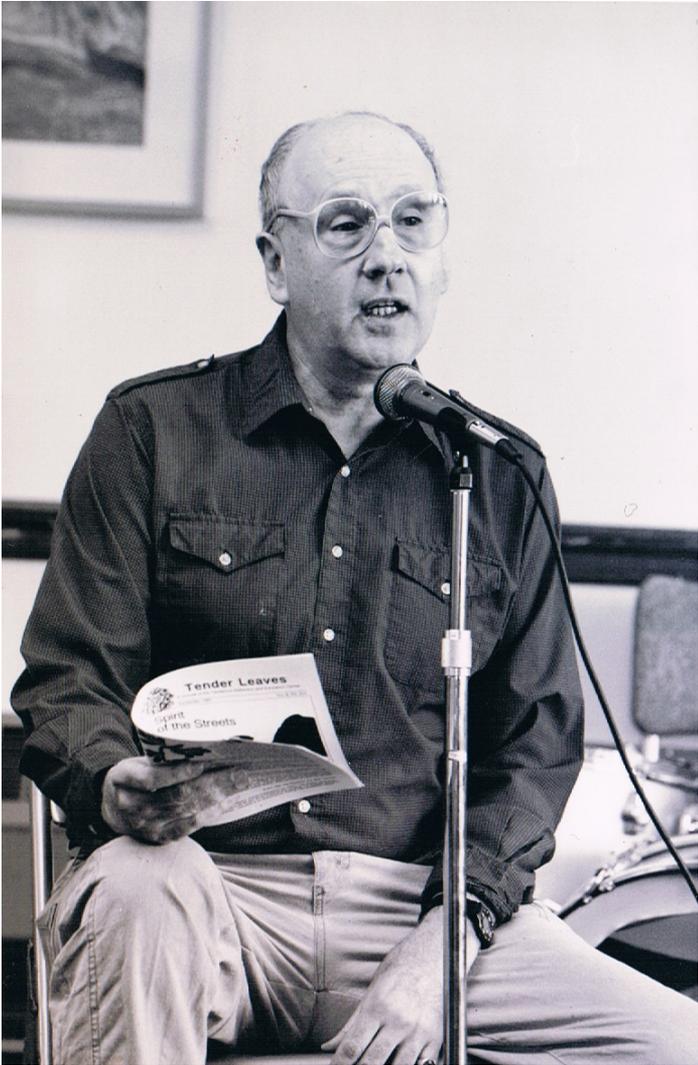


Remembrances and Poems of Rhett Stuart



A. Rhett Stuart

September 18, 1931 - October 11, 2009

Remembrances and Poems of Rhett Stuart

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www.freedomvoices.org

books@freedomvoices.org

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Rhett Stuart grew up on the James River in Virginia with dreams of becoming a singer. In the 50's he studied journalism in Europe and music in New York. In 1960 he came to California where he sang baritone in a show at the Pasadena Playhouse. A Tenderloin District and San Francisco resident for many years, Stuart performed and read at diverse venues in the Bay Area including: the San Francisco Press Club, the 509 Cultural Center, Intersection for the Arts, Small Press Traffic, KPFA radio, and cafes, libraries, and senior centers. He was an active member of the San Francisco writing community and before his death lived in the Hayes valley neighborhood. He was the first poet published by Freedom Voices (in 1989) and his book, *Man Offbeat*, is still in print.

Freedom Voices offers this memorial booklet in acknowledgement of his role in starting the press and his many artistic and poetic contributions to our communities. The contents are drawn from the Freedom Voices website and from his voluminous store of poems. Edited by Eric Robertson and B. Jesse Clarke.

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Albert Stuart's Obituary in the San Francisco Chronicle. November 15, 2009



Albert Rhett Stuart Died October 11, 2009 from an aortic dissection. He was born September 18, 1931 in Newport News, VA and reveled in memories growing up on the banks of the beautiful and wide James River. Rhett showed an early aptitude and interest in music. Despite formal piano lessons, he learned the songs he loved by ear and played throughout his life in F-sharp (the black keys). In his 20s he moved to New York to become a Broadway singer/actor. He lived there through the decade of the fifties, studying voice and

immersing himself in Broadway's heyday of musical theatre. Rhett interned as an NBC page and loved sharing tales of the stars that came before his desk. In 1961, he came west and played a Zook brother across from his real brother, King, in a production of Plain and Fancy at the Pasadena Playhouse, before following the coast up to San Francisco. In the early 70's Rhett began to direct his love of rhythm and voice into poetry. He often said he loved nothing more than a blank page and he wrote on a daily basis. Musicality and joy of word play influenced his work, which he read at dozens of San Francisco venues, riffing on reminiscences and daily life. Years of training as a singer and at the National Academy of Broadcasting came through in the mesmerizing smoothness of his lovely, baritone voice. In a culture where it's not always easy to find those who follow the bohemian credo, Rhett was a mentor and an inspiration to many. He made connections throughout the art community of San Francisco, much of it in the Tenderloin. He attended writing workshops at Hospitality House and the Tenderloin Reflection and Education Center, where he also sat on the Board of Directors. Rhett was a great believer in

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treating oneself with kindness, just as we would others we care about. Deeply spiritual and philosophical, Rhett helped establish the Tenderloin Self-Help center and was one of the original peer counselors who went to Esalen for training in reflective-listening. In 1989 his book *Man OffBeat* was published by Freedom Voices, and reprinted in 1990 and '94. This past decade, Rhett enjoyed creating colorful sketches while continuing to write and play music. He generously shared his work with family and friends. Rhett is survived by three cherished brothers-King, William, and Gray-and a large, extended family. He will be greatly missed by all who had the pleasure to know him. A celebration of his life and art is being planned and will be announced on his memoriam website at FreedomVoices.org.

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From: Jane Stuart Edel

Rhett was my uncle and Godfather. He was such a sweet, special spirit, and saw the best in everyone. I'm sad he's no longer with us, but happy for him. He is in a MUCH better place now, and he's not in pain anymore. During Christmas time in 2007, he sent my family a type written poem that has been on my refrigerator since then.

Titled, "**Said Again**", it is as follows:

All changes,
except heart—
in remembrance of gone loved ones--
in friends now here,
every passing stranger,
animal, bird, tree,
grass blade,
breathing rock and wave, sand grain.
Live, now
whether old, feeble or ill,
life here responding.
Life responds.
Hallowed, be our time,
heart, love
of no gender,
here alongside you in every living being,
here, and ones gone
only from sight.

Rhett Stuart—December 4, 2007

The day I heard he'd died, I came home and read this poem again. He was wise beyond wisdom. He would often say things that I wanted to jot down immediately, he just had insight into people and this world. My 8 year old daughter said a couple of nights after he passed at the end of her nightly prayer, "And God? Please take care of my mom's uncle, because he's new up there. Show him around and make him feel welcome!"

I think Rhett will be running things in no time. God bless you Rhett, I love you.

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From: Gray Stuart

As you can imagine my thoughts have been with brother Rhett since he died. I have wanted to say some things about him but he had such a multi-faceted personality it has been hard to select what to say. But here goes. As we know he had a keen sense of humor. When I had a stroke he called me at the hospital and bombarded me with questions and his wishes for me. I finally interrupted him and said "Stop your whining" and both of us had a good long laugh. His call was great medicine.

When he was a mid-teenager he made friends with a neighbors Red Irish Setter named Lady. He felt sorry for the dog who was confined to her yard most of the time. He went to see the owner of the dog and asked if he could take Lady for a walk from time to time. She, the owner, said yes and from that time on Lady and Rhett were inseparable. When Rhett approached Lady to take her out for a walk her tail was wagging at a hundred miles an hour. She covered him with dog kisses and then they would cross the road to the riverbank in a search for new adventures.

It is my belief that people who love animals are generally good people. Rhett was a good conversationalist and listener. He was a good student of the things he loved and they were many. He loved his family and friends, animals, art, the written word, the theater, reading, acting and singing and more.

Need I say that we need more folks like him.

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From: Eric Robertson

Rhett had such an interesting history. He had hundreds of stories. Some of them were just little snapshots of his life that I loved to hear over and over again. I think my favorite was when he was hired to play Davy Crockett to promote the movie that had just come out. Rhett was costumed in the full suit of fringed buckskin and coonskin cap and sent to some little strip mall. I believe this was when he lived in NYC and the mall was somewhere in New Jersey. Rhett was a big man, 6'5", and a southerner ta boot so you might figure this would be a good fit. Anyway, a kid came up to Rhett and said, "Hey Davy, what'd you do with that Bahr (a southern pronunciation, though probably not a Virginian pronunciation, of bear). Rhett looked at the kid and said, "Bahr. What's a bahr?" The kid looked at Rhett with an expression of disgust and walked off dismissing him with a wave, saying, "Awe, your not Davy Crockett." I loved to watch Rhett act that out.

Rhett never took jobs too seriously, though. Jobs for the most part where just a way for Rhett to get by so that he could do what he really loved--which was to witness art, listen to art and create art. He loved to go to the movies and believed he was one of the luckiest people on earth to have lived in NYC during it's Broadway heyday. Whether it be singing, playing piano, writing, or drawing, Rhett was a true artist. He loved the process of making and reveled in other's creations.

I will miss his poems and his drawings and his piano playing and most of all I will miss his voice, his concern, his caring and his humour. He was a great friend.

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From: Laura Feldman

I have a zillion and one letters and poems from Rhett. Once, sometimes twice a month I would expect to find that familiar envelope in my mailbox.

We corresponded some 16 years after I left San Francisco. This was dotted with phone calls but those were somehow not as intimate as the letters. He wrote to me wherever I happened to be in the world or in my world. Letters filled with love, spiritual reminders, some of the stuff of life but more the feeling of life. And always a poem (or two or three). He was one of the most prolific poets I've ever known. We met in the wonderful Tenderloin Writer's Workshop, back in the day, before he began publishing his work—a poetic journey journal of his life, as was he—truly sui generis.

We would spend hours talking about how we were in the world. We walked miles in these conversations. Late one night walking home through a deserted China town, just as we came to the big intersection of Stockton and I want to say and Bush Streets, money started floating down around us, like snow, fluttering \$20's. We ran around snatching the bills off the ground, catching them in the air, laughing like kids. When others appeared to grab their share we walked on.

Once when I was having trouble sleeping he suggested I do what he did to get to sleep—watch one of his favorite movies or plays in his head. I gaped —you mean the entire thing? Yes he said, songs et al.

Once when I was describing some life struggle to him-- he said—that's wonderful—you're so true to yourself and you don't even know who you are!

Ah Rhett, my mentor, my dearest friend.

He was one of those people who made the world lovely and sane.

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From: B. Jess Clarke

Rhett was above all committed to art.

His keen perception and intimate love of words yielded a hybrid abstract /sensual poetry that challenged, soothed, puzzled and amused.

I'm sad at Rhett's physical passing but feel his deeply rooted spirit is still flowering.

Rest in Peace Rhett!

From: Douglas Marshall

A man who not only had a talent for speaking, and creating, but also for listening and caring, and giving well-intended advice and guidance, when called upon for it. A good friend and someone who made a difference in this world, and to all he came in touch with. He left his mark on this world.

From: Dennis Finnegan

Rhett was one of the first people that I met when I came to San Francisco. He was probably the most enthusiastic person about music and art that I've ever met. I would play him a guitar piece that I'd been working on and he would be utterly engrossed and silent until I finished. He and I went to the opera once and I will always remember the joy in his face, I thought to myself; I haven't felt that way since I was a child. That was Rhett: a man who somehow managed to keep that immense enthusiasm his entire life. I miss him.

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From: Mike Mewborn

I met Rhett for the first time through Eric and Freedom Voices, about the time FV was considering for publication a short novel I'd written. Rhett was reading some of his poetry at a TREC open mic. I was struck by his urbanity and poise. Eric introduced us and, wishing to contribute to the exchange, I offered my small book to Rhett for his perusal. He graciously put aside whatever he was currently reading to give my book a looksee and then took the time to write a very supportive note. That was ten years ago. I still have the note, written in cursive long-hand, blue ink. Rhett flatteringly quoted this or that phrase from the novel and, in his characteristic jazzed-up style, described the effect each segment had upon him. Nothing could have been more encouraging to an as yet unpublished writer. I later asked Rhett if I could quote his letter for use as a blurb on the back of the book and of course he had no objection. When I returned to S.F. to promote the novel, Rhett put me up in his small apartment for three days, over the course of which he and I had a number of fine discussions regarding the writing life. In a culture where it's not always easy to find older males who continue to follow the bohemian credo, Rhett was a mentor and an inspiration.

From: Kathleen Moore

What I remember most about Rhett was that he lived for art and defined himself in every way as an artist. This was not a choice on his part, he just was. His accent was old East Coast and he was a gentleman. He and I shared some sort of special rapport that was built on maybe a common romanticism and aesthetic viewpoint. I just know that we were mutually delighted in each other's presence. Rhett enriched my life in many ways small and large. I am grateful that I got to share so many lovely moments with him

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From: Kitty Costello

Rhett on His Way Upstairs

Last time I saw Rhett was at the library. We shared just a short pause for a hello and how-de-do with me on my way to work the front desk and Rhett on his way upstairs... to Literature or the Music department no doubt. Later, when I heard he'd died, I had to wonder, "Would I have done it differently if I'd known that was our last time?" And the answer was no. If I'd known, I probably would have filled our moment with something too chattery or cloying. It wasn't like that with Rhett. It was simply his presence, his clear attention, his kind kind heart. All of that was right there in the moment, and in retrospect it was a perfect moment.

Rhett was maybe the only guy I know that wasn't walking around buzzing and beeping with gadgetry to keep in touch, and I'm so glad he got out of this life without ever burdening himself with cell phone or twitter. He stayed in touch right then and there in the here and now. He wouldn't allow his day, his attention, his being to get swept away in busy, pestery clap-trap. Poetry was the most important thing. And poetry wasn't just ink on a page. It was a way of being present, fully in relation in the world, to the world. May we all continue to absorb this wise lesson of being ever-more-deeply for a long time to come.

You always got the feeling from Rhett that he wasn't quite from here, but he wasn't from anywhere else you could put your finger on either. Yes, he was from Virginia, from small-town life along the James River, but I imagine that folks from there would say he was from somewhere else, too. He was a guy passing through, but not on his way to somewhere in particular. He was a fully-present observer, yet he was in his own world, one more sensitive, more awake, more kind than the rest of us. And one where the sounding out of things was done for the sheer pleasure they gave in the throat and ear... sounds full of rich story, but even more importantly, with rhythm driving and carrying from inside, underneath.

Rhett had a priest-like quality to him. I remember calling him when our cat, Emily Dickinson, died. We adopted Emily after Mary TallMountain passed away, and we had her for her last 3

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years. Rhett was a cat-lover and a dear friend to Mary, but I called him more because he was a deep spirit, deep and wide. I was having a desparate moment of feeling like I didn't know how to properly honor Emily's passing, what rites to perform, what words to say, how to make it holy. Rhett was the guy I called, not so much to tell me how, but to put me back in touch with the holiness inside of me, the part of me that knows my own how, and rests safely there.

In retrospect, I think Rhett was also priest-like in the sense that one could confess things to him. I never particularly availed myself of this, but I feel a certainty that I could have told Rhett anything that felt like a secret or a sin, and he would have received and absolved it without judgement. He had that power to absolve.

It seems so universal that we all second-guess ourselves after the death of a loved one, but with Rhett's death I find myself surprisingly devoid of should-haves, wish-I-wouldas or if-I'd-onlys. I think that is mostly due to Rhett's way of being. He did the whole thing, complete, right in each and every moment, nothing left over or left out.

Yet it has felt hard to begin formulating memories or eulogies. As others have begun to have their say, I'm realizing that together -- no rush, over time -- we'll be carving out a collective true-to-life portrait of the *Man Offbeat*.

I think more than anything, I'll remember the way Rhett would greet me or say farewell by puttng his palm sweetly to my cheek, looking me full in the eye and calling me "Darling" with that slight, Virginia drawl. "Hello, Darling." "Take care, Darling." I sure am gonna miss that.

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From: Terry Messman, Editor Street Spirit Newspaper

Farewell to a Gentle Poet

Rhett Stuart, an accomplished poet and active member of the San Francisco writing community, died on October 11, 2009. His book of poems, *Man Offbeat*, was published by Freedom Voices in 1989, and is still in print. Stuart's poetry was published many times in *Street Spirit*.

His writing was a creative outpouring of convoluted sentences, unexpected word choices and wildly unpredictable grammatical structures. His poems were often gentle, introspective, and elegiac, as he contemplated the arc of his lifelong journey. His poetic re-creation of the course of his life carried him from poignant recollections of early childhood to the bittersweet passage into his later years. Many of Stuart's poems contained lyrical passages expressing joy and wonder at the beauty of nature, and, in nearly the same breath, scathing indictments of a technological society he blamed not only for despoiling the earth, but for ravaging the human soul itself.

For all his appreciation of wild nature, Stuart was primarily a poet of the inner city, intimately acquainted with the pulse of San Francisco, and with a vast and curious love of the people who lived on its streets and slept in its alleys. Through his poetry, Stuart gave visibility and voice to the otherwise unseen masses of homeless people and desperate souls living on the stark streets of the Tenderloin.

Stuart was a gentle, poetic soul, yet his artistic voice sometimes rose in fierce indignation at society's mistreatment of the outcast poor. He loved the beauty he found in art, in nature, and in his memories of his beloved parents; and he fiercely hated the injustice of society, and the persecution of the poor. He expressed reverence for the human souls stranded on the streets of the inner city, and it was the depth of that reverence that led him to condemn the societal forces that had abandoned them there.

He was an integral part of the Tenderloin Reflection and Education Center, a group of artists and writers dedicated to

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celebrating the humanity and creativity of people living on the margins of society in the Tenderloin. Stuart grew up on the James River in Virginia, and even though he lived on the rough, raw streets of the Tenderloin District, he somehow carried himself in a courtly manner, with a trace of chivalry that seemed to come from another time and place, somewhere a little more gallant and refined.

Like many San Francisco poets, Stuart was a nonconformist from head to toe. He willingly chose a life of Spartan simplicity, because it gave him the freedom he needed to devote himself to his art. As a sensitive soul, he refused to buy in to our dog-eat-dog society.

Instead of ambition and materialism, he had his poetry. Instead of spending his life as a slavish worker-drone, he was a misfit, a gentle rebel, a willing outcast who chose a life of contemplation.

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Excerpted from Albert's Collar

After a racist comment by a parishioner to Rhett's second cousin, a minister, also named Albert Rhett Stuart, (after their great grandfather), Rhett reports that his cousin had the following exchange:

"Mr. Stuart, I happen to be one of the pillars of the church!"

"Gee, I'm really sorry to hear that. I understand our pillars have termites."

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James River Dreams

Boy river said "I'll
walk you thru dreams of future
but remember me"

Now dream of the river
Now-dream,
of the river

Of the river

that said I'll walk you through

Meantime religion heavy like grand opera:
operetta unto American musical meditative,
mediates lightened for carriage
feathered for flight river gleamed yellow brick road onto
prediction, a long while flame – finally flickering
cinder to bypass agony of its departed spark;
its fire, thing I remember dreaming of the river
when flame there first was first dream,
when through passage of yellow brick, flame became

I remember flame more wide than river

Now dream scheme of the river
like it said but remember me and I'll walk you through

Now-dream,
of the river

Of the river

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Excerpted from The Omnipotent Writer Mind

And I should write forever. It would be so unfair otherwise. It is said life is not fair. It is death that is unfair, that I intend to return and write again like I did this time, and like I had this real god time!

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Pain Talks

(Introduction : Quote from the play, "Claudia" by Rose Franken: "Make friends with pain.")

Maturity, like love,
is reality, riddleless.
Pain either screams, screens then talks,
or screens first,
screams then talks.
But listen.
For pain really talks really!

Says
everything matters and is lost,
that nothing matters and does.
Both nothing and everything matters,
but nothing comes first,
then everything.
Always was.
Is always this way.
Shall ever be so –
nothing followed by everything
followed by loss
but never nothing again –
more !!!

Everything, then lost
then everything again
but nothing was only once
if nothing ever was at all.
Pain says to
myself
to you,
"Come to terms."
Not "Can we?"
We can.
Can love it.
Find that mystery.
Embrace then bask it.

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It all matters and does not
and simultaneous, does.
Take that seriously.
Seriously take that.
Then halt the riddle.
When I stop the riddle,
stopped as riddle itself,
this eternalll, is certainty.
Riddleless riddle of life with no death.

Acceptance is maturity.
Pain comes and love is all truth,
all.
Banish it and it can't vanish, not ever,
and never has.
In the last analysis,
let love always breathe
both remembered
and instantly touched.
Love is just.
Believe it or not.
Believe it.
Or not,
and lose.

Just let just-love
Good luck
Forget the riddle
Mature
Let love

Pain writes.
Pain writes us.
Pain writes this.
Befriended, befriends again.

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Excerpted from Fun-con Con-fun

“Once a girl asked me if I thought I was indecisive.
I said I didn’t know.”

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Three days in March

25th

I don't know

26th

Await knowing

27th

Carry-on.

Tarry some.

Blank, for.

See anew,

the anew for first time.

Leave page blank.

When time comes, fill self

for!

For delay knows way.

Shows.

Rhett Stuart on the wisdom of delay

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If Can Write it Down

Is it pathetic love for writing
and could it be pathological?
Is not the case.
If can write it down, I
don't have to be in the play,
need not sing the song,
play on its tune, have a love.
Death can be a dead stop,
is or is not – if not,
so much the better.

Still, there is a “but” and one other,
if can write it down:
Remaining reign of friends;
nature and glorious order.
Animal over bronze earth greened,
sea breadth, breath of friends.
For these, the what I write down,
heart-sprint out fingers.

But,
song-burst wealth from my heart and
heart stance on public stage,
and the solitary love all believe heed –
none came up to pen pad for me,
none, to nature,
beloved lifetime friendships and
if can write it down, pen
telling me now, making it clear;
writes down said so all along.

If can write it down,
God is love of this –
loved ones,
grasses and bird.
Of no essential else is this,
not stage, not song,
not death nor what you marry –
if can write it down.

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For have courted pen,
song, stagcraft then
off first love, wed pen again.
Loves of soul mates and forests,
even thrusting song, speaking scenario,
work for me off condition
if can write it down
Happened love things
happen as ink repeats them manifold in
manifold lights again and over again –
happen often as inked, often as read.
I drop pen,
sprint to mirror for view,
harmony rising up off
slack of this gladdened heartbeat –
then head back,
pick up pen again,
again awaiting if can write it down.

Am replaceable
in the play; reading my work,
irreplaceable,

discovery in haiku

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Excerpt from Earning Keep

When having to find work for sustenance, I believed in going to interviews and interviewing them, to see if I wanted to work there. After all, am I asking for something or offering my services? When I wouldn't care whether I got the job, I'd get it.

“You got it.”

“You bet I do, fucker.”

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For Street Spirit:

How to Start Off a 2001 Morning

(Note from author: All at once I wonder if I was not put here to help us live. I'm on our side. All are simultaneous students and teachers.)

HMO prices rise on every
minute aspect of their planned-out procedures
Your rent, your bank
feel as though they cheat you, yes
Just pay it as long as you can only
fight it, fruitless
You can't save this money
but can save own sweat,
own slowed-down heartbeat
Divorce 'em
They can't have your heart, soul nor sweat
Never even listen to "offers" over the phone
None are offers
Instantly say no to anything "offered",
much less, solicited
(That will be hidden, anyway – at
any cost – to
you) Rip mail bribe in two at first crack
There is nothing free
other than "the best things in life,"
sun and sunflowers,
starfish and stars,
dogwood, dogs
Make up own list
Hand it out
Spirited streets listen

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Excerpted from Glorious from 1949 letter to Betty

“What a fortunate young boy I am! You know, some day I believe I’ll be able to look back and say, ‘I was reborn at the age of Seventeen on a boat going to Europe!’ Hope to enter the University in November. Will probably take up Journalism as my main course at first. Will have to do better than this letter!! You don’t care!! I’ve got too much to say to be careful. I’m compelled to write of my experiences and impressions of Munich merely for my own benefit. It’s a wonderful place and time in my life to begin to write, don’t you think?”

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Out There In Here

Stop pondering what spirit must have and go collect it
For spirit stands so alone anyway
Wallow in it less
I cannot live if I don't write it,
cannot live if write it at expense of not living it
But why would I myself not be enough?
For reason I harbor certain certain personalities
known to me, and not – for
Dinah Shore, Madeline Kahn and Arlene Francis should have
lived alive forever
Art is celebration of life
We know life therefore we celebrate
Art is not celibate – always has something to express
out there off out there
as I miss what I carry and tarry on it;
my name, appreciative man
apprehensive over kept loss while thankful
Let us pray over death of
brothers, sisters, creature and
own self of their personal making,
and talk with the leaf, breathe with the sea

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Tentative

The road the thing.
There was no start.
There is no ending.
There is here.
All universe and me tentative.
Indeed I procrastinated on road for
road is replete life,
celebration of journey somehow
knowing that it rides end
from starting first measure
till says there was no first grace note,
that numbers start with two,
infinity unending end.
End, we're on, now, ever.
One kibitzes and funks
rather than panic for ahead.
One, sometimes stunned instead
in road-rocky sections.
All is country lane with no so
phistication – oh,
you have your sites set, mind you,
reason for them fastening you
fascinated to be the unfastening.
Road deems no paradox;
is straight about curves
showing you You when you contend.
Road life was my laughter
and now after.
I, creative next the creative
without the prize till eyes sighed
prize imparts parts of the road headway.
Price for living is costly and small;
loving, your cash cast of gold.
Love and art, all my caress caring for me;
startles simplification of
living road's end that does not.
Take hold this right hand.
And you there, hold onto my left.
Stroll with me here.

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There is no there.
We don't have to get there.
We're blessed; we're confessed.
We're here,
moving on it.
Take a deep breath.
Head for destination, yes;
know self ever on its wing,
entire thing whole, holding you like my hand,
cliché of friendship and love exaltation
serving up magical, optimum.
This and the tentative is all of life's story,
gore onto glory.

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Dreaming Heaven Walk

So.

That's what I've been doing!
Singing walks on city sidewalks
and making up libretto!
Of feeling, of love.

Mom, a classical singer, collected
tunes to become jazz standards of
titles spinning her tale here:
The lamp is low, a
sleepy lagoon, skylark, speak low.
There will never be another you –
if I should lose you –
you'd be so nice to come home to –
I see your face before me

and too in dream,
coffee lengthed conversation with
she, Dad and walking angel,
Great Aunt Dougie, so great indeed.
Then walking through room as
vestibule to Manhattan first-floor
floorboard and out door,
all Big Sur, any redwood,
as all my people circle laughter,
and hug. Shush. Don't wake me.