

**Twenty-Eight Poems
&
Two Interviews**

Bob Arnold

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PREFACE

What I feel we're offering up here with Bob Arnold's twenty-eight poems & two interviews is a window into the life of Bob & his wife Susan along the Green River in southern Vermont. The twenty-eight poems appearing here were selected from new & still to be published collections; the most recent interview was finished eleven months ago, while "Line of Talk" was first published in *Coyote's Journal* #11 in 1987.

James Koller 13 Dec 08

TWENTY-EIGHT POEMS

GETTING PAST THE TEXT

If it just kept on raining
— far past the notion of an Ark
would we have a new mythology
to take its place

DAWN

To live by a woods river
Forever is to finally
Forget it

& to remember
It again
Is something

INVENT A WORLD

Billie Holiday

Janis Joplin

Both dead

Both up on my window

As postcard photographs

With the sunlight

Not dead

NO OTHER

After she was sick awhile
She became thinner
Still young enough and strong
Her moves sexy
I couldn't keep my hands off her hips
The attention delighted her
She blushed instead of being too confident
Her hair fell to pieces like always
When she looked up my sky was blue
At night she fell asleep by the wood fire
There never would be another woman
Rain at the windows for days was welcome
In times of trouble no one wanted to listen to this stuff

THE WOODCUTTER TALKS

Long before the great ships at sea
There were the deep inland forests

I stand in one today knee-deep in snow
10 degrees with a wind

My saw shut-down
Oil freeze to bar and gloves

Listening awhile to the ships at sea
The long groaning waves

High high
Above me

IDYLLIC LIFE

Even though we felt like shit
After he said we both looked great
We both felt great

WORK SONG

We carried the saw and ax to the top of the hill
Hop-hornbeam logs waiting dry off the ground
I cut the logs into firewood size and split each one
You do the ground work, keep everything in order
We stack the splits into heavy canvas sacks
Carry it all down a trail under trees of meadowy leaves
I'm in love with you who is love with me
The woodshed at home is filled to the brim
I'm in love with you who is love with me

COUNTRYSIDE

Where there are tall maples and oaks
There once was a barn

Nothing left where it was
But sunshine

BEING HUMAN

Seeing this —
let me today

if only for a
few moments

twirl like
this autumn

leaf, midair
just like

that, with-
out a care

NOWHERE

Strange to see—
A sofa abandoned
In the woods
Off a dirt road
By the river we hike
No one around for miles

We turn the sofa back
Onto its legs, sit down
Call the dog up with us

SLY

By truck we were
Heading home the same
Time we saw fox heading
Home by the side of the road
Muddy legs like quick
Moving boots he made
His way and I swear
We looked at him
And he looked at us
And the Earth was whole

SURE

The cat hides away all
Day asleep and thinks nothing
Of coming out and wanting a kiss

LOCAL

Spring snow melt —
River rushing through
One ear and out the other

FORTUNE COOKIE

All things

being
equal

hardly
ever

happens

FLOATING WORLD

It was a dreamy time for you and me
The weather said so

The pair of windows that opened like shutters
The easy turn of the latch

Through the opening light dazzled
Something like your hair

Many years married I loved you like
A young girl from behind

A small bird with flashing orange wings
Sang from a tree that grew to our window

In this hut we built with our own hands
Some would call it a fairytale

These days pass by as light becomes darkness
There is next to nothing to show for it

AFTER THE CHILD

the swing

swings

WISDOM

Three very large crows swept
Over the trees that day
From beyond the river
And the deeper woods
Where no one lived
And laughed at us —

So we laughed back

FIELD GUIDE

Blue jay never leaves —
Just changes
Its call

THE WORLD ON A PERFECT DAY

All day it rains a steady rain
We can't work in the gardens and fields
We hear the birds while we wait for the rain to end
The rain never ends
We watch the rain in the trees
We are surrounded by woods
We make love at lunch

DEVOTION

Those seem to be the finest birds —
The ones that sing
Through the rain

CONTAGIOUS

Just the way your loose
Hair sweeps your cheek
Loosens me

VISTA

All the empty boats of the harbor
doing nothing but
being boats for us

EDGE OF LAND

What overtakes me more —
The blue of the sea or her dress
Raised, wading, high above her knees

TIME PASSES SLOWLY

Breezy naked
Under a red
Summer dress

You will soon
Kiss me but
First point

To four goldfinches
On a wire close enough
As if watching us

Their colors faded
From a week ago like
These autumn hills

TIP-TOE

Summer dress
Covers you
Barely

ONE WORD

Finally a blue sky day
And you do the wash!
Then you go and hang everything
Out on the line, a place reached
Through two feet of snow, rotten
Ice and a pathway I shoveled

Colorful wash all day
Blowing in the wind

At dusk you go pick
Dry clothes off a rope —
For a moment your billowy
Red skirt, violet sweater,
Bright long hair blowing
In the same breeze

I come to help as
You hold one garment up to
Your face breathing in the
Fresh wash and all you
Say with a smile is
“Woodsmoke”

OLD COLONIAL LIVING

The fire is almost down
First felt on the legs

When it reaches the waist
Go to bed

VISITOR

Enough moon

To awaken

The room

TWO INTERVIEWS WITH BOB ARNOLD

AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED 31 JULY 07 – 15 FEBRUARY 08

Questions here were asked by James Koller, the entire interview a product of email.

1. Over a lifetime people live with partners whose desires &/ or lifestyles effect sometimes significant changes in their own lives, private & public. It might be said that this is especially noticeable in the lives of writers because of the writing that gets done. Your writing seems to reflect a life very much lived within the partnership you've had with Susan. Will you personally identify her influences, or otherwise identify what she has contributed to who you are as a writer or public person?

PARTNER LOVE —

Susan. Thirty-five years married, Susan is the one I have been in love with since I was 21 years old when we first met. We haven't been apart one day or night in all those years. This even spooks our son a little. One has to be careful not to reveal too much, simply out of privacy, and after awhile people just don't want to hear or believe so much lovey-dovey. It has been that. It's also been a lot of hard work and devotion, respect and care. One can't even begin to believe how deep love can go. I'd like young people to know it's possible. Marriage is possible. A long marriage. Co-dependency is simply heaven & earth / sunshine & plants / left & right / show & tell. Don't try to figure it out, try to practice it.

Susan and I are really nothing alike in some respects since she was raised into a military family, with some relatives buried at West Point. She also has other relatives who wrote the NFL rule book and blazed routes of the Pacific Crest Trail. She was born in Arlington, Virginia when her father worked at the Pentagon after a tour in the Pacific Theater of WW2. An older sister, likewise an Army brat, was raised awhile in Ketchikan, Alaska. Both daughters, with their parents, would sail for Italy to a new military job for their father in Germany that lasted some years, providing side trips to Italy, Amsterdam, Spain, France, and German cities. This early European stay made a long lasting influence on Susan with her style of dress, culture and cuisine, coming down into an all-American crash when the family next moved to Chicago for a short stint at the start of the sixties. From the 7th grade and straight through college, spanning all of the sixties, Susan's family settled in California where her parents were native, L.A. to be exact. Susan went on to earn a degree from the university in Santa Barbara, majoring in political science and studying literature with Hugh Kenner and Kenneth Rexroth. Girls wore surfer charms when Susan arrived in California; Charles Manson was on the loose by the time she left, and her military family lost hold of her to John Muir's Sierra and Hendrix, barely known, playing the dinky UCLA student union in the afternoon, the same year he would flourish at Monterey Pop.

In the early 1970s Susan made a visit to her sister in Vermont, in the same area where I was and still am. I was driving with a friend in his car one afternoon and spied this blonde feather walking up the sidewalk in a short white summer dress stopping to reach for lilacs. Spring was in the air! I told my friend I would meet this girl — me, without a car and two menial jobs, living seventeen miles from town and getting around on-foot. And I did. I wrote my first love poem to Susan and those lilacs, and I've been writing them ever since.

No matter the subject, she is my muse and we don't mind being unfashionable in the least with our monogamous love life, or whatever it is they are calling it now. Falling in love head-over-heels is enough for me. Love is the art, and centuries of it have proven this true.

We are quite alike in our family Republican backgrounds — and while her family has military history, and mine is in lumber — it has taught us a certain work ethic and conservative social side, aligned with a radical consciousness we picked up far from these families, or because of them. Susan's parents dropped her like a hot coal when they got a look at my long hair and beard back then and cabin life in the trees; never sticking around long enough to get to know us through the marriage, birth of a son and making a living out in this patch of wilderness. A pity. Looking at Susan you might not know all the hard physical labor she has carried through right alongside with me and others, and that's part of that classical European side minced with those southern California years of staying cheerful, modest and with a military might. She always sticks to her guns, her loyalties, and definitely gives more than she removes. Her grandfather Earl Grady Paules blazed the Alaskan Highway for the Army Corps of Engineers from the Whitehorse/Yukon side between April to November 1942. During that same time the Japanese had bombed the Aleutian Islands at Dutch Harbor and occupied the islands.

So, there are trailblazers in our family genes. My forefather loggers cut the summit road to Mount Greylock for timber while Melville was penning Pierre on the other side of the mountain in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. In 1965 in the mountain's foothills that I was climbing regularly, from a movie theater in the town of Adams, I watched James Brown do the splits in the film The T.A.M.I. Show, not realizing Susan was in the concert audience, front row, with her screaming teeny-bopper friends. Less than ten years later she told me this while showing me the only book of a contemporary poet we had double copies of, Janine Pommy Vega's Poems to Fernando. And to this day we dance to our favorite song, sung by Terry Stafford (or Elvis) and written by Doc Pomus, "Suspicion". Hardly a love song.

2. One's sense of identity begins with family & focuses ultimately in community, always a direct result of the causal connections between individuals, wherever those individuals are geographically. Knowing you, I know that near all of your life has been lived in western Massachusetts & southern Vermont. I watched your community extend beyond your physical neighbors, first to the rest of the US, then the British Isles, & finally to Japan. Your community grew first from physical connection, & became literary where your literary endeavors put you in touch with others you could relate to & identify with. Like one's partner, one's accepted community often has significant influence on a life. Can you characterize what you now think of as your community, however physical &/or literary, then nuance the changes in what you felt your community to be over your lifetime, explaining what these changes have meant (including the influences they were) to your literary life in particular?

ONE'S COMMUNITY —

I grew up as a small town boy in the Berkshire hills of Massachusetts in a lumber family that taught me immediate allegiances amongst an Irish working-class family on the one hand, as opposed to the lumber magnet and those influences. I early on sided with the working-class, the Irish, the carpenters I saw come and go in our house, as a toddler, the same ones I would work with as a boy. They had last names like Lazarzek, Duffy, Liebeck, Zarek and they each had memorable faces and hands, jaunty hitches to their step and stories, and none owned a truck back in those days. Farmers owned trucks. The milkman had a truck with a heavy quilt spread over the glass bottles, thick cream on the top. The carpenters pulled their tool boxes out of the trunks of their cars or a station wagon. They could build a house from the ground up, master all the framing, electric and plumbing, they dug ditches, too. They could work on their cars, help raise their kids, and wear a tie to church on Sunday. They were tough to beat when it came to later meeting poets.

I moved from the Berkshires to southern Vermont and set up a cabin in the woods and met my next community of happy souls in the tattered network of backwoods mechanics, loggers, carpenters, jack of all traders, barely built farmers. All way older than me. All dug in with their lives because there was nowhere else to go, or happy as they are, or that's all they knew generation after generation. I began to make many poems surrounded and working from this livelihood, lasting for years.

Community for poetry began with my starting up Longhouse and seeking like-minded ones ready to send their writing at my request. I started out at 19 years of age doing this, just one earnest kid, voraciously reading. The majority of poets have always been forthcoming and generous, and the older generation were wise in the ways of sharing the names of others, even sharing others poems as a way of fellowship and the way it was once done. To this day, when I meet someone younger, like a Kent Johnson or Dale Smith, I'm reminded of how many others worked the channels the same way I was — that beloved share and share alike of names, poetry and resources. It's a waterwheel and illustrious when put into practice. The poetry community has stayed constant (where else do they have to go?) as I have, wanting to work and massage it with an extensive correspondence and belief. There are always poets and there are always poets who have very fine work to share and stoke into one more ark floating the high seas, as witnessed by the recent collection I put together — the last Origin, sixth series.

My travel with poets actually began with Japan since I had studied judo as a youngster in a boy's club, long before I ever read a poem. By the time I came to poetry, the Asian influence from a body sport and philosophy was well in me and the poetry fell into place with it. Dovetailed. Swept the tatami mat.

The physical back country community I once knew has moved on. Ghosts now. Many dead and gone, their sometime slow hysterical ways barely manageable to pass on, almost impossible to mimic. Their children may as well live in skyscrapers. The carpenters are all about vanished, too — those with the cloth nail aprons and fearless at any job at any price, buffeted with stories and easy humor and even polite manners. I know a plumber who still works those charms, and I'm certain there is a carpenter in every other town who works quietly out of a small toolbox making wood grain sweetened magic. If they're still there, there will be poetry.

3. The range of writing that works for you as an editor seems more inclusive than what you allow yourself as a writer. By way of clarification can you explain your editorial stance & then name five writers who you consider your greatest literary influences, & explain what each has contributed to your own poetics (which you might need to spell out)?

SOME INFLUENCES —

For a small fry, I think I've been pretty inclusive, so far, in this little life of mine. It ain't over yet. I've written over forty books of all sizes with subjects ranging from train and travel books of poetry and prose, two books on the building arts (stonework & carpentry), a few books of stories and yarns, and all the books of poetry planted in mostly Vermont, concerned with farmers, woods life, hard work and love. A French poet once wrote me a letter and said, 'well Bob, you have written a book of poems, have the love of your life and you both have had a child and you've built a home with your own hands to house it all. A complete life.' I had to smile at that lovely voice of wisdom knowing more than I knew then.

To some the world is vast, to others it's all in the neighborhood, and then there are those specialists that see it all on the head of a pin. Come to think of it — I probably flicker between all three.

So I am inclusive only so far — for everything else I gather poetries from around the world and make anthologies and little booklets I like to share with friends and strangers of all that diversity I may not have, but I can locate it and bring it forth. I like nothing better than to read a collection of poets that isn't all that predictable, and even better if it swoons. By the end of this decade I'll probably finish up the 400th title published from Longhouse, hopefully spanning many regions of poetry, as well as continuing to mine the underdog, or what I consider the natural-act.

As an editor, I'm after what Charlie Parker was after in himself, 'Music is your own experience, your thought, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn.' The same with poetry. A good editor/poet can hear the horseshoe of the poem ring as it strikes the stake. My literary influences range between personal friendships with those I've been drawn to through first their writings, and then the person themselves, the whole portrait. To know the writer faraway from the literary and into their family life, professions, travels, that wholeness is the ultimate book.

So I have a crew of friends that are poets who have been extremely influential: Cid Corman, Janine Pommy Vega, James Koller, Gerald Hausman, Theodore Enslin to name only a handful. As for hardcore influences, and the list would change day after day, but when I was a youngster I could never deny John Muir, Robinson Jeffers, Kenneth Rexroth, Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder and Joanne Kyger — my west coast love affair, those who practiced as they wrote/does — and throw in Emily Carr for good measure. And a cherry on top with Lew Welch. On the other hand I already feel empty without Thoreau, Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, Woody Guthrie and one of his sons Bob Dylan. Did I say Joseph Cornell yet? As a reader it would be the ton of mountain hermit poets from Asia to the USA spanning centuries, too numerous to single out or actually expose... translated by Sandy Seaton, Red Pine, David Hinton, Corman. Plus the poetry of Issa. Blake. Patchen! A million others.

Kerouac. Tranströmer...it's endless, really. Celan. Ristovic. Rukeyser. Zukofsky. Kenji. One should swim in books and so swim everywhere.

4. With his & Fenollosa's ESSAY ON THE CHINESE WRITTEN CHARACTER & his own translations from the Chinese & Japanese, Ezra Pound created in the American psyche a model for first the imagists, & more recently the American mix of Confucian, Taoist & Buddhist sensibilities that we have come to take for granted in "nature" poetry. Gary Snyder is for me the most easily identified of those following Pound's route. Cid Corman too might have been on Pound's road. Will you describe what if anything your own writing owes to Pound or his still evolving literary & cultural influence?

POUND & OTHERS —

Yes, Ezra Pound was essential and he first came to me through music — from Bob Dylan particularly, since Dylan had him fighting in the captain's tower with T.S. Eliot in his song Desolation Row. When I heard that as a teenager, it flew open all windows for a combined music and literary association. Who would have thought, when I was discovering Pound in the 60s, there were also poets out in the world like the daring Palestinian poet Samih Al-Qasim, spending a great deal of his youth in prisons for the fighter in him. So who was this likewise fighter Ezra Pound? I asked myself. And when finally catching a glimpse of the sharp goatee prominent head of Pound's with hair as wild as Dylan's years later, I only questioned his worth more. Which took me to his books, every one I could locate in print, and I devoured everything straight up to his death in the early 70s. By then he was a silent man, by all appearances a troubled man, fingered by his struggles and wisdom, maybe a bit too cornered within himself. Not exactly my kind of guy.

I would later see the same critter made into many poets who followed Pound's example, or at least fell into the spell of poetry and tackling the muse, and almost all of them were furrowed cynics, self-involved and somehow tortured. I loved the Pound of the magnificent Cantos, straight through to the Pisan era, and moreso the younger adventurer into the literary architecture of fellowship, publishing and courageously messing up the status quo for a greater good. Often at his own peril. His correspondence is fascinating, inventive, colloquial, flinty and genius. His was a given nature simply by his invented living, and his poetry was all together earthy, shrewd and imaginative. Charles Bukowski, of all people said, 'Pound strengthened my arms and my brains'.

But I don't think Pound had the touch for the natural in a poem as wisely and sure as his close friend William Carlos Williams, who swept me up into his dustpan as quick and neat as a diligent housekeeper. It was certainly Pound who took me outdoors and showed me the stars: there was Robert Frost he discovered in England, and Doc Williams, and over there Zukofsky & Bunting majestic languagers, and Irish Joyce pointing to my own family roots, then so much of Europe into the Far East went the Marco Polo needle & thread of the Pound influence, translating and discovering as he cut through the brush of finding new poets, like finding new lands. Inventing his world, which I always consider the benchmark/the core of an artist's worth. From his poetry came friendships, countries and

diverse cultures, an ABC of Reading principle, and a daring to dog despots and intellectuals for years to come. That's a human nature, a human force and one to reckon with. Absolutely essential and unavoidable when it comes with so much terrestrial goodness, that can be made into language and so furthered.

When Pound took me to Williams, Williams took me out into his New Jersey neighborhood of broken glass and a housewife wrapped in her morning robe who reminded Williams of a falling leaf. I used to bring that leaf into classes I visited as roving poet, picking one or two up in the pathway as I approached the school, and in the class of only young women I'd ask one to stand up on a chair, and as the Williams poem was read aloud, she let that leaf drop out of her hand. And all of us would follow the words of the poem and the shape of the dropping leaf...and I'm still following that leaf....that's greater than any poet.

5. The New England tradition comes largely from the transcendentalists, themselves drawing hard on Asia. It's been said that Gary Snyder followed both Pound & Thoreau to Asia. Can you put away all consideration of an Asian esthetic & describe what you personally think of as "nature" poetry, & likewise give some positive historic as well as contemporary examples that are not based in Asian thought?

NON~ASIA & STILL NATURE —

I can only imagine what hasn't been influenced by Asia, which is sort of like speaking about Vermont's weather without bringing up what has first passed through the upper Plains, our general weather maker. Crosswinds are impossible to dictate.

Like Gary Snyder, I first went as a reader to Asia through Thoreau, but then Snyder took me deeper in, while Thoreau kept me back in my native New England woodlands with a much more local boy inquiry to the lay of the land and a language and wording built from studying and hiking, working with one's own hands and making something of it other than a job, perhaps an independence, a philosophy, a telling. Thoreau was key for me in the spirit of that pursuit, but his poetry was mainly lousy with the language. One went to his journals which made the heart of all his books. That is his poetry.

Whitman, Dickinson and Stein were also essential for me — each with their own inventions, style, map of the natural way, which for a writer must come in one hand as language/imagination and in the other hand as a real life. Your own life. Gazing as the animal, all barriers and prejudices fallen away. I believe nature poetry only comes about when the poet or artist passes into and through the subject, so becoming one. Or what Whitman termed 'we are nature'. Jeffers had it on his stone shore Pacific, so did William Everson and Robert Sund for awhile in the fields they worked as young men, certainly Woody Guthrie in his tramp of songs, Lorine Niedecker's hollowed out whistle of poems from a Wisconsin wood, Drummond Hadley high on the horse saddle southwest outback, and similarly James Schuyler in flower arrangement and deckled-days, Frank O'Hara on his NYC beat street rounds, ditto Amiri Baraka in dark continent NJ, Whalen & Welch & now Schelling in many parts of the west, the American snow & earth poems of John Haines,

Wendell Berry, Robert Francis, Jonathan Greene and Michael Mauri; and finally over to Lyle Glazier, Hayden Carruth, David Budbill, Barbara Moraff and Greg Joly in my native Vermont.

Most of us go to Asia for its resources, its vanishing depth; it's inevitable. Although one can remain quite-so with Robert Frost bed rocked to New England; or Ted Enslin's driftings between sea & wood & mind, quite palpable; Ian Hamilton Finlay's Stonypath landscape poem – Thomas A Clark just around the corner, as John Martone gardening America's midwest, or Cralan Kelder riding his poetry bicycle in Amsterdam — Native American chants and storytelling, Appalachian hollers and sayings, the full force of Blues music. A poetry nature need be only as wild and present at once, which is actually an informed and likewise unbalanced teetering of position — whether staying or fleeing — that flash point is where those fine poems are often hatched.

6. In the last few years America has seen a lot more poetry from all parts of the world, & because we are as speakers still generally limited to American English, all necessarily arrives here in translation, in which process it can be argued the poetry becomes both American & as contemporary as the translation. Given the world history of poetry, how appropriate do you think it is for American poets to maintain an American model for poetry? Are there benefits to more European or Hispanic or African exposure, given that most American families have European or Hispanic or African roots? Or will such exposure, given our educational system, ultimately result in views & works as formulaic as those Asia has influenced? In your opinion, does formal education at any level in America offer anything of use in its teaching of either the appreciation or the writing of poetry?

A WORLD OF POETRY —

I believe in a 'form' for poetry, many forms — whether Zukofsky's musical word/depth "A" in his precision of perceptions, mind/sound/body making that poet's language; Richard Wilbur's continued grace with rhyme; or the great burn-to-the-fingertips quixotic short poem; Neruda and Vallejo's odes and manifestos; Frank Samperi's book length sojourns toward angels and sometimes emptiness; bp Nichol's manifestations. It begins with content. De Kooning said 'content is a glimpse'. Whereas, a model I don't agree to, no matter where it comes from. It's already fixed, this 'n that go here and there, too many expectations. Good when building a dog house — you don't want the roof to collapse with snow or the dog on it, but bad for poetry. Poetry must have few expectations, that's its draw and its survival, its eternal mystery, its ability to spin out of thin air something whole from the human dimension. With no guarantees and every element of surprise, otherwise we're cooked.

So every influence is important, circular, fluctuating, no matter from where. As Barbara Guest worded it, 'form occurs in conditions of freedom'. How else will one form a judgment unless carried first through trial and error, opposites to one's own pole, looking down from space at Bucky Fuller's Spaceship Earth and knowing while the continents are fixed, the people are not, and their original habits were tribal and nomadic and meant to wander and mix where possible.

Poetry and song remain the passenger pigeons of cultures, people and lands, whole histories, very easy and conversational to transport. Of course one should try to know more languages than one's own, more songs, more crafts, but not at the loss of one's definition and soul. It's an individual calling. Read everything / discard with care. Travel into / not just with. I find very little in any school, anywhere, for poetry. The best teacher for the poem is any book of poems from anywhere in any language and at any period of time and waiting as patiently for the reader to make-do with it. If anything, we may come to realize the best poetry has always been worldly, and simply waiting for us. Zukofsky practiced 'to think with things as they exist'. No better rule of thumb.

The appreciation for poetry should begin at the youngest ages and carry straight up through graduate school and specialized degrees. I want my doctor and dentist to know poetry and have it in the balance of their hands. Bamboozle cultures at your own loss, whether in translation or revisionist histories — we find the aura of a poetry faraway from the printed page and more in the walk of life, and we find we can begin to formulate our living and being within the care of libraries and research — so develop the body with the mind. Poetry can be written anywhere. The question is: away from the poet, will the poem endure? The poet must learn to endure with everything but poetry.

7. You home schooled your son. That schooling included building some frame structures on your land. Can you describe briefly what beyond building you believe you were able to teach your son? You once taught poetry in a private girl's school as well. Do you think you might have home schooled a poet? What might that agenda have included?

TEACHING AS HOME —

I've always liked Ezra Pound's thought that 'technique is the test of a man's sincerity'. A poet is but technique, so when teaching in any school where I have visited, the essence for me is meeting everyone one-on-one and from a ground level of conversation. The poetry is in the room with us, but we have to welcome it in.

Susan and I were eleven years together as a couple before our only child Carson was born, and hopefully what we taught him was what Susan and I taught one another in the belief of mutual respect and love for one another, through the daily activity of physical work and then family as both a harmony and respect for the individual. Through sharing tools at work with Carson, plus the immensity and mystery to a youngster of building large frame structures, with materials fluctuating between wood and stone, both realized and often found, he had to find his ground within that vortex and with my help, as much as I had to find my own way with and for him and within the physical framework to succeed. Both with the human side and the materials. A technique will evolve, but it may take some years of struggle to realize exactly what it is. Readers should build / builders should read, as musicians should know silence since they plan to add or take from it.

I spell much of this out in my book *Sunswumthru A Building*. Stravinsky liked to advise, 'Love the art in yourselves, not yourselves in the art.' In my book on tools and learning I was never

out to exploit anything more than the love of relationship — tools, relationships, father, son and family. I think it best the student seek out the teacher as far as home schooling is concerned. It's not cut out for everyone, and often a teacher believes he or she has something to 'teach'. Whereas, I believe the student will find a teacher. Carson came and asked us if we would teach him. Not the other way around.

If I had an agenda for a poet I was to teach, it would be as far away from what we know as poetry, so we could sneak up on it and surprise all sides. Mostso our own. Again, remembering Pound: that poetry causes one's life to become vividly present in one's consciousness. It's our calling to be open to learning, mistakes and all. Some of my best classes in poetry have been on the basketball court between regular classes with a pickup game of students, or doing the simple but important math roughing out rafters with a youngster wild eye blue in the sky. After work, hand the youngster an enriched book of poems to spend the night with. Maybe something from Indonesia.

8. Anyone who knows you personally is aware that your interests include film & that you are very likely to have watched most all the new & old films available at any given moment. You also know a great deal about the music that has been popular over your lifetime. You regularly post reviews of those works that you consider to be among the better in their genre. Can you give us some examples, titles with reasons for their inclusion (i.e. generalities as to what makes a good film, a good cd)? You must see some connection here to what makes good poetry, can you explain?

CINEMA —

Auden thought poetry was the clear expression of mixed feelings. I want every poem, every kiss, every hug goodbye to travel from my head down to my toes — is that too much to ask? A barred owl call in this river valley night does this for me. When alone it does one thing, and when out of the greater nowhere it receives another owl call back, it does another thing to me. Alone I am with the one owl and our lonesome poem together. With a calling back, and now two owls, I am excited, extended, joyous at the continuity, and even the possible love I have with my own mate. I could listen all night to these two. I admire the love of others.

This is much of what all life is for me — one owl, and then two owls. The loner we begin as, the coupling and possible continuation until another passage of steering alone, maybe forever, maybe drifting awhile, though forever a calling. Sometimes inward / sometimes outward...and films and music are fully for me — as with literature — ingredients, testimonies, proof and a blessing to our existence. Some folks care nothing about films, others rarely listen to music (though all of life is a music), even more never pick up a book ever in their lives. I know family members who live quite happily this way. Call it curiosity, wonder, the builder in me with stone and carpentry, but I live to make, and all of something makes something more. Within reason. Knowing silence and emptiness, stillness and the approach, rather than the mile, is I believe crucial. So the high lonesome sound of Roscoe Holcomb playing his music is as poetry to me as Shakespeare or Basho.

While sitting down awhile with films over the years and years like Broken Blossoms, Shane, Alphaville, The Mirror of Tarkovsky's, Vengeance Is Mine, all Buster Keaton, Geraldine Page stepping back deeper into Texas in A Trip to Bountiful, Dersu Uzala and so many more is simply an extension for what literature still does for me, and the cinema just as handily. I came to serious film watching after the age of 35 and after decades of intensive reading. Films now open many book pages at once, fanning before the eyes. It allows immediate strange lands, languages, customs and people, or what Gilberto Perez terms 'the spellbinding elsewhere of the screen.' Music, like Roscoe, John Coltrane, Kayhan Kalhor, The Carter Family, Harry Partch, Franco, Radiohead put me into their hands. It's downright important to sometimes be taken out of your own hands, as a poet, and into some other hands, other lands, those loving arms. Two owls.

A LINE OF TALK, by Bob Arnold — THE WINTER 1986 INTERVIEW

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I walked up to a brakeman
to give him a line of talk,
he says if you've got the money
I'll see that you don't walk.

Jimmy Rogers

PREFACE

Jim Koller has had most of these questions from this interview knocking around in his head longer than I have—his questions got me on the stick to write these short essays, and they have been a line of talk in our friendship over the last decade. When Jim and Leslie and the kids visit us, or vice-versa, Leslie, Susan and the kids turn in early at night knowing Jim and I will stay up late talking. Some of my talk I've remembered in these essays. Both Jim and I make a living working with our hands—building and landscape work—and we also write poems and have edited literary magazines. It's no big deal. Others have done it. Speaking for myself, writing poems and hand labor are both one, they work off one another, and combining the editing of a poetry journal are the things I love to do. The hand labor earns a pay check, but moreso it earns the poems I write, and the editing derives from a literary enjoyment of gathering poets into the same pages, no matter their poetic landscape; the poems simply have to be good. Not just good to me, but good for poetry. Like when you hear a Woody Guthrie song, *that's* good. Bad is easy to smell. It's the same idea Whitman lit into our heads when he wrote: "who touches this book touches a man"—we've heard it a hundred times, but how many have you read? How many even get published? I try to find these poems built into such a book, and when I find them I want to put them into other hands.

Robert Frost wrote good poems in his early years, they were poems that felt lived-in, and curiously read as if they were written before Frost knew what he was doing—which doesn't mean he was ignorant—rather what Olson said: "we do what we know before we know what we do." Later, when the world ate him up and gave him 4 Pulitzer prizes the poems have already suffered from too much pollination; they had become only poems, down right expected of him. That treatment would kill anything that bleeds. My point is that his early poems talked a real talk, made a poem sing/made the reader sing, brightened the eyes to a connection of life and words. And to find these words you have to hunt, become a reader—a doer—and one good book will always steer you to at least one more good book, and finally to the man Whitman knows you can touch. In these essays when I write of the outsider I'm thinking of the writer with no easy definition or identity, call him what you want. It is

Montaigne who is always reminding me “The reader who is not willing to give an hour is not willing to give anything.” What isn’t explained in these essays is yours to find—it’s out the door, the tip of an ear to a sound, and how much you really do want to find. Don’t kid yourself.

When Jim and I get together to talk it is usually after a separation of many months, and in my case, months of being with Susan and Carson, working outdoors, talking to myself, piling up books to read at night. To some it might sound too simple, romantic—where are the bad days? they ask. Fortunately I can’t accommodate them. Why people want you to be as miserable as they are, is anyone’s guess. My bad days are mine, I don’t waste them into a poem unless it naturally flows in that direction. I’d rather work it out where bad days begin, in my gut. Sametime, the best love poems are never written. I’ve been lucky and Susan has helped, and so have other friends—just a crow flapping up river sets a pleasure. You notice these things and follow them through. When Jim and I talk he might be sipping whiskey, Leslie gives Susan jam they’ve brought from travels through the southwest, and little Bert and Ida Rose really smile at littler Carson which makes him smile. I want to take it all in, Susan and I talk about the visit later and months fill in between the next visit. Other friends visit and we all talk about what we’re doing—share books, music, go places with the talk and the silences between visits. Jim talks less than I do but when they return from a cross country car trip he likes to get out the map and show us where they’ve been, even though he has crossed this country more times than I can remember. It excites him, he may not always show it, but it goes into the poems. Poets put into poems what they do. My feeling is that the less they do, the more literary tricks show up—gumballs, forced language, because they’re-poets-and-they-must-write-a-poem! Spare us.

I have a photograph near my desk of Van Wyck Brooks and Jaime de Angulo, it’s a favorite of mine. Brooks is wearing a sweater, tie, and suitcoat standing proud into the eyes of the camera. de Angulo is on horseback in a ragged shirt looking sideways from the camera. What a meeting of the minds! Eastern establishment shaking hands with western soil, reminds me of Emerson seeking our John Muir in the Sierra. Like Emerson, Van Wyck Brooks had a generous mind; it was a mind that stayed open, hung on the lip of vulnerability, took chances, and because of that nerve both achieved more than most American literary historians in finding the gist and flesh of our literature. Brooks went looking for Jaime de Angulo because he knew de Angulo, like any good writer, must first live away from the pages of his writing. I first read Jim Koller as a teenager, looked him up and published him in my twenties...we’ve been visiting, working, talking, sharing things ever since. A Line of Talk is some of the hours.

—Bob Arnold

1. We have spoken often of the writer as outsider, coyote & buffalo, part of no organized or even informal group. Could you elaborate on this concept, detailing why these particular writers are relevant to other writers & the general public.

OUTSIDER COYOTE BUFFALO —

The question of how relevant the outsider is reminds me of how you can ask someone to draw out the interior plans to a city or country landscapes—how that city or woodland is comprised—and the map drawn will detail a territory that only reflects the interest of the

mapmaker: the middle-class show no slums. The weekend countryside dweller's map is the exact mileage to the nearest town. The city and countryside lose their identity among their residents, and most times that unmapped place is where the outsider is. The relevance of the outsider is as relevant as those lost horizons, even though they're right under our noses, we pass them by.

The outsider is that saint or visionary who has one, or many, experiences in life where he looks into the heart of nature and God and never turns back. Van Gogh had many. Coyote sees what the outsider sees but many gods talk to coyote. Turf is important, especially west of the Mississippi, but a few have been spotted east. His messages are found from signs integral to the eyes, hands, groin, heart. Coyote moves among us like dirt, water, blood. Buffalo has a passion for self-creation. Has no set locality, but wherever he is, lives in harmony with his life and craft which becomes his instincts. Fame means nothing, he works best in isolation or directly facing the amplifier. Outdoors, to coyote and buffalo, is more important than indoors.

To simplify, I'll integrate for most of the discussion the terms—outsider coyote buffalo—into the name outsider. These 3 should be relevant to other writers but usually that isn't the case. Like the mapmakers, writers stay in their groove—and if they read—they read what is comfortable to them, or expected of them: writers that eat-what-they-eat, talk-like-they-talk. That explains the echo you hear when reading about these writers. The outsider is just that, *outside*—out of town, blowing his horn on the corner, etc. He's Thoreau at Walden, Muir in the Sierra, Lew Welch driving cab in Chicago. Their families can't figure them out, friends (the few) shake their heads, the manuscript pages are folded and hairy, and repeatedly rejected by a clone of publishers who live for today. The outsider lives in yesterday today tomorrow and most likely is read in the tomorrow but is too busy living to care. Some editors want the outsider to be read now and publish their work, taking chances as editors should...nothing may come of it. The outsider makes the real *realer*. Students love it; read it on the sly, children invented it, and the outsider takes note.

With literary gimmick, distant theory, or reference pages that accumulate half a book, life is the outsider's book—and if he is a poet—all music is his rhythm. It would seem natural for the general reader to enjoy it. No schools are needed to curl up with the outsider's book; simply an awareness, and a desire to bring as much of yourself to the book as the outsider reveals to you. Thoreau reads best out of the lunchpail, not in school. Writers that write in school read best in school.

For some reason we expect writers to be famous before we read them. Look at Isak Dineson and the recent unburial of *Out of Africa*—the book is now called a “movie tie-in,” and what do we watch on the screen but a Danish woman finding her independence take soil on African ground. A nut case in her lifetime to many, but romantic and durable on the screen. The book has been around for years...(Hemingway spoke well of it at his Nobel Prize ceremony)...along with Jack London's *Martin Eden* there is no better example of a writer who followed her heart, withstood the struggle, broke rank, and busted her hump physically with the land, its wildlife and people—which many years later produced a book on that life which has no modern equal. On the movie screen it's fantasy and safe, off the screen it scares us.

Barbara Moraff has nitched out a life these past 20 years in Vermont which I think scares some people. It's off the screen, she lives down the road. A mother, potter and poet, who I believe has written some of the most songful poems Vermont will hear. Edgy, lamp-warm poems with rats in the firewood, and you can pour it all over snow and eat it. Of course where the tar road begins not many have heard of her and bookstores don't stock her books and she isn't that easy to edit anyway, since it's life we're talking about here—*made into poem*. That's architecture built with two hands that fits exactly back into two hands. There is no house, love, or poetry that is built better than that.

2. Some have said that they thought the outsider we speak of might truly carry the traditions of an American Literature that those in either the university or the closely knit groups of writers often found in cities have lost sight of. If you think this is likely, have you any thought relevant?

CARRYING TRADITIONS —

I don't want to whitewash any group, but if we consider the outsider—writers like Whitman, Dickinson, Melville—and they all certainly fit the bill: runaways from their homeland in love with their homeland, who worked best as loners and died as mysteries to the public, then we know the outsider has carried the tradition, since no writer worth his weight hasn't been influenced today by one of these writers.

Otherwise, I guess it depends on whose American Literature? there seem to be a few, depending on where you look. Let's take Whitman and Dickinson as examples and attempt to tie them to the flesh of poets working today. Whether the university poets or professors like that or not, we're going to find the poets that most of them have never heard of, or won't read. Whitman asked us to "look for me under your bootsoles" and today's boot-sole poets, who have carried the tradition, would be poets like Ed Dorn, James Koller, Bob Kaufman, Janine Vega, Thomas McGrath...workers, singers and visitors, who have all made books from a life lived in many combinations and have shown us they are here to stay. Each one is an outsider, or coyote, or buffalo, but they don't call themselves that, someone else does. Emily Dickinson lived so quietly as a poet in Amherst that few knew a poet was there, just like Lorine Niedecker in Wisconsin. But Louis Zukofsky and Cid Corman clearly knew Niedecker was there, and made connections. Even though you had to special order Niedecker's books of poetry just one year ago in most bookstores, poets who have come from her work were already writing and talking, and it skips a stone back to Lorine, Emily.....

I imagine a closely knit group, be it in the city or country, have good merit. Though reading the headdress of poets and writers that flock to writing seminars at Breadloaf every summer has no merit. I don't blame all poets—a job is a job—and occasionally a good poet, a shaker, is found visiting Ripton, Vt., but it's not the norm. The norm is the same type of poet. And the only tradition I think Breadloaf is sustaining is keeping those New England clapboards white. Of late I'm more skeptical about the poets that move from the city to the country to bake the country poem. Not much of a tradition there, more a personal search for the good life without any roots ever watered into the grounds. Poems galore are written while the firewood is buried under the first snow. Getting your shit together is the oldest tradition.

3. *What part does work with one's hands have to do with writing?*

HANDS —

Working with my hands has everything to do with my writing, but my hands usually want to say less about it and do more off the page—look for the rhythm in my poems—that's the hands.

There are piles of books of good example that show the sense and rhythm of working with one's hands and Eric Hoffer's *Working and Thinking on the Waterfront* is one of the best. The work is not explained as much as it is just there—it's a job, his life, it's daily. The thinking was something he did as a workingman, not the other way around: 1 hour of wood splitting for 8 hours of deskwork, that wasn't for him. He unloaded freight on the docks of San Francisco as a longshoreman, made his pay, and at night and days off wrote his books of philosophy and politics, and he made pretty good money from those books. But he was always his own man—definitely a buffalo writer. The writing and handwork tied together into a human pulse that moves the pages of *Working and Thinking*, and you get a clear idea how one couldn't live without the other for very long.

But it's not for everyone. Wallace Stevens probably raked leaves, at most, in Hartford and he wrote great poetry. The poem, or “building god through the labor of seeing” as Rilke said it, that revelation, comes as it has to independently for the poet. A good ear can hear what is true and what is false, that ear has to be trained and then trusted. So you don't hear the hands in Stevens, but you do feel the interior of the body, something tropical, and glimpses of lightning.

Working with my hands is what I do—I learned at an early age—and have tried to surround it with books ever since. Working in the family lumber business, learning the building trade, unloading boxcars of western spruce (smelling the west), listening to workers joke and gripe...later on teaching myself stone work, feeling the hands hurt, talk back, begin to sense what it really is to *touch*. If one is going to write a poem about felling a tree, or planting a tree, it can have all the correct words, technique, order—but if it doesn't give the reader the tree: roots, sky, ground, work of hands, then the poem isn't anything but words without the lights on. Don't give it to another poet to read for authenticity, let a woodcutter read it. Watch what he says.

4. *What is your political/ social stance? How does this affect (or effect) your work? Should writers concern themselves with political/ social situations?*

BODY SOUL NAME —

I consider anything political which knows its rights. We've got a malamute and its minus 5 degrees this morning and the only place where there is sun is near a backyard apple tree, and

he is sitting right in that place of sun. Won't move. And Jack knows he doesn't have to move, the day is his, and he is causing no one harm—he is living according to his nature, as Thoreau said everyone should do.

To be political, to be anything, is to give yourself completely to whatever you are doing. Some writers work all day at their trade and at the end of the day walk to the mailbox with their writing and wait for a check...the next writer might suggest for this writer to walk past the mailbox and around the corner and see that he has a burning nuclear plant slushing on the shores of his favorite river...and a third writer will drop his bags beside these two writers and begin to talk about the open road. Politics is the footing in the process of being alive, and for the writer it should sound familiar: "In the beginning, was the word"—it's where all good writing starts, with a footing.

The Eskimo say a man is made up of 3 parts: body soul name. That's as political as I am and I believe it's about as political as one can get. You can vote for this and vote for that but if you don't put your money where your mouth is, it only proves the shame of the vote. It's 24 hours. It's body soul name. If lived true to form it draws man through politics and back to man—most stop in the politics stumped. The best of our writers moved from man and into politics and back to man, everyday, because they take gambles and make it their business, it's part of their survival and what finally puts an edge to their writing. And there is a crushing machine out there waiting to spit them out into sameness—so they can be safe, like everyone, employable. They tried it with Vallejo, Mayakovsky, Brecht, and lost teeth for it.

Walter Lowenfels wrote "the revolution is to be human" and that's akin to the Eskimo body soul name. The writer must be human. Not a great man in his books and a piece of cold iron in person, it's easy to be a nice guy on paper. It's to be an activist fulltime, which in society quickly shapes up into being an outlaw. An outlaw has to be careful who he talks to, how he avoids the law, lives quietly and has no need of a big stick. If he chooses the big stick, or the big stick is put in his hands and it feels good for a few days, like Hemingway, then he's going to have to slug with it the rest of his life.

The activist, the writer, the one-with-words, watches Washington, Moscow, Belfast, Beirut; if he doesn't, no one else will. TV follows these places like a puppy. The writer has the ability to frighten governments, make it run around asking questions like "*Exactly who are you?*" Tom Paine had that power. Victor Jara was murdered because he had that power. The writer composes poems to the bear, the sound of high-heels, Larry Bird at the foul line, and the next day works on poems of our murderers: Pinochet, Marcos, Kissinger. A writer/activist is someone who climbs 80 feet into a redwood tree to save it from the assault of the lumber companies and is buried an hour later by the logger who cut it down, because he is also an activist, who has to put food on his big table. Better to go after the corporate leaders in the shiny city who think of redwoods as patio decks. Too many activist/writers get their photographs into Time or on the back of a book jacket...the best activist is hardly seen, the results are seen. Look how frustrating it is because Salinger or Pynchon won't show their faces to the public. They both know that without a face they move better around us.

5. *You have published Longhouse for years. Would you explain your approach to publishing. If you were to start it all over again at this time, how would you do it differently?*

LONGHOUSE —

In the early 1970's I found a plot of land to work off of, built a cabin on it to house myself, the books and tools, and shortly thereafter began Longhouse in 1973. My approach to publishing is to gather all walks of poets into the same bundle of pages and make it somehow jell. To inform my readers with poetry and an understanding that the reader has to be included in the lifestyle of the publication—since I believe in financial independence of grants/funds, no ties are encouraged with anything but flesh. As an editor I'm after the serious working poet; any style/and region. The idea is to move the poetry around...to excite people, make readers, bring readers and poets together.

When I started out I was involved with very few poets. The tough part was locating the poets I wanted to publish, and they lived everywhere: California, Wisconsin, New England, Kyoto. So I hit on a few poets I had been reading and admired, but didn't expect much since they didn't know me from fox. Hayden Carruth, John Clellon Holmes, Ted Enslin—each one responded with enthusiasm at what I was doing and put their shoulders to the wheel by sending poems, donations, other poets to contact. The important thing back then was they *answered*, many don't. Word got around. Before long I was trading publications with other publishers like Jim Well, John Judson, and Rosemarie Waldrop (all poets, too) who were each generous with their trade and knew that publishing a book didn't stop with the book: there was a sharing and a life devoted to it. At the start the magazine was called Our Poets Workstop, which was soon chopped down to Workshop, and by the time I met Susan and the cabin got a second story and the garden was widened, it all became a home in the name Longhouse.

I think we've done pretty well. Nobody owns us, and we have about 100 readers, and those 100 readers are the type to pass the magazine around to another 200 readers. It's not how many readers you have, it's what type of reader, and ours seem to be after that range of poetry light. I've lost count of how many issues, broadsides, booklets we've published, in fact the early issues were given away so free I don't even have copies. But someone's got them...most likely Tarachow, Giannini, Lewandowski, Levy—those are the poets of my age, each a personal friend, who have been the meat and potatoes: the give and take: for an editor.

I doubt I would do much differently if I was starting all over—in fact I try to change gears every few years within the Longhouse—smaller off-shoot publications like Poets Who Sleep and Scout. The tone of the entire publication reflects a habitat with fresh water flowing by, exactly what Susan, Carson and I have here on the Green River. It's homespun, printed by us and collated on the kitchen table. At the start we published more frequently and were publishing poets from the US and abroad—today I'm more interested in the outsider, the buffalo, as I like to call him. It's a writer near extinct who for years has roamed the literary world from the fringes, but like the buffalo he is a pathmaker, a road builder. This type of writer believes in no separation from his life and craft, the language grazes through it. I'd like to collect a small library of these buffalo writers into simple made books and place them in the right hands. Now, the “right hands” isn't always the person who already knows the

song—if that were the case we'd read only one another in our little cliché and be the same idiots we point our fingers at. Emerson said “give me initiative, spermatic, prophesying, man-making words”—that's the secret. Some poets gave me eyes and now I want to share those eyes.

6. Is poetry as it exists in our society of any value to the general reader or public? What do you see as the state of poetry, i.e.; healthy, out of touch? How can things improve?

STATE OF POETRY —

In one of Lorine Niedecker's poems she offers—

There are two kinds of artists,
Those who write for people and those who write
For art's sake.

It's that simple, and I like a combination of both. Poetry should be of value to the general reader, I've seen it so. If I visit a school to work poetry and on the first day I see faces blinking eager but unsure, I know there are reasons. Most of the general public is that way with poetry because it takes time to warm up to a poem. It's a job of the poet to shed some warmth. It's been drummed into the public, usually by schools, that poetry is a “mystery” we have to solve. Symbolism is attached. Very serious discussions take place...the poem is then frisked for meaning, once found it is disemboweled and pinned to the barbed wire fence...same thing we do with anything wild, which is where poetry originates. After the mystery has been solved and those funny lines stretched out into a “meaning,” the public can then enjoy it. Maybe. I see a lot of people in the backrow asleep.

I one time read a poem of mine about stone work to a group of teachers that asked to hear the poem, and I received gestures of appreciation after reading it, but no spark. Later on, walking out to my car, I met up with a crew of maintenance workers spreading sand off a pickup truck onto ice and one of them, a friend, for a lark, hollered over for “a poem.” I had the stone poem fresh in my head and recited it, a short poem, and at the last line all 3 nodded their heads and raised their shovels in salute. *That's* spark. They could have thrown the shovels at me hating the poem, that would be spark. Poetry needs spark, Poetry is written from a spark.

To reach people the poet has to write like the whole person that he is, who just happens to write. The reader has to do the same—give that wholeness—wake up past that state of semi-anesthesia. It isn't the language that scares the reader, rather the gooey pretense, that air some poets strut because they have nothing else. Poets are tuned into the sharpened verbal tide hashed together with being alive. They work on the page or as storytellers, and it takes work to read that page or to listen well. Some carpenters will build an entire house without ever touching a handsaw. Reading books and listening are handsaws—they bring you closer to others and make you meet yourself.

For the reader to sit down with a book of poems he has to be inspired to sit, he won't sit for nothing. So if a poet has written a poem about a hawk he has to bring that poem alive on the

page for the reader and the hawk. He can only do that by being-hawk. Fancy words won't help, only the ability of the poet's experience with language and a hawk will have the reader feel-hawk. It has to have feathers, claws. It has to be the flight of the language matching the flight of the hawk—and the reader isn't stupid, he'll love it, and read on.

The state of poetry had become a State. Since government funding has perfumed the scene it has both assisted poets and smaller presses and made most junkies for the money—a fine example of colonialism. Some haven't lost their integrity, a little money one year didn't hurt after years of the writing struggle...but whenever anything is government funded it is being watched, pegged, reeled in with red tape, and so is the recipient. That's the bureaucrat's job, he has nothing better to do. Editors and poets have plenty to do: they need to publish magazines and books that gather the best minds of their generation, and it doesn't matter if it's 25 copies or 1,000: you're publishing, you're moving, you're making true connections. Poets need to get into the schools to excite the kids, the kids are just waiting for it. He has to show students and teachers that Cummings was delicately smart as well as a wild-and-crazy-guy, not a duffer like their poet friend who has tenure. Poets need to work with the school basketball and football teams and share the poetry of pro-athletes Alex English and Todd Christenson; it won't be Shakespeare, but it will say more to them NOW because it's poetry written where they're coming from. Once inspired, one thing leads to another. Poets of the 80's were listening to Bob Dylan in the 60's and some are still listening while reading Pound and Petrarch; things connect. Poets have to get into the schools and tap these roots into the soil. On the job, more gingerly, the poet shares—not expecting immediate results—but like a gardener waters, weeds, hoes, gets dirty, relaxes, and the rows somehow flower straight. If they don't, plant another row.

Over in Europe poetry can still be found nailed to a post or tree (just like Villon's time) and a friend, while over there, read one he liked and mailed it back to me and I nailed it up on my wall in Vermont. That's connection. A poem having a friend think of a friend and then sending it over to make the tie. That's the strength of the poem and friendship, and it was up to me to nail that poem back up, or pass it along...to the next nailer.

A fine poet in San Francisco, George Evans, recently passed on a poem my way and it was one he knew I liked. George Oppen's "Forms of Love," printed handsomely on a straightforward placard that he said was running on 17,000 buses around the country. That's a lot of nailing up, and one sure way of improving things: get poetry visible to the people by choosing a poet of strong human examples, then select one of his poems that will ring in the ears forever, or at least for that day. That's enough, that's everything. It educates, it has people stop to read (they do) and gives the gift of a good poem to the people. Maybe it will agitate a few to question the poems that run in the New Yorker each week (many don't seem to ring like Oppen's).

To have healthy poetry we have to have healthy poets. Poets that walk the countryside like Wordsworth and Basho...who jump to that clickety-clack of the city, like Paul Blackburn...who feel the land and look into the eyes of the people they write about. We have to have poetry editors who don't complain, especially within the small presses—so what if no one is reading the books you publish—the idea is to publish good poetry that will eventually find good readers. Whitman took his poetry door to door. Find your readers, cut back your distribution before losing your independence; unlike the large publishers the small

press publisher shouldn't be in it to get fat, it's for the poem. If you make a buck and don't lose face, terrific. Poets have to read everything, or at least if you read Wilbur then read Whalen. And vice-versa. The healthiest poets I know help each other, and make their living faraway from poetry and with poetry; they don't have their eye on any marketplace, but on the muse. And the muse was the guy talking to himself last night in the laundromat...the muse were the geese you heard flying over so high they were out of sight.