

JANUARY 18, 1997

I heard about Marvin Malone's death the Monday before New Year's Eve. I was astonished at how strong and physical my reaction was. As if someone had kicked me.

From the first summer I began just thinking about writing, WORMWOOD was very central, very important, to me. That June and July, suddenly "released" from a job at a radio and TV station, I wrote to almost every magazine listed in the DUST BOOKS DIRECTORY. Of the new and exciting worlds unfolding in these magazines I'd never seen on any newsstand, never heard of in college, WORMWOOD was from the start unique and a favorite. I can remember sitting in the sandy new backyard of a house I'd just moved into on Rapple Drive, totally enthralled by the poems in the first WORMWOOD I'd had my hands on. Such lively poems—sparse, pared-down, conversational poems—very unlike anything I'd been reading in graduate school. I liked the crisp, clean narrative pieces, and I liked the layout: not flashy but attractive, cheerful, and compact.

I didn't immediately send my work to WR because I wanted to make sure my poems were good enough. One of the early poems WORMWOOD published of mine was "The Bargain" in 1973. From then on, whenever I sorted out new poems—in a tiny study at Millay Colony in Austerlitz, New York, where mice skittered over dressers and floors; in the gray living room of my mother's Middlebury, Vermont, flat; in the apartment that shared a wall with Janet Reno's in DC, so I could hear the water running, knew that she showered at ten to seven; in this townhouse in Virginia where geese skid onto the ice so close you can read a band number—WORMWOOD was always an envelope spreading to include something new I'd just typed up.

Until now, I'd not sorted out new poems without an envelope (or 3 or 4 or 6) to Marvin Malone. In our last correspondence, he had wanted me to change a line on one poem about Milne's son and I had returned it too late. In spite of over 20 years of ongoing, regular correspondence regarding submissions and the several editions I was featured in, most of Malone's comments were work related. He did remark, when in 1995 I sent him a series of poems written while I was in Hawaii, that he really did not care much for Hawaii—a rare personal, conversational note. Everything else was about the poems. Favorites, suggested changes, poems he liked but didn't feel fit into WORMWOOD. The bibliography he did of my work that he published in the 1975

special edition of my poems, *PAPER APPLES*, is by far the most detailed, complete, and interesting bibliography of my work. I only wish that it covered a much longer period. That he could still be working on it.

I've worked with many, many editors. I especially valued Marvin Malone's extreme professionalism, patience, calm balance, reliability. In the many issues I've appeared in and the additional chaps and sections, Marvin was always extremely careful, fair, supportive, kind, and unbelievably energetic. Few people have had the endurance and devotion to continue to work so hard at an ongoing project out of love and belief in poetry. Especially when so much in the publishing world is cliquish, political, a matter of power and connections that has little to do with the love of words and what can be done with them. Malone was truly unique.

Since I tend to read in California fairly often, I always thought on some trip I would meet him, though I had heard he was a very private person. Now I wish I had made more of an effort to invite him to a reading, suggest we meet for coffee. I could, at least, have asked.

From the first week of knowing of this huge loss, I thought of little else, keep thinking still, this is impossible. Early in January, sorting out new poems, I thought again how I missed not having a *WORMWOOD* envelope there, like a familiar voice. And, how different it was. Many of the new poems were definitely *WORMWOOD* poems, and it seemed very sad, very peculiar, there wasn't another magazine like *WORMWOOD* I could send them to.

—Lyn Lifshin

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