

FROM: SPINNING OFF BUKOWSKI

Chapter 1:

One night in 1968 or 1969, Bukowski was here by himself and the two of us were quite drunk and he asked if he could sleep on the couch. Yes. He was in no condition to drive.

During this time period, I often asked myself why the writer who I knew was this world's strongest and best scribe ... why he of all living folks was visiting and befriending me. I couldn't figure it out. I asked my brother Denny (5 years older than myself and a fine surgeon), "Why is Bukowski coming over so much? What th'hell does he see in me? I mean why is he making me a friend?"

My brother, who always seemed to suddenly get a bit more serious and attentive when I mentioned the word 'Bukowski,' gave me a quick and cogent answer, "He's on the edge. Does he have trouble keeping liquids down?"

"Yeah, he retches every 15 minutes or so," I said.

"Very ill alcoholics can't retain liquids. He's on the edge."

It's possible I was one of the few Hank grabbed by the hand. He then ended his letters to me with "hold" — maybe Hank meant for me to HOLD and don't let him go over the goddamn edge.

Ah yes — Hank, right exactly where I sit now this 6-3-94, began preparing for sleep on the old couch (that couch is long gone, replaced by the one I'm now sitting on).

He took off his pants, and MY GOD he took off his undershorts. He took off his shirt — I saw his back — his back shook me up some because of scars (acne vulgaris scars) — it was much worse scarring than I had supposed. In fact, I hadn't known his extreme skin problems as a child were on his back too. I had known of his face covered with huge boils because I had read this in his 1965 Confessions of a Man Insane Enough to Live with Beasts and also in several of his early poems ... but I didn't know anything about his back. Horrible fucking scarring man, I tell you, horrible vicious JOB OF TH'BIBLE epidermal massive damage. Shit, I thought, I know this man is 'real' but I didn't know he was THIS REAL. And then Hank put on again his sleeveless white undershirt. He moved slowly in first sitting, then getting on his back — then lying down on the couch. A minute passed and he slowly got up to his feet and walked

a step to a pile of newspapers and he picked up several parts of an old LA Times, then returned to the couch and again lay on his back.

I offered him clean sheets and a blanket but he said no.

All he wore was the undershirt and I am the sort of fellow who feels uneasy in the company of a man or men who are nude. I was 17 feet away preparing for sleep on my used king-size I'd recently bought from the poet Max Schwartz for 80 dollars. I was taking secret side peeks at Hank to see how he was doing — I mean how often have you, gentle reader, had a friend over to your own cave and who you simply know for sure is earth's best writer and who is lying on his back virtually naked and then slowly blanketing himself with old newspapers?

It was obvious he had done this many times before in his life on park benches scattered all over America.

My real dad Abraham hardly ever visited here and when he did he immediately, upon entering, began saying, "You should paint the walls there (gesturing at some specific wall) and move those papers away from the heater ... better plaster that crack in the ceiling and put a screen on those windows and"

My real pop never got drunk with me and he told me being a goddamn poet is like building a house of playing cards — it will collapse and your whole life will have been a useless naive foolish WASTE OF TIME. He didn't use these words but he meant it was a TERRIBLE TRAGIC WASTE OF MY LIFE if I didn't wise up quick and take the California bar test once more and pass it and join him and his probate law practice and begin doing important and vital work — write wills for clients.

Abraham supported my ass all the way through UCLA Law School and once went into a terrifying red-haired man's RAGE at me when I refused his money. He was so scarlet-faced and pissed off, I decided to cease yelling back at him — just grab the wad in his fist and escape.

Abraham, I could tell, sometimes felt his 2nd son was most definitely in need of Biblical sacrifice. Bukowski was my father too — FATHER OF MY ART. Now both men are dead. Thank God and BUKOWSKI and th'gods and Abraham too that I am now writing from the exact spot Bukowski told me to write from: my inner gut vision.

Hank was still sleeping when I awoke the next morn. It was bright and sunny and ... I woke him up.

FROM: SPINNING OFF BUKOWSKI

Chapter 10:

About one year before I first met Charles Bukowski, I self-published my first book of poetry. A fellow UCLA Law School student, Stephen Malley, helped select the 30 or so poems included in Poems by Steven Richmond. Malley then told me a friend of his had opened a print shop on Sunset Blvd. between Vermont and Alvarado. The shop was called TASMANIA PRESS and Malley's friend, Don Michelle, had joined with one Al Frank to open this printshop. These two young men told me they would charge me \$100 for 1000 copies. They began by setting each poem by hand, just as I had learned a bit about in Junior High School Print Shop class. What they wanted to do was print a truly gorgeous book that would show the world that Tasmania Press was a wonderful wonderful place to publish/print a book. I was there most of the dozens of hours it took Don and Al to set up my poems — letterpress printjob, offset cover, chromecoat stock, amazing grace.

A few months later I was armed with 1000 copies and I began selling copies at stores and at parties. I sent free copies to everyone I could and a few months later I'd made back about \$200. "I must have been nuts," is how I think about it aloud right now. However, being nuts did beat being a 3rd year UCLA Law School student.

Two guys who seemed ultra-literary types (both graduate students in English at UCLA) — I believe they were friends of friends — often spoke of their close friendship with Henry Miller. I'd just read Tropic of Cancer and like many others I'd instantly felt him a hero. And here are these two precious young pedants, silk scarves & all, talking about Miller like he's their very own close buddy! At first, I thought they were bullshit artists.

One day, they wrote down Henry Miller's address in Pacific Palisades. They told me that I should visit Henry Miller. I'd recently read a Miller piece in which he lamented the dozens of his fans who would camp in front of his cabin in Big Sur. He didn't like it at all. So I decided I would drive to his place, stick a copy of Poems by Steven Richmond in his mailbox, and get th'hell out of there.

About 10 AM one weekday morn in 1964, I drove to Miller's house and I parked on the opposite side of the street and I looked for his mailbox. Where the fuck is his mailbox? Oh shit, it's a slot in his front door!

His house was a big white nice upper-middle-class wealthy person's house. The driveway was actually a large half-circle with two different exits. His front door was way

off the street and I thought about it, sat in my car for awhile, getting butterflies, trying to gather courage. After all, if Henry Miller didn't get a copy of my first book of poetry, he'd never find out what a knucklehead I was.

I opened the car door, walked across the street and I began walking up the 70 or so feet to his front door. And I suddenly saw Miller and another older fellow — through a big arch-shaped front window — they were talking. Suddenly Miller looked at me walking up to his front door and I saw him rise quickly from the chair and move to his front door. He opened the door and came walking right toward me — and I stood frozen about 35 feet from the front door. He was a little old shriveled elf of a man — blue terry-cloth bathrobe on and he seemed about 5 feet 3 inches and maybe 125 pounds — and he was stooped over and 4/5 bald and about 78 years is it? However old he was in 1964 and he came at me like who the fuck am I and what the goddamn shit am I doing? And didn't I read his piece in a recent New Directions paperback that slammed those leech-slime idiots who bugged him up at Big Sur?

But he didn't say these things. They were in his face as he approached, so I held my book out toward him and said something like, "Oh, I didn't want to meet you and bother you — just wanted to put this in your mailbox and go away. I wouldn't want to bother you — I'm sorry ... shit!"

The ire I saw or thought I saw in his face ... went away, disappeared, vanished. He walked without a bit of hesitation right next to me and he took the copy of my book and he looked at the cover and he said, "This is a very good cover" — cover etching of "Hanging" by Anna Purcell.

Then he put his right arm around my waist in a very fatherly way. He told me about those assholes who bugged him up at Big Sur. I told him I'd read his words and that's why I didn't want to bother him, just drop my book in his mailbox and get the hell away. Then he opened my book up and read some lines ... he read for about 4 seconds and closed the book.

He was like a leprechaun — wiry and tiny and elfin — a faded middle-blue terry-cloth bathrobe over pajamas — slippers — 10 AM — it's sunny and clear and his right arm is around my waist like a kindly grandpop.

I was around 24 and 6 feet and about 200 pounds, muscled — kind of a white O.J. Simpson. I mean I was a GIANT talking to a GIGANTIC WRITER inside th'body of a little, relaxed & cheerful granddad sprite.

I never did get to his front door. He met me half-way
— he put his arm around me — Henry Miller — My Hero.

Before and after.

— Steve Richmond

Santa Monica CA

THE ANNOUNCER (1982)

here I sit
again
as the man on the radio
tells me, "for the next
3 hours we will be listening
to ..."

it's now eleven p.m.
I've heard this man's
voice
for many years.
he must be very
old.
his station plays the best
variety of classical
music.

I don't recall how many
women I have lived with
while listening to his
station,
or during that time
how many cars I've
owned
or how many places I've
lived in.

now each time I hear him,
I think, well, he's still
alive, he sounds all right
but the poor fellow must be
very old.

some day
he'll have his funeral,
a little trail of cars
following the limo with
his hearse.

and then I'll have to
listen to
a new voice.