

BERKELEY DAZE (Hugh Fox)

Let me start out with a recent trip I made to Berkeley in the middle of May to participate in a, what should I call it, a shebang/revival festival/holy day celebration to remember, in a sense, revive the big poetry get-together that took place in Berkeley back in 1968.

I was there and it was the high point in my whole career as a mad poet. There was Mr. Smiley Long-Hair Richard Krech, Charles Wildman- from-the-Wilderness Charles Potts and his total outback leather outfit and as long-as-possible hair and beard, John Oliver Simon, Mr. Smiles, yes, but always with a touch of wry intellectualoid cynicism, beautiful Alta and her perfect body/stature and long hair, another Ms. Long-Hair Meditation, Julia Vinograd, Luis Garcia, Gene Fowler, David Meltzer.....like a group-incarnation of all the saints of Hippydom. All high optimism, a sense of total existential Nowness, turning the present moment into a moment of the fullest possible happiness.

Then forty years later, I go back and there they are....most of them. Krech with a cane, a successful defense attorney over the years, totally involved with southeast Asian religion, Mr. Buddha-Berkeley, Charles Potts, post-heart-attack, getting up every morning to go to the YMCA across the street from his house in Walla Walla, Washington, fighting to stay not just alive but thriving, and very successful at doing it, John Oliver

Simon still smiling, suprisingly bi-lingual in Spanish, Alta older, of course, but still staturesquely a beauty, Julia Vinograd, problems with one foot....the forty years had taken their toll, but they all still universally radiated a sense of paradisal Nowness. And some new blood, like Bree, the thirty year old incarnation of loveliness from Cleveland Heights (head of the Green Panda Press) who just sprawled out on the floor as if she were being beat by invisible goblins.

Here's the last poem of the poem-series I wrote when I left to come back to Michigan. Ellaraine in the poem is poet Ellaraine Lockie who wasn't part of the original Berkeley group but is a next-generation genius goddess I stayed with in Sunnyvale with her big-exec retired husband, Bob.

Welcome back to the Real (San José airport) Welt/World, almost tears, finally embracings of Ellaraine and Bob, too, too final goodbying to Napo (Napolean), the foot-long, furred super-cat, the wisterias and the palms, the all-in-one Korean-Chinese-Vietamese-Indian restaurants, the limping-timeless Krech, Mr. Super-Depth/Fun Potts, Spanish-English dual John Oliver Simon and his ex, Alta-Tall as a doric column topped with white hair, reading her beyond-biblical revelations, timeless-eternal flowering Bree on the floor being her-her-her-her-self, the meatloaf with whole eggs baked in the middle, all the orentalized humor...trying to forget for as long as I can that I'm seventy-six, four years away from (this can't have happened to me, can it?) ("It's a Beautiful Life," 1946) eighty,

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ALTA DAVID BROMIGE RICHARD DENNER LUIS GARCIA
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40th ANNIVERSARY OF 1968



ANNUS MIRABILIS

I'm back home in Michigan for a week full of longing, wishing I could turn back time, move back to Berkeley in 1968 and start all over again, when, a few days after my return, I get a book in the mail from Rychard Denner -- Berkeley Daze: Profiles of Poets in Berkeley in the 60's. Published by 7 dPress in Sebastopol in 2008.

One of the most marvelous books I've ever seen. Photos of Krech and John Oliver Simon on the cover, Rich Mangelsdorff in the background between them. Mangelsdorff looking a little worn out, but Krech and Simon the incarnation of nuclear reincarnation, Krech with his right hand up, fingers in a V for Victory. Victory over ordinary-ness.

The book a series of vigorously written vignettes of the whole Berkeley poet-gang, broken down into various categories:

Old Berkeley Hands: Luis Garcia, Belle Randall, Helen Breger (drawings), Ron Loewinsohn,

Young Poets of the Berkeley Poetry Conference: David Bromige, Gail Dusenbery, Gene Fowler, Jim Thurber, David Meltzer,

Berkeley Street Poets: Doug Palmer *Facino*, John *the Poet* Thompson, Julia Vinograd *the Bubble Lady*, Rychard Denner, John Oliver Simon, Richard Krech, Charles Potts, Joel Waldman, Harold Adler *photos*,

Outriders: Jack Foley, Al Masarik, John Bennett, Larry Kerschner.

I'm hardly mentioned in the book because I wasn't really a Berkeley poet but was living in Los Angeles between 1958 and 1968 and was at the big poetry get-together in '68 in Berkeley when Len Fulton created

the poetry press

4. and Denner

you know

the poetry press

COSMEP, the Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers and I ended up on the first Board of Directors. I also read with the rest of the poets....and it was one of the great moments in my whole life as a writer.

But back to Berkeley Daze.

Take the piece on Charles Potts. Known in those days as Laffing Water.

It begins with a photo of Potts with all his long hair and beard, a look of exaltation and at the same time "cleverness" in his eyes. Like a mouse that sees a big chunk of cheese down at the end of the hall in front of him.

Next comes some *great* bio-data, listing Potts' book, talking about Potts' publishing ventures, the mag The Temple, the book publishing outfit, Tsunami, and then gets into Potts' life as a real estate broker in Walla Walla, Washington. Next come a few words about Potts retired, followed by a total bibliography of Potts' work. Then, in order to give a critical overview of the work, there's a comprehensive review of Potts' Valga Krusha....followed by no less than five chapters of Potts' Valga Krusha which is mainly about the poets in the California scene -- Blazek, Andy Clausen, D.R. Wagner, Pete Winslow, Alta, Krech. I'm even mentioned for a second, my first meeting with Potts before we became good pals over the years. It's a *magnifique* overview, really alive, alive, alive.

And then the Potts piece ends with samples of Potts' work, classic poems like "Little Lord Shiva":

The sounds I'm hearing
Are putting me in a trance
From which I may not
Come out alive

Bodhisattvas we
Will not survive
The revolution
In a house in this much dis
Order

When it becomes
Absolutely necessary
I must leave.....

It has begun
And the bells of when
The saints go marching in
with Abraham and Jeremiah
Eurpides and Zeus
Lawrence and Ford
Duncan and Whalen
Laffing Water Laffing Gas

(pp.347-348)

A very complete picture of the total Potts somehow condensed into
fifty-one pages.

And Denner performs the same miracle with *all* the poets in the book. Even himself.

You read the book and feel you've spent a vacation with Denner and Julia Vinograd, Gene
Fowler, GalL Dusenbery...and all the rest I already mentioned at the beginning of this little
overview.

6.

After a whole life immersed in the arts, especially literature, I must admit that I've never seen a
book that more masterfully overviews a whole world, a whole scene. You're back in Berkeley forty
years ago, all the faces and voices and the philosophy that says **NOW, NOW, NOW, nothing
more than NOW.**

It's not just a study in nostalgia, but in a sense a map of not where we should return to, but
where we should walk to in the future, getting back our sense of the vitality and urgency of The
Present Moment, perhaps looking to the ancient Far East for a kind of buddhistic regeneration of
existential amplification, walking out of a world totally preoccupied with failing economic systems
and religious-, racial-, economic-wars and coming back to enjoy the lives we have while we have
them.

Like in Denner's poem (that appears after a poem that just repeats and repeats Vietnam over
and over again):

there
is a
cemetery

in the
mind
tombstoned

we look
for it --
the door

that
opens
onto
gardens
and
graveyards.

(pp.257-258)

These poets of the 60's were very well aware of the same madness that surrounded them and surrounds us today. But their lives, their poetry, their whole philosophy was a remedy we could use (again) today.

I could write two books about this book, but ça suffit.