

## MY EXPERIENCE AS A POET IN THE 60s

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Barely anything, than life itself, loomed larger to me during my twenties, than that idea 'I am a poet.' When George Stanley, who was probably ten years older, spoke of writing half-dozen or so poems in a *whole year*, I regarded that with contempt. I was not only a poet, but was writing literally thousands of poems. (1965-1975)

How does a poet write thousands of poems? And, the very leading and natural question that follows, *are* they poems? The first question is pretty easy to answer, at least on one level: I wrote thousands of poems because thousands of people asked me to do so. The second question may never be answered, because those poems were carried away by the people for whom I wrote them, and as I did not make a copy for myself, unless the poems held meaning enough for people to retain them, they are lost forever.

Literary criticism of the street poet, should such ever be deemed worthwhile, will necessarily prove fragmentary, though, I would hope not without reward. My conviction is that among all these poems are to be found some of such worth as to justify the critic and collector.

I was the poet Facino. I wrote first in San Francisco, on Market Street, and North Beach, then on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley. Sather Gate and City Lights Bookstore were the twin touchstones of those years of writing, which extended from 1965-1975. Figures that loom large, and about whom I will write a great deal hereafter, were Pan at Cal campus, and Shig at City Lights. But what about Ludwig, and Julian Michel, and Larry Cantor? Dave Hazelton, Mark Morris, John Simon? And hundreds more whose names I will have forgotten, but whose lives in that moment's passing remain, as acts of kindness, thoughts shared, the smiles of recognition that gave those years their warrant of worth.

1.

There are a few people we want to remember to the world, thereby restoring somewhat of what the world has lost. A man's life is mainly lost, most of all perhaps to himself. Yet if that life has borne meaning into ours, how firm is our hold upon that spar of spirit chance has lifted in our way!

I would appreciate Lew Welch.

On Saturday night of my first week writing street poems in San Francisco, I was arrested. The charge was begging. This was mid-January, 1965. Dave Hazelton, editor of the magazine *SYNAPSE*, was with me, also writing street poems, using the name CINZANO. Subsequently, through our mutual friend, Mark Morris, who was involved with

Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA), a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle interviewed me, photos were taken, and a couple days later, the story of the arrest made the front page, with accompanying photo.

Mark mimeographed the Chronicle article, along with some of the street poems I had written before my arrest – I kept copies of all those first poems. Dave's wife Jeanne Lee (Hazelton) was appearing at the Jazz Workshop. Dave encouraged all his poet friends to go hear Jeanne sing, so that among the audience were Gary Snyder and Lew Welch.

I had my mimeo sheets, and handed them out. I wrote a poem to Gary, and one to Lew. Each wrote me one in return. Lew wrote his on back of the mimeo sheet. Here is Lew's poem that has grown so in my heart, ever encouraging:

Han Shan on the rocks—  
Brecht, with proofs in  
hand,  
to the printer—  
"A workman, in a  
City, of  
workmen"  
but neither of them faced  
the City Face

to face

with nothing but a poem

I set up a reading in Berkeley at the Jabberwock on Telegraph Avenue, with David Meltzer and Lew. This must have been a year or two later. Lew read last. He talked of Kenneth Patchen in the hospital, read some of Patchen's poems, tears coursing down his cheeks, full of the other man, and his trouble. During the evening he read 'Desiderata', which he said he had up on his wall.

These words seem so flat and lacking, yet of the many poets I've known, and readings I've been at, none moved me more than Lew, talking his love out, the pain.

When the reading was over, I gave Lew his share of the money taken in, which couldn't have been much more than ten dollars. Yet he was gracious and genuinely appreciative.

It is not difficult to envision Lew in a shelter he's put together deep in the river canyons of Nevada Country, the last old Bear of the River: And each of us who's been taken to heart by him, could rejoice to be the one to find him there, and bring back the news.

My spirit grieves his loss more than any other I've known.

## THE ROCK FLOWS UPSTREAM

Your letter  
wasn't in the mailbox.  
Climbing the hill again  
I read an old poem about our firstborn.

What's happened lately?

Here it's a clinic.  
An occasional patient  
stumbles down from the city  
to share this silence.

Up the north fork of Limekiln  
is a place I want to show you.  
White water washes our pain.

RICHARD BARKER

3.

I was helping Dave Sandberg move in San Francisco. I had an old white '52 Dodge pick-up truck, with no tail gate. We had loaded up, Dave was putting in the last of the load. He was to follow me in his car. I am heading downhill, at a fair clip, when suddenly I hear a horn blow. Looking out the rear-view mirror, I see a mass of sheets of paper blowing every which way, many of them making better time than I was.

These 'sheets of paper' were Dave's poems.

We had a lot of help from people along the streets, but even as we gathered, far in the distance other sheets were blowing, both up and down the street.

Dave was disconsolate. Yet the humorous aspect of the thing was not altogether lost on us.

Dave interpreted this as a sign of direction to take, and started his 'Free Poems Among Friend'. He invited his friends to submit poems, and he mimeographed these, with the poet's address, so people might make contact if they wished. Wherever Dave would be, in Union Square at an outdoor reading, in the Haight, etc., he would hand out these poems to whoever would receive them from him, like a leafleter.

4.

One evening when Dave Hazelton, myself, and several others were all jammed into what I remember as being a pretty small car, on our way to San Francisco from Berkeley, perhaps for one of Jeanne's appearances at the Jazz Workshop, Dave told me of a visit he had made to Jack Spicer in the hospital.

Apparently, at the time, Dave was irritated, but now he was part-pleased to be recognized by Spicer. Dave edited a mimeographed poetry magazine he called *SYNAPSE*.

Spicer quipped that Dave ought to change the name of his magazine to 'Synapse, Pops, Crackles'.

5.

Great smile  
on the forehead

the shirt –sleeved  
slight red-faced

cabbie  
nods,

the guy gets  
in the cab.

To enter  
so, by such leave  
  
is the hope I have.

as FACINO, 1967

6.

I first knew Dave Hazelton and Jim Thurber through a poetry class at San Francisco State College. Mark Linenthal was the instructor. The class was not working because we sat back to back as in other classes, and harsh, unkind criticisms resulted. Thurber, who was for several of us, the fire of the class, started coming less and less. Finally, I wrote a critique of the class, suggesting, among other things, that we form into a circle. Mark Linenthal read this out loud, concluding with some non-supportive comment on sitting round in a circle.

Immediately, the whole class turned their desks round, so that we were sitting in a circle. (The sequel, however, was that after a couple sessions, the back-to-back seating was resumed.)

FOR DOUG AND JIM

to give:  
the song starts  
from its place  
in the heart  
a traveling  
steady in its  
path toward the  
outward moving  
circle, the rings  
expanding like heart-waves  
that lose the eye

a simple friendship:  
spurt of soul  
from the one to the  
other, a glad  
handing of worth  
to worth, increase  
in the song that  
is solitary, sung  
from the singular  
need

D.R. HAZELTON

8.

The highest moment of Dave's and my relation, and one of the most delightful of all moments in my life, came the Saturday night we were arrested street writing.

I had been street writing earlier that day on Market Street. He wanted to go out with me street writing near City Lights and offered to treat me to a Mexican dinner at a nearby North Beach restaurant. He had been there before and had a high regard for their food and hospitality.

Indeed, it was as he had led me to believe, and we had the whole works, plus beers. He had not figured on the extra beers we had had, when he had calculated what he'd have to pay. The upshot of it was he was short about a dollar. I had a few cents, so we emptied our pockets, leaving them an odd assortment of wonders in lieu of the dollar. I had been

given a bright fresh red apple street writing, which was the best I had to give. So we piled it all together, got up as nonchalantly as we could, said thanks, got out the door before they reached our table, and ran like bats out of hell, down to our street writing station at Columbus and Broadway!

9.

When I picture Dave, I see him dancing. In one vision he is holding his small daughter, Naima, close against him, one hand behind her head, as they turn to the music; then he holds her out in front of him, looking down into her face, as she looks back up. In the other vision, I see him dancing, his arms outstretched, as though pointing, and he waggles his forefinger to the music.

10.

One of Dave's poems starts with the line "We have failed each other." I didn't like the idea. One of my poems of that times starts

Keep  
what might have been,  
that it is,  
and you just don't  
see

At first thought, these ideas seem contradictory to me. The second thought is that the self (or succession of selves) remains a constant, even when others are lost to me. Yet I cannot reconcile myself to the belief that the self remains whole and undiminished when others fall or recede from my life.

I have never admitted of a loss in the spirit's own substance, as it has regard to itself.

#### FOUR POEMS TO LEW WELCH

by Doug Palmer

#### LEW WELCH

The trees stand  
over you, as  
they always have.

AFTER L.W.

And what is there now,  
after you've gone? Of  
course, I will go on,  
an occasional thought  
of you has reminded me  
of feelings I so long  
denied. But now, there  
is no such respite. You  
are in me nearly every  
day, and I welcome you  
there. What's left  
is the dimensions of  
my heart, that must  
grow larger for me  
to express your effect,  
the effect of my heart  
upon itself. Who will  
understand I speak of  
you, when I speak of  
myself now? Now I try  
to tell of the largeness  
when I am but the  
seed of an oak.

AFTER L.W.

What brief light glanced  
from the cover of cloud  
crystalline and strong,

rivers pouring down falls,  
in mist, in brilliance,  
forging great heights of stone,

in counterpoint to pillars  
and columns of cloud,  
in density bred, living in darkness:

An alien substance to yourself,  
shredding stone drops from  
ledges, trails turned to space,

your feet seem hinged to  
the bottom of time.

I have tried to reconcile  
the life I loved with what  
is left. He is gone,

having given himself up,  
having handed his heart  
into our crude keeping.

I cannot call him by name.  
Only in silent caring  
do the words approach

my unfound feeling.  
And what of my feeling,  
when its only living object

is these words which would  
betray his secret.

#### Letter to Lew Welch

What are the winds  
that softly hum in  
the heart, like tears  
that have stopped falling

Rough and brittle like  
the shed bark of old pines

Who will drink and cry  
the dying Kenneth Patchen  
Whose heart will bound  
like stags pierced and lame

Moon upon night's rivers,  
swept glistening upwards



When he learned of my arrest, Shig sent word that I could street write in front of City Lights Bookstore. I accepted this invitation. But I did not street write there until the case was settled in court.

Dave Hazelton and I were charged with begging. We were represented by an attorney who was recommended to us by Mark Morris. He accepted the case because it involved civil liberties, and made no charge. We entered a plea of not guilty, and requested a trial by jury in a few days.

We were told to return for the setting of the date of the trial. We requested that we be allowed to go free on our own recognizance, and that our bail of \$23 be returned, but this was denied.

Such a relatively small amount of money may seem inconsequential, yet for Dave and me it was not. At the time I was separated from my wife and basically living on what I could find in the streets. I remember how good I felt when I found an unopened can of mixed nuts in Golden Gate Park. And a wet paper dollar I found on another occasion.

When I was brought into the police station I was told to empty out the contents of my pockets onto the floor. It was such an odd ball mess and assortment of stuff that one of the policemen remarked to the other that I was a packrat. These were things I had picked up off the street.

12.

When we were arrested, Dave asked if I wanted to go limp and force them to carry us. Dave had been involved with SNCC, and this was a tactic they apparently employed. I told him I felt that would only compound things, and we would then be charged with resisting arrest.

Two San Francisco policemen had approached us, looked us over, and may have asked us what we were doing. One said he'd have to check with his superior to see if that was legal. He went off to call, and in perhaps ten minutes, returned, and told us that we were under arrest.

We walked quietly with the officer till we came to a paddy wagon. We were loaded in back, and driven to an underground garage. We then were taken to an elevator. Dave and I got in, the officer drew a sliding gate across, which separated and enclosed us away from him. Upstairs we were fingerprinted, and photographed. We were allowed to make a call, and Dave called his wife, I believe, asking her to let Mark Morris know so he could bail us out. As I recall, I had that much money saved up somewhere, perhaps at my wife's, or at Mark's. I think Mark went Dave's bail.

Then we were taken to a cell, and locked in. I think the greatest impression of the whole experience came then when I heard that heavy metallic sound of the cell door closing. It is a truly final sound.

Even then it remained for us an adventure, and we seemed not to be afraid. Within two or three hours Mark came and bailed us out.

Mark was excited, amused, and delighted by the whole episode.

13.

When we checked out the police returned our belongings, such as they were. But two things were not returned to me. One was the sign I was using when I was arrested street writing. This was retained as evidence. The other was a nice piece of cheese, probably half-a-pound or more, that had been given me street writing. I was later interviewed by a San Francisco television station, and the plight of this cheese became, for the interviewer, a source of well-meaning amusement.

14.

When Dave and I returned to court for the setting of the date for the trial, the judge dismissed the charges, but warned us to not return to writing poems on the streets of San Francisco. We learned from our attorney that the law governing begging defines it as asking alms, which we were not doing.

15.

Shortly thereafter I was able to reclaim my street writing sign. Mark Morris lettered the original. The first day I was going to go out street writing on Market Street I had printed on a small scrap of paper the words that appear on Mark's version, and was going to safety-pin this on my shirt front. Mark offered to make me a sign which would show up.

Mark lettered a second sign, which we used for the Chronicle interview. On that sign he unintentionally omitted the word "candy".

16.

The place Mark Morris held in my life in 1965 should be stressed. He was already a man, with much experience, good sense, and worldly wisdom. I was still pretty much a wild-hair kid, in love with poetry, and convinced I was an incarnation of Jesus Christ. Mark had stability, and an on-going creative life, as well as strong commitment and organizational talent applied to CNVA, to the paramount importance of peace, to the ending of war.

He tempered my enthusiasm with his experience, and is one of the only men in the whole of my life I listened to.

It is with sadness one acknowledges how much more one has received than he has given in return. I think of Jim Thurber as the person of all I have known as being most full of fire: Mark Morris as the most full of light, enthusiasm, and encouragement.

17.

Jim Thurber represents a freer, wilder time in my life. He was one of the many open door, which were later to close to me. Living was a succession of open doors, a secret of life behind every one.

One night in Alameda we walked, long striding, with the night as much in us as out. Destined but with no destination.

18.

This poem makes me think of Thurber; I may have written it to him, though I don't recall.

THAT'S ALL, IN THE NAME OF GOD

Beautiful thing  
in a box-car  
stomping stomping  
hearing someone  
stomping  
you are  
there.  
I saw a rock.  
The car is  
made  
of  
well, I'm  
made not  
the same.  
But precisely,  
if  
at all.  
Beautiful  
thing that you ARE  
thing that you  
shall be if  
you shall be  
beautiful, thing.  
I saw half  
a rust of  
can lid once  
cut off of the  
top of a  
can of  
maybe  
well  
maybe  
if it's red

then  
first I am  
myself,  
whatever I shall  
be told I was.  
Beautiful.  
Think of  
pieces of  
cardboard  
between the rails  
of the  
track of the  
seagull's wings.

19.

When I was first street writing at Sather Gate, Jim, Dave and I all went together. Facino, Cinzano, and Flamambo. I had suggested the name to Jim after the C.K. Chesterton story, 'The Flying Stars'. Flambeau is the master-thief. Jim had never seen the name written out, and from its sound came Flamambo.

Someone offered me a peach for a poem. Jim, seeing it, says 'Do I dare to eat a peach?' And from that I wrote this street poem.

#### INDECISION

Do I dare  
to eat  
a peach

If so  
do I dare  
to eat  
a fig

If so  
do I dare  
to swing  
a swing

If so  
do I dare  
to lay in  
sun

If so  
do I dare  
to doubt

If so  
can I  
doubt

If so  
will I

If not  
no problem

To Bob

20.

Thurber was he who came and went, the elusive. He was the spirit of the free. Freight-hopper, far-strider, late-nighter, first-gone, least-accounted for. His poems were as much a mystery as he was. Dave Hazelton published two or three in *SNYAPSE*. These were the only ones any of us had seen till the *Peace and Gladness* anthology.

Jim was the figure of a myth, a lost spirit perhaps but truer to himself than anyone I've ever known.

I cry out that I am forsaken.  
But in your nature  
there is nothing which forsakes me.  
The wind sweeps the leaves  
from every branch,  
and for miles in the woods  
I hear only that sound.  
Where are you hiding?  
And why do I not hear  
your inevitable movement toward me?  
I listened to the brook endlessly.  
I saw my own face in it,  
tasted its fire and coldness.  
Have you already arrived at my cabin  
shamelessly, while I was away?  
I have come, empty-handed and without reason  
thousands of miles. I am sure  
to prefer death to your absence.  
I cry out that I am forsaken,  
and that you do not answer me.  
Forsaken, how is it –  
that one forsakes himself?

Jim Thurber

It was Thurber who told me that one of my poems had been stolen from his rooms. It was this one:

Whether the  
 man says  
 I'm alone  
 or  
 not,  
 remembering  
 how the men  
 threw/throw  
 their lives  
 like  
 stones to skip  
 over the stream.  
 Stones/skip  
 given the  
 desire  
 and  
 effort  
 a stone  
 and  
 the stream.  
 And the  
 man,  
 whose aim  
 it's all  
 attributed to.  
 Who/stands  
 silent  
 watching  
 the stone,  
 plunge.

/The water.

Finally.  
 And  
 you ask,  
 where  
 would you keep  
 or would  
 be found,  
 the record  
 of this

small  
occurrence?  
And its  
place, its  
feel in your  
hand, the  
proper weight.  
Man-sized.

/And the

winter waters  
carry much  
weight of wood,  
trees/the  
rain fell  
of the mountains  
And later/the  
melt of snow.

/Cold water.

And finally  
the warming up,  
the last summer  
or any other  
year things,  
rocks that heap  
up, as the  
walls of water,  
the river lowers.  
A day, you  
can see  
the wet sides  
of the rock banks,  
indicating the  
water was higher,  
even today/and  
before your eyes.  
And finally/

you can

swim in the  
waters, with  
little fear.  
And you can/  
drink  
of the water,  
thinking only  
of your thirst,  
and the quality

of cold  
that the water is.  
And how the  
sun sets  
the water  
askimmer, and  
the water  
over rocks  
and in  
deep-colored  
pools, and  
think  
of animals  
that have drunk  
here/  
          before you.  
And after.  
And you will  
not disturb  
the still  
with a shout  
or a stone-cast  
and rings.  
Nor maybe  
will you come again.

22.

Thinking on Thurber I feel our greatness. The greatness that is of the heart, greatness in the feeling. The feeling of Thurber is greatness, though it remain forever unknown. The spirit that lays a permanent claim upon us, to feel its power upon us never diminished, to blaze from kindled memory, fresh and lithe as ever: in this I knew I knew greatness of Thurber. Thurber was great, and so was I.

#### FOUR BOOKS BY DOUG PALMER

BASTA. Poems written in response to Basta! La Historia de Nuestra Lucha: Enough! The Story of Our Struggle, a publication of the United Farm Workers of California, headed by Caesar Chavez.

MOON SERVICES. Street poems written as Facino, mostly on Cal. campus, Berkeley. A collage accompanies each poem.



GRAND GESTURES. Poem-observations of people written while street writing. Calligraphy and illustrations by Jenny.

MARGARET'S EXPERIENCES. Sexual love poems. Illustrated.