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Dear Mr. Malone --

I'm afraid I'm of no use to you. I never met Jon Webb and our correspondence was limited to discussion of the 2 books he printed. Besides, I'm over my head in work -- and am sick of work. Want only to write what I want to write for my own pleasure.

Sincerely

Henry Miller

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The Outsider

As I sit here to write this, I have these things in front of me: THE OUTSIDER magazine 1, 2, 3, issue 4-5, and two books: IT CATCHES MY HEART IN ITS HANDS and CRUCIFIX IN A DEATHHAND. It is a cold Los Angeles afternoon; I sit among these high-rise apts. wondering when they will raze this last skidrow court on DeLongpre Ave. The books and magazines sit to my right and I have just washed my shorts and stockings and they sit on a rope over the gas heater. So? I would have to say, that in the short time that it existed, THE OUTSIDER made more of a landing upon our literature than any other magazine. Perhaps because Jon and Louise selected and then printed their own selections; perhaps it did add a dimension. Of course, selectivity had much to do with it, and their poverty had somewhat to do with it, and their hard luck and their eccentricity, their genius.... I, perhaps, knew them better than anybody, and I would like to tell you a bit about them, how they lived, how I lived with them, how I saw it work.

Let's look at THE OUTSIDER #1. Gypsy Lou is on the cover. There are names here -- Sinclair Beiles, Corso, Di Prima, Snyder, Charles Olson, Ginsberg, Langston Hughes, Sorrentino, Lowenfels, Ferlinghetti, Creeley, McClure, Henry Miller, LeRoi Jones, Burroughs, Kay Boyle, Paul Blackburn, so forth.... Jon told me later that the known writers had tried to place rejected and stale work upon him and that he had to keep insisting to get a vigorous and fresh work. Too many magazines simply print names without

content. In THE OUTSIDER the work is good, plenty, and there are photos of the writers, and in the back, advertisements for the now defunct little: statements, CHICAGO CHOICE, BETWEEN WORLDS, KULCHUR, NOMAD, AGENDA, outburst, YUGEN, TWO CITIES, SATIS, BIG TABLE

OUTSIDER #2 has Gypsy Lou again on the cover. There are also a couple of jazz men working out. As with the first issue, this issue again came out in New Orleans. Both of these numbers were run off by a small hand-operated press at the expense of much labor and agony. There is less emphasis on names in this issue, although there is Genet, Burroughs, Nemerov, Corso, Kerouac, Henry Miller. Some of this issue is taken up by a jazz documentary with photos and comments. Also there are some black and white reprints of Patchen drawings. Since much of Patchen's warmth is in his child's use of color, it does seem a shame, but even in black and white the drawings are warm and Patchen. On the first page is a reproduction of a New Orleans building. And there just aren't any buildings like those old French Quarter rusty iron railing, swaying, rat and roach-infested buildings. Underneath is this interesting note: "In the building on the left above the renowned DOUBLE DEALER, which helped introduce Hemingway, Faulkner & Sherwood Anderson to a world unlike today's, was first published in 1921. In building on r., in a room Whitman wrote in, THE OUTSIDER was born in 1961." There are some Henry Miller, W. Lowenfels letters perhaps not as interesting as they should be. THE OUTSIDER made some mistakes. The jazz section, too, seemed more milk than gold. But in the selection of prose and poetry the genius of editorship was evident. If you think there are few good writers around, then, my friend, try to find yourself a good editor. Good editors are rarer than good writers, and when you consider that the editors are responsible for what we read, then you must realize the type of literary hell we are forced to live in.

THE OUTSIDER #3 has a photo of the mad poet Charles Bukowski on the cover, and in the upper right hand corner, Gypsy framed in a painting. Bukowski is not very pretty. One well-known literary figure in England wrote Jon a long letter of outrage, one of the lines being: "How dare you run a face like that on your cover?" Well, Jon liked dares. He dared attack the untouchable Robert Creeley in one of those early issues.

There are some personal notes from Jon and Louise in this issue I have, and an ad for Bukowski's IT CATCHES MY HEART IN ITS HANDS. But there's more than a Bukowski section of poetry in issue #3. Oh yes, I see, they have

reprinted a NOTICE TO QUIT that slid under my door one night ... in part, and in hand writing: "... Aragon Apts., 334 S. Westlake Ave., Los Angeles, California. Apartment occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Buckowski. Said apt. to be vacated, for Reasons: Excessive Drinking, Fighting and foul language. Disturbing other tenants." I thought this was the funniest thing in the mag but there was also Patchen, Snyder, Creeley, McClure, Burroughs, Irving Layton, Genet, Diane Wokowski, Norse, Miller, Anselm Hollo ... The selection of printed works again is forceful and evident of balls and flame. Good writing immediately catches the eye. But the thousands of manuscripts to be read in order to achieve this, and the way you must blister "names" in order to make them roar the eternal and immortal roar, it just ain't easy. The Webbs achieved it.

THE OUTSIDER 4-5 was a double issue. On his deathbed, Jon was saying something about a "triple issue...." Which showed that old Jon was always one jump ahead of the literary gang. Anyhow, 4-5 is in book form with a photo of Patchen on the cover, dark shades, in cast, that famous back in cast, and he's smoking what appears to be a Lucky Strike, with medicine bottle and lamp in background. The photo catches the dissolute agony of the situation. This issue left New Orleans for the graces of Tucson. Lou's emphysema was getting worse. There is a homage to K. Patchen section from the boys who knew him then.... There are many non-names in this huge issue and they stay right in there with the names, slugging and interesting. Some of the names that remain: Elizabeth Bartlett, Di Prima, Levertov, Lawrence Durrell, Robert Kelly, Thomas Merton, Lenore Kandel, Jackson MacLow, Jean Cocteau... also, Edson, William Wantling, Eigner, Howard McCord, David Meltzer, Margaret Randall, Brown Miller, Gene Fowler, d. a. levy, Robert Bly, Norse, Dick Higgins, David Antin, Anselm Hollo, T. L. Kryss, George Dowden, Simon Perchik, Emmet Williams, Kay Johnson (kaja) Jon didn't mind mixing schools. And if you are a student of snob literary America, you know how little this is done. All Jon demanded was the best from each and I believe he got it. On the homage to Patchen, which I found more lively and interesting and earthy than expected were some of the following: Norman Thomas, Bro. Antoninus, Ginsberg, J. B. May, Norse, Millen Brand, K. Rexroth, Bern Porter, David Meltzer, Ferlinghetti, Jack Conroy, Fred Eckman, and Henry Miller.

If this seems like a name-dropping contest, it isn't. It was simply that the flame bent toward THE OUTSIDER. It was the gathering place, the tavern, the cave of the gods and the cave of the devils ... it was the place, it was in ... it was literature jumping and screaming, it was a record of voices and it was a record of the time,

it was THE OUTSIDER, it was Jon and Louise Webb, and now Jon Webb ... has vanished.

2 books. IT CATCHES MY HEART IN ITS HANDS. Charles Bukowski. "Small birds who go the way of cats sing on inside my head." New and selected poems 1955-1963. It is not a bad book, but it is not immortal except for one or two poems. Cork cover, almost violently-colored pages, a photo of Bukowski, a half of a Bukowski, long cigarette, Bogartish, worn, simple. O.k. It is a work of love, a work of love that the poet may not have returned.

CRUCIFIX IN A DEATHHAND, new poems 1963-1965, with the exception of one poem, was written right into the face of a waiting press and does not represent Bukowski's best work, but it is a work of heat and it is lyrical (for a change) and it flows and sings sad songs & it is printed on paper that is supposed to last 2,000 years, and you know that anything that lasts 2,000 years -- like Christ -- can become tiresome. The book is decorated by Noel Rockmore, and it is rumored that 1,800 copies of this book lie boxed and rotting in a damp Lyle Stuart cellar in New York City

All right, that's the record of the works on hand. I had the Henry Miller book about, the one about his letters to a French painter, but I sent it up to Elizabeth Bartlett who auctioned it off with other items, not so long ago, in an effort to get the Webbs out of the red or to keep them alive. The recent Henry Miller book was being issued (I believe) about the time of Jon's death and I never received a copy.

So, now, if you'll allow (and you must since I am writing this), I'll go into more personal things about these strange people behind the Work

After coming out of the L.A. County General Hospital around 1955, still alive, having been told it would be my sure death if I did so, I began to drink again. I am still drinking. In fact, the phone just rang and Jon's son, Jon Webb Jr. just phoned. "What you doing?" "I'm writing about your old man and his wife." "Well," he said, "it might be a good time for a few beers. Should I come over?" "All right," I said.

So there'll be a slight interruption here, but I'm going to write this thing yet

All right, I came out of the hospital around 1955 and got a job -- shipping clerk for a light fixture plant in east l.a. -- got an apartment, a typewriter, opened the beer and began writing after a ten year layoff. Only now I was writing poetry instead of prose. I mailed the

first 40 or 50 poems to a mag in Texas, then somehow I heard of THE OUTSIDER at the beginning of it. I smelled good action. I sat in that kitchen on Kingsley Drive and later in that kitchen on Mariposa Street, symphony music on, smoking, alone, the sound of the typer, the words banging and wailing ... those ten years and the near death and my bad health all helped make it go. The next batch went to THE OUTSIDER. I got an immediate response. It seemed that no sooner were the poems in the mailbox, I got the answer. Jon had a way of saying it that urged one on. It was Romantic, if you'll forgive me; it was also important enough and real enough. I wrote letters with the poems. I believe I was about half mad, which is as good a state as a man could ask to get into. I missed most of THE OUTSIDER #1 but by #2 things were really working between us all. The poems began to build and then, suddenly, Jon said, how about a book? Here he was in contact with the greatest writers of our time and he wanted to do a book by an unknown. I mean, fuck, man. I said, why not?

Jon and Lou asked me to come down and see them in New Orleans. All right, I thought. Let them see the flesh of the words and then if they don't like the flesh they can tear the book.

The place dipped down below the sidewalk in that rotting French Quarter building. Jon seemed to accept me as if he had known me a lifetime. "Buke," he said, "hello Buke... want a beer?" We talked a while and then he said "Why don't you walk down and see Lou? She's down a couple of corners selling paintings." "How'll she know me?" "She'll know you," he said, "you'll know her."

It was true. We knew each other. It was cold that day. The paintings were not moving. A buck a piece, two bucks a piece ... they weren't moving. Gypsy was wrapped in an old shawl. The paintings were hardly immortal, but the people were less so. We walked across the street and got a coffee in the tourist place. It was a deathly place full of deathly people.

"So you're the poet, eh?" she asked.

"This place makes me sick," I said.

"Well, we might as well drink our coffee," she said.

Louise was tougher than I, more real, and more forgiving. I would never forgive Humanity for what they had become. She could. She felt they couldn't help it. I wasn't yet ready to accept that. In a sense, I had met a better person.

We drank our coffees, picked up our paintings and went back to the sunken room. Jon was feeding pages delicately into the P & Chandler and I sat in a chair, half asleep, while Louise put dinner on. Then I got up and went out and bought 4 or 5 six packs of beer. I got back and opened up a few. Then I looked around the room. Here were these trunks all about, stacked up against the walls. Bukowski, they said, page one. Bukowski, page two. Bukowski, page 3. Their bed was up on stilts so that pages could be stacked underneath. Bukowski was everywhere. Bukowski was stacked in the bathtub. They couldn't even bathe.

"Bukowski, Bukowski, Bukowski EVERYWHERE!" screamed Louise, "I hate the son of a bitch! And now he's here in our place drinking beer with his big belly and looking wise!"

Lou was Italiano. Fiery Italiano. She said what was on her mind. Jon was more introvert. He said clever little delicate & subtle things, rather rolling the last word off the lips, giving the clever smile and checking your eye for reaction. They were the perfect pair; they may have lived in hell but they were married in heaven. It was the mating of the sun and the moon, the sea and the land, the horse and the bird. What one didn't have the other gave.

Anyhow, I felt I owed them something so I drank and I drank and I told these stories, one after the other, about women and life, and the death-jobs and the crazy things that happen to a man who moves from woman to woman, from place to place while being half crazy in the head; the miracles and the luck and the horror. I could see that they were enjoying the stories so I told some more. It was a fine night, the roaches crawling the walls, so many roaches that they seemed to be a wall, wavering of black hard backs and feelers and unfeelingness. Here were a people trying to improve the literature and poetry of the world and living with bugs and drunks and madness, and hardly a chance at all.

Well, they went to sleep and I slept somewhere and the days went on. We made the bars at night and I met Jon's fiction editor, a mute, and we wrote on paper napkins all night and got drunker than what? We got drunker than James Joyce.

Anyhow, it was that. Paintings on the corner. The press. The bars. The drunken stories. THE OUTSIDER. All the people. And there is a streetcar named DESIRE. I left town. The book came out

I don't know. Jon and Lou lived in many cities. I remember another book -- CRUCIFIX. But there were cities in between and after. It was simply a love affair without saying it. They enjoyed me; I enjoyed them. I met Corso. Corso and I raged around a bit, but for all our flair and wordage, there was always a gentleness underneath it all. Corso was one of the most gentle, and Jon and Louise. I played the hard guy because somebody has to or you don't have a backdrop.

All right, with CRUCIFIX it was strange. I'd come by (they had me living with a fat and nice lady around the corner) with a hangover every morning and Jon would let me in and he'd say, "Bukowski! More Poems!" And I'd sit down to the typer and write one and he'd immediately set it up for printing. Well, the book came out. I left town

They were always on the move, dragging that press behind them, and 2 dogs, and manuscripts and books and and "Come see us, Bukowski...." And out I'd go. This time Santa Fe in the rain. A rich psychiatrist's place. 2 or 3 wives. I'm drunk. I'm in bed with one of the wives. 6 bathrooms within ten feet. Across the way, a tower of a house. You've got to climb 100 feet to get into a doorway. The psychiatrist rents these places. I meet the psychiatrist. He is like any other p. I ever met -- emptier than any insanity.

"Bukowski," Jon asked me, "should we stay here?"

"Stay here for what?"

"THE OUTSIDER"

"What's he want?"

"We gotta break down one wall to get the press in. Then he cements the wall back up. We'll be locked here, you know. It's difficult. But he says rent free. I can stay here forever. But he rather hints that I should print a book of his poems"

So Jon and Lou moved from there to elsewhere and from elsewhere to someplace else.... Once again, back in N.O. I'd walk up to Lou on the corner where she was selling paintings. She'd have a large map on her lap. The map of the U.S. She'd crossed out, with pencil, all the places that it is impossible to live in. The whole map was blacked out.

"Look at me," she'd say, laughing, "it took me 5 god

damned hours to go over this map and I find out what?
-- there's no place to live."

"I meant to tell you," I'd say

Jon always meant to get at a man. He was under one of the false misconceptions that is so popular nowadays -- get a man angry and he'll really tell you what he is and what he has to say. Jon was always trying me but it led to nowhere. Jon was as lonely and mixed up and crazy as the rest of us, yet he was one of the 2 or 3 great editors of the 20th century. Along with Whit Burnett of STORY and Mencken of the old MERCURY....

I tell you that those people lived in so many places that I can't keep them in order. Right now, I remember 3 different store fronts in Arizona, or maybe one of them was in New Mexico. Jon was a good carpenter and he'd fix up these store fronts and really make them livable. Although all the livability circled around the printing press. They never found their place, though, they always had to move again, and again. They became disgusted with the people. Once in New Orleans they hired a crew to move their printing press and undo the electric hook-up (the press needed a special power line). Then they changed their minds, had the crew move the press back, hook it up, then they changed their minds again and the press was unhooked and pulled through the window. Their funds were fucked by this constant moving, looking for the place. Paying freight for that press and paper stock, belongings, 2 dogs. I tried to tell them, I tried to tell them that the people all over America were rotten and decayed and false and unreal.

Jon died in the state of Tennessee. It was a simple and routine operation that failed.

Jon's son was with me at my place while his father was in the hospital. We phoned Louise first. "What you guys doing? Drinking while Jon is in the hospital?"

Jon's son was in contact with the doctors. He was a med student about to graduate. I heard him discuss the entire operation with them. It was not to be a dangerous one. They hadn't operated yet. His son talked to Jon. "You heard anything from Bukowski?" he asked him. "No, Bukowski doesn't write anymore. Henry Miller still writes me though, Henry Miller just wrote me the other day"

"Have you given up on Bukowski?"

"Oh no, I haven't given up on Buke...."

The operation didn't work. It was a matter of correcting something along the neck, one side of the neck. The part on the other side of the neck was gone. One part left to fix up. They operated. Jon went into a coma afterwards. Lou was there. She was religious. I'm not too religious but her business is hers. She stayed by the bed and prayed. The doctor came in and asked her what she was doing. "I'm praying that my man lives," she told him. "Well, I'm praying that he dies," said the doctor.

Lou leaped up: "you're praying that he DIES? What the hell kind of a doctor are you? What the hell kind of a human being are you?"

"If he lives he'll be like an idiot. He'll be like a child, he'll be useless...."

"What do I care? What do I care if he's like an idiot? I'll take care of him. He's my man!"

Women like Louise Webb come along about one in two million. Jon died.

"Everything seemed all right with the operation. He seemed to come through it and then ... BINGO! ... something wrong...."

That's the way the doctor described it. One of the best surgeons in the state.

The OUTSIDER of the decade was through. The greatest editor since Mencken and Burnett was finished. Our great nights of beer and talk were finished. Visits from Corso and Ginsberg were finished. Pulling that press all about the country looking for Nirvana, that was finished. I doubt that THE OUTSIDER will continue. There has been some talk by Louise and Jon's son of continuing the magazine, the press, but I feel that it is over. I wish now that I had told some of the funnier stories about Jon and Louise and myself, but I've written too long now.

The miracle of Jon Edgar Webb, x-con, x-writer, x-editor It would seem that now the skies would come down a bit or that the streets would crack and open up, or the mountains waver. But they don't. It's history, history, and the game goes on. A new deck. Another drink. And the sadness. That they built us not to last, and that we waste so much, make so many mistakes. Look, Jon, I see you grinning.... You knew Buke would write it for you. It's cold now and a white Corvette pulls up outside and a beautiful girl gets out. I don't understand it