wombs . . ." and, "The practice of thinking 'in utero' is the most dangerous discipline of our times."

I agree, and a wonderful thinking process it is, too. Today is my birthday. The day of birth. Rebirth. Upper birth. Lower birth. He birthed upon the scene.

Andrei has a Rumanian perspective on the slow death of America. I agree entirely, but, as an American myself, I feel a different, or at least, more particular response. The wind that fills the sails of the soul is still blowing, and if there's an American soul, I feel compelled to enliven it. To in-live it.

Through a series of fortuitous moves, sly and deft, I have maneuvered myself into the best seat in La Boheme. Susan is nearby, with Jean, attempting to save Terry's life. I've known Terry for years, bit by bit, here and there, and she doesn't have that infectious, hard to cure, born again glow that Susan slops all over everybody like the Bubonic plague newly arrived from the Holy Land.

Susan comes over and says, all aglow, "Oh, it's your birthday. How wonderful." While I contemplate some murderous reply, she adds, "Jean hopes you live another year." "Yeah," I say, "I think I will." I'm hesitant to join them, even having been invited, because I know I'll be sarcastic and nasty witty. It's fun and partially satisfying, but mostly it only adds to displeasure, and it births nothing.

Almost everything we manufacture in place of simple being is a stillbirth by Cesarean section. "My, what a lovely baby." "Yeah, but it's dead."

Now, in re me and my in utero ala this book, (Read that line over, fast, ten times.) I find the change from drinking Steve to non-drinking Steve, i.e., the

raw lion, is working, but I still feel crazy, and I have yet to settle into my new skin. I've never hollered bullshit in a crowded fire before, except when I was five sheets to the wind, and the urge comes upon me, but I don't have it habituated, yet.

Apropos, in a similar vein, I made a good step last night, with Carrie, the waitress in The Shamrock. She came by me to retrieve a bag of Cheetos, and I said, stewed to the gills on five bottles of Perrier, "You're very attractive, but I don't know what to do about it." She said, "Well, it's my last night, and I'm leaving town tomorrow, but my name is Carrie."

God is teasing me.

Back at Josh's, I had a wonderfully understanding kind of conversation with Marja as she read some of my writing. Josh was agitated. Not at me and her talking, but at him and her not talking. She really is wonderful, and the answer to all my desires, but Josh got to ask the question first. Fate is going to have to kick in a little more actively, if anything of a major nature is going to happen.

A friend of Alan Cohen's sat down and offered to sublet his house to me and Jack in June for four months. Mike, the guy, lives with HIS eighteen-year-old son.

I've talked, written, and breathed myself into a mellow space, so on to babble. I believe the only way I'll ever achieve my own hesitant, inevitable revolution is through determined anarchy under a regime of calculated sobriety. And that, my friend, is my political treatise for the day.

I just leaned into the circled wagons of Susan, Jean, and Terry and said, "You know that conspiring to overthrow the government is illegal. You might want to break this up." I waved my fingers over the metaphorical campfire and made my exit, folded my tent, and stole off into the night.

Having done that, I felt crazy, again. Then Emmanuel, the painter, sat down and, after talking about this and that, said, "I am BORED." "Is that a

cover word for anything?" I asked. Shit, I'm not bored, I'm horny. Emmanuel says, "We are born into this world alone, we live alone, and we die alone, and we should be grateful for those who come along to share in our loneliness."

"Yeah, yeah, but fuck a duck, I'm horny. God continues to dangle carrots in front of me and then lift them slowly out of my greedy reach. I'm learning patience and perseverance like learning to tie your shoes with jungle vines. (Don't think about it. I don't know what it means.)

The Eyes of the Fingertips

2/17 Later

11PM. It's still my birthday. I'm in the Shamrock. I'm reminded how much I've come to despise alcohol. It's curious to examine this phenomenon. Ingesting mind-altering substances is like being taken on a roller-coaster ride and experiencing emotions that have been dragged out and set before me like a lab experiment.

So there sits the emotion, like a dead frog. Billie Holliday singing on the stereo. Women, half a million miles away at the other end of the bar. Strangers with glum faces wander in off the cold street. A slump-shouldered, balding young man, in a crew neck sweater, sits at the bar reading **On the Road**. He's brought along a dictionary to decipher the more erudite sexual references.

It's Sunday night. Josh has one of his other girlfriends over. Lisa is Mediterranean, sexy, flashy, and intriguing. Maria is the kind I want to marry. Lisa is the kind I get a healthy kick out of. Both are appealing. Given the absence of a Marja, I'll take a Lisa, every time. No quarrel, no contest, just differences that cut nicely into the desires.

Wanting to make love to every beautiful woman I see is like wanting, being compelled, to touch a piece of sculpture. I want to touch it, just to see. It has to feel like something. One sense prompts another. The eyes of the fingertips. The fingertips of the eyes.

It was hard being with Josh and Lisa. Go, Josh, take Lisa, leave me Marja. Go, Josh, love Marja, let me and Lisa play. The similarities, commonalities, the quiet bond I felt toward Marja was teased and tempted away by Lisa. Wife and mistress. The solid peasant blond face of Marja, prettier than Lisa, was supplanted by the darkly exotic face of Lisa, sexier than Marja. So, Josh has two women in complement, and I have none.

I've thought for a long time about writing a book about alcohol, but women are more interesting, finally. A woman like Marja has finally become exciting. An exciting wife. It's a new idea. As I drop off the thrill-seekers parade float, I notice, lo and behold, I can smell the roses. There's more life when **More Life!** is no longer a call to arms.

God has set before me a primer in my options and notions of women. Not that I automatically get what I want, but the only decent route to getting what I want is to know what I want. And the Lion doesn't want any bullshit. He likes getting used to this kid from Nebraska and getting out of the grape and into shape. The Lion thinks there's a real good chance for total takeover, and he's licking his chops and purring like a pussycat. Go, Lion, go. You can have your antelope and eat it, too.

Midnight. The day-after-my-birthday begins. Today is Presidents' Day. Like White Flower Day at Macy's. I could just kill myself. In 15 years in San Francisco, I have never attended White Flower Day at Macy's. Oh, the horror, the humiliation, the indignity.

I just did an awful thing. There's graffiti in the toilet at the Rite Spot, and I just went in and re-inked it. It's been there for a while, and it reads, "Steve Brooks is the only poet left alive in San Francisco." It had faded and was written over, so I re-inked the idiotic thing. The caves at Lascaux, redone in poster paint. Oh, the horror, the humiliation, the indignity. It was my birthday present to myself.

Twenty minutes after midnight. On the bus . . .

(Jeez, things happen neat when I least expect it.) As I was writing the previous sentence, I heard someone say, Birthday Boy. There was another one. I asked the waitress, and she pointed out a burly guy with a bunch of people. It was after 12, and his birthday was the 18th. We shook hands, and he offered to buy me a drink.

I declined. "I quit," I said.

"I should quit, too," he said, "but she tries to get me drunk, so she can take me home." She smiled. "We should all quit," he said, reminding me that I'd had that thought this afternoon. What if no one drank? What anarchy. What explosive times that could be.

Then, walking out the door, thinking of the bus, the standing on the corner, the waiting, the transferring, along comes the quirky little bus, the 33Ashbury, which is, right now, even as we speak, taking me halfway cross town, right to my front door.

I'm experiencing another curious drug/booze phenomenon. Just as I begin again to feel free, happy, and strong, I feel like taking a hit, a slug, a draft. When I have achieved the very state of mind, body, and being that the drug has failed to produce, I think of the drug. Peculiar. Born of habitual substitution. In utero, I think of false pregnancy. Born free, I think of the bottled in bondage.

And so, goodnight.

My Mission

2/19

9PM. My imagination loves to play in the traffic. I feel sexy tonight. A dreamy-eyed woman comes over to the couch where I'm just sitting down, and she drops, serene and languid, into the armchair. Her eyes drift lazily, intently, across my eyes. I drop my Copenhagen down my shirtfront and forget my Mission on Earth.

Then she leaves in a huff. Or was it a minute and a huff? It WAS fast. Bye.

There's a young Chicana nearby who is truly, almost, if not perfectly, beautiful, with a sweet, mobile face, naturally intelligent. Ah, truth and beauty and absurdity and foolishness. It's a wonderful feeling to look at such beauty and feel no obligation, no possessiveness, to simply see and enjoy.

10PM. Josh wants me to join him in his Westwind Productions, and I've been reluctant. His offer and his ideas have been working their magic on me, nonetheless, and it's having the effect of helping transform me into a fulfilled oral poet, a performance poet, where it is the poem that is performed and not the poeticizing of the performer.

I've done characters and voices on stage, it was great, I've written and read poems, that was great, now comes the amalgamation, in the form of poems, I want to let all the voices and energies loose.

I've thrown off the way I used to read. It never was satisfying. It was an attempt to fit into the general rules of reading, and I tried the best I could to read well, inside the tried and true good delivery manner and voice. I was called one of the two best readers in SF, and still . . .

I'm going 90 miles an hour down the detour, burning up the road, and flying over the bridges that haven't been built yet.

The Church of the Hip and Cool

2/21

Heart Bath Pillow \$3.99. Two thousand years later, I'm sitting in the Grand Piano on Haight, after all the hippies died. Wearing jeans, boots, a fancy belt buckle, and a suede jacket, reading poetry, listening to people with parts of their brains removed, babbling semi-coherently about any goddamn thing they want, Johnny-One-Note On Drugs. Little Johnny Numb-Notes.

This place has become a shrine, a museum, before it's had its consciousness razed, it's become genteel. Street gents act like gentlemen. "This is where it all happened," they seem to be thinking. Actually, the Grand Piano came in on the tail end of the hip scene and spent ten years playing nurse-maid to the stragglers.

Lee gave me this suede coat, and it's definitely high hip garb. I think I'd rather be on the street in the sun than paying my penance in the back room of the Church of the Hip and Cool Jesus Christ.

(Later) I have life in me to be drawn out, gone past, given back, made more of, and taught to sing and dance.

I have a big spirit today. It's a warm light that shines and spreads in the room. People feel it turn toward it. Wonder what it is. It illuminates whatever it is they are feeling, they love it and hate it as much as they love and hate whatever it is they're feeling. I have a big spirit today. Women get goosey. Men get antsy. I get quiet and sad. The sadness is curious. I feel sorry for people's bullshit when my spirit is big.

Another Dead Cat

2/22

I feel like drinking, tonight. At 2:30, this afternoon, my life suddenly felt mundane, and I wanted to blow it out my ass. I went home and watched the Playboy Channel. Look, but don't touch.

Someone wrote Dear Abby, "In olden days, when a woman wanted to meet a man, she'd drop her handkerchief. Nowadays, if a man wants to meet a woman, what should he drop?" And she replied, "His wallet."

Stephen Spender says, in his intro to **Under the Volcano** that the saintly drunk is seeking and receives "translucent clairvoyance, perfected expression. The price to be paid for being fully aware is isolation."

My sobriety makes me sociable, and it's frustrating when, after the experience of awareness, which continues, in the mind, I can't find someone to share it with.

Playboy sucks. The bodies look terrific. It's like bottled booze, across the bar, tempting in memory and appearance, but empty of heart and knowledge.

My reactions to everything are the same as when I was drunk, but I'm healthy, happy, and sociable, so I keep my awareness to myself, and kept to myself, it's not so dynamic, so omniscient, so overpowering. I'm still in contact with all perception, but it evolves at a distance.

At this stage, I must trick powerful awarenesses out of myself by poetic technique. I have poems that can only be read and understood by someone equally possessed of such extremes of awareness.

Sober, I'm certain I write poems more readily accessible to the non-possessed-reader, who still must be able to recognize deeper senses,

because they're in us all, but at a distance. Those poems are easily appreciated for titillating hints, obscure references, convoluted absurdities, all the junky nomenclature of mass consciousness.

I'm inundated with socially acceptable and socially praised ignorance. Ignorance is that state of human thinking dictated by fear of human thinking, lack of courage to explore and know human thinking, and even more pervasive simple stupidity which is the vast range of human thinking from the imbecile to the highly intelligent, which exists not from lack of courage but from lack of imagination. My god, Martha, there's another dead cat under the house. Let's pray.

If you haven't slipped at the edge and caught your heart at arms length, you don't know what the edge is. Then, the edge is only a roller-coaster ride at Great America. Josh hasn't caught his heart at the edge. Otherwise, he wouldn't be jerking himself off so much. He knows he's not ready for any kind of final awareness. He's been close many times, but he's still looking for some sort of reasonable resolution to life's dilemmas.

He's trying to decide whether or not to go up to Reno and survive, somehow, the bad audiences, the chorus girls, and the drugs. He says Marja is not in love with him. He's full of good advice and good intentions and the bad idea that he's really a sonofabitch at heart. It won't wash.

Josh has been through the mill. "I've been everywhere, man, I've been everywhere," but he can't make peace, because he's still making war. Making do. Trying to make it. He's still on the make. It's outmoded for him, but he doesn't know how to go beyond it. I see these friends in deepest struggle, and I care for them. It's impossible to supply the next level, and ludicrous to condemn, even that which harms and impedes them.

Peter used to sit with me in his kitchen and describe a man who thought the way I do, he'd wonder out loud why he could never find such a man. I felt like a Buddha ghost sitting there in my playful mind. I would wave my arms, stick out my tongue, and bulge out my eyes and gurgle like a baby.

Here, you motherfucking idiot, here is your goddamn man. Your friend. Steve. Get it? you club-brained, purple nosed bozo!

(Intermission or Epilogue.) This feels great. I've gone ahead and felt and talked, on the page, as I would have hoped to, if I'd gotten drunk. P.S. I haven't gotten laid yet. I'm still in carry-over isolation. Carryover is like hangover, but it's when you wake up still drunk from the night before. I'm sure it's how Hemingway wrote every morning, standing at his typewriter, still pumping from the night before.

In the Land of Drunkenness, there's a half-hour, on waking, of absolute clarity, that's either extended by more drinking or fades quickly into regret, remorse, guilt, and all the other emotional goodies that come along with depletion, the wasting away of the physical storehouse.

I'm still in a state of isolation, carried over from my previous night. The dark night of the last years. Lacking the arrival of a final woman, I'm still attracted to women much younger than I am. Their youth is still vital and only recently attached to the big bad bear of the adult world. End of chapter. Time to . . . run the bars.

The Back Burner

2/23

9PM. I'm a solitary. Such is my plight. Born into it as a kid in Nebraska, nurtured by an independent spirit, honed on poetry and alcohol, brought to the essentials by age and experience.

I'm still handsome, witty, friendly, appreciative, sympathetic, and understanding, but I'm a solitary. My best company is with other solitaires. All the partying, fucking, living with, intense raps with, performing, etc., have not made me bitter, regretful, miserable, or addicted. I'm fine. Never better. I love the pretty ladies, and I'm horny in my imagination. But in my reality, I'm a solitary.

It has an inevitability about it. If someone comes along, she will be someone. I'm not easy anymore, like I was when I hadn't had enough experience to know all about it. I can imagine a future in which women, knowing my mind, come to me for mutual caring and leave it at that. I have nothing to offer a woman, who needs an offer, in order to be interested.

Norman and I shared this perspective, last night, in The Little Shamrock. I have great times in companionship when someone shows me, in the telling of his or her own story, who I am.

Jack took his car and six punk friends to Sausalito, last night. I noticed, in his papers, a précis of all the characters he's hanging out with. Perhaps we have a young punkerouac on our hands.

If prostitution were legal and cheaper, I imagine I'd indulge as regularly as I take in a movie. Shit, I'd probably fall in love. My heart, intact as it is, still waits for a target for its Eros.

Whenever I see a particularly attractive woman, I make a quick movie of the two of us in some situation and test it for silver screen magic. Generally, it looks like two people who bump into each other for absolutely no karmic reason. I watch the movie I make, and I'm in the movie. There's no point in it if I don't get along with my costar.

San Francisco is re-populated, in waves, by wandering Momma's boys and Daddy's girls with some very strange Mommies and Daddies, the honored sons and daughters of some very intense people, half-crazy, quarter-brilliant, quarter-normal, everyone's dream of lucky you. The Gays and Lesbians are only the extremes in one direction, there are many extremes.

Norman supplied the missing link, giving me an idea. I told him about watching Richard Pryor on HBO in concert in New Orleans, talking about anybody he pleases, granted the position of his blackness, and I felt disallowed by my whiteness from doing anything similar.

I said something about white people, and Norman jumped on it. "White People! Do a show about White People." Do it as if I'm not white, but of course, I'm as white as they come. I do certainly have the inside dope on white people.

The White Emperor has no clothes. So, there goes another idea onto the side burner. Whenever I put it on the back burner, it falls behind the refrigerator.

I went to the DeYoung Museum in the park and did the place in about twenty minutes. I kept imagining I would come on the better paintings in a real room somewhere. Real stuff is in real rooms. I went by the Painted Room, (Italian Medieval) which I always like. Jack wants to do a room painted up entirely in drawings and poetry, etc. Great! All we need is a place.

Sweetheart, if you want me, you're going to have to come and get me. I'm done ingratiating myself to anyone just because I'm capable and willing to pump their moans. In the meantime, in-between time, aint we got love . . .

going to waste. It's Saturday night, and I just got paid . . . less than I'm worth.

I should (dread word) map out some agenda for sexual survival. Use it, or it loses you. I'm rambling. Nasty. Time for me to get un-serious.

I've become residential in La Boheme. OK. That's good. That calms women down. Women want to be kept from hysteria like men want to be kept from violence. A woman, alone too long, gets crazy, and a man, alone too long, gets violent. Perfect rape lovers.

Jerry just made up the word FAILLOSOPHY.

Criminal Sobriety

2/24

"I'm so criminal in my sobriety, it would take a court order to get me drunk." I wrote that, in the dark, last night, as I was going to sleep. I suppose it's also criminal for someone to enjoy writing as much as I do, but I do, your honor.

I'm ten days from two months sober and two months has been my limit, so far. It's my third time. I intend on a year, at least, just as an effective plateau, but in the past, after two months, the freshness of sobriety wore off. I feel bold and adventurous, newly sober, and I'd like it to become a constant condition, but there's one good reason to drink. The world is fucked, there's precious little reason to please the world. Which brings me to my topic. Remember topics? "Our topic for today, children, is oral hygiene."

Parental approval is the topic. I have unconsciously sought the approval of my parents all my life, most obviously my mother's but also my father's. I suspect he approves, always has, and will never show it. She doesn't, never has, never will, and shows it. Last summer, she closed the book on my long-held foolish notion-that I might somehow garner her approval. She told me that not only was it a bad idea for me to be a poet, I was a bad poet.

Point taken. She's wrong, and that's the point. Never had I seen so clearly the disparity between my reality and her denial. I called my brother, Mark, when I was living back there, last year, and he said, "Steve, get away from there. Now." He was right. I did. It was stunning to hear my mother condemn me. But it clears the decks. There's absolutely no way to win the acceptance and approval of one's art from a blind woman.

I've always thought there were two camps, normal people and outlaw artists. I saw them either from a neutral vantage point or from my Midwestern All-American, normal, background. Now I'm coming to accept

the non-creative normal from the advantage point of the true borderwalker. No longer is it a position I fear or aspire to. I am it. It is I. Case closed. Let's celebrate.

Larger Than Myself

2/25

10PM. I'm coming out of isolation. I think all of us are. A woman just said to me, "You have a nice face. You're really alive. It's nice to meet someone who's really alive." That, after conversation of a couple of hours, quite by happenstance in La Boheme. I'm beginning to get the recognition I've been missing, and it's coming from my life and not from acclaim. People are simply seeing.

To a degree, those of us who have been in seclusion for years are recognizing each other. A working agreement is being struck. It should prove the beginning of a productive period. This is closer to my sense of la vie boheme than anything I've seen. I searched for it, for years, thinking from time to time, in different places, that it was taking place when I was being misled by superficiais.

I've become quieter, more secure, more open, more willing. My time of hibernation is over. I'm saying these things with a boldness that runs ahead of the transformation. My writing always precedes action. Writing is codification of thought/intention, of the process from being through doing to being. Transformation. Good word.

Those who are very good at something, or at many things, are often resented, if not deified just as foolishly; a maligned and misunderstood minority, riding around in wheelchairs of ability and awareness, when they have strong limbs with which to leap from their limits, and lead. I remember a line I wrote 18 years ago. "Tell them I'm hiding, planting myself, kicking out a root, in the cool mind."

In both previous journals, I anticipated the arrival of a woman. And, look who finally arrives. Me. Myself. And I believe it. Thanks to Mick Jagger, my refrain was always, "I am waiting, I am waiting, I am waiting, for someone to come out of somewhere," and my own aphorism, "I have tried

to become something built on something missing," and now that something has arrived. Ten years ago, I wrote, "I want to put myself inside a self larger than myself, and watch it fit." No more waiting.

Honoring the Pope

2/27

4PM. I just gave Bob Kaufman a cigarette. He came through the open door of La Boheme at 4:10, this Wednesday afternoon, stepped lightly up to my table, and whispered, "Cigarette?" I looked up, saw who it was, and went for the Marlboro's as if the Pope had just asked me for my crucifix.

I imagine people who have had to deal with the drunken Bob Kaufman for years have no such reaction. To me, it's an honor. I haven't read everything he's written, but I think he's a true American genius, and he ought to be treated like a national treasure.

He moves in that saintly isolation that comes to a few, through whatever means, in a life set for it. Clairvoyant, pure expression. It takes a similar awareness to get it. The poems don't do a song and dance for the reader's entertainment. The poems are like Hesse's magic cafe, an unassuming, unmarked door on a side street, unlit and unadvertised, but once inside, as Kerouac might say, "Zowiee!"

I finally spent the night with a woman, last night, and it showed me another lesson. Audrey is as thin as an anorexic, but attractive and wonderfully physical in her touching and holding, gentle and strong. She has no chest to speak of, so I'll speak of it. Skin over ribs, with pretty nipples only slightly more fleshy than the rest.

In order to come, I imagined full breasts above my reclining body. I noticed, on recollection, that during the evening we spent talking, listening to music, dancing, and making out, I kept forgetting to be physical. The moment after I first slid my hand up her shirt from her back to her chest, and realized how flat and smooth her chest was, I began to lose physical interest. I tended, after that, to stay in my intellect, and that was fun, too, but whenever we began kissing again, it was a pleasant surprise to be back in the physical.

It was a happy night. "You're a fun guy," she said. "You're a fun girl," I said, "We're a fun couple."

She laughed at that syllogism of superficiality. In truth, it was better than fun. Still, it seems to me that the obvious attributes of great beauty and larger breasts have always served to draw me out of my mind. Sometimes completely out of my mind. But without the compulsive desire to fuck THAT kind of woman, I'd just as soon be bowling for matchsticks.

A curious metaphor. Which reminds me that what I fear most from poetry is what attracts me most. It was and is the fear of saying something revealing of my true nature. The risk of looking foolish, insane, evil, stupid, dorky, or self-deluded. Well, if anybody is going to delude me, I'd like to be the one to do it.

I shaved off my mustache and beard yesterday, in anticipation of playing kissy-face last night. A Brilliant Move. It was also instructive to sit with Audrey all night while she drank Jim Beam. It was my training ground 20 years ago. A woman, cigarettes, music, and a bottle of Jim Beam. Once, when she left the room, I considered taking a sip, but I laughed instead. No thanks.

I took great pleasure in having all my fun without getting bitten by the bottle. No Beam hickies on me. Shit, I knew all these unadulterated thrills before I met Jimmy B. That's the most fortunate part of all this, that I know how to truly enjoy my life without assistance from a nerve deadening or nerve activating agent.

Next to me, there is a mealy-faced, middle-aged teacher with a sappy half-smile perpetually on her face, grading papers. God knows what damage these pathetic also-rans of life have done to generations of innocent minds. Which reminds me of an image.

Teachers, parents, societies telling young humans to be proud, honest, courageous, loving, etc., and never bothering to tell them what these things

mean, and then turning on them when they show any inclination to practice the same proclaimed virtues.

My, here's a lovely soapbox that would do nicely to make a fire out of, Martha.

The advantage to making love (I don't like the word FUCK - an unlikely combination of fun and work.) to someone who doesn't provoke compulsive desires, is that the impulsive desires to kiss, touch, and hold come gently and clearly, without possessiveness and without fear.

Success, as a lover, poet, performer, great human, my version of the American success story, has been my bugaboo. In other terms, I've done almost everything in my power to turn away from the pursuit. At first, I thought it was fear of success, but I've had success. I'm not a failure, and I don't feel like one. I never understood the notion of success. Success always seemed like someone else's idea of what I was good at. I tried to live out others' ideas, but it never felt right. This feels good. I'm at peace in myself, with myself, and with its manifestations.

My second thought was that the isolation of alcoholism was responsible for my retreat from the rat race. Wrong again. These are my true beliefs. Whatever success is, from now on, it will be an experience done from peace. I'm not aggressive by nature.

I'm being shown that lesson by Josh. He's all aggression and assertion and very quick to promote the attitude. He's not happy, he's driven. I was driven to the brink, and the brink can kill you. Brinking and Driving Kills.

Start slow. Slow down. Stop. Now, you're getting somewhere.

Eyes send, as well as receive. If looks can kill, can they conceive?

OK, I got off on a word-play tangent. I'd like to be a tan gent. The beard wouldn't have survived the sun anyway.

All my impulses of the last ten years to disengage from the success treadmill are paying off. I don't know what the next level is, but I'm game for it.

I'm game, I'm seen, I'm conquered.

We conquer others because it's a damn site easier than conquering ourselves.

By no longer explaining myself or apologizing for it, I've discovered a new hobby - watching and listening to the inadequate approximations of intelligence in others. Having broken out of the time-honored bullshit of Western society, it's fascinating to see how tethered to it most people are, if they're not completely bound and gagged.

It's a terrible awakening for intelligent humans, to discover the deep and abiding lack of reward in attempting to adjust to any maladjusted social order.

I'm still in the early stages of this Final Man completion cycle. I'm only beginning to practice these developments in the wider world. I look forward to more and more events, not of confrontation, but of clear delineation.

I'm in The Edible Complex in Rockridge, Oakland, and it's time to stop all this semi-linear exposition and write a goddamn motherfucking POEM!! (Yes! Go!)

Desire and Dispute

2/28

9:30PM. I've tried to be a macho poet. Lord, I've tried. I've seen poets in all shapes and sizes, as big as houses and tiny as a grasshopper's mortgage. Prison poets and demitasse poets with polished pinkies, but I've been trying one way or another, all my adult life, to be a regular guy with a solid gold chip on his big shoulders.

I'm a big guy, but that's not the point. Some people are afraid of me, but that's not the point. At base, I'm quiet, pensive, gentle, sensitive, and reserved. I tried to drink myself into a kick-ass, nut-busting, chest-cracking, listen-to-this-or-go-fuck-yourself kind of poet, but my roots are in the heart, and my best manner is reserved.

I come out of my reserve when something or someone draws me out. When I drank, I broke down the barriers of my reserve. Now I like it. I can tell when I'm drawn out, and I can tell when nothing is going to do it. It can be an idea, attitude, poem, look, moment of the day or night, whatever, but it's real, the doors fly open. Steve's Private Reserve. 100 proof. Finest stock. Aged 43 years. Sweet on the tongue. Mellow in the throat. With a kick like a Georgia mule. True Macho Brew.

Well, I'm out of work again, for two weeks, unless something happens. And something always does. It feels good to drift through the days.

I went to a poetry reading at the Community Blend Cafe on Haight and Fillmore. Three generations, beat, hippie, and punk. Sloganeering poetry. I left at the break. I couldn't imagine reading anything that anyone would hear, unless it could be chanted back at me. Paranoid, angry, lonely, self-righteous cries of indignation. The same old shit.

Jim Wilson came up to me and stuck his palm up and said, "AIR," after Cocteau's **Blood of the Poet**. An eye in the palm, crying, "AIR." I took the

air, and the air took me out of another airless room of alternating desire and dispute.

God Bless the Poets

3/1

When I woke up this morning, I had no idea who I was or what I was doing. Then I felt stupid, clumsy, illiterate, and missing the boat. I felt false and misled. The feeling went away. You start the day, and one way or another, it gets going.

Jack and I hung out together, and by dinnertime, I felt fine, rounded out, shaped up, filled out, and back in time. All self-transformation is taking yourself out of routines of thought and action, reinventing yourself. It takes time and effort and eventually you end up back very close to who you've always been, but refreshed.

I went to hear Tom Raworth read, and it almost put me to sleep. Sara Menefee said, "Oh, isn't he wonderful?" and I thought, maybe he is, and I've lost the ability to listen, but all I heard was a guy staying alive, like weightlifting in prison or memorizing the Bible backwards.

It did get me writing, to hear the English language read well. It was a good bunch of great words. I saw Leslie Scalapino and Ted Pearson. I noticed we poets are all of a type. We dress well, if comfortably. We're fairly nice looking people, with good voices and decent manners, with a strong willingness to see and hear anything. Anything. These people have been around the block, with their eyes open, and they're still alive, mostly well, and kicking.

We expect each other to take on a great deal, and suffer from it, and survive it, and produce from it. It's a good feeling to be in a room with such characters. There's compassionate appreciation, no condescension, and no games. Poetics Anonymous. It's a great support group stretching across many, many centuries. God Bless the Poets. I love them.

Long Lists of Lesser Blame

3/4

1PM. I feel like a drink. Today makes two months sober. That's been my record. I'm itching to push forward. On the other hand, it's interesting to explore the thoughts that broke my sobriety at this juncture, the other times.

I spent the weekend in a condo on Russian Hill, in the home of the vice-president of a giant real estate company. He and his pretty, busty, blond wife were off at Squaw Valley drawing geologic surveys of the finer slopes and restaurants, I'm sure. Evidence was everywhere of what jerks these people are, but I thought it was enjoyable hanging out with Audrey in the lap of someone else's luxury.

However, today I'm pissed off and depressed. For no apparent reason. I like Audrey. I'm not in love. Again. We had good talk, good sex, good food, good movies on cable, and I read her my poems. After each poem, she told me she wanted to hear more. They had a cumulative effect, something I've thought about my poems, for years. (It's the career-long, life-long pastime of a poet to try to define his poetics; the manner, form, and content of his writing.)

I told Audrey about my fear that sobriety would rob me of the deeper levels of my thinking and writing. Twenty years of poems and experience have taught me the availability of all levels of being to each of us, particularly those of us who have sought out the proverbial mule trail down the Grand Canyon Wall of our collective and individual subconscious.

Audrey has reopened one of my own particular cans of worms. When I make love for an hour, and I don't come, it means I'm holding back. I want her for a friend. Many of my ex-lovers are friends, but I've never been upfront about it. It evolves. I don't see any great moral imperative in saying

I just want to be friends. It's not that simple. Part of my holding back is the fearfulness of letting go.

I'm drawn to Audrey. Her awareness, self-possession, and maturity are terrific, for want of a more original and mellifluous judgment. Her A, S-P, and M are sexy, in a way. And yet they're the characteristics comfortably reserved for friends. In other words, she's the sort of woman I'm always looking for, but here's the catch; she's not stunningly beautiful, and she's not voluptuous. She's good looking, and her skin is soft, and her skinny body is artistically, visually attractive, but goddamn it, I don't WANT to fuck her.

Then, as Norman says, "She probably has a long list of things about you she doesn't like." So, I feel stupid today. I'm not working. I don't think Josh wants me in his place anymore. It's been a month, and it feels like a week. I'm so fucking transient again, right now, always.

It occurs to me to go buy new clothes. I feel as if I'm too old to be dressed as young as I do. It's time for an older look. I've had the urge for a few years. Ever since I first contemplated being forty. I'm wearing the same outfit I've been wearing for 25 years. Boots, jeans, big belt, nice shirt, nice jacket. I still don't look 43, but I am 43.

All this is manifestation of a continuing self-perception and self-critique, it has more to do with my work and my attitudes than with fashion.

It's been three weeks since I felt any emotional need to get drunk. Perhaps it's only a cycle, but I felt, this morning, like giving up. I'm so relentlessly of positive spirits that it gets a bit much. "Fuck this," I think. Time to flake off, hit the skids, take a dive, get stupid.

I was pleasantly surprised to recognize this reason to drink. Because I often catch myself being extremely positive, in a mixed situation, like being with miserable others. I think I must appear shallow and superficial. This is a stupid concern. I know my friends see me and know me as well as I see and know them. My anger is at those who don't have the depth of

awareness in their own lives to appreciate what have become, for me, obvious absurdities.

While watching **Garry Shandling Live in Las Vegas** with Audrey, I said that one of the causes of my disaffection with performing came when I realized the sort of people who went to make up an audience. "THEIR love I don't need," I said.

The needle in this haystack may be in the analogy of teaching, which Audrey and I have both done. Among the hundreds of people I've taught (who used to be kids) are a few who have profited from it and remember the influence, as I remember Barbara Garst (may she rest in peace) who showed me, in her love of the language, my own love.

I'm thinking now, everyday, of performing. The key to performing, it seems, is always in the attitude of the performer. The comic says, "Imagine everyone in the audience is naked." The tragic flaw of my performing, on and off stage, is that I've always imagined the audience is smarter than I am. It's led me through a life of disappointment and disillusionment. The stupidity and illusion of sad, small human lives has led me to withdraw from involvement, but the attitude of scorn, mockery, and arrogant superiority, sucks.

Teachers get to have a professional posture of feeding the swine and occasionally finding a pearl. I can't see people as swine, except when they jump up and oink in my face, but it actually hurts when the pearls are so few and so far between.

I don't want to acquire a professional attitude toward my fellow humans. I seem not to want to have any posture at all. I watch poets reading, to see what their relationship to the audience is, I resist, to the point of despising, any poet who assumes a posture, simply because the posture begins to direct the writing. The poet ends up pontificating, or the poet italicizes his or her life. I want to see the true, and convey it in such a way that it's receivable.

It's tempting to, and often feels like a failing not to, get a posture, an attitude, a role, a position, from which to hand down the tablets of poetry. Militaries, religions, social orders, academia, and the arts are not reluctant to cast their members in robes and uniforms, offices, and degrees.

I haven't been trained to the way of thinking I've come to. I'm East Indian, native American, tribal, primitive, whatever. I don't know how I came to not be of the Western Judeo-Christian Capitalist Imperialist Materialist ethic, but what I feel is an ethic of mature innocence.

Truth is, I wouldn't mind going into another alcohol period, if I could end it as quickly as I could begin it, but I know better. I miss the alternative state, seeing the world without the rose colored glasses of my sanguine nature.

(OK, Steve, let it happen. Go for it. Be pissed off.)

I've always wondered at, disliked, and secretly admired people who, when their dog dies, proceed to shit on everything and everybody in sight for days at a time. Then, when it's over, they say, "Hello, everybody. I feel great now. Sorry I was such a pig, yesterday. Ha. Ha."

And for good reason, I don't like it. My mother was a master at working people over just because SHE was in a rotten mood. And she's only a point runner, in my experience, for a great many self-blinded people who think nothing of imposing their misery-soaked personalities on everybody else. There, that feels better. I may be warming for a major blow-out.

I remember lifting a beer and having my personality change before I got the bottle to my lips. It was often a cool, malevolent feeling of "Fuck Everybody." I don't cherish the feeling. I didn't like it when it came, but when it came, it carried its own volition.

I haven't been swallowing enough shit lately to have to spit it out. What's underlying this anger? I've been doing everything fucking right for two

months. And what have I got to show for it? No money. No place to live, no job, I might as well be drunk on my fucking ass.

(Hello. Steve. Surprise. Life is exactly the same sober as it is drunk.)

Of course, I have always known this, and there's no one to blame, But no one. If I blamed God, I'd have to start making long lists of lesser blame. I choose not to. I choose to feel shitty just because I feel shitty. I choose not to get drunk. Instead, I choose to leave the Grand Piano, right now, and take some sun. Bye.

Blind Date

3/4 Later

5PM. So, I jumped up and did something. I went by Dave's house, and left a note.

Dear Dave, I have just solved all your problems.
Make me a partner and take me along on the bids.
Old women love me. Not to mention others.
Your friend and mine, Steve.

Long lists of lesser blame. I like that. Got to do something with it. I'm a little goosey right now, because a woman I've seen off and on in North Beach has sat down nearby in La Boheme. She has a wry glint in her eye and looks like Natalie Wood, and I don't mean "dead."

That's the kind of face I could stare at and be stirred, I think. Hers in reality, not Natalie's in fantasy. So I imagine I'll dwell on this little swelling of the glands until it passes. In the meanwhile, I just read a quote of Denise Levertov's, to the effect that to be a poet is to do more than transcribe inspiration. Transcribing isn't doing anything.

All this recent thinking is apropos. I'm defining myself as a poet in a way I haven't managed until now. At least, I've set myself that task. A poet is not a person telling the details of one particular life. That's narcissism, self-celebrity. It's not the skill of operating the spot-light on one's own personal dramalog. It's more like an operating room light, a laser, a candle in the darkness.

OK, so, I'm not seeking public office as a poet, and I'm not seeking personal stardom. The teacher's job is to focus on the subject at hand. He facilitates the engagement of the student. The poem must ultimately belong to the reader. The poet, in his or her function, other than as a writer, is a facilitator. He must be an invisible lion.

The woman nearby has, already, the attention of four men around her. My god, she's a lefty, and she's Portuguese. I love Portuguese. She's reading the want ads with a pen in her hand. She's looking for a flat. We could live together. It boggles the mind. Will I do anything about it? Hardly likely. Highly unlikely.

Jesus, the back of her hands even look good to me, and the kind of clothing she's wearing. Last night, Norman and I were talking about our male sexual hearts. Neither of us has lost his heart for years. It seems to be an accident of experience. Women experience it accelerated; the sensory overload of too much of the opposite sex. A hesitancy to, and a realization of, getting involved.

Anyone involved in life becomes involved in the lives of those nearby. There's a wake-up point when you begin to realize what actually happens when you get to know anybody.

I'm going to close my notebook and sit quietly, thinking of no purpose.

7:30PM. It occurred to me that my relationship to the audience as a poet is the same as my relationship to that beautiful woman. I don't pursue unless I am overwhelmed or inspired. I wait for the occasion of confrontation. I only trust the relationship when it's mutual and without guile. It's a romantic affair, but it's rooted in genuine communication. A performance, a reading, is a blind date, that may lead anywhere. Anywhere. Anywhere at all. Nowhere. Everywhere.

First Real Day of Spring

3/5

3PM. Sami did the trick. I was sitting in the Shamrock, round about midnight, drinking soda with a squeeze, reading **Golden Sardines** by Bob Kaufman, when I felt an arm around my shoulder, heard my name, and turned to see a face that I could bare recognize.

It was Sami Farhat. Many months off booze and drugs, working in a restaurant in San Mateo, he looked great, if unrecognizable. I knew the voice. It's always in the voice, the eyes, the heart. We had compatriot talk. Sami, poet, "illiterate from the desert" and Steve, poet, "dumbfuck from the plains," re-engaged a long-standing bond.

The good, strong men of my knowledge show up, good and strong. It's refreshing and renewing to see these guys. We are alive and well. Sami gave me \$40. I had forgotten the \$40 I gave him, two years ago, when he was down, embroiled in his own poetic angst, so to speak. Many had given him up for lost. I knew better. No one knows the self-discipline that goes to make a creative life.

Sami laughed, and said he wants to give a wine reading, to lift a gallon to his lips and toss the bottle at the audience of his detractors. Too much fertile land is plowed under by detractors.

Then he gave me an idea for getting my book of aphorisms published. So, today, I Xeroxed five pages from the book, included a short introductory letter and request for an advance, and mailed it off to New York. I have four more letters planned. We shall see.

Putting his money (my money) to that use was a wonderful feeling. I bought stamps and a new notebook. I'm off and running. Dropping the manuscript excerpt in the mail slot at the post office was a deeply satisfying experience and fun.

I bought Josh some shampoo, toilet paper, and dish soap. Last night, sitting with him and his friend Vaughn, who's a mime, and a new friend of Vaughn's, Brian, who's a magician, I realized I'm not one of them. They are performers. I'm a poet. I could see the camaraderie of their instincts and experiences. I didn't share it. I do, with Sami and other poets. Josh gave me advice, and it's good to hear how his world works, but it's different from mine.

I told Sami of my sense that the artists who have been in hiding for the last few years are coming out and recognizing each other. This is a process one cannot legislate, for or against.

Then Josh told me of an apartment opening up on McAllister in a couple of weeks at an affordable rate. It's still shaking.

9PM.

Release, by Siegfried Sassoon

One winter's end I much bemused my head
In tasked attempts to drive it up to date
With what the undelighted moderns said
Forecasting human fate.

And then, with nothing unforeseen to say
And no belief or unbelief to bring,
Came, in its old unintellectual way,
The first real day of spring.

I went by Paul's hotel and found him. Accident is the only plan, said my friend in bed, watching the bronze gleam of his hanging pans. He has stopped drinking, and another one bites the dust. Another one is born anew. We talked as we always have, for hours, ranging many topics without topic. He told me several wonderful, hilarious, poignant, serious stories, but I leave them for his books. We talked about everything you and I talk about. I'll bet you do talk, too. Pity I can't play back your thoughts,

responses, ideas, harangues, penitents, discourses, disavowals, confessions, anecdotes and cracks. I'll leave that to you and your book.

I sat down, a half hour ago, at the table of the woman I described yesterday. I said nothing. She packed up and left, without so much as a how-de-do. I was glad to have presented her the opportunity, and me the same, to let a conversation begin, and when it didn't, I took it as just as well.

Then, Mike, the housepainter chess player, odd-ball character, sat down and started advising me to take up roofing. "Mike," I said, "if you'll forgive me, I'm not a housepainter, right now. Right now, I'm reading," and I went back to Siegfried Sassoon, who wasn't nearly as good as that first poem.

Paul has cleared the way for me and Jack to take a room in his hotel. I'm glad, and I'm ready. Now I'm trying to find Jack. Haven't seen him in four days.

I'm beginning to reflect on the stages of sobriety I have evinced and evoked even in the writing of this book. From Drunken, to Crazy, to Reserved. I love this new phase. It's the calm acceptance of all that comes before and goes to make up an Invisible Lion. Now, there's my title. From Savage Amusement to Dear Nadja to Invisible Lion. Perfect. Drunken to Crazy to Reserved.

I'm in a period of grace, luck, serendipity, karma, good feelings. Calm acceptance of chance life. Accident is no plan, and courage is quiet.

I ran into Hilton Obenzinger, yesterday, and he's finished a book on the fires that have leveled the city of New York over the years. New York was founded because a boat anchored there, burned down. I congratulated him on the job of doing the book, and he shook his head, "It's like watching **The Towering Inferno**, over and over and over again."

I'm going to the Broadway Arms, where he lives, and find Jack.

A Sunday Grin

3/6

Noon. "I'll bet he wouldn't do that, Sunday morning at the Vatican!"

My fear, as I watch, with great joy, all my crazy poet friends clean out, is that it's merely an extension of the social plot engineered by the pendulum and Ronald Reagan, the military, and the way it goes, to socialize everyone to a fare thee well. Invasion of the Freedom Snatchers. The end to benign insanity.

The street crazies are rife. They're everywhere, like a boil on the body politic. They rant and rave, they spout insane babble, they show how repressed we are as a people. America is not Amerika, a fascist state, but A-merry-ca, the land of the mindless, with cookie and ice cream stores on every corner.

I trust that we poets are cleaning out, gearing up for the dark age of happy smiles, a president who wipes out minor foes with a Sunday-go-to-meeting grin and handshake.

It's time for us to exert our independence, to write out of the awareness that independent thinking is becoming a relic of a more enlightened past. It's time for concentrated action, when all aberrant action is under attack by the phony Sunday school teacher in the White House, for example.

Paul and I were talking about the time we terrorized (the owner's word) the Owl and the Monkey Cafe. We regret the way we tried to force perception and action on others, in such a crude way. It felt like a last gasp defense against a bleak outlook.

But the survivors survive, go underground, and plot their revenge. That's cute, but there's truth in the analogy. Poets are good for the soul of man.

4PM. I just came into the Blue Danube and ran into Peter, who looks a lot better than a rain-wet cat who's scrounging for food in the gutter. He was in good spirits, as that goes, with him. I saw a glimpse of a twinkle in his eye. I smelled the fragrance that triggers the unfailing memory of the ability to love.

The Blue Danube has the attraction of being a cafe for beautiful women, yuppies mostly, or yuppie girlfriends, seekers after the immortal grail of material security.

Josh spent the morning trying to track down a woman named Eve who runs a city tour service, a strikingly beautiful blond he and Vaughn met in a posh cafe. The pursuit of beautiful women is, at least, a sign of life. It's also a desperate transference of energy. There are 80,000 good-looking women in San Francisco, and most of them are preoccupied with the 79,999 socially desirable walking crypts of the soul. Hyperbole. I have, of course, reserved one woman, above and beyond the scheme, for myself.

The weather. Let's talk about the weather. It's raining, OK? A good rain, it comes in bursts, heavy, then slack. A full moon, last night and tonight.

Bodhisattva

2/7

9PM. Dave made me a partner today. I'm helping him finish a difficult job for no pay. It's the least I can do to put into the partnership. He's got all the equipment, the truck, and he put in the effort to get it started. I'm just glad to be working. Of course, the sooner it pays off, the better. I think that'll happen within two weeks. Then, it's an apartment, or a hotel, until I can find an apartment.

It's a gamble, going into business. It may take too much mental time, but Dave has the same concern. He's contemplating, he says, joining an order, becoming a monk. He says that if he does, he'll leave me all his painting equipment and his truck. Josh says that if he dies or goes to jail for any reason, he'll leave me his apartment and recording equipment. Dave says that if all that happened, no one would want to be my friend, something would happen to them. Anyway, I simply can't work for someone else and be at their will and whim. It was a good idea, for a time that's passed. Now it's an interesting sign of change.

Mark sent me a reproduced photograph of the two of us for my birthday. In it, we're maybe six and three, or seven and four, I can't tell. I look like I'm about to cry. About to be about to cry. Not really cry. Looking around at a bewildering world. I've never seen the photo before, and I've never seen the look in any other childhood photo, but I know it. The way I'm sitting in the photo is familiar.

Josh was telling me about the Bodhisattva. I recognize it. It's the wise man who lives one more time to tell others what he's learned. I think of him as a teacher by indirection, an invisible lion. I always feel as if knowledge is close. Pay attention, wait and see, and it comes to the surface.

Of course, I don't know everything, but it's all available. I've been told I have a very old soul. I've been told I'm on my last life. Shit, it's all OK with

me. I've been told I'm an Indian. Sad, wise eyes. Grandfather eyes. I've always felt I'd fulfill myself in my aging.

I used to disparage this kind of thinking. I was too young and embarrassed to think such things in society. It isn't an accomplishment to be born such a person. I perform daily as an ordinary man. It is a grounding. I know I'm doing it. Anytime I sense a confusion, a blockage, an insecurity, I tell tales. I tell jokes. I tell parables. I act as if I'm just talking, kidding around, being crazy.

I'm not always a Bodhisattva, but I become so, more and more openly, less and less hesitantly. I don't care how all this works, or what you call it. I don't care if you think I'm egocentric, crazy, full of shit, or whatever. Your sense reflects your sense.

As a poet, I extrapolate and exemplify what everyone does. I know that if you want to predict someone's future, tell them who they are right now. Our consciousness always runs late, often many years behind our real awareness. And those of us who are changing are thrown into confusion as often as we change.

None of this is taught in school, and what's learned in church is taught as law, as if the laws of man and nature are exterior and not interior.

If our culture were more in tune with our spirits, I wouldn't bother trying to understand and elucidate. These books would be superfluous. In such a culture, that little boy in the photo would have been seen, nurtured, and prepared for a calling he has yet to figure out on his own. He wouldn't have gotten sucked so far into the destructive end of booze. He would have experienced the drugs and learned from them, but he would have been guided, kept in balance, and taught the uses of the transformation.

I imagine all that could be. Would it were so, it isn't. We are who we are, where we are, when we are, I'll take it. I won't waste my time, energy, spirit, wishing I'd gotten a better roll of the dice.

It is all as it should be. It's time we all had a few people trying to map out the life of the soul under our current circumstances.

I noticed myself, today, as I watched Dave going nuts trying to deal with the client, a manipulative old fart trying to get his way by pretending he's absolutely wonderful. All he wants Dave to do is way too much, for far too little. He masquerades as guileless, getting his way in everything. In my glorious new position as partner, I felt more at ease telling him what I saw, than I did as his worker. It suits me, finally, to take on a different role. I'm sure this will progress to a greater acceptance of a more public role. Indirection, as in parable, but public, as a man, and as a poet.

I'm becoming more explicit with Jack. At first, I thought it was a recognition of his maturity, his ability to receive and understand. That's true, but it's also my recognition of my maturity, my ability to give.

Josh keeps helping people, giving advice. It falls on deaf ears. He's heartbroken that people need help, and doubly so that they don't take his advice. It's all well-meant, but it comes, in part, from his insecurity. The best gift is one left on the doorstep. The attention must go to the idea not to the giver or the receiver.

"Look what I found. An idea. It's a good idea. I'll leave it right here. Who knows? Someone else might find it useful." These books serve me. I have no way of knowing if they might serve anyone else. That's not my province. I write them. I don't sell them. I can't figure out what the effect is. The reader is, you are, unknown to me.

This writing seems peripheral to poetry, but there's no way for me to know. It isn't so much that the more we know, the more we realize, how little we know. What's knowable is always coming from the unknown. The more we realize how capable we are of knowing, the more we can appreciate the unknown. The unknown is perpetual, and the knowing is occasional, but it's not impossible.

Held Liable

3/8

5PM. The key here is an element of seriousness, long masked by lightheartedness. Well, a heavy heart needs a few balloons tied to it. But seriously.

Rolling across the Bay Bridge, going to work, I listened to Dave use a word that I could have done tricks with, turning it to a series of puns. I let it go. Later, I began talking about his wish to quit the job we're on.

"There's no job worth having that isn't worth quitting," I said. The implication is a major tenet - to give up your life in order to save it. Life is a job worth having that's worth quitting, if one considers death a worthwhile price.

What may prohibit your long life may exhibit your best life. It's a fearful prospect, and it's the only conclusion one can put to a life of conscience and value. Always, when one has an ethic above expedience, there's that risk and its corollary, the necessity of accepting it. And then the freedom it gives. If you can walk up to whoever or whatever holds your life in his, her, or its hands, and say, "OK, put me in prison, cut off my head, kill me. Do your worst. I am doing my best."

So we packed up and drove off the job. Dave has worked three weeks and made no money. I worked a day and a half for no money. But it was time to walk. Coincidentally, there was an article on the sports page, describing the need for men of integrity caught in an untenable situation to do a very simple thing. Walk away. Say, "I don't like this organization, so I quit."

It's tough, when you've been trained to, were able to, and practiced, thinking you could do any job, and would always try to do the job, to then quit that job. Quitting has a bad reputation, given to it, by those who stand to lose, if you didn't believe them.

I'm becoming more at ease with my seriousness. I used to reserve it for drunken pronouncements, when I thought it had become chest-cracking time. Now, it is beginning to emerge from my own reserve, calmly and surely.

I've always been afraid that my art would get me into trouble. I thought that the surest test of the fulfillment of my art would be the degree to which I'll be held liable for it. I don't seek to offend or outrage. I seek to be held liable, at the level to which I apply myself in the art. It seems to be that if the truth hurts, then hurt the teller of truth.

The truth is not my right. I don't own it. The truth is. I only seek it. It appeals to me. I don't deserve to feel self-righteous. The truth doesn't care, and it doesn't offer prizes or medals for those who approach it.

I just asked Gene for a match, and he gave me a book, saying, "You can have this," and on the book it reads, "Burial Benefits - Send no money - No Physical Exam."

It suddenly came to me, a while back, that when Martin Luther King Jr. said he would like to enjoy the life of longevity, that he was truly prepared to die. "I have been to the Mountain," he said, and I had thought, for years, that that was merely a beautiful spiritual metaphor. Now I see that he meant it. It was true. He had tasted the incredible freedom that comes when one has given up control over the cruel unknown and allowed the felicitous unknown to happen.

A caveat. Dave gave me \$20, to get through the weekend, and I felt happy. I told him, "Whenever I have \$20 in my pocket, I stop feeling like an endangered species for another day."

9PM. Vaughn, who looks suspiciously sleazy and self-centered, revealed himself to be anything but. He's done his mime show for kids and paraplegics, MD victims, and Vets. Among the kids, some were autistic. It was miraculous, according to the supervisors and nurses, the way they

would respond. One kid, signing, dragged Vaughn all over, saying, "This is my new friend." One kid spotted him sometime later at a fair, recognized him in makeup as the same mime who'd come to the hospital, became excited, and signed it. The kid had shown no recognition or memory of anyone else. After that, Vaughn says, when some guy from LA tells you all about your great future, it seems absurd and superfluous.

I'm beginning to think this writing is going much too fast. I'd like a few events and revelations of an unexpected sort, but they're all new and unexpected. OK, I'm talking about finding love and having money, moving out and on. That will happen, or it won't.

Young Joy

3/9

10PM. Falling in booze is falling in love. The affair starts magically, with great expectations, and it ends badly. Getting over the bottle is the same as getting over a great love that was born in addiction. Whenever anything or anyone becomes the ostensible fulfillment of one's life, there are three solutions. One solution is to continue the dependency forever. The second solution is to find a substitute dependency, another drug, another lover, and the final and the only solution that is truly a solution, is to find that fulfillment in yourself.

It takes time to survive a dependency. One remembers the good times and forgets the bad. And one drink is one more kiss. One more kiss, and the affair is on again. You kiss it off by not kissing it on again.

My quarrel with AA, in part, is with the way they sit around and talk about booze. The affair is enjoined. All talk isn't cheap. Good talk is expensive, valuable. It's good to get it out. When you get your mind on it, you get it off your mind. Up to a point. But when one develops a dependency on the shadow relationship, one continues to build it up in dwelling on it.

I went to see **Spinal Tap**, a satirical movie about the obsessive lives of mediocre artists. I caught myself in an identification with the movie. I began to fear for my own mediocrity and my own obsessions. Finally, I felt relief in my desire to stay out of the limelight. Whether or not I'm worthy as a poet is a question for others to decide. I love to write. If I were ever to deal with the praise and condemnation that goes with celebrity, it could thwart the simple process of sitting down with paper and pen and love of the language that comes from the heart. It could. I would take the risk, because I won't let fear stop my simple right to see and to tell.

One day, Paul was describing the pitfalls of writing. Painting is freer, he contents, because you can hang your work on the wall and draw joy from it

as an object. But language has a perpetual tentacle grip on one's heart and mind. Painters may disagree. I haven't pursued painting beyond my young joy in it. Young joy. How wonderful it is when one's faculties fall in love with any process. Early on, when I was being a painter, it was seemingly endless play of discovery and productivity. Falling in love and making babies.

Poetry is an addiction, I suppose, in some minds, but it's an addiction like eating and breathing. It's life-giving. I've forsaken poetry a few times, but the bond never broke, and it continues to be a positive love. It always triggers a life-force, positive, energizing, and calming.

I have lows in my life, but they're always raised by poetry. It's an elevation of low spirit, not in the sense of cheering me up, but in engaging me, in spirit. It is uplifting, in a spiritual sense, by engaging me to rise above, not to abandon my earth-bound self, but to enact my heaven-bound self.

Booze put me so at home in my earth-bound self that it seemed to be a release. The end result of the engagement was the enactment of our reptilian ancestry. One progresses deeper, inside the physical, to primate, reptile, amphibian, sea snake, ultimate to a watery grave. It's a kind of drowning, and I'm glad I made the journey, but flying is another experiential journey.

The spirit, heaven-bound, returns to the air, the wind. "I wait for God like the wind through the hollow in a stone wall."

The trick is to keep this continuum intact and be in touch with it all, from earth-bound to heaven-bound. Family ties in the human cycle. Body and Soul.

I want a drink. I want a lover. I want to drink a lover instead of loving a drink. C'mon, baby, let's get reptilian. I want to return to the ocean. Put me back in the primordial ooze.

As in myself, I look, in others, for heaven and earth. Not the perfection of it, but the life of it, earth in heaven, heaven on earth, no separation.

A Nice Fall

3/10

5PM. "I can hear the music, all the lovers on parade. Open up. I want to come in again. I thought you were my friend." I was singing. You never know when life cracks open, and everything turns beautiful.

I got off the bus at 18th and Mission and stood under a canopy, watching a small, bent, old couple hobble up to the light, in the rain. He held onto her arm. Then he fell. As low to the ground as they were, it was almost like they fell into a love seat. He crumpled. She toppled onto him. I dropped my backpack and hurried to her and set myself to lift her. Her eyes were closed, and I looked to see if she was hurt, in shock, dead, or alive. I asked if she wanted to get up and out of the rain. "Just a minute," she said.

Others came to the old man. We lifted them up and walked them under the canopy. "He's blind," she said. "I have a 19 year old son..." I thought she said. It trailed off.

"You took a nice fall," I said, meaning to compliment them on the success of it. It's a real trick to fall well, not to resist the fall, but to give in to it.

They were fine, and I stepped aside. The old man took off for the corner, and his wife started after. She turned. "Thank you for helping," she said. I gestured that it was no big deal. I saw a white plastic bag where they had stood, and I said to her, "Is that your bag?"

"No," she said, "that's somebody else's garbage."

I laughed a little, to have my moments of being helpful turn ludicrous, as if I was trying to force a bag of trash on her. My backpack was soaking wet.

The rain stopped. I crossed the street and got on the bus. When you are feeling as good as I was, there is no tragedy, no unhappiness.

The last few days, I had been thinking it was time for a change. This book, that is, my self, felt ready to open up. I joked with Norman in the Shamrock that I'd probably get drunk at the end of it. I didn't mean it. I said I would get drunk if the entire community begged me to.

Today, Jack said his sister thinks I'm still drinking. His mother's friend asked Jack about money. Jack said I'd given him some, but it was tough, because I hadn't been working much. "Well, he's got a habit to support," the friend said sarcastically. and Jack said, "Yeah. Eating."

I understand it all. I told Jack not to feel bad, because people don't get what's happening. "It's my problem," I said, "I have to deal with it. You shouldn't have to deal with it, too." Most people have decided why people drink, and usually it's to escape. Drunks are weak. People seem to believe drinkers are helpless to deal with their weakness, and they condemn all drunkenness, usually as a cover for a greater condemnation.

I became angry and began thinking of what Christine said, on the phone from Minneapolis. She remembers my drunken escapades and thinks they were wonderful. Then she told me she was reading **Moon and Sixpence** by W. Somerset Maugham, about drunken poets and drunken painters in Paris before W.W.II, and, "It's the same, then as now," she said.

She and Paul and I and Sami and others, are still the same. Drunken artists provoking the inherent condemnation, born of envy, in part, of the bourgeois sluts of the world. That's fun to say. Bourgeois Sluts. I'll graffiti spray in on a wall somewhere.

All this doesn't incline me to get drunk. Instead, it inclines me to watch the great, normal human stupidity in action, clearing the decks of the myopic miasmic moronic multitudes. Ah, it feels good to get a little righteous. It's a refuge in the rain. My sobriety continues to be a wonderful place from which to observe the world.

Later. I bought **The Moon and Sixpence**. I found it, with limited funds, for \$1.50. I came in Josh's singing, "I can hear the music . . ." and Josh said, "Who got laid?" Not me, not by anyone, but by everything. Thank you, Josh, Norman, Christine, Jack, W. Somerset. Fire up the engines. Let's kick some ass.

7PM. Writing a book, even a book such as this, is an interior project. One must sit still, in some manner. The themes must be kept in close proximity to each other, even if one doesn't have a clue what those themes are. I imagine that composing a symphony would require keeping the damn tune straight for a very long time.

I'm beginning to anticipate my release from this unique bondage. Even as much as this form draws from the external moment, it remains contemplative and rational. Poems, on the other hand, are better suited to a life of action and emotion. They're also done in a state of disinterestedness, but the relative intensity and brevity do not require the extended rationality of prose. Jumping out of an airplane is different from hiking across India, even though both are born from the same spirit. I like them both. Vive la difference.

By release, I mean changing gears and having a different sort of life. I won't remember how to do this for a long time, if experience serves. Other than the pages numbering by, rapidly, to an end, I sense an end. A poem is similar. One begins with one true sentence, proceeds into the unknown, with lines, images, ideas, words, feelings, and then there's a surprising linkup of the parts to the whole. Toward the end, there's a sense of completion approaching. It's exciting and frightening. One does not know yet what it is that will do the trick. The poem may seem scattered, as a piece, unformed, because it's not yet finally formed.

Then God drops a ring on your finger and says, "Merry Christmas, little one," and the poem is done. Once it's done, you move on.

It's good to read Maugham say, " . . . the writer should seek his reward in the pleasures of his work and in release from the burden of his thoughts,

and, indifferent to aught else, care nothing for praise or censure, failure or success."

Yes, yes, yes! This makes three books, close to nine hundred pages in ten years, unpublished and thoroughly satisfying. Any interest in this will come from some unexpected direction, prompted by some action of mine on some other front. I have ideas, but no knowledge of how that may happen.

I imagine putting myself, in a place or situation that might prompt a new creative direction. Tahiti, Managua. Or, what's her name might show up.

Enough. Time to stop.