GROVER LEWIS

The Uncommon Insight and Grace of an Ordinary Man

Rodger Scott

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Grover Lewis: The Uncommon Insight and Grace of an Ordinary Man
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Dedicated to
Rae Lewis and Maria-Theresa Au-Scott
who paid their dues
and kept their promises

And to the memory of
Brothers and Comrades
Doyle Ewing
Chuck Edward
Don Goode
Joe Cox
Kell Robertson
Paul Foreman

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Introduction

Santa Monica/Beverly Hills—1978

> *I was curious to learn what I could about a man who had entered American publishing by way of an eighth-grade education and a newsletter he had put out for topless bars he then owned in Ohio. In four years [Larry] Flynt had created a magazine empire . . . by tapping into some of the quirkier wellsprings of the American psyche.*
>
> From "The Shooting of Larry Flynt"
> New West Magazine
> March 27, 1978

Nothing about the Larry Flynt story had anything to do with Grover Lewis, except, of course, the fact that it was Grover who was walking twelve paces behind Flynt, in Lawrenceville, Georgia, when shots rang out and Flynt staggered and fell to the ground with bullet wounds that would leave him crippled for the rest of his life. In the stunned seconds after the shots were fired, Grover turned on his tape recorder capturing the sound of a vehicle speeding away, but everyone's attention was focused on Flynt, who was writhing in his own blood and groaning in pain.

Grover, Flynt and Flynt's two attorneys were returning from lunch to the Gwinnett County Courthouse where Flynt was on trial, defending himself against obscenity charges relating to his publication of *Hustler* magazine. Flynt had walked ahead with Gene Reeves, one of his attorneys. Grover and Flynt's other attorney, Paul Cambria, Jr., were walking behind them. My part of the story began with a phone call. I was at my mother's house in Kanarraville. My father had died the previous December, and I had come home to be with Mom for a few days while Grover was covering the trial in Georgia and interviewing Flynt and his wife, Althea, at their home in Columbus, Ohio. The phone call was from Paul Cambria who told me about the shooting. The first

televised reports were saying that a writer, who was with Flynt, had also been shot. Grover had asked Cambria to call me because he didn't want me to hear the first report on TV news and be worried. Grover was unable to make the call himself because he was being interviewed by the Georgia police.

Moments later I received another phone call. This one from Jon Carroll, the editor of *New West* magazine, where both Grover and I were currently on staff. Jon had assigned the story to Grover and when Grover called him from Georgia, immediately after the shooting, Jon decided to pull apart the March 27th, 1978, issue which had just been "put to bed" and insert the Flynt shooting as the new cover story. He was arranging through contacts in Georgia to get Grover back to Los Angeles and he wanted me back there too. I told Jon I would leave as soon as I could get the car loaded. I kissed mother goodbye and as I was going out the door she handed me a small handful of Valium. I was on the road back to Los Angeles less than an hour after the phone calls.

Grover was waiting for me at the home of Larry Dietz and Penny Bloch when I arrived late that afternoon. Larry had, until very recently, been Executive Editor at *New West*, and Penny still was a copy-editor there. Grover was a wreck. Clearly in shock, his pupils were dancing around even more vigorously than usual. He was well-oiled from a long flight that served cocktails, but clearly the alcohol had had no tranquilizing effect on him. His hands were trembling and cold. He was wound up tight and still wearing the clothes he'd had on since morning. He was disheveled and frantic and there was a peculiar odor emanating from his person. Not just body odor you'd expect from a smoker who had been traveling and hadn't showered in a couple of days but something else, funky and rank.

Larry had picked Grover up at LAX and the plan was that Grover would tell the story to Larry and Larry would sit at his typewriter and transpose it into publishable form that would be a reasonable facsimile of the tone and voice of a Grover Lewis story. Penny and I would transcribe tapes and edit the pages as they rolled out of Larry's new IBM Memory typewriter. It was crucial that Jon Carroll have the manuscript in Beverly Hills by early the next morning, so he could

meet his print deadline. Not to meet the print deadline was not an option.

The story came out in lumps and bumps. Lucid, informed paragraphs of reportage would pour out of Grover for a while and then he'd veer off into murky territory, paranoid fantasies filled with violence and raw fear. He believed the shooter was still out there looking for him and could show up at any moment. When he'd slip into one of these episodes I would sit by him and talk to him, soothing and reassuring him. Penny would heat water and make him another toddy out of Dietz's high-dollar Scotch, and Larry would turn up the thermostat and find another sweater. This would settle Grover for a while and we'd all return to the story. As the night wore on, the three of us were exhausted and impatient and poor Grover was still amped up and wired. His wild rants were becoming ever more frequent, frightening and elaborate. He complained constantly that he was cold and finally Larry brought out a blanket and his navy-blue Brooks Brothers blazer. He helped Grover into the jacket and I tucked the blanket around him. As I did so, I vowed to myself that I would take him to the emergency room as soon as we were released from this hellish project.

As first light appeared over the Santa Monica Mountains, we had the story in decent shape and we all hoped to get a few of hours of sleep before Larry delivered it to Jon. As Grover and I were preparing to leave I told him he should take off Larry's Blazer and return it to him, but Grover refused, saying the jacket was warm and he needed to keep it against the early-morning chill. I persisted and told him it was only a short drive home where he had warm clothing of his own, but Grover was adamant that he would not take off the jacket. Ever the gracious host, and sensing a stalemate, Larry said it was fine. Grover should keep the jacket on and we could return it in a day or two.

When we got home I gave Grover one of mother's Valium, hoping it would help him sleep. He wanted another hot toddy and I made him one, skimping a little on the booze. I took a Valium, too, and began preparing for bed. Grover's bed preparations involved taking off his shoes. Everything else stayed on. I was far too weary to object and we collapsed into bed and sleep.

Sleep didn't last long. The phone began ringing around 7, waking us both. It was Jon and he told me that Larry had asked for a shared byline on the story. I handed the phone to Grover. I heard him tell Jon that under the circumstances, he was willing to share his byline, which I thought was both generous of Grover and the right thing to do. It occurred to me that perhaps Grover's decision was aided by the fact that he was still wearing Larry's navy-blue Brooks Brothers blazer which was, in fact, looking a little rumpled.

Back on the phone with me, Jon insisted that I spend the rest of the week at home with Grover, to calm and anchor him and encourage him toward re-entry. Obviously Dietz had told him of our overnight excursions into the dark zone. But re-entry proved elusive. In the next couple of days Grover's drinking did not taper off at all. He refused to take off his clothes or attend to his personal hygiene and all my efforts to get him to a doctor—or even outdoors—failed miserably. I might as well have suggested a trip to Mars. He paced around the apartment and kept the thermostat up high. Chain-smoking cigarettes, his only "nourishment" was black coffee laced with booze.

In this lingering paranoia I think that the sounds of the Flynt gunfire played and replayed in his head and every time his attention fixed on that sound, he was thrust backward, into the room with Opal, a gun in her face, and Big Grover firing in a murderous rage. In an instant Grover's protector and the one person in his life who loved him unconditionally dropped to the floor (not unlike Flynt dropping to the ground) and was gone forever. It all made him, as they say, temporarily insane. This was the only time anything like that had ever happened, and nothing like it ever happened again.

On Friday morning, feeling defeated and dispirited, I drove into the office by myself to pick up copies of the new issue. Grover was just getting up as I arrived back home. Having the magazine in his hands improved his outlook at once. The cover was red, of course, and had a reasonably accurate drawing of Flynt and Grover done by Julian Allen. The cover line said "The Shooting of Larry Flynt, An Eyewitness Account, By Grover Lewis." We took our coffee into the living room and settled in to read the story. Larry did get his share of the byline,

and we were relieved to discover that it all held together rather nicely.

Encouraged by the improvement in his mood, I persuaded Grover that it really was time to take off his by now rather fragrant collection of clothing—he had lately added a Pendleton Black Watch scarf to his ensemble—and take a good hot shower. While he was in the bathroom I snagged Larry's jacket, emptied the pockets and hustled it out to the car so I could get it to the cleaners as soon as possible.

Freshly showered and shaved and in clean (warm) clothes of his own, Grover looked wonderful. My spirits surged and I felt like smiling for the first time in days. Here was my knight-errant, home again. Mine, again.

Over the weekend things continued to improve. Grover did not reflexively reach for the Wild Turkey to juice up his coffee. He ate a couple of donuts. We ventured outdoors and walked to Palisades Park to look at the ocean and the sunset. On Sunday morning we went to our local deli and he actually ate breakfast: sausage, eggs, grits, biscuits and gravy. It was the first meal he'd had since the shooting. On Monday we went into the office together.

We were welcomed enthusiastically by Jon Carroll and the editorial and art staffs and as word circulated that Grover was in the office, staff members from all the other departments drifted by to say hello. There was genuine concern for Grover and he was visibly delighted by the responses to him and to the story. Joe Armstrong, the new Publisher of both *New West* and *New York*, was in town and with some fanfare he presented Grover with a bonus check for $1,200.00. Hazard Duty Pay, I supposed. The story was something of a coup for the magazine. Except for television and daily newspaper coverage, ours was the first periodical on the newsstands anywhere in the country with a story about Flynt and the trial and the shooting.

Grover got a lot of attention that week; not all of it pleasant. Two FBI agents came into the office and talked briefly to Jon and to Grover. They wanted to "borrow" the cassette tapes he had of the Flynt interview and the aftermath of the shooting. They said they would make dupes of the cassettes and return them in a few days. We handed them over pronto. True to their word, the same agents returned them a few days

later. More disturbing, there were several threatening phone calls, both to the *New West* office, and to our home. One woman, whose voice I recognized, called twice. Both times at 3 a.m., and when I answered she spat out only one word: "Pig!" Later in the week, Dick Adler wrote in his gossip column for the *Herald Examiner* "How could Grover Lewis be an eyewitness to anything? Everybody knows he's blind." The solution to the threatening phone calls was obvious: get an unlisted number, which I did, immediately. And The Her-Ex swipe was old news by the next morning when another edition hit the newsstands.

Grover was coming into the office every day now and we'd have lunch together or with other staff members or writers. With the infusion of bonus cash fattening our budget, Grover wanted to go shopping. Specifically, he wanted to go to Brooks Bros., which was conveniently located right across the street on Wilshire Blvd. And, to be precise, he wanted a navy-blue blazer, just like the one of Larry's he'd worn for four days straight. That was just fine with me. I thought it was a splendid idea. I went shopping too, but I went to Neiman-Marcus for new shoes and perfume.

New West was a bi-weekly publication and the high point of the issue's run on the stands was Grover's appearance on Tom Snyder's late-night talk show. This felt like the big time for sure and we both dressed up. Grover, of course, wore his new blazer. A stretch limo showed up at our apartment to pick us up and drive us to the Burbank studios of NBC. "I could really get used to this," I said to Grover as he handed me into the back seat. Sidney Sheldon was Snyder's other guest that night and it was jarring to be in the same pre-show hospitality suite with those two very different writers. Sheldon, so very smooth and polished, phony as a 3-dollar bill, and Grover, hyper-articulate but still bristling and as serious as a heart attack. Sheldon clearly had no idea who Grover was. (He scarcely knew who Flynt was, or so he claimed,) but Grover, demonstrating that he could be rational and poised when the situation required it, reined in the adrenalin and was gracious and charming. I was on pins and needles the whole time; grateful when the show-attendant walked each of them to Snyder's desk, so I only had to deal with one of them at a time.

Sheldon was there to promote his new book, which sounded, to me, depressingly like all the other books he had written, the ones whose sales had made him a very rich man. I don't remember that much about Grover's interview, except that both Snyder and Grover were focused and intense and Grover's comments seemed to carry a subtext: Something corrosive and dangerous had been set loose upon the land. Grover was so buoyed up by the attention and the bonus money (not to mention the cross-town travel-by-limo), that I began to think perhaps we were out of the woods, but my optimism was premature. By the time the next issue of the magazine came out, the spotlight had moved on to other players and while I was at the office every day, Grover was home with no one to talk to and nothing much to do. As the coming weeks unfolded, I began to understand that, for Grover, being in such close proximity to gunfire and seeing Flynt fall bleeding to the ground, had been a mind-shattering event. It had thrust him back into the violence of his childhood, and the deaths of his parents; the mysteries surrounding their double homicides, and the disastrous impact their deaths had had on his life. In no time he had slipped into the haunted precincts of his past and from there it was an easy slide into depression. A professional, if I'd been able to get him to one, would have diagnosed his condition as post-traumatic-stress-disorder.

Lacking the concentration to read, Grover played music and watched old movies on TV, but he called me at work two or three times a day, just to talk and to ask when I'd be coming home. One afternoon he called to say there were FBI agents on the porch and they kept ringing the doorbell. "Did they show you identification?" I asked. Grover said, "I didn't answer the door." I said "I think you should answer the door and ask to see their identification and if they are really from the FBI you should let them in and talk to them." I told him I'd call again in a few minutes to check on the situation and make sure he was okay. That seemed to satisfy him and when I called a few minutes later, he said he "was fine. When are you coming home?" He made no mention of any FBI agents out on the porch, or elsewhere. Eventually, our lives did begin to resume their familiar contours. Grover had eased way back on the hard liquor. He was regularly taking walks. He began going to

the neighborhood library to catch up on new books and magazines. He visited his local barber and got a haircut. These were positive and encouraging developments.

One Saturday morning in early May I was puttering around the apartment enjoying the prospect of the weekend and spending some time outdoors in the heavenly southern California weather. I was in the bedroom and Grover came in and said "Come into the kitchen and have some more coffee, I need to talk to you about something important." He held out his hand to me. His tone was somber and left no room for argument. I had a pretty good idea about what would be coming next. Seated in the breakfast nook with our coffee, he took my hands, (both of them this time) and said "There is something I haven't told you. I deeply regret it, but it is something you need to know. I have two children, Shannon and Clay, and I have been estranged from them for many years." We continued holding hands and I looked at him as sweetly as I knew how and said "Well, honey, I already knew that."

Letting go of my hands, Grover immediately became defensive, as if I was the one guilty of betrayal, and in a sharp voice he said "How could you have known about it?" I ignored his sharp tone and, again, as sweetly as possible, I said "Knox told me about the kids when he visited us in San Francisco four years ago. He looked stunned, and for perhaps the only time in our lives together, he appeared to be speechless, so I continued. "That's all I know. That you have two children."

"Why didn't you say something to me about it?" he asked. This, too, in a sharp tone." "What was I going to say?" I said. Me, still being sweet. "Obviously I spent a lot of time thinking about it," I told him, "but just as obviously I knew I wasn't going to be going anywhere, even if you did have kids. I guess I figured that if you could keep a secret about the children, then I could keep a secret about them, too." Then I said "Now that our secrets are out, why don't you tell me about the kids."

It was a tearful, sometimes wrenching story and we sat at the table the rest of the morning while it unfolded. He got out pictures of them and, of course, they were beautiful children. He told me they had been adopted by his ex-wife's second husband and that he had had no contact with them for many years. He deeply regretted that fact but he

had no idea how to address it. At present he didn't even know where they were living. At the end of our conversation that morning I had a much clearer understanding of the man I was married to; some of his history, a few of his fears and at least one of his failures. I also had a clearer understanding of the depth and configuration of the emotional scars he still carried from his own ghastly childhood of neglect and abuse.

My reluctance to confront Grover about the children after I had learned of them was centered in my belief that his health was in perilous condition. I understood that if trust was ever to to grow between us, we first had to survive or, more precisely, Grover had to survive. Since Grover had never once thus far demonstrated the slightest interest in survival, I was obviously the one who had to come up with a plan.

Mine was the easy part of the puzzle. My personality is not a complicated one. I am not an angry person. So, when Bill Knox, in his own blundering way, informed me that I had step-children, it was relatively easy for me to regard it as just another piece of unmoored information.

Grover's part was more problematic. He had a formidable intellect and was obviously tough-minded. He possessed a steel-jacketed logic that was difficult to argue with. For a man whose life had dealt him a dark hand, he had a keen wit, and there was a musical quality to his voice and in conversation his precisely articulated words came out as if each had first been struck by a tuning fork.

Nevertheless, his physical package was visibly fragile, the embodiment of years of neglect and excess and faulty nutrition. He no longer used amphetamines, but he still, not infrequently, drank hard spirits as though death was his object, not mere entertainment or diversion. Compared to the complex workings of Grover's mind, and my own daily encounters with his brilliant and inventive conversation, his dissembling about the kids was a minor transgression and some part of me feared he might not survive a confrontation. Every day he made me laugh. Every day he brought music into my life. In my mind, in those years, finding out the "truth" about his kids was simply not worth the risk. After that May-Saturday confessional our relationship

finally acquired the element of trust that had been missing for four years. Without the necessity of keeping secrets our marriage blossomed and we relaxed into domesticity and true intimacy.

I think for the first time Grover realized that my interest in him and my commitment to him were genuine. I think he finally realized something else, too, something I had known from the beginning: He needed a lot of love and I had a lot of love to give him.

Rae Lewis

The Unfinished Book: *Goodbye If You Can Call That Gone*

On a warm Tuesday in April, 1995, five days before Grover Lewis died of lung cancer, he dictated notes to his wife Rae on the book about his life, *Goodbye If You Can Call That Gone.* The book, which he had started a few months before, begins with a quote from George Santayana: "Everything in nature is lyrical in its ideal essence; tragic in its fate, and comic in its existence."

> History and legend bind us to the past, along with unquenchable memory.
>
> In the spring of 1943, my parents—Grover Lewis, a truck driver, and Opal Bailey Lewis, a hotel waitress—shot each other to death with a pawnshop pistol. For most of a year, Big Grover had stalked my mother, my four-year-old sister, and me across backwater Texas, resisting Opal's decision to divorce him. When she finally did, and when he finally cornered her and pulled the trigger as he'd promised to do, she seized the gun and killed him, too.
>
> A next-door neighbor of Opal's—called "Dad" North because of his advanced age—witnessed the mayhem shortly after dawn on a rainy Monday morning in May. Big Grover was twenty-seven years old, Opal twenty-six, and they'd been married for almost eleven years. My father survived for half a day without regaining consciousness, and died in the same charity hospital where I was born. Opal died where she fell, under a shadeless light bulb in the drafty old rooming house where she'd been living alone and struggling to keep Titter and me in a nearby nursery school....The fatal events took place in my hometown of San Antonio when I was eight.

Grover concluded in the last year of his life that, in spite of the police report and press accounts, his mother probably hadn't shot his father. It was much more likely that "Dad" North, had—when the old man

intervened, trying to protect Opal—but the police wanted to spare Mr. North further investigation and publicity.

Grover at Texas Tech

I met Grover in the fall of 1960 in an American literature seminar at Texas Technological College, a large land-grant state university on the high sandy plains of Lubbock. Grover had a National Defense Education Act fellowship and was in the first semester of a three-year doctoral program. He had chosen Texas Tech over Emory University and often lamented that choice. A professor in the English Department, Lawrence Boling, used two expressions that complemented Grover's not overly charitable view of the town and the college: "The people around Lubbock have a good clean brand of ignorance," and "The rascalar density (which Boling determined, as scientifically as he could, to be the number of sons-of-bitches per square yard) in the Tech administration building is among the highest in the world."

At the age of 26, Grover was, by intellect, a socialist skeptical of ideology and, by instinct, a sharecropper populist circumstantially at home in the Democratic Party of John Kennedy. During the self-introductions in the first class, he described himself, without hesitation or self-consciousness, as a writer, and announced that his work had been published in *Nation* magazine. Grover also listed the specific academic and literary awards he had won. I was sitting behind him and couldn't see his face as he spoke. He was wearing a light-blue chambray shirt, navy denim trousers, a beige corduroy sport coat and black Wellington boots. His glasses had black plastic frames and thick tinted lenses. I was bothered by his lack of modesty but attentive to his audacity. He spoke with a kind of sincerity and authority that made what would normally seem self-aggrandizement almost matter-of-fact observation. The first impression was that he was a self-promoter.

Grover said that reading good books was the best way he'd found to inform and liberate the mind and that he would try to be fair and objective in deciding whether graduate education was integral, incidental or antithetical to that process. There were several things about Grover Lewis that set him apart from the other graduate English

majors who wanted to write like William Faulkner but only talked like him. When Grover was reading, which he often did during class, he would hold the book or paper four or five inches from his glasses and move his head from left to right in a jerky motion then smoothly from right to left, repeating the process until he had finished. Other activities taking place in the classroom had no effect on his concentration.

Two or three weeks later when the instructor asked us to indicate what our seminar projects would be, the titles could have come from the table of contents of dreary literary journals until it was Grover's turn. He said, "I'm going to do a screen adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter*."

The instructor, Dr. John Guilds, who had told us at the first class meeting that he had published several articles on the theme of the unpardonable sinner in Nathaniel Hawthorne's writing, visibly disapproved of Grover's project but had already sensed that the slender graduate student with thick glasses believed in—and practiced with the appropriate level of combat—a simple and supremely democratic principle: The quality of a person's logic is always more important than his rank. And Grover had a distinct, resonant voice to punctuate his eminently logical yet sometimes jarring views. He had not only read more of the best American writing of the 19th and 20th centuries than the professor but invariably expressed his understanding of literary and human questions in lively, graceful language that compelled respect from anyone who valued precision and lucidity. In principle and practice, Grover rarely offered sanctuary to the pompous and self-serving.

Grover's screen adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter* ran 109 pages; it followed the screenplay format and had the technical instructions, terminology and specifications of a film script. At the end of the presentation, which was about as compelling to the instructor as a theological treatise on the Koran would have been to a Hardshell Baptist, Dr. Guilds observed gravely: "Well, Mr. Lewis, that certainly represents a lot of work." The professor offered no further comment.

After class as Grover and I were having coffee in the student union, I said: "Guilds didn't have much insight to offer on your screenplay."

"I suspect this may be the only one he's ever read, but as a scholar he

may be tryin' to keep on open mind on whether film is an art form."

A few weeks later my seminar report was on "The Unpardonable Sinner in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Works." I suggested that Hawthorne was probably agnostic and was more interested in the social and individual psychology than in the theology of Puritanism and that Hawthorne—like thoughtful, independent-minded people of any religion—rejected tenets of faith that placed an unbearable burden on credibility, and dogma that left no room for humanity. I concluded that the unpardonable sinners in Hawthorne's works, like the infamous oppressors of history and contemporary psychopaths, were not literally doomed to hell but were lost souls because they were incapable of empathy or compassion. The instructor strongly disagreed and added that I hadn't made a very convincing case for my "narrow and unconventional interpretation" that was "more sociological than literary."

In the hall, Grover said: "I can tell you're bothered by Guilds' reaction, although the way you challenged him you must've expected it. Your report was based on common sense, thoughtful and reasoned analysis. Your only error in judgment was thinkin' the people who run this college place much value in those things."

Grover moved through the corridors of that high plains academic bureaucracy like a cagey trusty on a prison farm who knows he can outwit and outmaneuver his keepers. He loved literature and ideas and his passion for both never led him to mistake academics for intellectuals.

The second semester Grover was at Texas Tech the college put together a week of cultural and artistic activities. One of the faculty members who claimed to be a friend of William Faulkner promised to do everything he could to have "ol' Bill" be the keynote speaker. Grover remarked that "Faulkner had the good sense not even to acknowledge the letter of invitation." Grover wrote and presented a paper on Woody Guthrie. The dust bowl folksinger and labor activist who had ties to the Communist Party during the 1930s was a hero to Grover.

Woody was from Oklahoma and had lived in the Texas Panhandle town of Pampa, but few people at Texas Tech in the early 1960s had

heard of him. That same week Grover debated a young graduate student on whether Ernest Hemingway was a major writer, and began the debate with the statement: "I suppose the people here this evening have seen the surreal posters all over campus HEMINGWAY: A MAJOR WRITER?—to question whether Hemingway is a major writer is a bit like saying: 'Jesus Christ, question mark.' "

Rev. Dr. Billy James Hargis

For several months Grover wrote the liberal political column of the campus newspaper and another student wrote the conservative column. When the Rev. Dr. Billy James Hargis came to Lubbock in 1962 to deliver his Christian anti-Communist message, Grover wrote in the first paragraph that a group of Lubbock businessmen, a de facto chamber of commerce, had invited the Rev. Dr. Hargis to town. Grover then described Hargis, who had studied for one year at a small Bible college in Bentonville, Arkansas, as "a 270-pound barnstorming fascist." That was Grover's last column.

In the fall of 1962 I had a one-year fellowship to study Spanish and linguistics at San Francisco State College. Out of boredom or loneliness, I was turning the radio dial late at night and happened to hear the voice of Hargis introducing a "Latin American expert" from England named Lord George Blarney (truth can be stranger than parody as well as fiction), who had just completed a book called *Cuba, the Truth*.

In a proper British accent, the man described Cuba's attempt to overthrow the government of Venezuela "under the able leadership of the dedicated anti-Communist and gentleman soldier, General Perez-Jimenez," (he pronounced the name "Peray Jimenay"). The "expert" revealed that a ship had sailed from Cuba to Venezuela with a load of weapons for Venezuelan insurgents. He described the color and tonnage of the ship, the precise number of rifles, grenades and other weapons, including the names, models and capabilities of the arms as well as where they had been manufactured and how they had gotten to Cuba.

The dates of departure from Havana Harbor and arrival in Maracaibo Harbor included not only the month and day but also the exact hour

and minute. Hearing the British accent and encyclopedic details that we associate more often with the narration of Public TV documentaries than with the cracker accents and shade-tree theology of radio evangelists, I realized that Southern fundamentalists weren't the only ones who had seen the light and were reaping the material as well as the spiritual rewards of preaching Jesus and fighting Communists.

At the end of the program I wrote a letter requesting the free book, *Cuba, the Truth*. I added a question mark to the title and sent a 25-cent "love offering to carry on God's work of fighting Communism." I misspelled at least 30 words and ended the letter urging Dr. Hargis to use his influence to investigate the Police Department of Lubbock, Texas, which, I charged, had been taken over by the Communists. I signed the letter "Grover Lewis." When I told Grover what I had done, he smiled: "The only thing I object to is that you gave a quarter to those swine."

Billy James Hargis—who was born in 1925 in Texarkana, Texas—was adopted by a railroad worker and his wife. The family was too poor during the Great Depression to own a radio. When Billy James was 10 years old, his mother was hospitalized and near death. Billy James prayed for God to save her; and promised to devote his life to God's service if He did. She survived and he kept his promise. When Billy James was 17, the Disciples of Christ Church ordained him. In the next six years, little beyond his size—he was six feet six inches tall and weighed 260 pounds—distinguished him from other country preachers who reminded the congregation every Sunday that all had "sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" but confessing their sins and accepting Jesus would save them from an eternal burning Hell and ensure them a place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In 1948, the young Rev. Hargis read a religious pamphlet that documented the connection between Communism and the NAACP; and his life was never the same after that—and the next jarring revelation was equally mind- and career-altering: The National Council of Churches, he came to believe, was a Marxist organization. At the age of 23, Rev. Hargis recognized that it was as much his sacred duty to drive Communism out of America as to save the souls of sinners.

In the early 1950s, the Cold War and the undeclared war in Korea helped Senator Joseph McCarthy convince the good people of our economically and militarily powerful country that we were losing the battle against Communist subversion. The anti-Communist preacher's fame and fortune allowed him to play a bit part on the cultural stage of that era: Hargis and his Christian Anti-Communist crusaders floated helium-filled balloons with Bible verses attached to them from West Germany into East Germany, and some media sources reported that Rev. Hargis not only supported and collaborated with McCarthy but also wrote some of his speeches.

On May 31, 1961, Bob Jones University awarded Rev. Hargis an honorary Doctor of Laws degree, and the success of his labor continued much like Jesus's parable of feeding the multitudes with the "loaves and the fishes." By the mid-1960s, Rev. Dr. Hargis had created a media empire that included hundreds of television and radio stations, and his organization published and distributed books, a newsletter, and LP records of his sermons.

In 1971, he founded American Christian College in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and ran a summer camp for young Christian crusaders. Until the mid-1970s, Hargis and his multi-media empire educated the people on the truth and sanctity of segregation ("ordained by God"), states' rights, and a literal interpretation of the Bible—and on the moral and practical failure of "Communism, Socialism, Russia, China and the welfare state." Rev. Hargis coined or adopted two terms to describe Civil Rights activists: "race agitators" and "race rioters."

Rev. Dr. Hargis pointed out that none of the 70 leading ministers of the National Council of Churches had voted for Barry Goldwater in the 1964 election, also that the National Council of Churches urged the U.S. "to get out of South Vietnam and turn over the country to the Communists and to abandon Chiang Kai-shek and turn the country over to Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communists."

In the 52-minute radio program, "The Cross and Sickle," Tom Anderson introduces Hargis:

> The Great Society—or the Great Step Backward, as some of us Americans like to call it—is neither modern nor unique. The

Great Society is Socialism. Socialism is a 2,000-year-old failure. We know what Socialism is. We don't have to guess—unlike the young bride who was complaining to her mother about her husband's drinking; and her mother asked her: "Well, why did you marry him if you knew he drank so much?" She said, "I didn't know he drank so much until he came home sober one night."

Our speaker, Billy James Hargis, has fought the liberal lepers who promote Marxism, Naziism, Socialism, immorality. For the past 20 years, Reverend Hargis has the dignity and the guts to take an outward, open stand for these United States and for Jesus Christ. Billy James Hargis doesn't spend his time opposing other conservatives as so many conservatives do.... Billy James Hargis preaches Christ's way. I haven't figured out yet what kind of way it is the hierarchy of the National Council of Churches preaches but it's not the American way and, from what I know about my Bible, it's not Christ's way. Dr. Billy James Hargis goes to the extreme buying time on more than 400 radio stations to tell the American people to stick with God instead of the United Nations. Billy James Hargis preaches Christ and His virgin birth, His divinity, His miracles, His saving power, His resurrection, and His promise of eternal life. This is as Senator Fulbright says of our Constitution: "out-of-date and unsuited for our modern, complex life."

Billy James Hargis is a dedicated, fundamental, born-again Christian who knows the full story of the insidious, Marxist-oriented, pro-Communist organization now going under the name of the National Council of Churches. Dr. Billy James Hargis is about to lay it on the line all about the Judas goats who are leading their flocks to the slaughter.

Dr. Hargis begins:

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that the National Council of Churches is an instrument of Satan. It's not good for freedom; it's not good for religious orthodoxy.... Every problem in the United States today—race agitation, immorality, and even a Socialistic political revolution, is due directly to both active leadership of the National Council of Churches or its failure to declare itself

> in defense of Christian traditions. I contend that every problem that confronts us today is the making of the National Council of Churches perhaps more than any other organization.

Hargis also condemned Berkeley activist Mario Savio ("this little brat"), Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois, Dalton Trumbo and Kirk Douglas, but his harshest criticism was of the Episcopal vicar and other members of the clergy in San Francisco who wanted to bring homosexuals and lesbians into the church.

> I believe that the church of Jesus Christ ought to set an example of righteousness and virtuous living and when a minister participates in filth like this, this man is not fit to be a minister in the gospel of Jesus Christ. (When four Protestant ministers sponsored a dance for homosexuals in San Francisco, the police broke up the dance, and the ministers charged that the police harassed everyone who attended, including the ministers.)

Hargis' response:

> They charged they'd been harassed by police officials. They shouldn't have been harassed; they ought to have been hanged. I say that facetiously but that's the truth. Now, don't go out and say that I advocated hanging the four preachers. I said that facetiously. They should've been fired from their churches, to say the least, and driven out of their ministries, and their ordination papers should've been taken away from them. They should've been de-frocked for very good reasons.
>
> My biggest disappointment is when I see God's people failing to accept a responsible role in this fight to preserve Christian freedoms in the world.... Everything we have said on radio in the past 20 years was true. They've ridiculed us; they held us in contempt. They questioned our motives—even the administration moved against us—and we had to go out with tin cups and beg people to give us a dime or quarter to save their kids and their kids. And when I got a few dollars to buy a few minutes of radio time, they questioned my motives and called me a "patriot for profit." How much can one human being take? I've taken 20 years

> of ridicule and contempt, but, bless God, I'd rather die fighting Communism than have to live under Communism.

In 1974, Rev. Hargis was forced to resign as president of American Christian College after two college students—one male, one female—claimed Hargis had had sex with them. In 1976, *Time* magazine reported on that and other alleged incidents at the Hargis farm in the Ozarks and on tour with his All American Kids musical group.

In 1977, Tom Snyder invited Rev. Hargis to appear on his TV show. In the hour-long interview, the radio preacher and televangelist showed qualities I didn't expect. Watching that program 38 years after it was taped, I found him to be thoughtful, witty, and articulate. If the 52-year-old reverend was acting, he certainly fooled me when he described himself as a "country preacher" and a "repentant sinner." I don't think Grover, who was on the Tom Snyder show the following year, saw the Hargis interview. If he had, I suspect he would've concluded that Snyder erred on the side of humanity in his charity and good will toward the fallen preacher.

Billy James Hargis never recovered from the scandals. Declining enrollment forced American Christian College to close in 1977. In Hargis's published statements and autobiography, *My Great Mistake*, printed in 1985, he continued to deny all the sexual allegations. He told a reporter in Tulsa, Oklahoma: "I was guilty of sin but not the sin I was accused of."

After becoming an internal exile on his farm in Neosho, Missouri, Billy James Hargis continued to make daily and weekly radio broadcasts, to write books, and to publish the monthly *Christian Crusade Newspaper*.

In the last years, the Rev. Dr. Hargis suffered from Alzheimer's disease and died in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2004. He was 79 years old.

Editing a Literary Magazine at Texas Tech

Grover edited a literary magazine at Texas Tech. The name of the college appeared one time on the back cover in tiny, barely readable type beneath a black and white photograph of the door to Grover's office, which was in the Chemistry Building. Immediately above the

door were the words DEPT. OF   . A short time before Grover and the other teaching assistant in the English Department had been assigned to that office the word CHEMISTRY had been painted over and more than a year later ENGLISH was still missing. Immediately below the back cover photo was the message: "Thanks for the use of the hall."

During Grover's sixth and final semester at Texas Tech, I went back to Lubbock for a brief visit. Knowing that Grover had bypassed the M.A., I asked if he was going to finish his dissertation and get the Ph.D. "No, I'm not," he answered without explanation.

"Did you have more political problems?"

"No," he said, "I just quit goin' to class in the middle of the semester. I started thinkin' about it and decided that havin' a Ph.D. from anywhere would be hard enough to live down but havin' one from Texas Tech would be impossible to live down."

In the late summer of 1960, Grover and Peggy, his first wife, had moved into a red brick house on 20th Street less than two blocks from the southeast corner of the Texas Tech campus. If he and I were discussing something after class, I would walk with him to the southeast edge of the campus and we would part company there.

We were standing in the deep grass near the wide intersection when I told Grover that I had considered making a placard CATHOLICS FOR NIXON to counter the BAPTISTS FOR KENNEDY placards that some West Texans had carried when John Kennedy made a brief campaign stop at the airport a few miles north of town. I added that I agreed with Truman's comment that Nixon was a "lying son-of-a-bitch" but I didn't think Kennedy would turn out to be much better, especially for working people, since he was a Harvard-educated rich boy with more charm and good looks than intellect and principle.

Grover said that Kennedy didn't strike him as being bright or principled but he expected some of the Kennedy advisers to be both and that about the only good thing Nixon could accomplish as president would be to make "Eisenhower's benign incompetence look a little

better by comparison." Grover then gave me a brief history of Nixon's rise to national prominence by redbaiting and destroying the political career of Helen Gahagan Douglas, a "decent and intelligent woman," in their race for the Senate in 1950. Grover characterized Nixon's anti-Communist pronouncements as "cast in *Readers' Digest* rhetoric but born more of opportunism than the ignorance and paranoia we're used to."

Grover and I became friends during that fall semester of 1960. He assured me that my undergraduate major in foreign languages was not a disadvantage for someone beginning graduate work in English: "You don't need anybody to tell you how to interpret literature—or life either. Thoughtful people can do both for themselves."

After we'd had several conversations walking across campus, he would invite me to their house for a beer or coffee or dinner in the evening. Grover and Peggy had a two-year-old daughter named Shannon and their son Clay was born the second year they lived in Lubbock. One of her toys was a green inflated plastic dinosaur as big as Shannon. It was the logo of Sinclair Oil Company, so they named it Sinclair Lewis.

G.W. Maxwell, a friend from high school, and I dropped Grover off in mid-afternoon, and he suggested we have a beer. As Grover was playing some Country and Blues records, G.W. went into Grover's study and was looking at the bookshelves, squinting to read some of the titles.

On the way to the car, G.W. said: "I never seen so many books in somebody's home. You don't think he's read 'em all, do you?"

"Most, I think."

My initial impression of Grover as a self-promoter with an exalted plan for his life as a "writer" changed drastically as I observed him in class. He would take on anybody intellectually, although there was little competition from other students or faculty, but he wasn't a bully or a snob. He was a kind of Jeremiah with imagination and wit, an intelligent country boy who knew the ways of the city. Becoming a friend of Grover's wasn't an accomplishment but it was a blessing.

Sam "Lightnin' " Hopkins

The summer before I met Grover, he had traveled all the way from Dallas to Houston to meet Sam "Lightnin' " Hopkins, the country blues singer. A year and a half later, Grover and Graham Compton—a friend of ours who did some writing, played the guitar a little, studied part-time at Texas Tech, and worked full-time as a surveyor—drove to Houston to spend a couple of days with Hopkins. They met his brother "Son" Hopkins, also a talented musician. After two days of playing guitar and singing, drinking and talking, Graham and Grover starting loading the car for the 550-mile trip back to Lubbock. Graham picked up his guitar and gave it to "Son," observing after he and Grover returned to Lubbock: "The way ol' 'Son' played that guitar, it didn't seem right for me to have it."

When Fantasy Records, of Berkeley, California, released "Lightnin' Hopkins Double Blues" in 1972, Grover, who was associate editor of *Rolling Stone* magazine at the time, described on the record jacket his first meeting with the great Texas bluesman:

> I first met Sam Hopkins in the summer of 1960, and it took some effort. I drove the 300 sweltering miles from Dallas to Houston in a car without air conditioning and prowled around Dowling Street, the main artery of the jukebox-sprawling black ghetto called the Third Ward for almost a week before anybody would give me a tumble as to where the legendary country bluesman might be located.... But I persisted in the hunt, for reasons that I probably didn't fully understand at the time, and finally, having heard about this young white dude who was beating the bushes for him, Hopkins found me.
>
> Wearing a jaunty porkpie hat, enormous oval shades, and a white barber's towel draped around his neck, Hopkins pulled up at the curb of a side street just off Dowling late one afternoon in a battered old black-and-pink Dodge sedan. Uncapping a pint of bourbon, he took a deep swallow and eyed me warily. "You ain't just signifyin', is you?" he asked with a metal edge in his voice. "You mean you come all the way down here from Dallas just to hear me

play?" When I nodded yes, he searched my face quizzically and then slapped his knee and rocked back and forth with laughter. "Climb in this ol' hoopy, white boy," he crowed, leaning across to open the car door. "There's a little hell-dive around the corner that sells the coldest beverage in Houston town. Les' you and me go over there and get our heads tore up."

Which we did. The head-tearing up process which began at a piss-smelling little beer parlor wore on for days, at the end of which I knew considerably more about sour mash whiskey than I had counted on. But in the end I also knew considerably more about myself, and the South (and that knowledge ultimately freed me to leave it forever), and my own forebears who, like Hopkins in his young manhood had been share-croppers....

Texas had changed greatly since my childhood days when, striding along beside my grandfather, I'd roamed the heart-burstingly beautiful dogwood trails of the lower Red River Valley. The transformation, roughly coeval with my own lifetime, hadn't all been for the good....

Somehow, all of us in Texas, I gradually began to understand, had left behind the old fierce, personal capacity for love and anger that engenders and sustains tribes. Collectively speaking, we were all running scared and alone. Later, traveling and living in other parts of the country, I would understand the referent "we" encompassed not merely Texans, but Americans at large.

Growing up absurd in the Fifties, I found myself increasingly attracted to the few dwindling areas in Dallas that hadn't changed beyond recognition in the span of my own memory: the hustling, strident Farmers Market: Deep Ellum with its bawling street singers and gaudy pawn shops; a rundown "back o' town" section with massive stone staircases soaring crazily out of the debris-strewn foundations of wrecked Victorian mansions.

Invariably, I'd encountered the two most fully-articulated aesthetic expressions of my rolling, lonesome native country: the wild, fellaheen plaint of the hillbilly ballad and the brooding, archaic blues sung by men like Sam Hopkins....

All the pungent flavor of his experience, I discovered, was hidden somewhere in the canon of his music: the country dances

and Baptist "association" suppers in Leona and Grossbeck and Buffalo Springs, where he first heard the harsh, intense poetry of singers like Blind Lemon Jefferson and his cousin, Texas Alexander....

Yet it wasn't merely the cold-turkey facts of Hopkins' day-to-day existence nor his anguished esoteric music that accounted for my unflagging interest in him. Instead, it was the burgeoning realization that, lying at the heart of both his existential experience and his intense, personal creative efforts, there existed a working fund of values of profound significance for a generation such as mine, born circa Munich.

From Hopkins' music, I learned long before I met Hopkins himself something of the essence of the bleak, barbaric microcosm of his fallen and perishing world—and in the end I understood that he had come to full terms with it.... Accepting the bedrock necessity of unceasing struggle for existence as a simple, inflexible condition of life, he had summoned up the strength, the courage, and the raw marrow to forge ahead and confront a vaster dilemma: the problem of fashioning something outside oneself worthy of continued life....

Sam Hopkins, I understood at last, had accomplished in his fashion as much as any man can do. With only one good arm and a splintered toothpick for a bat, he had coolly stepped up to the plate and knocked the concrete ball aimed at his head clear out of the largest goddamn park there is.

Jazz, Blues, Country, Classical and Folk—Some Rock and Roll

Grover liked jazz, blues, country, classical and folk music—and some rock and roll. He had an extensive collection of records and tapes, and over the years he would mail me tapes of country singers (his favorites were Jimmie Rodgers, Hank Williams and Kitty Wells) and Mexican Rancheras.

As a child, I didn't like country music, maybe for some of the same reasons I didn't like drugstore or singing cowboys. I also associated that music with people I'd grown up with who pronounced "dance" to rhyme with "saints" and were convinced it was unsanitary to have a toilet inside the house; but when I was in the army stationed in Kaiserslautern, Germany (known to the troops as "K-town") I spent near equal amounts of time listening to classical and country music. The beauty and order of classical music were as distant as anything I could imagine from the regimented chaos of Army life between the Korean and Vietnam eras, and the music probably helped to sublimate what my "superiors" described as "anti-social tendencies and insubordination" on the occasions they reprimanded, restricted, court-martialed me or refused to recommend me for promotion. In 22 months, I was promoted once.

I also came to recognize a third of the way around the world from home that country music was part of my heritage. Every morning in the barracks I would wake up to the music of Jimmie Rodgers, Hank Williams, Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, Ernest Tubb, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, Slim Whitman, Bill Monroe, George Jones, Ray Price, Lefty Frizzell, Johnny Cash, Mother Maybelle and the Carter Family.

The Armed Forces Network disk jockey would sign off by identifying himself, starting with his rank of Pfc.; then, with a Blue-grass banjo galloping in the background, he would say: "Good Lord willin' and the creeks don't rise, see you tomorrow mornin' at six oh five." Eighteen

months later when I met Grover, it didn't seem out of the ordinary that somebody who read *New Yorker* magazine would love Jimmie Rodgers' songs of freight-hopping hoboes, the blues of Lightnin' Hopkins and Robert Johnson—and Woody Guthrie's nasal hymns to ordinary, courageous and decent people.

I was single and lived with my parents about a mile north of the Texas Tech campus. On several occasions Grover went home with me and if it was around noon, Mother would insist that we have lunch with her. When my mother was home alone during the week, she would often bake a pan of cornbread to go with the red beans that she always cooked in rainwater that drained from the roof and was left in a 5-gallon water bottle until the sand and bits of leaves settled at the bottom. To go with the cornbread and red beans, she would cut thin slices of white or red onion and pour up large goblets of buttermilk for herself and whoever joined her. The first time she invited Grover to lunch, she said: "I can fry some ham and make a salad if you'd prefer that."

"No, thank you, ma'am, cornbread and red beans with fresh onion and buttermilk sound mighty good to me."

I don't recall Grover and my parents ever having a long conversation but my mother, without a doubt, told Grover more stories than he wanted to hear about the accomplishments of her nine children. She also related how hard it was to control her weight since "things that aren't fattenin' just don't taste good."

Grover liked my mother's descriptions of a girl or woman as "pretty as a speckled pup" or "ugly as a mud fence." Mother described a neighbor lady as "so lazy she had to carry a cat under her arm to breathe for her." Mother's compliment to a friend or family member who had prepared a delicious meal of many dishes was: "You really put the big pot in the little one." Her assessment of a mother's love: "Every ol' crow thinks her little crow's the blackest."

My parents studied for eight years in a one-room schoolhouse in Comanche County, Texas. Mother told me that Daddy was the best student in algebra and history and she was the best in reading and English. My dad added: "Your mother was good in grammar, but I

managed to go to school for eight years without ever learnin' what a verb was."

Both of them told stories to their children and our friends about Gus Hogan, the class comedian, who would mimic the teacher when his back was turned. Gus, whose sister dated and eventually married the teacher, was a short, slightly built, enterprising lad who would jump out of the second-story window for a dime.

There were many stories about the Crews family: The parents and nine of the ten children were retarded. Mother recalled that the twins, Claude and Maude, were very different. He was brilliant and she was considered the most retarded. Mr. Crews couldn't read or write but could total the bill for a wagonload of groceries in his head before the storekeeper could figure it out with pencil and paper. "One of the Crews boys got his sister pregnant," Mother said, "and when the baby was born, Mr. Crews killed the poor little thing and buried it there on the farm. People knew what happened but nothin' was ever done."

Anderson Crews could pick up a 500-pound bale of cotton and carry it a few feet but was still in the primary grades. When the teacher, who was inches shorter than Anderson, scolded or paddled him, he would cry like a little kid. The Crews family went to a Holiness church, and Anderson learned to speak in tongues and pray like the preacher. My dad described Anderson getting down on his knees in the school yard: "He prayed for rain till tears rolled down his cheeks and late that evenin' we had the biggest rain and storm you ever saw."

Grover heard several of those stories. He and my dad also exchanged ironic observations on ignorance in high places, especially in politics, churches and academia. My dad described a TV interview with a former Texas governor who had been charged with taking money improperly, if not illegally: "Can you imagine a grown man and ex-governor, at that—sayin' to a group of journalists, 'I didn't take that money; I used it to pay debts'?"

"Well, that's not the same as takin' it, is it?" Grover said.

Grover was deferential to my parents and listened more than he talked. During the short drive back to the campus after one of the visits, he said: "You're lucky you had folks like that to raise you. They're

like my people—at least the ones I looked up to."

"In high school I was kicked-out six times and in our part of town at least as many guys went to prison or the military as to college."

"You made amends and your folks are proud of you—and your brothers and sisters as well."

"You treat me like I'm somebody."

"You are somebody; in fact, both of us are."

"Maybe next time we can get Mother to talk a little about her children."

Grover smiled, "I expect we could persuade her to."

When I mentioned to my parents that Grover was probably the smartest person I had met at Texas Tech or maybe anywhere else, they listened without comment then my dad asked: "Is his eyesight gettin' worse?"

"He doesn't think so, but sometimes in the summer he has ulcers on his eyes."

"Poor boy," my mother said.

When I told Grover my mother thought he really liked cornbread, red beans and buttermilk, he said: "I do."

Grover met several of my friends from childhood and was as friendly and respectful to them as to my parents. He asked one day if I had known Buddy Holly. I told him that I had since Holly was one year behind me at Lubbock High School but that I didn't recall ever having a conversation with him. I explained to Grover that many of my high school friends were good athletes: football and baseball players, sprinters and boxers. Most were from the poorer sections of town and among the toughest guys in school—people that Buddy Holly didn't feel very comfortable around.

I drove Grover past Lubbock High School, the aging but distinguished tan-brick complex with faded-red Spanish-style tiled roofs that occupies a whole city block, and showed him where the Westerner Drive-In Cafe had been. The high school and drive-in were half a mile from the house Grover and his wife were renting.

Buddy Holly and other teenage musicians and singers performed

during the late spring, summer and early fall on a ground-level concrete slab in front of the drive-in for the mostly high school customers in their cars. In 1953 Holly was 16 and was a better guitar player than singer. At the time, his voice hadn't changed and was more suited to the Vienna Boys' Choir's "Hallelujah Chorus" than to the Crickets' "That'll Be the Day" and "Peggy Sue."

Buddy Holly was a short, thin, self-conscious and bookish boy who wore glasses with black plastic frames. He usually came to the drive-in a few minutes before he was to perform, set up his equipment, played and sang several country and rock and roll pieces then left, conversing as little as necessary to do his set.

On a warm summer evening, Holly and the two other musicians started playing, and in the middle of the first number the sound system began to fade out; it would work for a few seconds then fade out again. Buddy was embarrassed and frustrated but managed to finish the piece.

"Tinker," whose real name is Hugh but only his teachers and parents ever called him that, got out of his car and assured Holly that he knew what the problem was and could fix the sound system in no time. Tinker had several trial-and-error methods that included shaking each speaker, turning the power off and on, and taking the microphone apart. After 45 minutes of Tinker's best efforts, the sound system wouldn't work at all.

The wife of my friend Chuck Edward worked as a car-hop at the drive-in. Joy, who was in her junior year, was a small, cute blonde who could talk as tough and dirty as any boy on the premises.

Chuck, who was one year older and a senior, was thoughtful and unassuming. He was six-feet tall and weighed around 145 pounds. Chuck shared "Doc" Edward's agnostic views and love of books; and he became a journeyman brick-layer like his dad, but Chuck didn't drink like Doc, have his short temper or abrasive manner. Being slender and handsome yet regarded as one of the smartest and best Golden Gloves boxers in that part of the country, Chuck got a predictable number of challenges from young men who couldn't believe that a skinny, polite 18 year old, who looked more like a student librarian than a Golden Gloves champion, could be the boxer and street fighter they'd heard

so much about. In almost every instance, they quickly regretted their decision. Chuck never had a problem making the 137-pound limit for the light-weight division, yet he could take a 100-pound weight in either hand and lift it above his head.

If a fight at the drive-in lasted more than a couple of minutes, somebody would generally yell: "The cops are comin' "—whether they were or not since that was a graceful way out of a bad situation for the loser and a chance for the winner to quit while he was ahead. People would jump into the cars and speed off in different directions, leaving the drive-in almost deserted. As a general policy, Joy and the other car-hops served the performers complimentary hamburgers, hot dogs, French fries, milkshakes and soft drinks since on most occasions the musicians weren't paid for their work. After the fights, they got more than the usual ration because some of the customers didn't come back for their orders.

I pointed out to Grover the area just down the street from the drive-in and told him about Buddy Holly running into the rear end of a new, shiny dark-green Chrysler sedan that Joe Bob Martin's parents had let him drive to school that spring day in 1953. Mrs. Holly had picked up Buddy at Lubbock High just after classes ended. Buddy took the wheel of the grey mud-spattered four- or five-year-old Hudson and half a block from the school, as he was accelerating to pass another car, he rammed the Chrysler, throwing Mrs. Holly into the windshield.

Her forehead was bloody, there was a softball-sized break on the passenger side of the Hudson's windshield, the grill was damaged and the hood had buckled from the impact. There were scores of students on the sidewalk watching and talking. Buddy and his mother were standing between their car and the curb. Both were embarrassed, Buddy in the extreme. The only visible damage to the Chrysler was a small scratch on the rear bumper but Joe Bob insisted on calling the police.

"Ol' Joe Bob sounds like a real humanitarian," Grover said.

One warm fall evening I stepped up on the concrete porch of Grover

and Peggy's house and knocked on the screen door. When Grover came to the door, he was upset. "I just talked to two women," he said, "Jehovah's Witnesses. I was patient and polite then I decided to ask them a question: 'If I knocked on your door and said I'm an atheist, would you listen to my reasons for not believing in God?' One of them said, 'No, of course not.' 'Then get the fuck off my porch,' I yelled, 'and don't come back.' "

On another afternoon when I went by to pick up Grover, the front door was open and I could hear his loud voice: "I want you to understand that I don't want your trashy newspaper thrown in my yard. Your paper is litter and your editorials are insane and offensive, and I don't want to be a statistic to raise your advertising rates." He was on the telephone with I.M. Hall, the editor and publisher of a free weekly newspaper that was primarily advertisements. A recent editorial had upset Grover even more than usual: Hall had charged that the teaching of phonics was part of the International Communist Conspiracy since phonics encouraged people to use the International Phonetic Alphabet; and internationalism inevitably led to Communism.

My dad shared Grover's view that Mr. Hall's editorial absurdities extended prideful ignorance and self-righteous belligerence well beyond the parody scale of our most single-minded satirists. Grover and my dad also considered The *Lubbock Avalanche Journal*, which was the only daily newspaper in a city of more than 100,000 people, about as newsworthy as a local church bulletin or a chamber of commerce newsletter. Grover and my dad were capable of harsh judgments and could be unforgiving, but both had a quality that I've come to regard as the primary index of character: They stood up to people who had more power than they did and were gentle with those who had less power. My dad told me on more than one occasion that he'd found gamblers and bootleggers to be better neighbors than preachers and bankers. Grover said of his own family: "I loved them all—the good ones and the bad ones, and I found out in the case of Cecil and Lester [his uncles who were thieves and bank robbers] the bad ones turned out to be the good ones and vice versa."

Living With Redneck Relatives

After the death of both parents Grover and his younger sister had to live with redneck relatives whose familial obligation to keep them never reconciled the economic strain or broader responsibilities of that choice. When Grover was around 12, they were living with his mother's sister and her husband. Grover had a paper route and had saved for weeks to buy his great uncle, Charlie (known by family and friends as "Spook"), a handsome hardback edition of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Spook, by word and example, encouraged Grover to read and Grover discovered at that early age that reading was the best education he would ever get and the only real escape from the misery of being with, and like, the people who had taken him and his little sister to raise but never wanted them.

When the uncle found some "dirty" words in the Steinbeck novel intended for Spook, he marched Grover outside and made him throw the book into a barrel of burning trash. Grover was unforgiving of ignorance, and exponentially so when people paraded ignorance as virtue. Two days before he died Grover recalled the pain of having to burn that book.

At the age of 13 Grover considered killing that uncle or himself. Instead, he moved out of the house and Spook took him in. Over 40 years later, Grover wrote in "Farewell to Cracker Eden," an autobiographical magazine article published by *Texas Monthly* in September 1992:

> Spook's insight—his special grace—was to treat me as a younger brother instead of a ward. In his 50's by then, a union machinist and lifelong bachelor, he kept his mind sharp by studying the Bible and parsing out "the lies in the papers." Half a Wobbly in his secret heart, he taught me a multitude of useful things, one of the germinal ideas being that decency and common sense were most likely to be found in common people.

The circumstances of life, which speak more directly than popular entertainment or cultural myths or holy books, reminded Grover every day that he was as common as people could be. Opal and Big Grover got married when they were teenagers, both had little education and jobs that were no less common than the tragedy of their violent deaths. But Grover had an uncommon intelligence and he learned from Opal and Spook that decency is more a matter of will than circumstance. He also learned, younger than most, that ignorance can be an indeterminate sentence.

Grover gave Spook credit for saving his life. They lived in an old boarding house. "Spook and I had lived upstairs in a bare room with a bare bulb above the iron bedstead. When I started working after school, I bought us reading lamps, feeling grown-up about pitching in."

The boarding house was near school and a library:

> The old library had saved my life as much as Spook had. I'd found my own sacred texts in there, groping for direction in that period when the self doesn't really know what it is yet. A precocious reader by the age of 12, I read an average of four or five books a week all through high school, including trash, the classics, and everything in between. Above all, I learned how to read and think critically, with no clear sense of vocation yet, but at least the ghost of an ambition forming. Predictably, my hardshell relatives claimed I was ruining my mind by "thinkin' " too much. Doggedly, I read on. Working a night job, I sometimes skipped school to read because reading was as essential as breathing to me.

Different Views of Texas Tech

Grover and I were in four or five of the same classes at Texas Tech. Generally, I had a higher opinion of the instructors than he did. I told Grover that going to Texas Tech when I was 17 had changed my life and that that I'd had some brilliant instructors when I was an undergraduate, especially in the Foreign Language Department: respected scholars who were fluent in five or six languages and delivered commencement speeches at Princeton and other great schools.

We took an English literature class from James Allen, dean of the graduate school, who taught one class each semester. Some of the instructors regarded Allen as a Fielding and Richardson scholar. Grover referred to Allen as "Dean Booby" and read during most of the lectures. When I volunteered that the dean was an animated lecturer and seemed to enjoy teaching more than his administrative duties, Grover responded: "Don't misunderstand me. I'm not sayin' he should be taken out and executed, put on a chain gang or forced to work at a service station on 19th Street. I don't even begrudge him his fancy office and Lincoln Continental, but it assaults my common sense to go to class three days a week and see him perpetrate the fraud that he's a teacher of literature."

There was one professor in the English Department that Grover respected on both a human and an intellectual level: Dr. Alan Gunn, a scholar and poet who took positions that were politically unpopular on the Texas Tech campus and generally objectionable to a majority of the people in Lubbock. Some of the faculty equated Gunn's support for Palestinians with anti-Semitism; and his agnostic views, in the minds of some of my relatives, put him into that category of "atheistic college professors who corrupt the young people who look up to them." Dr. Gunn taught Old English, a course Grover had no interest in whatsoever and resented having to take; however, Grover was always respectful toward the professor, who certainly erred on the side of humanity when he gave Grover a "B-" in the course. Grover also appreciated it that Dr. Gunn chose not to see that I had passed to Grover some of the answers on the final exam.

In a long afternoon seminar, Grover looked a little paler than usual. I asked him if he felt all right. "Physically I'm okay," he said.

"What's wrong?"

"Recently, I've been writin' more than I've been readin' and that's always a bad sign."

Grover went with me to visit my sister Gene (Imogene), who lived on a farm about 10 miles east of Lubbock in the community of Roosevelt.

Gene served us coffee and cookies and as we sat around the kitchen table, she said she just didn't know what to do about the plan to bus Black elementary school children from Lubbock to the Roosevelt school system. Six years before when I had been expelled for the sixth time from Lubbock High School, I transferred to Roosevelt and lived with Gene and her family for one semester until I graduated. There were a few Mexican-American students at Roosevelt then but no Blacks. Gene thought the busing plan would be unfair to both the local white children and "the little Nigra kids bused in." Grover listened in silence for a few minutes then said: "I don't see any reason for your concern. The white kids'll accept the Negro kids unless the parents influence them not to."

"You can say that," she said, "but if you had children of your own, you'd feel different."

"I have a three-year-old daughter and a son almost a year old." Grover stood up, walked out of the house and waited in the car. When I got in the car, he said: "I've heard that same bullshit all my life. I didn't want to offend her because she's your sister, so I just left."

Grover viewed racism as a combination of Black-White economic competition and self-serving ignorance; and since the relatives who had made his life miserable were religious and racial bigots, his opposition to both forms of bigotry was deep and personal.

When Grover learned that a young woman poet, who had been quoted in the Texas Tech newspaper, didn't object to the poll tax since it was such a small amount of money, he pointed out the irony of poets using symbols in their art, yet that "local poetess" had not understood the symbolism of poor people, principally the Black poor, having to pay for the right to vote in a country that an overwhelming majority of Americans proclaim without qualification to be the most democratic in the world.

When people sought direction from Grover on writing, he had at least two observations: "You have to read in order to write and you need to know how to spell." He also concluded that most people were more interested in talking about writing than actually doing it.

On The Road With Grover

One afternoon after class Grover asked if I would be interested in making a trip to Fort Worth with him, suggesting that we use his and Peggy's car, a two- or three-year-old Valiant, which was more comfortable and reliable than my old MGA roadster.

Grover wasn't much of a stoic and he didn't accept gracefully mechanical failure or bad judgment that subjected him to inconvenience or hardship, but in other ways he was a great road companion. He couldn't see well enough to share the driving but he would take books and magazines and would read aloud for much of the trip.

He would never abandon me or anyone else he was traveling with to go to sleep at any hour no matter how tired he was, except when he passed out from too much alcohol or when the effects of speed were completely gone and there was no energy left. In the thousands of hours of conversation with Grover in almost 35 years, I learned more about life, literature and the accumulation and application of common sense than from any schooling I ever got, and some of the most memorable conversations took place at odd hours on lonely roads.

The longest trip we made together was from Lubbock to San Francisco in the summer of 1963. We drove to El Paso and visited friends. People talked and drank almost all night, so I'd had no more than three hours sleep when we left in late morning for Los Angeles—800 miles away. The four-year-old Porsche coupe was the best car I'd ever driven and there was no better friend and intellectual companion than Grover; but after 600 miles of hot weather and hard driving, the quality of the conversation, the mechanical grace of the Porsche and the blackest coffee couldn't bring me out of the weariest state I'd ever been in.

Two years before, I had traveled by bus and train from Guatemala City to Monterrey, Mexico, where I ran out of money—except for a few pesos to buy food. I hitchhiked north—getting rides in cars, trucks and pick-ups—to the border town of Piedras Negras and walked across

the international bridge over the Rio Grande to Eagle Pass, Texas. A lighted sign at a bank read "10:11 pm" then changed to "74°." There were thousands of grasshoppers in the streets and on the sidewalks. It was impossible to walk without stepping on them.

As I stood at the edge of the highway, sticking my thumb out each time I saw approaching headlights, a dark, new sedan stopped a few yards ahead of me. I ran over to open the door, but it was locked. A middle-aged man alone in the car shined a flashlight into my face through the rolled-up window. He shook his head and drove off without saying a word. Less than an hour later, a stout older man pulled off the highway and asked where I was going.

"Midland."

"I'm goin' to El Paso, welcome some company, maybe help with the drivin'."

"Not exactly the way I'm goin' but appreciate the ride. Thought I was gonna be here all night. One guy stopped but when I tried to open the door, it was locked. He shined a flashlight in my face; and I guess he didn't like my beard. He took off."

"Nothing wrong with a few days growth. Hate to pass somebody standin' on the road in the middle of the night. I hitch-hiked a lot in the Navy during World War Two." I should have realized he had a vision problem—or at least night vision—because after my bag was stolen on a train in Mexico I didn't shave or even trim my beard for two months.

"I need to sleep a little while, if you don't mind, then I can drive."

"Go ahead," he said and turned on the radio. The first stop on the dial was Mexican accordion music; the second was a preacher from the powerful station in Del Rio. I leaned my head against the window and was in a deep sleep before he got to the third.

I was startled when the car started running over bumps. I heard gravel hitting the doors on the driver's side—but was relieved that there were no cars approaching since we were on the shoulder of the wrong side of the highway. "I can drive now. Had a good nap and I'm wide awake." And I certainly was.

"If you're rested, maybe I need to sleep a little." The man got out, walked slowly around the front of the car, and got into the back seat. It

was a little after 3:00 a.m. I drove until dawn.

He insisted on paying for breakfast before leaving me on the interstate highway just outside the west Texas town of Van Horn. By early afternoon I was in Midland. Nobody was home at my brother and sister-in-law's house. I opened the gate to the back yard, took newspapers out of my bag and spread them out on the brown dusty grass. In seconds I was sound asleep.

A car pulling into the garage awakened me. I was standing at the gate to the yard when Virginia, my sister-in-law, approached. She was looking down, reaching into her purse for the house keys and didn't see me even though she was three steps away. Suddenly looking up at a dirty, bearded man wearing a wool coat in 80-degree weather, she stopped and opened her mouth but didn't speak.

"Sorry to scare you, Virginia. Nobody was home so I took a nap on the grass."

"My goodness, Rod, I didn't expect you." She hugged me and apologized for not recognizing me until I spoke.

For 11 days I hadn't slept in a bed, shaved, taken a shower or changed clothes; but that trip from Guatemala City to Midland, Texas wasn't as exhausting as the drive from El Paso.

There were few towns along the highway and all the motels had "No Vacancy" neons. Grover and I stopped around midnight and had coffee and pie and I bought hard candies and chocolate bars, which kept me alert for a while. We were in the Mojave Desert not far from Indio when I noticed large black and white birds that I'd never seen before diving toward us, but at the last instant they would fly above the car or bank to one side or the other. Each time I would flinch and move to the opposite side since I thought the birds were going to come through the windshield. Grover said, "What are you doin'?"

"I'm tryin' to dodge those big birds. They almost hit us."

"I hate to tell you this but there aren't any birds out there."

I realized he was serious: "I've got to pull over for a little while. This is the only time I've ever hallucinated."

"I have several times but never from fatigue."

I stopped the car a few feet off the highway and tried to sleep. Big trucks passed by every few minutes and in my dreams I would be falling asleep at the wheel and veering toward an oncoming truck. I'd wake up sweating and struggling to turn the steering wheel. Since that was more miserable than being on the road, we took off. I managed to stay awake and didn't see any more birds, but a few miles farther into the desert we encountered high winds that made the car hard to steer. The winds sandblasted the paint on the front of the Porsche and put two stress cracks between two and three inches long in the middle of the windshield.

In less than an hour, we were almost out of the desert. In the first light of morning, there was little traffic and no wind. "You don't see any more birds, do you?" Grover asked.

"No."

"I'm glad."

We reached my sister and brother-in-law's house in Lakewood, California, about halfway between Los Angeles and Long Beach, a little after 7:00 a.m. My sister Billie was 12 years older and treated me as much like a son as a brother. She and her husband Bill always made me feel welcome—even when I turned up early on a Sunday morning or late at night with friends they described to the rest of the family as "a little odd but interesting" or with women who didn't understand much English.

A hot shower, bacon and eggs, and five hours sleep returned me to a world with precise and familiar boundaries between consciousness and dreams, and the brief rest summarily gave memory the distance it needed to treat that long night like any other.

On the last lap to San Francisco, we drove up the coast on Highway 101, then through the coastal ranges and valleys of some of the world's richest farmland with canals as long as highways.

San Francisco

San Francisco was one of Grover's favorite cities. He wanted to look up John Bryan, the editor of a little magazine that he had written for;

and Alvah Bessie, a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. Bessie was one of the Hollywood screenwriters that had been blacklisted during the McCarthy Era. He was working as the light man at the Hungry I, a nightclub in North Beach, where Lenny Bruce, another of Grover's heroes, had performed. Grover introduced himself to Bessie during a break and Bessie invited him to have a drink after he got off work. They talked for a couple of hours. It was after 3:00 a.m. when Grover got back to the friend's apartment in Oakland where we were staying, but Grover spent another 30 to 40 minutes making notes before going to bed. He said that Bessie was moved that somebody would drive all the way from Texas to look him up and surprised that Grover knew so much about him.

The novelist Larry McMurtry and Grover had met at North Texas State College in Denton in the mid-1950s, when both were undergraduates, and put out a literary magazine that almost got them expelled. In the early 60s McMurtry and Ken Kesey became friends while they were in a writing program at Stanford University. McMurtry had given Kesey's telephone number to Grover and suggested that we contact him. Grover called Kesey and he invited us to visit him at his home on Perry Lane, near the Stanford campus.

Kesey was a strapping, handsome man with alert blue eyes, an instinctive smile and a receding hairline. He moved like a mature athlete who no longer trained rigorously but hadn't adopted a sedentary life style. Kesey and Grover got along immediately; both had definite views and thoughtful observations and were not reluctant to express them. Kesey, unlike Grover, didn't reveal any particular gift for the spoken language, but he presented his ideas with a combination of enthusiasm and extravagance that engaged those around him. His primary theme of the evening was the "renaissance going on in Texas writing." Kesey cited McMurtry, Bill Brammer, John Rechy and other Texas writers he admired and predicted that the "literary renaissance" would continue. The afternoon Grover and I spent with Kesey was months before his LSD punch-bowl parties and two years before the psychedelic bus voyages. McMurtry described him as the "last wagon master."

First Trip to Ft. Worth

On the first trip from Lubbock to Fort Worth in 1961, Grover introduced me to friends he had known since high school and people he had studied with at North Texas State College, also to a group of young pre-sixties hippies who had been Grover's students. They considered him a mentor when they were sober and a guru when they weren't.

Two of the young men wore black Wellington boots like Grover's. Larry McMurtry was at one of the parties. McMurtry was an accommodating, polite man in his mid-twenties dressed in Levi's, a cowboy shirt and boots. He was a bit self-conscious and seemed to have mixed views about the ambience of the evening that included serious discussions of literature, music and other matters—and equally serious doses of alcohol and drugs. I sensed that McMurtry respected Grover's intellect and single-minded commitment to writing but found his use of amphetamines, marijuana and alcohol troubling, as did others close to Grover, who was physically frail to begin with and those substances sometimes put him over the edge. None of us, however, urged Grover to moderate his consumption because we knew he would consider our advice well intentioned but preaching.

Grover and I had very few conversations about his use of alcohol and drugs. In the early 1970s he mentioned drinking: "Sometimes, that's the only way I can turn off the mind. I'm offering this by way of explanation; not to excuse it." In response to the gossip that when Grover was working for *Rolling Stone* magazine, he was so drunk that he fell off a barstool at Jerry's, a bar in San Francisco frequented by writers and staff of the magazine. "I was drunk in Jerry's lots of times, but I never fell off any Goddamned barstool there or anyplace else." The last few years of his life Grover drank only an occasional beer or Margarita. "You reach a certain point," he said, "and you know it's gonna kill you if you don't quit."

Trip from Kanarraville to Lubbock

In 1974 I called Grover and Rae and told them I would be making a

trip from San Francisco to Lubbock and that I would like to visit them in Kanarraville on the way or coming back. Rae suggested that Grover needed a little vacation from southern Utah and might go with me to Lubbock. We agreed and after a night in Kanarraville, Grover and I took off around mid-morning in the dark-blue 1970 Peugeot that I'd bought three years before.

Most of the trip went well. We ran into some cold weather and snow flurries but no problems; however, Grover was drinking more than he usually did. As we were passing through the little town of Taiban, New Mexico, I started looking for a small, abandoned chapel that I had photographed a few years before. I wasn't sure it was still there, but I saw it around 120 yards north of the two-lane highway. I turned onto the dirt road and told Grover I wanted him to see the old chapel.

It was a cold, overcast morning around 8:30. Grover stayed in the car while I took a few shots. When I got back in the car and tried the starter, the motor barely turned over. I waited a few seconds then tried again but the car wouldn't start. "I think it'll start if we push it," I said.

"What's wrong?"

"I think it's something electrical. Let's see if it'll start," I said. Grover was cold and drunker than I realized but he got out and started pushing. I was on the driver's side with the door open. After we pushed the car 30 or 40 feet, I jumped in and put the car in first gear, and when I released the clutch, the car started; but it had little power and was missing. We drove about a mile until we came to a service station. I left the car running and went inside and asked if there was a garage anywhere nearby. The man said, "Yeah, there is and they work on foreign cars."

We weren't sure the shop was open but there were three cars in the parking lot at the side of the building. I left the car running and went inside. The mechanic opened the large door and told me to drive the car inside. Grover got out of the car and walked over to the heater and stood in front of it for a few minutes. When he came over to the car, the hood was up and the mechanic, who had a strong German accent, was asking me what had happened. Grover started speaking with a German accent: "Vee hope you cahn fix it."

I walked Grover back to the heater, moved a chair next to it and suggested that he sit there and get warm. I went back to the car and said to the mechanic: "My friend's a little drunk and we were driving most of the night."

He nodded and said, "No worry."

In less than 20 minutes, he repaired the car and charged $35. I looked around and realized Grover was gone. I went to the parking lot and found him. He had opened the back door of one of the cars and was folding a long grey woman's coat with a fur collar. "I'm gonna take this to Rae," he said.

I grabbed the coat and put it back in the car. "It belongs to the people inside." Grover looked disappointed but didn't protest. We walked to the front of the shop, and the German mechanic was pulling the car out. I thanked him and we took off. Later in the day Grover had sobered up some and didn't remember much about the coat. When I told him what he'd done, he said: "I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't tell anybody about this." I didn't for over 30 years.

From Lubbock to Kanarraville Then to San Francisco

Returning to San Francisco from Lubbock in 1975, Maria-Theresa and I called Grover and Rae to see if they were up for a short visit. I asked if they needed anything from Texas. They didn't but as a prize for filling up at a Texaco station in Lubbock I'd gotten a baseball cap with a Texas Lone Star flag design and thought it would be a good idea to have Grover give the cap to Jack Thibeau.

A few months before Jack had run into David Howie, a poet and friend of ours, in a bookstore in San Francisco's North Beach and asked: "What do you hear from those two Texans?" Since there were many ways to describe Grover and me, "those two Texans" was a description that definitely fit but was not one Grover or I would've consciously chosen, especially Grover, since his life in Texas had been so tragic—and isolated from people who loved and appreciated him. I had a very different view of Texans. The high winds and sandstorms of the Texas Panhandle depressed me and, I believe, contributed to my frequent 10- to 12-hour headaches that often ended in vomiting, but I can't imagine

having a better life anywhere else in the world than I had growing up in Lubbock.

Years later Rae told me that Grover kept the baseball cap.

Maria-Theresa and I chose a route through the mountains and around midnight in southern Utah we were less than an hour's drive from Kanarraville when the car started missing and losing power as we were climbing. After reaching the summit, I found a place to pull over. I got out and raised the hood, hoping there was some minor electrical problem I could fix. None of the spark plug wires were loose, so I took off the distributor cap and pushed in the contact point, which had a coiled spring around it. When I took my finger off the contact point, it shot out several feet. In the darkness, I couldn't see where it landed. I turned on the headlights and crawled around on my hands and knees searching through the rocky soil for almost an hour. Coyotes were howling several hundred yards away. With a break in the electrical system, there was no way the car would start.

Since the contact point was only a little larger than the diameter of a coat hanger—and there were some in our luggage—I took the pliers and cut off a piece of a coat hanger around an inch and a half long and inserted it into the distributor cap. The piece was too long and the cap wouldn't close. In the second try, I cut off too much and the car wouldn't start. I cut a third piece about a quarter-inch longer and closed the distributor cap. As I tried the starter, Maria-Theresa said: "I hope you know what you're doing."

"Me too."

The engine started and continued to miss but we were going downhill for several miles. When we were out of the mountains, the top speed of the car was less than 45 so the last 40 miles to Kanarraville took over an hour. Grover and Rae were waiting up for us. It was almost 3:00 a.m.

At breakfast I asked if there was an auto parts store in the town. "No," Rae said, "but in Cedar there is." I called the parts store 13 miles away in Cedar City and said: "I need a distributor cap and a rotor for a 1970 Peugeot."

"A what?"

"A Peugeot, the French car."

"Spell it."

"P-E-U-G-E-O-T."

"Oh, out here we say 'Pee-Got' for that but we got a distributor cap and rotor."

Grover had little to say about that adventure but I had the impression he was glad he hadn't been stranded with us in the middle of the night on a deserted mountain road with coyotes howling in the distance. He probably gave me higher marks for perseverance than judgment.

On the way back to San Francisco the car ran fine.

Amphetamines in Lubbock

Grover knew that some of my friends in Lubbock used drugs and asked if I could get him some amphetamines. Sensing that I had reservations about his request, he said: "Don't worry; I'm not gonna do anything crazy. I just like to have the pills around when I have deadlines and I'm over-extended." A friend from junior high days, a former gambler who'd become a used car salesman and told me that he had cheated more people in car deals than in poker games, took me to an osteopath whose office was in a modest frame house in a residential area. Parked in the unpaved driveway was a brown Cadillac sedan that was worth half as much as the house.

The doctor was a tall, gaunt man with acne scars. His glasses had thick, powerfully magnifying lenses. He was wearing a white medical coat. No one else was in the office. "Afternoon, Doc," my friend said. "I need a prescription—diet pills." The doctor nodded and put his hand into a tinted one-gallon bottle containing brown and pink capsules. He filled a small plastic container, then wrote the instructions: "Take two, twice a day." My friend paid him six dollars and said, "Thanks, Doc." The doctor nodded.

A few weeks later Grover asked if I would get some more pills for him and said he'd like to go with me. Again, there was no receptionist, no patients. The exchange was very similar to the first. As I took the money out to pay him, I asked, "How much is the prescription, Doctor?"

"Six dollars," he said, looking through the window at a passing car.

"Thank you."

When we got back to the car, Grover said: "I've seen corpses with better color; I suspect the ol' doc has sampled a few too many of his own pills."

On each trip to Denton and Fort Worth, Grover would shift into a combined natural and chemical high that sometimes lasted over 48 hours. Rarely he might nap or nod off but he wouldn't go to bed unless it was with a woman or he passed out and someone put him there. Sometimes the effects of fatigue, alcohol and marijuana would cause Grover to function like a frail old man, veering in and out of consciousness, but his wit and lucidity never deserted him.

When McMurtry, who didn't drink or smoke, noticed that I wasn't drinking, he observed: "It upsets some people at gatherings like this when they're drinking and you're not. I've even been accused of feeling superior to people for staying sober and watching them get drunk and make fools of themselves, so I've learned to keep a drink in my hand all evening."

Larry McMurtry in San Francisco

When I moved to San Francisco in the fall of 1962, Grover suggested that I look up McMurtry, who, with his wife Jo and their infant son James, had settled in the city after he completed the Wallace Stegner Writing Fellowship at Stanford. I was curious about how McMurtry and Grover had become friends at North Texas State College. McMurtry mentioned the interests the two shared in literature and the commitment to writing, then smiled: "When Grover first met me, he thought I was a hopeless hick." I asked Grover about that and he responded: "I don't know why Larry would say that. He was kind of young and country when we met but he was intelligent and well read."

McMurtry took off two or three days from his writing to drive me around the city until I found an apartment. He also took me to City Lights and Discovery bookstores and other places he liked in North Beach. We were in his car when I asked if he had a city map. He said that he did, in the glove compartment, which wasn't locked. I opened it and found a short-barreled .22-caliber Harrison and Richardson

revolver on top of the map and other papers. I noticed it was loaded and recalled that McMurtry hadn't acquired the city habit of locking his car. "Do you keep this in the car all the time?"

"Yes," he said, "I was waiting for a bus one night in Houston when I was a student at Rice and a carload of guys stopped and beat me up for no reason at all. I got the gun after that and I'd shoot somebody now before taking another beating like that." I mentioned to Larry that I'd had a .22 caliber pistol made by the same company but with a long barrel. The cousin of my friend Chuck Edward came to Lubbock and offered me $35 for the pistol. I agreed. He took the gun back to Detroit and around six months later robbed a bank with it and went to prison.

In 1985 Grover wrote a piece for the Los Angeles Times to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In that piece he recounts some of his and McMurtry's experiences as undergraduates at North Texas State College, where both earned literary awards and were included in "Who's Who Among American University and College Students" but were threatened with expulsion for publishing an alternative literary magazine that upset the administration:

> Dr. Martin Shockley, who could recite most of *Huck Finn* from memory, was the first man I ever knew who actually twirled his mustache. He was well into middle age when Larry McMurtry and I began to take his American literature classes at North Texas State in the mid-1950's, but still robust and vigorous—"well set up"—with a boxer's watchful eyes and wide shoulders, and the broad, smiling face of someone who likes to laugh and often finds sufficient reason to. And his voice was of a wonderfully sonorous and sarcastic bass that seemed to come up from the depth of his belly, so that everything he said was in a way a gut statement, and you tended to believe him even if you had some evidence that he was exaggerating....
>
> Dr. Shockley fiercely opposed the McCarthy-type incursions against intellectual freedom common to the period and was considered an irritant or worse by the campus powers-that-be. A noted Twain scholar and 19th century generalist, he published regularly in the leading academic journals and was always

immersed in some new line of research. Legend had it that he had declined a partnership in his family's Virginia banking business to pursue scholarship, only to be hounded from distinguished job to lesser job to his present position by the racist yahoos who largely controlled Southern education back then, just on the verge of mass desegregation. Perhaps that explained the air of exile about him at odd moments. He seemed a man of brooding scruple, alternately cordial and aloof, flinty and compassionate, "public" and reclusive....

The school was a kind of gulag operation in the boondocks, a melange of ugly buildings surrounded by greasy eating joints. I lived on the main drag in a rickety rooming house with a pool table on the second floor, taking my suppers at a farmers' cafe downtown because I could get a week's meal ticket there for $3. Nobody in my family—what was left of it—had possessed $30 all at once since the Civil War. I had been married early, worked a couple of years and then entered college as a kind of private dare to myself. Webster defines character as "strength of mind, individuality, independence, moral quality." I wrote stories and poems in the evenings, and looked up quite a few such definitions. I harbored the dread that Dr. Shockley would find me "stew-pid." Larry McMurtry, my closest student friend, felt the same insecurity, and we tried to keep each other's spirits bucked up.

Dr. Shockley kept his eye on McMurtry and me. We were the aspiring young writers on campus, the two who had begun dividing up the literary prizes awarded each semester by the school magazine, *Avesta*....

"Mistah LOO-WIS! Mistah MUG-MURTRY!" He was waving his stick like a baton. "Step over here closah, if you please, gentlemen."

McMurtry and I approached warily. "I hope he doesn't have a magic bulldog or anything," Larry said in a worried tone.

"Umn-hmnn...yas, yas...I thought so." Dr. Shockley twirled his mustache while looking us over crisply. He tucked his cane under his arm like a riding crop. "I've seen you two boys togethah like this for several yeahs now..." Dr. Shockley said with a mock-dolorous shake of the head, "and I still can't make up my mind which of you is in low company."

Because of the threats to expel them, Grover and Larry were relieved when they were allowed to graduate and had the diplomas in hand:

> McMurtry wore blue jeans under his baccalaureate robes at the ceremonies, as I recall. Afterwards, at a private function, a group of faculty stalwarts and scrubbed new B.A.'s stood around someone's living room, holding glasses with something brown in them. "To your health, Mistah Loo-wis," Dr. Shockley proposed. I returned the sentiment, and after a couple of sips, I fell to confessing my uncertainties about the future. "Ah, the fantods of youth...umn-hmnnn...yas, yas." Dr. Shockley lifted his glass and clinked it solidly against mine. "Re-read *Huck Finn* every two yeahs, young man," he said, "…and you may develop some charactah yet."

Filming *HUD* in Amarillo

In 1961 Harper and Row published McMurtry's first novel, *Horseman Pass By*. Paramount Studios bought the movie rights to the book and was filming it as *Hud* (the name of the character played by Paul Newman) in Amarillo, Texas and the small nearby Panhandle town of Claude. Patricia Neal, Melvyn Douglas and Brandon de Wilde were also starring in the film, directed by Martin Ritt. McMurtry and Mike Hutcherson (one of Grover's protégés who had been traveling around with McMurtry doing still photography for a book McMurtry intended to do on rodeos) observed the filming for a couple of days, and Larry suggested to Grover that he might like to spend a couple of days watching the Hollywood film crew at work.

Mike met Grover and me in Lubbock and the three of us drove 120 miles north to Amarillo. It was late afternoon when we pulled into the Ramada Inn parking lot. The first person I recognized was Paul Newman, who was sitting by the swimming pool. Several people greeted Mike and asked about McMurtry. Bob Hinkle, the film's technical adviser—a congenial man in his mid-to-late-thirties who was wearing a short-sleeved white shirt, Levi's, boots and a white straw cowboy hat—went out of his way to introduce us to people as

"the good friends of Larry McMurtry's." Between introductions, I told Hinkle that Grover was a good friend of McMurtry's but that Mike and I didn't know McMurtry very well. He nodded and asked me where we were from. When I said Lubbock, he volunteered that he was from Brownfield, a small town 39 miles southwest of Lubbock.

"I boxed in two Golden Gloves matches in Brownfield," I said, "and had the spectacular record of one loss and one draw." Hinkle chuckled. He knew the boxer who had beaten me and said he had become a milkman in New York City. Hinkle continued to introduce us to the actors and technicians as "good friends of Larry McMurtry's."

"You boys have a room yet?" he asked. "No," Grover said, "we came directly here."

"Well, there ain't no rooms left here and no point in payin' someplace else," Hinkle said. "We'll find somebody here to put you up. Where's that little shit Brandon?" Hinkle quickly found out where Brandon de Wilde was and took us to see him. He was conversing with two young men in the parking lot. They were sons of a rich local ranching family. Brandon was admiring their cars: a new Chevrolet Impala and a Mercedes-Benz 190 SL coupe that still had German or Swiss license plates even though the older brother had brought the car to Amarillo more than a year before. When Hinkle mentioned that the three of us needed a place to stay, de Wilde said we were welcome to share his suite if one of us didn't mind sleeping on a sofa.

The conversation shifted quickly from cars to Texas and politics. The two brothers didn't like Texas any better than Grover did. Grover said he was troubled by Amarillo's political climate, which he described as "virulently reactionary even by Texas standards." The brothers had traveled extensively throughout Europe and other parts of the world. They described Amarillo as dull and provincial but were not critical of the conservative political climate, although the one with the Mercedes coupe added that he liked the "head of Don Yarborough [a liberal Texas Democrat] but not his politics." Grover responded: "I like his politics but not his head."

When the younger brother asked me what Grover and I did in Lubbock, I told him that we were graduate students at Texas Tech and

that Grover was also a writer. That evening Grover reminded me of that part of the conversation and said: "I noticed you hesitated to describe me as a writer. I'm a graduate student by circumstance and a writer by choice. I may succeed or fail as a writer, but that's what I am and that's what I'll always be."

Brandon de Wilde, who was 20 years old, was playing the part of Lonnie, a boy in his late teens who looks up to Hud Bannon, his wisecracking, womanizing uncle, played by Paul Newman. Inevitably, de Wilde's role as Joey, the tow-headed little boy in *Shane*, came up quickly in the conversation. His performance in the great western had earned him an Oscar nomination for best supporting actor, but he didn't win. Brandon pointed out in a polite enough way that he was a bit weary of people doing an impersonation of him shouting: "Shane, Shane, come back, come back," as he runs after Alan Ladd at the end of the movie. He preferred that people pay more attention to his recent roles.

Grover said he understood, then complimented Brandon on his performance in *All Fall Down*, a movie based on the novel by James Leo Herlihy, starring Warren Beatty. Brandon was pleased by Grover's compliment and description of the movie as "an intelligent, serious film." Brandon de Wilde was a curious personality; at the age of 20, he had been an actor for more than 10 years. His first movie was *The Member of the Wedding*, released in 1952. Brandon made perceptive, mature observations about filmmaking and the actors he had worked with, including Alan Ladd, Warren Beatty and the actors in *Hud*. In other ways he was like a child; he spent an inordinate amount of time deciding what food to order and had an obsessive interest in cars, especially sports cars.

Hinkle continued to introduce us to the actors and production crew the next morning. Grover was eager to meet the director, Martin Ritt, and Melvyn Douglas, who played the old rancher. Since filmmaking is such a slow, tedious process, Ritt and Douglas had the time and inclination to be attentive to us. Grover knew almost as much about films as literature and he asked Ritt several questions about the films he had made that Grover admired.

As everyone was waiting around to load up and travel 30 or 40 miles to the ranch house near Claude for that day's shooting, we started a conversation with Melvyn Douglas, a tall, distinguished man in his sixties with silver-grey hair and a full mustache, who had returned from Spain a short time before. After Richard Nixon had red-baited and defeated his wife, Helen Gahagan Douglas, in the 1950 Senate race, the Douglases chose to live in Spain under General Franco, rather than in the U.S. during the McCarthy Era, and had stayed there 12 years. When Grover mentioned the irony of fleeing McCarthyism and being in exile under Franco's repressive regime, Douglas said: "All my Spanish friends hate that fascist bastard even more than we hate Nixon but Spain's a great country in spite of Franco." Grover invited Douglas to ride with us out to the ranch house near Claude and he accepted.

When the Douglases left the U.S., he was a leading man but after they returned 12 years later he had a much more limited choice of roles. Grover observed that Douglas had suffered almost as much at the hands of Richard Nixon as his wife had.

"No, that's not really true. In my case it was more a matter of choice, but I'll never forgive that son-of-a-bitch for what he did to Helen."

Douglas told us that a group of rich ranchers in the Amarillo area had invited the film crew to a party a few nights before and had served some of the best food, wine and liqueur that he had ever seen. He said at one point in the evening one of the women began to criticize the national Democratic leadership for wasting so much money on "giveaway programs" that weren't needed and would never work anyway. Douglas didn't interrupt or comment, but a few minutes later he approached her and said: "You and your friends here remind me of the Spanish aristocracy."

Douglas said the woman seemed pleased. "In what way?" she asked.

"You really don't give a shit about anybody but yourselves," Douglas responded. He said the woman gave him a strange look, wished him "good luck in the film business" and walked away. Grover and Douglas sensed that they had a lot in common. They talked about acting, writing, the Kennedys, the Spanish Civil War—and some of the actors and screenwriters that both of them admired who had been

blacklisted during the McCarthy Era. That evening they continued their discussion at dinner, which was catered by a restaurant that specialized in mesquite-smoked barbecue.

While Grover, Douglas and I were approaching the table, someone suggested that I sit across from Patricia Neal.

"I'm Patricia Neal, very glad to meet you," she said, extending her hand. Ms. Neal had the role of the live-in cook for the three ranchers played by Douglas, Newman and de Wilde. She was a striking woman, even dressed modestly in the tan blouse and brown skirt she had worn for the afternoon's filming. In McMurtry's book the cook is a young black woman and, unlike the screenplay, there is no romance between the cook and Hud, Newman's character. Ms. Neal mentioned how different the screenplay was and asked: "What does Mr. McMurtry think about all these changes in his book?"

"I think he was surprised by some of them, but he recognizes that film is a different medium." I didn't tell her that McMurtry was amused that the screenwriters seemed defensive about some of the changes but he didn't object since he had nothing to do with the screenplay and Paramount had paid him well for the rights to his book.

I told Patricia Neal that I admired her work, especially in the film *Face in the Crowd*. She responded: "That was an ambitious and, I think, successful film. I was very fortunate to get to work with talented, intelligent people like Elia Kazan, Andy Griffith and Walter Matthau." When it came up in conversation that I had been accepted by the Peace Corps, she said: "I think that'll be one of the best experiences of your life. If I were young, I'd do the same thing." After dinner as people got up to leave, she extended her hand and said: "It was a pleasure to meet and talk to you. Good luck in the Peace Corps."

"Thank you and good luck as well. I'll never forget visiting with you." I was sad to see dinner end but relieved that I hadn't made a fool of myself. I told Grover and Mike afterward that sitting across the dinner table from a beautiful, intelligent woman like Patricia Neal was a bit like being in heaven for 45 minutes then ending up back in the Texas Panhandle. Grover said: "I don't know anybody who'd confuse heaven with the Texas Panhandle."

The only people Grover had wanted to converse with who hadn't been very responsive were Paul Newman and James Wong Howe, the brilliant cinematographer. Howe, a small Chinese-American man in his late fifties or early sixties, was wearing a navy-blue baseball cap with a flat bill, a black sweater, blue jeans and black boots. He was friendly and gracious when Martin Ritt introduced him to us, but he was so preoccupied with his work that we thought it would be an imposition to approach him afterward. On several occasions when we encountered him, he always smiled, spoke and nodded but never stopped to visit with anyone on the set.

Newman usually didn't participate in the banter and horseplay that took place on and around the set between takes. He kept to himself, going over his lines and working on gestures for the approaching scenes. He walked from the back porch of the ranch house to the car four or five times, then he asked one of the technicians a question before making the walk one final time. Newman wasn't aloof or unfriendly but it was clear to us and to the other actors and production people that he didn't welcome distractions. At the first meeting with Newman, Bob Hinkle, the technical adviser, said: "Paul, I'd like to introduce you to these fellers, good friends of Larry McMurtry's." Newman nodded and extended his hand: "I remember Mr. Hutcherson; I met you and Mr. McMurtry a few weeks ago. How're you doing?" On the way to the room, Grover observed: "Did you see the way ol' Mike lit up when Newman not only remembered him but called him 'Mr. Hutcherson'?"

We were in the motel when someone knocked on the door. It was the young man who owned the new Chevrolet Impala. Within a few minutes, Brandon de Wilde asked if he could drive the car. The young rancher consented and Brandon invited Grover, Mike and me to go with them. Mike declined but Grover and I joined them. Brandon had poor eyesight and was supposed to wear glasses, especially for reading and driving, but he rarely wore them since he thought glasses made him look "dorky." He drove through the city, jamming the accelerator to the floor after each stop and exceeding the speed limit by at least 30 miles an hour. Brandon asked how to get to the nearest highway, which turned out to be a straight two-lane farm-to-market road. He headed

east at full speed, putting his head almost on the steering wheel and squinting. In less than a minute the speedometer needle passed the 110 mph mark. "At 120," Brandon asked, "what are we clocking?"

"Over a hundred," the owner answered.

Grover, who was sitting across from me in the back seat, said: "I can't believe this. Goddamn it, Brandon, slow down or stop the car and let us out."

"Relax, Grover, I've got the car under control."

"The hell you do," Grover raised his voice. "If I'm gonna die, I want it to be for some purpose, not for somebody's adolescent amusement. I'm serious. Stop and let us out."

"Okay, okay." Brandon slowed to 75 for a few miles, then stopped the car on the shoulder of the highway and made a U-turn. "It's no fun to drive a car with this kind of power unless you use it." (A decade later on July 6, 1972, Brandon died in a car accident in Denver, Colorado, where he was working in a stage production of *Butterflies Are Free*. In a rainstorm, his car skidded into a flatbed truck parked just off the road in a suburb of Denver. Brandon had worked as an actor for more than 20 years. He would have been 30 years old in October of that year.)

Between conversations and late each evening, Grover took extensive notes. He was impressed at how competent and serious the actors and the production people were. They were also friendly and unpretentious. The only person we met who fit the Hollywood stereotype in any sense was Hinkle, yet he was kind and accommodating to us. Grover had a beer with him in his suite. Hinkle told him that the vice squad of the Amarillo Police Department had threatened to shut down the movie operation because teenage girls were slipping into the Ramada Inn rooms at night (sometimes through the windows) for sex, alcohol and marijuana.

Grover said: "You've got to see ol' Hinkle's room; it's like a movie set."

We knocked on the door. "Come on in; it's open," Hinkle said.

"We thought we'd join you for a beer, Bob, if you have any," Grover said.

"We got a cooler full," Hinkle said; "you boys help yourselves—now

or later—the room's usually unlocked." Lone Star Brewery not only supplied all the complimentary beer the film crew could drink but also provided coolers and fresh ice. Above the door inside Hinkle's room, the Lone Star publicist had put up a pair of steer horns that spanned five or six feet with a leather Lone Star logo joining the horns. In the middle of the carpet there was a tan hand-tooled saddle that smelled of new leather with a gun belt slung around the saddle-horn. The gun belt with real cartridges and the scabbard—which held a large-caliber, long-barreled revolver—were also hand-tooled. On the desk was a scrapbook with Hinkle's photos and movie credits; also an IBM Selectric typewriter and a partly completed screenplay. On one wall was a large poster of the movie, *Old Rex*, a story about a dog that was "produced by Robert Hinkle."

Hinkle had been the technical adviser for *Giant* also and had told us several stories of drinking and carousing with James Dean and Rock Hudson. When Grover asked Bob how he would compare the two films, Hinkle said: "Oh, I got a lot more pussy when we were making *Giant*."

On the road back to Lubbock, Grover was taking notes. When he finished, he said: "I've come up with a title for the piece I'm gonna do: 'Splendor in the Short Grass: The Deer Park People in Texas.' "

Grover chose the first part of the title for an article he did in the early 70s for *Rolling Stone* magazine on the filming of *The Last Picture Show*, the second novel of McMurtry's to be made into a movie. Grover had a small part in the film: the alcoholic father of Timothy Bottoms' character, the high school boy who has an affair with the coach's wife, played by Cloris Leachman. "Splendor in the Short Grass" became the lead piece in Grover's book, *Academy All the Way*, published in 1974 by Straight Arrow Books, the publishing arm of *Rolling Stone*. The *New York Times* described the article as "extraordinary."

Leaving Texas Tech With a B.A. and 90 Graduate Units

Grover left Texas Tech after three years of graduate school without

a master's degree and with no chance of getting a Ph.D. His love of language and literature and his commitment to the life of the mind would have made him a brilliant teacher but that wasn't his interest. He also believed that writing and teaching took the same kind of psychic energy.

Grover worked as a music and book critic at the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* from 1963 to 1966 and met some of the old journalists who had worked with Edward Anderson, the journalist, novelist and screenwriter whose best-known novels were *Thieves Like Us* and *The Hungry Men*. Grover saw in Anderson's life and work a kind of energy, intelligence and humanity that moved him. Over the years Grover wrote about Anderson, traveled to the Rio Grande Valley on two occasions to meet his widow and friends. From 1966 to 1969 Grover worked for the *Houston Chronicle* then left Texas with about as much regret as a parolee walking out of Huntsville Prison, known by hip country boys who had spent time there as "Uncle Bud's."

Moving To San Francisco

In 1969 Grover moved to San Francisco and worked for two years as the West Coast correspondent for the *Village Voice*. From 1971 to 1973 he was an associate editor at *Rolling Stone* and during this period did some of his best work.

He met and married Raona Ence Seavey (Rae), an energetic, attractive blonde from the Mormon country of southern Utah, who also worked for *Rolling Stone*. Although Grover's vision was a degree away from legal blindness, he never missed beautiful women or physical detail. He had indeed met more than his share of attractive women—but not with Rae's common sense, decency and stability. On July 4, 1973, they chartered a bus to Reno and got married in a public park.

I missed the wedding because I was in China with a delegation of teacher-unionists, but I saw photos of the lively ceremony, including some of a young British man who had invited himself along, then drank until he passed out and spent most of the trip on the floor of the bus.

As a wife, partner and friend, Rae took good care of Grover. She occasionally scolded but always looked up to and loved him; and she kept him alive for 23 years.

Grover had the independence of mind that allowed him to disagree with people he respected and to agree with people he loathed. His character was shaped by pain and struggle, also by determination and concentration—both in the extreme. To me, he was a big brother and mentor yet I felt protective toward him because, even in his twenties, he lived and worked with a kind of intensity that demanded more stamina than he possessed. In recent years the solitary act of writing, his disciplined crafting of language that revealed the exceptional qualities of ordinary people and the complexities of the human spirit, took too much of his energy.

After Grover and Rae made a life together, I still worried about him,

but I knew she would do her best to look after him—and that he would listen to her, as much as he would to anybody.

Arbitration Against *Rolling Stone* for Breach of Book Contract

In 1973 Grover signed a contract with Straight Arrow Books to do a book on former Texas Governor John Connally, and he and Rae planned to move to Texas in order to be close to Connally, his family and friends. After Grover and Rae gave notice on their apartment at the edge of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, rented a house in San Antonio, and made other plans and commitments relating to the move, it occurred to Jann Wenner and the Straight Arrow editor that Connally's political star had begun to fade and doing a book on him wasn't such a good idea after all. When Connally (a conservative Texas Democrat more widely known for having been shot when John Kennedy was assassinated than for any legislative or administrative accomplishment) became a Republican, a journalist observed that it was common for rats to desert a sinking ship but Connally's case was the only one he had ever witnessed of a rat joining a sinking ship.

Grover—who was the first to refer to the boy editor and publisher of *Rolling Stone* as "Citizen Wenner"—believed that Wenner had decided not to honor the contract then instructed editor Allan Rinzler to call Grover into the office and tell him that the book deal was off.

Wenner added afterward: "We hope you understand, Grover." It wasn't Grover's nature or habit to turn the other cheek or to defer to people who, in his judgment, derived power more from ambition or circumstance than merit. Grover understood two things with a singular lucidity: Wenner's imperial certainty that any expression of regret from the mighty could right major wrong or banish all complications—and that Straight Arrow had indeed breached the book contract. Grover filed for arbitration, eventually winning a $10,000 judgment—not a figure that would shake *Rolling Stone* financially but it made the victory more than symbolic.

In a country where we murder some of our most heroic citizens than name streets and schools after them, it's as astonishing as it is

encouraging when the little people win. After hearing the arbitrator's decision, Grover suggested we have a beer to celebrate.

When we got on the elevator, the only other person there was Jann Wenner. Grover looked at him and smiled: "How ya doin' there, lad?" Wenner's hair wasn't combed, his eyes were bloodshot and he looked as if he'd slept in his clothes for a couple of days. "Uh, okay, I guess," he said, without looking at Grover. As soon as the elevator stopped, Wenner got off, even though we hadn't reached the first floor. Grover watched him hurry down the hall. "I'd say ol' Jann's definitely a loser but not a very graceful one."

Straight Arrow Books had published Grover's collected poems, *I'll Be There in the Morning If I Live*, in 1973 and his collected pieces on films and music, *Academy All the Way*, the following year.

Because of the arbitration, Straight Arrow never made any real effort to promote and distribute either book, so most copies were remaindered.

When Grover and I stopped in San Luis Obispo around two years later on the way to L.A., we noticed a bookstore near the restaurant where we'd had lunch. When Grover had time, he rarely passed up bookstores. On a large table of "Books on Sale" near the front entrance, I found *Academy All the Way*. The price was two dollars. We bought the book. I thought about asking the young man behind the cash register if he recognized Grover from the photo of him in a flat-brimmed black hat on the back cover of the book but decided not to. Grover was a bit disappointed in the fate of his book but amused by the coincidence.

From 1974 on, Grover's work appeared in the *Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, St. Petersburg Times, L.A. Weekly, New West, California, Cosmopolitan, Playboy, Texas Monthly, Movieline* and other magazines, but he never came close to earning as much money from his writing as he had in the early seventies at *Rolling Stone*.

Grover had the kind of intelligence that genetic chance shapes but never explains. I can't say that Grover Lewis was the smartest person I ever knew, but few people I've met worked as hard as he did to refine

the gift of language. He believed that reading had literally saved his life. And there is no better index to the quality of Grover's thought and character than what he did with language. His writing has grace, humanity, intelligence and wit. And whatever Grover wrote—an article, a book review, or a letter—he worked with deliberation, intensity and concentration because he believed that his work revealed his character and values.

As a journalist, much the same way he did as a human being, Grover attracted and sought out interesting and talented people, then observed them until he found the right voice and circumstances to let them tell their own stories: "My interest was always aroused by fringe people: rebels, poets, mavericks, poor-boy aesthetes and creative badasses. My goals as a journalist were to write stories with human resonance beyond the surface events, to discover the knowable truth and to search for a unique style—a personal voice. On principle, I refused to write a story to hype a personality or a product, and this made for some hairy times with editors."

Grover wrote an article for the *Village Voice* about a naked man killed at the Altamont Concert by Hell's Angels hired to provide security for a Rolling Stones concert. He did a story for *Rolling Stone* magazine on a 130-year-old ex-slave named Charlie Smith—regarded by the American Medical Association and the Social Security Administration as the oldest man in America—also articles for *Playboy* on musician and composer Randy Newman and on the filming of Ken Kesey's novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. In *New West*, he wrote about Sandra Sutherland, a successful woman private investigator in San Francisco, and Larry Flynt, publisher of *Hustler* magazine, one of the most despised men in America in the eyes of Christian fundamentalists—and women across the political spectrum.

Larry Flynt

In March 1978 Grover traveled to Lawrenceville, Georgia, to interview Flynt, who had been charged with obscenity and was on trial in that small Georgia town. Grover was intrigued by Flynt's striking and particular contradictions. He was a born-again Christian who offered a prayer before every meal yet continued to publish one of the country's most scandalous skin magazines. Flynt ran a multimillion-dollar magazine empire but talked like a hillbilly. He was a former street hustler with little formal education who believed in the First Amendment and had a close friendship with spiritual leader Ruth Carter Stapleton (President Carter's sister), comedian and social activist Dick Gregory, conspiracy theorist and lawyer Mark Lane.

> I had spent five days with him, shuttling between the hotel in Atlanta and the courthouse in Lawrenceville, Gwinnett County seat, 30 miles up Interstate 85. Over the weekend we had flown up to Flynt's Tudor mansion in Columbus, Ohio.
>
> I was curious to learn what I could about a man who had entered American publishing by way of an eighth-grade education and a newsletter he had put out for topless bars he then owned in Ohio. In four years Flynt had created a magazine empire (and brought his yearly profits to an astounding $10 to $15 million) by tapping into some of the quirkier wellsprings of the American psyche.

Like so many life events, Grover's intersection with Larry Flynt had more ironic consequences than philosophers or bookies would anticipate. Grover regarded Flynt as an odd mixture of opportunist and hero with intriguing complications and contradictions. Flynt could be a bully with a conscience and a businessman with a mission.

After having lunch at a cafeteria, Flynt and his lawyer, Gene Reeves, accompanied by Grover and another man were walking back to the state courthouse, where Flynt was to continue testifying. Grover and Flynt were conversing and Grover had the tape recorder on when

Reeves interrupted to say that he needed to discuss something with Flynt regarding the trial. Grover and the other man let Flynt and the lawyer walk about 10 or 12 paces ahead, so they could confer in privacy. A few seconds later, Grover heard the sound of gunfire, which he described as "muffled only slightly by the noise of the traffic." Two shots were fired; and after a pause, two more:

> Flynt's arms swung from his body as if he were reaching out to clutch at someone unseen. Then he began to groan horribly.... I took a step toward Flynt, who remained on his feet, twisting from side to side and staggering. Then I realized there was a gunman out there. I turned and raced for the protection of some shrubbery next to the driveway of an old frame house. Flynt toppled and fell, face down, on the pavement.
>
> I heard a car roaring away and I ran toward Flynt. His groans blended into the chorus of screams from passersby, who were out for their lunch hour, as they rushed over to him. Neighborhood kids shrieked in terror and excitement. A woman standing over Flynt sobbed, "God help us."
>
> He was writhing spasmodically on the sidewalk, his face grinding against the concrete. "Try to lie still, Larry," I called out. "Try not to move." He groaned again as the first siren arrived. A cop ran to the body and I dashed up the yard to the old house that loomed over the scene of the shooting. A woman, gaunt and weeping, her lined face out of a Walker Evans 1930s FPA photograph, tried to quiet her kids, who tugged at her skirts in fear. "Ma'am, I was walking with him. What is the address here?" "One-thirty-eight Perry Street," she sobbed. "What is your name?" "Collins." The professional journalist: "Your full name, please." "Sandra Collins. Oh! I heared the gunshots, I was settin' on the couch—"
>
> One of her kids shouted, thrilled, horrified, "Two of 'em got shot, Momma!" I had forgotten about lawyer Reeves, hadn't noticed him lying there bleeding between two cars in the gutter.

When the paramedics loaded Flynt into the ambulance, Grover got in with him. On the way to the hospital, Grover and the paramedic noticed that Flynt was losing color:

> He began to rock from side to side. The paramedic said to me, "Hold my watch for me." He didn't want to get Flynt's blood on it.... Flynt moaned. "Give me something for my pain." "Hang on, Larry," I said. "You can't let the sonsabitches kill you."

Flynt and his attorney survived but Flynt has remained paralyzed from the waist down.

Grover came to San Francisco to visit Maria-Theresa and me around three weeks after the shooting. He was still a captive of the scariest event of his adult life. When we were walking in the Mission District, Grover would look over his shoulder several times in the distance of one block. George Lewis, a friend who had grown up in a Sicilian neighborhood in New York, put his arm around Grover and said: "Don't worry, Grover, I've got your back."

"Thanks," Grover said, "but who's got yours?" When we got back to the apartment, Grover relaxed a bit after drinking a couple of beers and sharing a joint with George.

Grover's description of several key details of the shooting differs from the *New West* article bearing the long title: "The Debauchery, Redemption, Persecution and Attempted Assassination of Larry Flynt" by Grover Lewis with Lawrence W. Dietz. Editor Jon Carroll described Grover's traumatic reaction to the shooting and the collaborative rush to get the article written in time for *New West* to be the first magazine in the country with the story:

> And he was walking five feet behind him when Larry Flynt was shot. He called me on the phone, just panicked. Just terrified. He said, "You have to get me out of here. They're crazy. They're shooting." Which is a reasonable conclusion when a bullet has just passed your body and hit the guy in front of you. We figured out how to get a plane. And then the other side of me, the monster journalist, wanted the story for the next issue. We had the only eyewitness to the Larry Flynt shooting in the country, and he

> said, "I can't write a word." So we came then to a very interesting question: Am I a friend of Grover Lewis's? But I also wanted the story. So I put him and Larry Dietz, the previous editor of *New West*, out on the back of Larry's house in Santa Monica with two typewriters facing each other. Grover talked and wrote, and Larry listened and typed. And together over the weekend, they produced the manuscript. Monday was our deadline for an issue to come out on Thursday.

Grover wrote about people as different as Larry Flynt and Audie Murphy, Gene Autry and Barbra Streisand, Lash LaRue and Paul Newman, Hank Williams, Jr. and Bette Midler, Woody Guthrie and anti-Communist preacher Dr. Billy James Hargis, Elisha Cook, Jr. and Lee Marvin, Lightnin' Hopkins and The Rolling Stones, Gus Hasford and Larry McMurtry, Aldo Ray and Robert Redford. Jack Nicholson and Stacy Keach, John Huston and Sam Peckinpah. Grover was always drawn to "creative badasses" and "hip country boys" and he gauged Flynt to be a bit of both.

One of Grover's first comments about Flynt: "He's likable in his way, astute in business matters, tough as a stump, smarter than you'd expect, and he really believes in the First Amendment." During the trial, Grover spent a weekend at Flynt's mansion in Ohio. "I wanted to get to know him when nobody was snapping pictures or gawking at him. He had a big guard dog—a Doberman, I think—and one day he said: 'What would you do if I sicked the dog on you?' 'I'd take out my pocket knife and cut his throat.' "

I recalled Grover's account of Matthew Bailey, the father of Grover's mother, who was a handyman and made extra money doing plumbing and other odd jobs in his spare time. Matthew took his granddaughter with him on a Sunday afternoon to do a plumbing job at the home of one of his friends. When the friend's little black dog bit the girl on the arm, she screamed. Matthew put down the wrench and went into the living room to see what had happened. Without saying a word, Matthew took out his pocket knife and slashed the little dog's throat. "I don't think Larry was serious," Grover said, "but the dog was big and dangerous."

Many theories emerged about the motive for shooting Flynt. Grover described the three most prominent: "Some people think it was a Mafia hit over magazine distribution, or because of Flynt's contributions to conspiracy theorists, or that some religious fanatic shot him because he's a smut peddler." Grover reasoned that the attempt to kill Flynt was more likely a mob hit related to distribution of *Hustler* magazine than an attack by an anti-pornography group, the CIA or a rogue government agency to prevent him from publishing material on the Kennedy and King assassinations. Since Flynt's lawyer, Gene Reeves, had been shot only a few seconds after he and Grover had traded places, Grover concluded that a dangerous, accomplished marksman was still at large and could find him if he wanted to.

George asked Grover what he had done when the shots rang out. "The first thing," Grover said, "was to hit the ground; the second was to turn on the tape recorder." The recorder picked up the sound of a car speeding away.

The shooting, it turns out, had no connection to the mob or the CIA—and was only peripherally related to pornography.

Joseph Paul Franklin

In a 1996 *Hustler* magazine interview, "21st Century Flynt," writer Aaron Lee asked Flynt about the incident: "No one has ever been convicted of your shooting. Looking back, what are the most likely theories about who shot you?" Flynt responded:

> A man who is serving two life sentences at a Federal Institution in Marion, Illinois, confessed to my shooting. He's a racist named Joseph Paul Franklin. He confessed to bombing synagogues in the '70s, shooting a black and white couple out jogging in Utah and shooting Vernon Jordon [sic], the civil rights leader. He was upset with me for publishing an interracial photo feature, *Butch and Peache*s in the December '75 issue of *Hustler*. Authorities seem to think he's the guy. I don't know and I don't really care. I don't look at it as who shot me, but rather what: a mentality.

On May 29, 1980, Vernon Jordan, then president of the National

Urban League was shot in the back at a hotel parking lot in Fort Wayne, Indiana, as he was getting out of car driven by a white woman. Prosecutors brought Joseph Paul Franklin to trial for the attack on Jordan but failed to convict him. Franklin admitted afterward that the jury had made a mistake. Investigators and prosecutors in 11 states have linked Franklin, by indictment or confession, to at least 17 and maybe as many as 22 murders that took place between 1977 and 1980. His other crimes include six assaults, two bombings and over a dozen bank robberies. Franklin targeted African Americans, interracial couples, and Jews. In recent years, he admitted killing two African-American boys, aged 13 and 14, in Cincinatti, Ohio a week after shooting Jordan; also two white women in West Virginia in June 1980 who were hitchhiking to a hippie festival. Authorities believe Franklin killed a white woman hitchhiker in Wisconsin after she told him she was dating a Jamaican.

In 1999, two decades after Franklin had failed to kill Flynt and Jordan, the two men shared the world media stage with Independent Prosecutor Kenneth Starr, President Bill Clinton, and the managers of the House of Representatives, who tried to remove Clinton from office. Starr's four-year $50-million pilgrimage, Clinton's self-righteous finger-wagging lies and semantic escapism, and the Republican House managers' embracing redundancies like "perjurious lies" as fervently and frequently as the "rule of law"—and substituting "genitilia" for "genitalia"—the good ol' boys with college and law degrees ultimately inflicted more damage on the English language and the Republican Party than on Clinton. The collateral damage not only eclipsed some of our most memorable political satire but also confirmed Grover's observation about language and politics: "Corrupt politics debases the plain truth, and debased language in turn empowers corrupt politics."

On November 20, 2013, Joseph Paul Franklin was executed by lethal injection in Bonne Terre, Missouri. He was convicted of killing Gerald Gordon in 1977. Franklin knew nothing about Gordon but picked him at random in front of a Jewish synagogue in St. Louis after a bar mitzvah. His two daughters were standing a few feet away. Franklin said that he wasn't an experienced killer at that time or a very good marksman but

he planned the shooting carefully: He left his car some distance away from the synagogue, rode a bicycle to an area within range that had bushes to provide cover, and carried a large-caliber rifle with a scope. He fired several shots, killing Gerald Gordon and wounding two other people, then threw the rifle to the ground and rode the bicycle back to his car and drove away. No one reported seeing him.

Franklin was born Adam Clayton Vaughn in Mobile, Alabama in 1950. He came from a dysfunctional, alcoholic family and was beaten often—mostly by his mother, he said. After dropping out of school, he was an enthusiastic reader of Ku Klux Klan and American Nazi literature and was strongly influenced by Adolph Hitler's manifesto, *Mein Kampf*. He said after reading that book, "I never felt the same again." At the age of 26, he changed his name to Joseph Paul Franklin: Joseph Paul after Paul Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda of the Third Reich, and Franklin after Benjamin Franklin. Soon afterward he started shooting people.

Franklin was a cunning, methodical killer who used a .44-caliber rifle with a scope and continued to kill from a distance, then calmly follow his well-planned escape—as he had in St. Louis.

Around five years ago I was channel-surfing late in the evening and tuned in to a trash-TV docudrama on serial killers that featured Joseph Paul Franklin. I missed the first 15 minutes of the one-hour program, but in the part I watched no connection was made between Franklin and the shootings of Larry Flynt and Vernon Jordan. The episode that I remember best was an interview with a prostitute that Franklin had picked up at the street corner she was working. The couple went to a quiet part of the city and had sex then Franklin drove her back to the corner where he'd met her. Franklin pulled up to the curb at the intersection with the car partly blocking the pedestrian crosswalk. When a Black man who had to walk around the car shouted an insult, Franklin said to the woman, "You think I ought to shoot him?"

"Course not," she said. "And you'd be arrested."

"No, I wouldn't; people would be so concerned about tryin' to help

him nobody would pay any attention to me."

Franklin supported his homicidal campaign by robbing banks and selling his blood to blood banks.

In the 33 years Franklin was incarcerated, he practiced meditation, read extensively, especially in comparative religions, and expressed remorse for killing the Jewish man in St. Louis and the two Black teenage boys in Cincinatti. In a *New York Times* article in February 1997, Franklin said: "I have nothing in my heart but love for Larry [Flynt] now. I really regret what happened. Larry has some faults, but I don't hate him anymore. It's the only shooting I've committed that I've ever cried about." And in a Fox 2 News interview with Tom O'Neal shortly before Franklin was executed, he referred to Flynt as "My ol' pal Larry," adding that he supported "Larry Flynt for president" because Flynt would "close Gitmo and stop killing men, women and children with drones in Pakistan."

Flynt petitioned the court to stop Franklin's execution and wrote in the *Hollywood Reporter*: "I have every reason to be overjoyed with this decision, but I am not. As I see it, the sole motivating factor behind the death penalty is vengeance, not justice, and I firmly believe that a government that forbids killing among its citizens should not be in the business of killing people itself." Flynt, however, didn't forgive Franklin: "As far as the severity of punishment is concerned, to me, a life spent in a 3-by-6-foot cell is far harsher than the quick release of a lethal injection," he wrote. "I would love an hour in a room with him and a pair of wire-cutters and pliers, so I could inflict the same damage on him that he inflicted on me. But I do not want to kill him or see him die."

Interviewer Tom O'Neal asked Franklin, "Do you think you deserve to die?" Franklin paused then responded: "Well, to tell you the truth, I actually think I do, yeah. To be quite honest with you, I cannot say no to that question."

Franklin's execution was scheduled to take place at 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday, November 20, 2013; however, on Tuesday afternoon, U.S. District Court Judge Nanette K. Laughrey in Jefferson City granted a stay of execution, ruling that neither Franklin's lawyers nor the court

had been able to address the question of whether the state's method of execution was constitutional "because the Defendants keep changing the protocol they intend to use." The stay was also issued "to ensure that the Defendants' last act against Franklin is not permanent, irremediable cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth Amendment."

In the U.S. it's difficult to obtain the lethal drug, anesthetic propofol, which is widely used in executions, because most of the suppliers are drug makers in the European Union, which opposes the death penalty and has threatened to stop supplying the drug to the U.S. to execute inmates. When Missouri Governor Jay Nixon ordered the state to find a new drug, the Department of Corrections chose pentobarbital. Judge Laughrey criticized the state for three reasons: 1) changing the plan of execution just a few days before it was scheduled to take place, 2) using a lethal injection of pentobarbital that is produced by a secret compounding pharmacy, and 3) rejecting the challenge to the method of execution because the challenge was untimely. Tuesday night U.S. District Court Judge Carol E. Jackson in St. Louis granted a second stay of execution based on Franklin's claim that he was mentally incompetent to be executed.

Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster, however, successfully appealed the orders of Judge Laughrey and Judge Jackson to the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals, which overturned the stays the two judges had granted the day before. Then at 5:20 a.m. on Wednesday, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Appeals Court decisions, so the execution proceeded. Attorney General Koster's successful argument was that "the use of sufficiently potent pentobarbital, in the dose planned, will lead to a rapid and painless death," and he reminded the Supreme Court that previous rulings had acknowledged that "there is some risk of pain in any method of execution." Attorney General Koster also argued that Franklin had no right to relief from the court because he had not exhausted his administrative appeals. (When a court refuses to hear a case because the litigant hasn't exhausted administrative remedies, the litigant must pursue the issue at a lower level. If relief isn't granted, then the litigant has exhausted that administrative remedy and can

proceed to the next level of appeal. In Franklin's case, carrying out the execution on Wednesday eliminated the opportunity to exhaust any future administrative appeals.)

On Wednesday, November 20, 2013, at 6:05 a.m. Governor Nixon ordered the execution to proceed. Franklin was strapped to the table in the death chamber, waiting for the injection. Prison is the ultimate bureaucracy and nothing is more relative than the calculation of time: 33 years behind doors that other people lock and unlock ended as quickly as a summer thunder storm.

Franklin declined the last meal, saying it should be given to a homeless person. There were three media witnesses and six representing the state. Franklin's four witnesses had left at 4:00 a.m., not expecting the execution to take place before they returned. The prison guards had cordoned off an area outside the prison for those who came to support or oppose the execution, but no one came.

Franklin made no statement—written or oral. The execution team injected five grams of pentobarbital at 6:07 a.m. Ten minutes later the medical examiners confirmed that Franklin was dead.

Lee Marvin

I asked Grover which person he considered the most intelligent of all the Hollywood people he'd interviewed. "Lee Marvin," he responded immediately but never said precisely why.

After re-reading Grover's 1972 *Rolling Stone* interview with Marvin in Oregon's Willamette Valley during the filming of *The Emperor of the North Pole*, the Depression-era movie about hobos riding the rails, I can see why Marvin's audacity, imagination, knowledge and wit appealed to Grover.

Lee Marvin was from an affluent family. His father was an advertising executive and his mother was a fashion editor. Marvin told Grover his parents had sent him to exclusive private schools:

> "...quite a few of 'em, but I was a poor student. I really didn't give a rat's ass about Algebra II or Shakespeare to be read. Finally, when I got kicked out of this Catholic academy in Florida for pushin' a kid out a window, I said, fuck it all, and joined the Marines. After basic training, I got shipped out to the Pacific."
>
> Leaning forward, Marvin grasps his ankles and looks ruminative. He elides past the fact that as a teenager he saw action in the battles of Kwajalein, Eniwetok, and Saipan, was awarded a Purple Heart, and was sent back to the U.S. to be hospitalized for wounds for which he still receives a partial disability pension.

Marvin was a tall, physically powerful man. When he was drinking—and, in periods of his life, Marvin admitted that was more the rule than the exception—he could get as wild as the outlaw biker he played in *The Wild One* with Marlon Brando and the murderous old cowman character in director John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*.

Marvin recounted one of those episodes at the end of filming a one-hour TV show called *The Losers*, directed by Sam Peckinpah. Marvin said the project was "wild" and "dopey," adding: "For an hour show, 300,000 feet of film was exposed for an equal amount of dollars."

And the human cost included actor Keenan Wynn's having four ribs broken, director Sam Peckinpah's being hospitalized for a "belch-out" and Marvin's getting locked-up for drunk and disorderly behavior.

> "After the picture wrapped, there was a cocktail party. By that time Keenan and me were both really shitfaced, snockered. Suddenly Sam eased up at my elbow and said, 'Don't you think you ought to eat something?' Well, that was a cue, right? *Va-voom!* I mean, shit, we were standin' alongside a thirty-foot-long table heaped with hors d'oeuvres. Well, the next thing I knew, I'd decked a nurse who was trying to get a needle into me, and I had Sam up against the wall with his feet off the floor like this—? cackling fiendishly, Marvin clambers erect to his full six-foot-three height to pantomime the scene—"and I said, 'Sam—I hope you know what I mean, Sam.' And he finally gave a little sag and went limp and I said, 'OK, Sam,' and let him down.
>
> "The night of that *Losers* cocktail party, I got so sauced-out that somebody had to drive me home. Which meant that the next mornin' I had to go back to the lot to pick up my car. The cop at the gate gave me this weird look and said in sort of a hushed voice, 'Mr. Marvin, I got to tell you. I haven't seen anything like your behavior last night since 1934.' Well, there it was, you see. That guy made my day. What he meant was 'The Old Hollywood,' which was probably why I went out there in the first place."
>
> Marvin dusts his hands together and sinks back down on the steps grinning hugely.
>
> "See, Peckinpah is another guy who likes to act it all out, just like I used to be, so it's kind of fun to mix it up with him, you follow my meaning? Because Sam's always going to try to top you, except just maybe you've been workin' on your technique a little longer than he has and you can eat him up. And if you beat him at his own game, maybe he respects you. With somebody like him, you have to say, 'Hey, Sam baby, watch out. Some guy's not goin' to be so merciful with you the next time. Maybe when the next guy beats you, he's goin' to take your head right through the wall. So you better walk lightly, friend.' "

Lee Marvin was at least as entertaining off-screen as on. His

anecdotes, observations, lines from songs (especially blues) and shotgun recollections ranged from the erudite and poetic to character-revealing gossip about some of Hollywood's most respected and accomplished figures. He was irreverent without being cynical and his monologues had more Anglo-Saxon expletives than anyone else Grover interviewed.

Marvin talked about his work in the theater in the late '40s and early '50s: "Introducing the 'great drama' to rural areas, see—holy shit, 33,000 miles of one-night stands, all in the wintertime, and you got 75 dollars a week...." He described his early films, *Bad Day at Black Rock* and *The Caine Mutiny* as "excellent"..."but what the fuck're you gonna do with *Gun Fury* or *Gorilla at Large*?"

After Marvin sang a few lines from a song about "ol' No. 19" and a "Rayroad man will kill you when he can," he explained to Keith Carradine, who played the young hobo riding the rails with Marvin's character, the meaning of "the Great Black Shadow":

> "Well, you know they were fuckin' tough, those old-time railroad men," Marvin muses. "I mean, back in the Thirties when this picture is set, there were a lot of more or less ordinary guys ridin' the blinds, see, just plain joes lookin' for work....I was readin' this book by some Englishman—for some reason, the English seem to write better about Americana than Americans do—and this guy'd rounded up some wild old photos. There was one shot of a bunch of itinerants waitin' for a train. They're followin' the wheat crop, see, which started out in the Midwest and wound its way up through this region to Alberta and Manitoba. Between 1890 and 1920, maybe 200,000 men a year bummed the rails to meet those jobs, and they were referred to as 'the Great Black Shadow.' Isn't that wild?"
>
> "Wow," Keith murmurs.
>
> Marvin bumps the toe of his clodhopper against the pickup's wheel. "So in that scene between you and me, I'm gonna say, 'Kid, don't mess with me. I'm the Emperor of the North Pole, and the King of Nowhere. I've gone over the falls and seen the elephant—and I've followed the Great Black Shadow.' Hah! That oughta snap a few heads, huh? What's the best rail line you ever rode, kid?"

“Uh, this one right here, I guess,” Keith stammers. “I’m only twenty-three—”

“Yeah, yeah, I forgot,” Marvin grunts, cocking his head at an oblique angle to watch the long-necked herons soar and swoop above the glinting waters of the lake. “Well, it’s a damn shame you missed the great ones, kid. The greatest of them all, of course, was the Twentieth Century Limited, and after that came the Empire State Express. Both of those babies went straight from New York to Chicago, first class, no stops, sixteen hours, fuck you, Albany. Their main lines were four rails, nine-inches high, and each yard of that rail weighed 193 pounds to withstand the beatin’ they had to take. And the roadbeds were made out of crushed granite, see, because crushed granite won’t shift, even under enormous pressure.” With a mild sneer, Marvin gestures towards the tracks across the road. “That stuff over there is like nothin’. It’s siding rail—tootsie talk. It’s a very light road, and comes up too tight to the tie. See how it falls away there? That means the bed can settle and shift. You couldn’t fly over those tracks at sixty-five. Shit no, baby, you’d be right off on your ass. That was the same kind of crap they used to make Sherman bowties out of.”

With exaggerated gestures, Marvin grins and pretends to be tying a bowtie in the air before him. “During the Civil War,” he drawls, “Ol’ General Sherman sent his boomers marching through Georgia, you’ll recall. Well, the boomers were Sherman’s crack front-runners, see—bad motherfuckers to a man. Along the way, they ripped up the railroad. First, they’d burn the ties, then they’d throw the rails on the fire and get them red hot. After that, they’d wrap them around any of the big trees at hand. When a rail cooled, you could never get it off. You could saw down the tree, of course, but you couldn’t reheat the rail, because that would kill the tree, too. Fucked either way, see. Sherman bowties. To let the rebs know the boomers’d been there.”

Kell Robertson

In the summer of 1972, Grover took me to meet Kell Robertson and Cindy Read and their daughter Penelope, who was three years old, had large brown eyes, and wore black plastic-rimmed glasses. Kell nicknamed the pale, polite little girl "Frog." Grover had described Kell as a talented poet, singer and song writer, and gifted guitar player. A block away from their apartment in an old Victorian house, Grover smiled: "Ol' Kell lives at 7 Coleridge Street."

Kell and Cindy survived marginally. She was on welfare and Kell picked up some money from scheduled gigs but more from passing the hat at bars and coffee galleries after he played and sang. It took only a couple of visits to 7 Coleridge to see that they spent more money on Coors tall-boys and Benson and Hedges filtered cigarettes than on food.

One of Kell's great gifts was his ability to quote long passages from writers he admired like Keats, Shelley, Yeats, Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, Sandburg, and many others. Another poet Kell loved and quoted often was Thomas Hornsby Ferril, who was also a journalist from Colorado that wrote about the American West.

Kell remembered the lyrics of entire songs of Country and Western and Blues singers he admired, like Jimmie Rodgers, Hank Williams, and Lightnin' Hopkins. The descriptions of his own life, however, were elliptical and inconsistent. There weren't many experiences he wanted to share, much less celebrate. But from those occasional comments, I concluded that he was a drop-out even before he got to high school and that his Army service during the undeclared Korean War had led to a general or dishonorable discharge. I believe he served in Korea but I wouldn't bet that he did—or didn't. Kell told me different stories about the fight with his stepfather, who forced him to leave home when he was a teenager. After hearing the second version, I realized that Kell had the ability to tell a true and powerful story that related more to the human condition than to the facts of his individual life.

Over the four decades of our friendship, Kell never forgot that those who win the wars write the history books, and he believed creativity has a right to liberate—or at least parole—memory. Three of his creative interventions have stayed with me. Kell introduced me to a short, wiry man in San Francisco named Joe Perrillo, who was cool and colorful. Joe had been a serious user of heroin, according to Kell, but had won some recent battles. I never heard him play but Kell and others said he was a talented bass man. I didn't spend much time with Joe but I liked his spirit, quick wit and street wisdom. Kell never complimented Joe directly in his presence or to others but Kell was deferential toward him in a way that suggested Joe was somebody. Kell and I were ending a telephone conversation when he said: "You know Perrillo's dead."

"What happened?"

"I don't wanna talk about it, man. See you later." He hung up.

I didn't see or talk to Kell for a few weeks. I thought it was odd that I didn't hear about any kind of service or memorial for Joe; but since I didn't know him well and his life path hadn't been the most conventional, I didn't think much about the lack of opportunity to pay my respects. Around two years later, George Lewis asked me if I'd heard about Joe Perrillo. "Yeah, he died a couple of years ago."

"No, he died last week."

I called Kell and asked: "Why did you tell me Perrillo died a couple of years ago?"

"I never told you he was dead—he just died a few days ago."

In a poem of Kell's and in a conversation, he regretted going back to a small town in Kansas and discovering that his grandparents' farm had become a shopping mall. When I mentioned that to Kendall McCook, he asked: "Who told you that?

"Kell."

"Jason and Mike went back with him to that little town in Kansas. The farm's gone but there's no damn shoppin' mail anywhere near the place. It's miles from any city big enough to have a shoppin' mall."

In July of 2008, I went to Santa Fe, New Mexico to videotape a memorial to Utah Phillips. The event took place in a hall where Kell had performed on several occasions. The marquee in a pasture near the highway read:

SANTA FE BREWING COMPANY
BREAKFAST-LUNCH-DINNER
OPEN AT 7 AM 7 DAYS A WEEK
MON A TRIBUTE TO
UTAH PHILLIPS

KELL ROBERTSON

Kell was the headliner and videotaping his performance and interviewing him for a documentary was the main reason I'd made the trip. It wasn't a good night for Kell. He said he hadn't been feeling well for a few days and he'd had too much beer and too little food that day. He did the song he'd written as a tribute to Utah—also to Woody Guthrie—and a few other songs. At one point, he told the audience: "I'm 78 years old now and this is not as easy as it used to be." It was good to see Kell and Kendall and to meet his talented and generous friend, Argos MacCallum, who made it possible for Kell to survive in a protected and productive place. Argos helped Kell more than anybody else ever had. Kell had another gig at Silva's Saloon, a bar with one of the greatest photo and license plate collections in the world. Neither performance justified the trip but a long interview with Kell and another with Kell and Kendall made it worth flying 2,400 miles, driving 900 miles, videotaping two performances and two interviews and sleeping in four different places on a five-day trip.

Two years later I was on the telephone with Kell. He said, "Kendall and some other people are helping me get Social Security—I think they call it SSI. I'm 72 now and finally on Social Security."

"You're 72?"

"Yeah, that's what they tell me. Born in 1938."

"Do you think there's any way I could hire you to calculate my age for me? I like your creative mathematics: two years ago you were 78; now you're 72."

"Who gives a shit about numbers? I don't even know what year it was when Penelope was born. When I held the little thing in my hands, she peed on me. I leave numbers to the practical people. There's a line in one of Ferril's poems: 'The practical people are coming.' "

I never met anyone free of some moral and behavioral contradictions, but Kell's were memorable: He had a curious combination of self-indulgence and conscience. By circumstance and choice, Kell was a proletarian, and a sterling one; but a person with his musical gifts and intellect who lives on the margins has many opportunities to become a hungry elitist. Like Grover, I was taken with Kell's poetry, the songs he composed and sang, and his command of a steel-stringed Martin guitar that had a higher standard of living than Kell and the women who walked through life with him. (A line from one of his songs to a woman he was attracted to: "I wanna walk around heaven with you.")

People didn't expect eclectic erudition from a stocky man wearing Levi's, scuffed boots, a dust-weathered cowboy hat that was originally black, a shiny black leather vest and mirror shades.

Kell had a hair-trigger mind and as much humanity as the law would allow but he followed a life script that had him perform brilliantly then 15 minutes later he could tempt the gentlest souls among us to grab him by the collar. In the early 1980s Kell was the sole performer on a spring afternoon at the Art Institute in San Francisco. He was relatively sober and the audience loved his poetry and his music. Around a decade later, Kell was so drunk he fell off the stage in a grand old landmark theater in Raton, New Mexico. Kell's behavior instructed us on the truth and relevance of the Christian ethic to hate the sin but love the sinner.

In 1975 I was living alone between marriages in a studio apartment at 23rd St. and Guerrero in San Francisco's Mission District. The doorbell rang early afternoon on a weekday. It was Kell and Ben Hiatt, a poet and small press publisher who ran a program that paid poets to go into public schools to read their work and talk about why they wrote poetry. Both had been drinking and brought a six-pack with them. We talked for a few minutes then decided to go to the back yard. When one person is sober and two others are drunk and getting drunker, the social dynamic tends to veer more toward controversy over the irrelevant than to any communication worth remembering.

I'd known Kell for three years and liked being around him when he was in control. I'd seen Hiatt only a couple of times before and didn't dislike him, but when he was sober, he seemed a bit officious. That afternoon he wasn't sober. He reminded me of guys I'd encountered in the Army who inherited a little more power and authority than they knew how to deal with. Hiatt was in a position to accord his poet friends a few dollars and some attention that were both generally in short supply.

After two hours in the back yard and nursing one beer—and being on the periphery of conversations that usually sound much better to drunks than to sober people—I probably conveyed some of my impatience with the wisdom and focus of my guests. Maybe they sensed that because both became unpleasant and aggressive.

Kell stood up and walked over to where I was sitting and lowered his head slightly: "Man, your beard sure is white. How old are you now anyway?"

"About the same age you are," I said. "I guess I've just had a harder life."

Hiatt joined in, "Your beard is so white. I never noticed it before." Both of them started laughing. Kell stared at me and moved closer: "Really, man, why is your beard so damn white?"

"Yeah," Hiatt said, "it's white as an old man's."

I stood up. "You've said four times now how white my beard is. If either one of you says it one more time, I'm gonna show you that in spite of my white beard I'm young and strong enough to kick both of

your asses, and I guarantee you I'll do it." That ended the conversation about my beard—and a few minutes later Hiatt said, "I need to get on the road soon, so we'd better go." I offered to drive them to Kell's place if they needed a ride—or make coffee, especially for Hiatt, since I couldn't think of a single instance of Kell choosing coffee over beer—but Hiatt said: "We have to walk several blocks to the car. I'll be okay. I may drink a little coffee and wait for the traffic to slack off before driving home." I think he was living in Folsom, California.

My threat was more reflex than reflection. I'm glad I didn't have to follow through. When I was 16 years old, my dad said: "If there were no cowards, there'd be no bullies."

More than 30 years after that back yard scene, Kell and I were at his cabin in Santa Fe and talking about Grover. "You know what he said not long after I met you: 'Ol' Rod seems like a nice guy but he's dangerous.' " I suspect that hyperbole stayed with Kell. He knew also that I'd been a Golden Gloves boxer for three years and he didn't realize how bad my eyesight was. And in some part of his mind, he knew that he and Hiatt were being mean-spirited drunken bullies who probably deserved a punch in the gut or a kick in the ass.

In the early 1980s, I got a call from Kell. He was in southern Oregon and planned to take the bus to San Francisco, spend a few days with us, then go by bus to L.A. to visit his mother. "Do you think you can put me up and up with me a few days?"

"I guess so," I said, "I can think of a few people who might be happy to see you."

I met him a little before 7:00 on a cool, cloudy morning at the old Trailways Bus Station at First and Mission. He was wearing the same black cowboy hat he'd bought seven or eight years before when he was working eight-hour days at Shields' Printing in San Francisco, a brown wool coat, Levi's and boots. His hand was shaking as he extended it. "I had a hard night but after a beer I'll be okay." He was pale and walked like someone who had been sitting longer than he should've. I took the suitcase he was carrying. He kept his guitar case, which always had

room for books, notebooks, cigarettes, and a half-pint of whiskey or cheap wine. Kell wasn't secretive about the contents of his guitar case but it was clear enough that he didn't welcome anybody else opening it or getting too close when he was going through it.

I admired and appreciated Kell for his talent, humanity and wit, but in decades of friendship I don't remember ever seeing him without reflecting that wherever he was and no matter who was with him, Kell had the ability to disrupt orderly lives and to make those whose lives he complicated appreciate the security of the mundane that generally followed the crises. Jack Thibeau, a writer and actor and friend of Grover's, took Robert Duval to spend most of the night talking and drinking with Kell before Duval produced and starred in the movie, *Tender Mercies*. I thought it was a good movie and I could see Kell's influence. I think Duval has that remarkable combination of understanding and loving what he's doing and the compulsion to keep trying when others would quit or coast. Thibeau said of Kell a few years before introducing Duval to him: "If you need somebody to drive your pick-up into the bar ditch, Kell can do that for you as well as anybody I know."

I got a call from Jack Micheline a short time after I'd helped a friend of his with a grievance at New College in San Francisco. As we were having burritos at a Mexican restaurant in the Mission District, I mentioned that I'd gotten a recent letter from Kell and that he was writing some fine songs and poems. "I'm glad he's doing okay," Micheline said, "cause most of the time he's not. Kell's a hero to me and a lot of people, but if anybody can fuck things up, he sure can."

In the three days Kell stayed with us, we had some good visits. He read some of his newer poems and sang some of my favorite songs from the past—and a few new ones.

I finished work mid-afternoon and drove home. Walking up the stairs of the building, I noticed that our front door was partly open. Kell had been in the apartment alone and decided to make a quick trip to one of the mom-and-pop stores in the neighborhood to get a package of cigarettes but ran into a friend and spent several hours in a bar on 16th Street. We had a beautiful blue and white parakeet

named Yenta that flew around in the apartment. Fortunately, he didn't fly down the stairs and out the front door. A day later around 2:30 in the morning, Kell and a tall, skinny woman, who was as drunk as he was, were banging on the front door and laughing. My first class that day was at 7:30 a.m.; and I had told Kell that he was welcome to bring a woman home with him but not in the middle of the night. I felt a bit hard-hearted but I wouldn't let them in.

Kell and Cindy had separated around four years before, and Penelope stayed with Cindy. I never learned exactly what happened on that visit but Kell made Cindy so angry she wouldn't let him see Penelope. Kell convinced me to call Cindy and try to change her mind.

She didn't offer any details: "It's just too much—and always the same," she said. "He upsets her and he upsets me. He can call her and write her and see her in the future—but not now."

"Not even for an hour?"

"No, and I don't think you should keep pushing me. There's a lot about Kell you don't know."

I gave up and passed Cindy's message to Kell when he came back to the apartment. He was drunker than he'd been the previous days. "She's my daughter, Goddamn it. I haven't seen her in years and I'm leavin' town tomorrow." He walked across the kitchen and stopped two paces from me. "I've got a pistol in my suitcase and I'm gonna go in the other room and blow my brains out, and you'll have to clean up the mess."

"I'm sorry you can't see Penelope. You tried and I tried but Cindy's not gonna change her mind."

Kell walked out of the apartment and came back around five hours later. He was still drunk but more sad than angry. "She's my daughter and I came a long way to see her." He went into the bedroom, fell face-down on the bed and in a couple of minutes he was out.

Early the next morning I drove Kell to the bus station. He said it would take him 11 hours to get to L.A. I shook his hand. "Kell, you're my friend and comrade. I love and respect you; and a few days ago I was really happy to see you but I have to tell you I'm equally happy to see you go."

He smiled and nodded. "I suspect, ol' buddy, that a few other souls

share that sentiment. Ride easy," he said as we shook hands again. He picked up his suitcase and guitar case and walked into the bus station. It was Thanksgiving Day.

Desperado Magazine

In 1969 Kell started publishing *Desperado* magazine on a mimeo machine that someone had given or lent him; and Ben Hiatt printed most of the issues that came out in the 70s and 80s. In 1992 Kell and Kendall McCook, a friend and writer from Ft. Worth, Texas I'd met in graduate school in 1970 at the University of New Mexico, decided to print an issue of *Desperado* worthy of the talented writers who contributed their work. Kendall had raised $2,000 to finance the printing and to pay Kell for editing the issue. Kendall submitted an article on a relative who was a champion rodeo cowboy. Kell chose not to include any of his own work; however, he selected nine poems of a friend, the poet Keith Wilson.

Grover, who was the best known and most successful writer in the magazine, contributed the article, "On the Road with Hank's Kid, 1978," which he'd written about Hank Williams Jr. for *New West* magazine. The editors had liked the piece but didn't use it. Grover, in principle and practice, believed writers should be paid for their work, so after receiving a kill fee from *New West*, he submitted the article to *Desperado*. When Kell and Kendall told me they wanted to publish a poem of mine, I volunteered to typeset the magazine, assuming that if the job was beyond my limited skills, Maria-Theresa—my wife, who was a fast and efficient word processor in a big, fascist San Francisco law firm—could salvage the results of my well-intentioned incompetence as a typographer.

Hank Williams Jr.

Grover—like many of his generation, Americans of all ages and people throughout the world—admired Hank Williams: a country boy and an artist whose instrumental and lyrical genius spoke a language close to his heart. Hank Williams Jr. was three years old when his famous daddy died and navigating the roads of life had led to mixed fortunes—and when Grover showed up at the Gold Dust West Casino in Reno to go

on the road with Hank Jr. and the Bama Band, he knew as much about ol' Hank and his boy as anyone on earth could. Grover also knew that on a good night, Hank Williams could take the music of the heart to the celestial honky-tonk then the next day wake up hungover, sick at heart, and facing mortality in bright sunlight.

Grover acknowledged that the Golden Showcase Lounge of the Reno motel and casino wasn't "exactly Hillbilly Heaven but that didn't bother anybody in the elbow-to-ass throng waiting to be seated for Hank Williams Jr.'s 11:30 p.m. closing-night performance." Grover was sitting at a table near the stage with Albert Caudle, the road manager for the Bama Band:

> Merle Kilgore, Hank Jr.'s second banana, opened the show with a down-pat medley of his hit compositions "Wolverton Mountain" and "Ring of Fire." Kilgore was a big, bluff Okie whose style ran to squash-blossom jewelry, a lot of affability, and more capped teeth than I had ever seen in one mouth before.
>
> The five-man Bama Band sawed away energetically during Kilgore's turn on-stage, then shifted to a gritty stampede that mingled the juices of western swing, jazz and electronic swamp. It was the cue for Hank Williams Jr. to stride out from the wings and the sight of him put the pure-dee throb on the joint.
>
> He was wearing mirror shades, a black hat with a reb emblem holding a $50 bill in place, cowboy boots with silver in-laid toe guards, and a sort of chain-link belt made of Mexican and U.S. gold pieces. He was whanging hell out of an antique Martin dreadnought guitar and singing "Jambalaya," one of his daddy's better-known tunes.
>
> You could see by his outfit that Hank Jr. was an "outlaw," meaning that he shared Waylon Jennings' and Willie Nelson's predilection for cussing, carousing, and cutting albums that sold more than 20,000 copies at a whack. Lately, old Hank Williams' only begotten son had been spreading it around that he was taking leave of his old man's music, but I didn't put much stock in it, and the notion seemed faintly ludicrous as the Golden Showcase Lounge began to jump like a seven-minute egg.

Hank Jr. performed more of his father's songs, some old favorites like

"White Lightning"; then "The New South," the title recording from one of his most successful albums.

> By this time, the polyester chenille backdrop was whipping like wash in a blue norther, and when Hank Jr. flung back his head and played a passable imitation of Jerry Lee Lewis's "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," the ladies began to out-whoop the hard-hats. "You Win Again" put Williams on his daddy's track, but that's what everybody expected, really, and the response was hazardous to the naked eardrum. The salvation of the situation was that Hank Jr. sang the plaint achingly well, as he did "Your Cheatin' Heart"—another of daddy's heartbreakers.
>
> "Long-Haired Country Boy" moved the action back down the dope-smoking woods below the Mason-Dixon Line, and "Wabash Cannonball" carried forward the good-timey, quasi-Confederate spirit. "I Saw The Light" was the show's obligatory hand-clapping hymn, but it was also—what?—the fourth or fifth of dad's golden oldies in an hour?
>
> Hank Jr. closed out the set with a modest and moving blues number about his recent travels and travails. The hard-hats and their ladies listened to the story with close attention, nodding in sympathy at the singer's lightly self-mocking pleas for recognition of his own "home-grown" music. The lyrics made it clear that Hank Jr. merited attention for reasons beyond his paternal lineage or his trendy association with the Hip and Holy Heroes of Southern Outlawry. Old Hank Williams's kid had survived the deadly legend of his famous dead daddy, and he had begun to create intense, mature songs worthy of the creation. In a widely-reported accident, Hank Jr. had even tumbled off the crest of a mountainside and hung in the icy interface between life and death for months, but he had survived that, too. At the end of "Feelin' Better," the room rocked with foot-stomping whistles, and banshee rebel cries.

Grover was one of the first people to board Hank Jr.'s bus, which was parked on the tarmac behind the casino. The young driver directed him to take a seat at a cluttered table in the lounge area behind the front seats.

Fancy cowboy hats dangled from pegs all over the cabin, and a sign above the door read: PRESERVE WILD LIFE—LET'S HAVE A PARTY. Among the junk on the table were a brace of *Star Wars* comics, a deck of greasy playing cards, a plastic "Fanny Pincher" toy, a "collector's edition" of a magazine called *Who Killed Bruce Lee?*, half of a half-pint of vodka, and an ashtray full of spent .38 cartridges.

It was the next morning before Grover got to spend much time with Hank Jr. The bus made a mid-morning breakfast stop above Bakersfield and a couple of minutes later a second touring bus pulled up at the truckstop. When Merle Killgore saw the bus, he "stopped and grinned: 'Bah God, it's Mel Tillis's bunch. Somebody better turn out the lights and call the law.' "

The bus rolled south again, and I rode for a couple of hours in the rear compartment with Hank Jr. He was wearing a Ruger T-shirt and a billed cap that said "CAT," and he drank small tins of grapefruit juice and chain-smoked cigarettes while we talked. The hoarseness had vanished from his voice, and he was cheerful, blunt-spoken, and less enamored of himself than most musicians I had met. Not a "complex" or a "deep" person by nature, he struck me as remarkably whole, given the serial catastrophes of his 29 years.

Hank Jr. was three when his daddy died, and he had no direct memories of the man, only "mental snapshots." By the age of eight, young Hank was part of his mother's traveling show, "Audrey Williams' Musical Caravan of Stars." Audrey had been old Hank's first wife, and she was a "hard-driving business woman" and stage mother. She took a matriarchal hand in Hank Jr.'s affairs until her death in 1975.

The Caravan of Stars toured the tank towns and rural purlieus of the South, and Hank Jr.'s job was simply to imitate his daddy in style and repertoire. The youngster carried the imitation a step further; at a tender age, he was sneaking around backstage drinking liquor and getting seduced by women who wished he were more than the spitting image of his long-gone lonesome daddy.

At 14, Hank Jr.'s voice changed for the better and he landed a long-term recording contract with MGM, old Hank's label. He appeared on the Ed Sullivan show and toured intensively, playing bigger and better-paying halls. He started writing songs but they were imitations, too. What little formal education he had, he got from MGM tutors like Judy Garland before him. By mid-adolescence, he was committed to the honky-tonk life. He sang like his daddy, and he was girl-crazy like his daddy, and he loved to shoot off guns like his daddy used to do in hotel rooms. When Hank Jr. wasn't chasing women, he was out hunting with his daddy's daddy in the Alabama shinnery.

The incessant touring was the worst part of it; sometimes he was on the road 300 days a year. By the age of 21 Hank Jr. started cracking up. He drank too much, and popped pills. He went through an agonizing divorce, then a second. He was sick to death of singing his daddy's lovesick blues to the virtual exclusion of all other styles, but his Nashville management and the white-shod capos at MGM saw nothing but green in the arrangement. In a depression he couldn't shake, Hank Jr. upended a bottle of Darvons in 1973. He survived the overdose, but he was none too happy about it. Merle Kilgore had acted the part of an older brother to him over the years, and Merle and Waylon Jennings helped steady him back on his feet. Hank Jr. talked to a shrink who spelled out for him how he had been programmed to self-destruct exactly like his daddy before him. Hank Jr. quit touring and changed managers and started maneuvering to change labels. He moved off to himself to Cullman, Alabama.

Hank Jr. left Nashville society with no regrets. The "fatcat hypocrites" who ran the place had fired his dying daddy off the Grand Ole Opry for carousing, then claimed his corpse as a sainted martyr. By early manhood, Hank Jr. felt more of an affinity for the despised longhairs of "progressive country" than he did for the aging beer-joint balladeers of his father's generation. Being an "outlaw" meant leaving the three-chord two-steps to the old men, and creating a music that whipped and coiled. Fundamentally, being an outlaw meant attracting a following larger and brighter than the traditional hillbilly audience. The irony of it was that on both counts, old Hank ranked as the mightiest outlaw of them all.

I've read the Hank Jr. article at least five times, and I have no doubt that Grover appreciated the character, style and wit of those good ol' boys with more intelligence than formal schooling. Reading silently, I don't laugh out loud very often but I did several times at the colorful and imaginative comments of that misbegotten but unquestionably talented crew on the bus. Merle Kilgore's description of them: "See, this outfit bears more than a passin' resemblance to a land-locked ship of fools, but every fool on this ol' rattler has got his own useful function. Take Brother Wayne up there at the wheel—he's supposed to disagree with everybody about everything." "Naw, I ain't," Wayne protested.

Describing the first performance at the Golden Showcase Lounge, Grover wrote: "The polyester chenille backdrop was whipping like wash in a blue norther." Since I was sure that language was from Grover's own past, I asked: "Were those guys really that witty? Did they talk that way—or did you help 'em some?"

"No, as you'd probably imagine, I was selective in the quotes I used, but that's exactly the way they talked."

> Around sundown, the Williams entourage regrouped, and the bus moved out toward a night's layover at an L.A. hotel. The musicians crowded into the cabin, passing along lukewarm pop and beer. Hollywood Jim put on a deafening Dixie Dregs tape and started hopping up and down in place. Hank Jr. fished around in Harold's closet until he found a paper bag filled with airline-sized bottles of Canadian whiskey. He handed out a couple of samples and asked me if there was anything special I wanted. "We got a little something to smoke?" Hank Jr. called out above the music. "Parliaments," somebody offered....The bus headed into what was left of the light, gliding past power corridors and palm trees. Swigging a brew, Plunkett [the bass player] sidled over to Hank Jr., who was sitting with his hat tipped over his eyes and his arm draped around Becky's shoulder. Plunkett had to yell to be heard above the din of the music, and pretty soon he was raving: "I ran into these pissants today, and they was callin' us hillbillies. Well, by God, I'm here to tell you, I ain't a hillbilly. I'm an American! I'm one of them! WE'RE US!"
>
> Hank Jr. pushed his hat back and stared up at his wild-eyed

> bassist. “Plunkett,” he said, “you deserve a raise. Despite the fact that you’re a commie pinko fruit-loop Yankee avant-guard punk-rot ageist sexist pre-vert.” “Yeah,” Plunkett agreed happily, “I sure am.”

“Splendor in the Short Grass”

I think it’s ironic and unfortunate that few people had the chance to read Grover’s article on Hank Williams Jr. I concur with the *New York Times* critic who wrote that “Splendor in the Short-Grass: The Filming of *The Last Picture Show*,” was “extraordinary.” That article became the lead piece in the book the University of Texas Press published after Grover’s death. But I liked the Hank Williams Jr. article better. I think Grover was too hard on actor Clu Gulager and that Grover’s understandable bias toward Texas—and Texans—displaced a bit of his empathy.

The piece has Grover’s eye for detail and ear for colorful language—and his ability to make language sing in ways most of us wouldn’t hear without his baton and direction. But, from my perspective, Grover’s soul and humanity weren’t engaged in telling the story. When he wrote that article and the piece on the Allman Brothers Band around the same time, Grover was a brilliant stylist and exceptional storyteller but he didn’t have the character and wisdom that made articles like “Farewell to Cracker Eden” and “The Killing of Gus Hasford” as memorable as journalism is likely to be in any era. I’ve looked hard but can’t locate the exact quote of H.L. Mencken’s but I’ll always remember the essence: Theodore Dreiser wasn’t a great stylist but he was a great writer because he wrote about fundamental human questions. If people read Grover’s work 100 years from now, I believe many will appreciate the music of his language, the subtlety of his wit, the agility of his mind, and the light of a soul that survived in spite of the darkness he knew as a child and never completely escaped.

When Grover was traveling to Archer City, Texas—McMurtry’s hometown, where *The Last Picture Show* was filmed—he described the drive through Wichita Falls.

> On the way out of town in a Hertz station wagon, we pass the M-B

Corral, a notorious hillbilly dive where, fourteen or fifteen years ago, Larry McMurtry and I stood among a circle of spectators in the parking lot one drizzly winter night and watched a nameless oilfield roughneck batter and kick Elvis Presley half to death in what was delicately alluded to afterwards as a difference of opinion about the availability of the roughneck's girl friend.

The description and circumstances of that event never seemed right to me, but for some reason, I never asked Grover about it. Decades later that incident came up.

My friend, Paul Foreman, the writer, small-press publisher and prospector, made a business trip to Sweden to confer with an expert in metallurgy that Paul thought could help him locate and mine gold and platinum. Before leaving Austin, Paul called and asked me to contact Larry McMurtry to tell him that he planned to speak with members of the Nobel Prize Committee for Literature to inform them that McMurtry should be in contention for the next Nobel Prize. Rather than express skepticism about the likelihood of Foreman even getting the opportunity to speak to members of the Nobel Prize Committee much less influence the outcome, I simply wrote a short letter to McMurtry at his bookstore BOOKED UP in Archer City, Texas and told him what Foreman was planning. It had been years since Larry and I had been in touch.

Two weeks later I got a hastily handwritten letter from Larry on stationery with the BOOKED UP logo at the top of the page:

10 July 09

Dear Roger,

Thanks for your letter — always good to hear from you—

However I don't want to be mentioned to the Swedish Academy. That's a bad, political prize. There's no reason a few Swedish professors should get to decide what literature is—

I'm what my old great aunt said—a minor regional novelist—that's enough—

I have another memoir coming in winter, called Literary Life. In it I revisit the question of Grover and Journalism. A friendly piece but I did point out the famous evening in which Grover & I

watched Elvis Presley having a fight in the parking lot of a honky-tonk in Wichita Falls — this hogwash is in the Title essay, no less, Splendor in the Short Grass. Total fiction. I was never at a honky-tonk with Grover. I never saw Elvis live. The one time he did play Wichita Falls it wasn't at a honky-tonk and I had been gone for several years.

I also have a Hollywood memoir coming in the Fall of 2010.

Best
L

A few weeks later I responded.

8/5/09

Dear Larry,

I appreciate very much hearing from you. I can imagine how many ways people and circumstances impose on your time.

I agree that the Nobel Prize for Literature is bad in various ways and certainly political and I agree even more with your statement: "There's no reason a few Swedish professors should get to decide what literature is," although the committee has made some good choices over the years. I think Faulkner's acceptance speech is among the best writing I've ever read. I think you're likely to be in contention. If the committee picks you, you could reject the prize and tell the whole world that your old great aunt had better judgment and more character than all the professors on the committee—and she had at least as much right to judge your literary stature.

I reread Grover's description of you and him in the parking lot of the honky-tonk in Wichita Falls watching a roughneck beat and kick Elvis. When I read that piece the first time in the 70s, the story didn't seem right for several reasons. And I certainly wouldn't have described you and Grover as "wild-headed young runners and seekers." Grover also has a shorter version of that incident in "The Legacy of Huckleberry Finn" (p. 241). I never asked Grover why he included either version. I have a vague recollection of hearing somebody else tell a story of Elvis taking a beating in a similar setting. I thought that story was complete fiction or based on some minor offense or misunderstanding that

might've embarrassed Elvis but didn't lead to a serious beating. Grover might have appropriated the story thinking it had some factual basis and decided for some strange reason to put you and him at the scene.

Last week I talked to Chuck Edward, my oldest and closest friend from Lubbock, who now lives in Kingsland. You met him and Sandra, his second wife, in December, 1962. You don't have any reason to remember him and Sandra, but you might since before taking you to their house, I described Chuck as both a close friend and a hero to me. We fought in Golden Gloves tournaments '52-'54. He was a brilliant boxer, and I was one of the worst. I was strong for my size and could hit harder than anybody I ever fought but I couldn't see very well in the bright lights of the ring without my glasses. Chuck was a union bricklayer who didn't finish high school but loved to read and was an agnostic by the age of 16. When I brought up Grover's description of Elvis's beating in Wichita Falls, Chuck told me that Elvis had performed in Lubbock 3 times before he rose to national fame on the Ed Sullivan show. The first performance was around 1955 at the Cotton Club, a honky-tonk southeast of Lubbock. Sandra was a waitress there. Even though she was 14 or 15 years old, she looked and acted much older and was striking. She was moved, as so many women were, by Elvis's looks and performance and asked him for his autograph. He obliged her by pulling her blouse down and autographing her breast. The next time Elvis came to Lubbock, he and his band did a promotion in the parking lot of the Pontiac dealership on the bed of an 18-wheeler. Sandra and 2 other girls went to the motel where Elvis and the band were staying and had a few drinks. Elvis threw Sandra down on the bed, but that scared and startled her, so she and the 2 girls left. Later, she drove to Odessa to see Elvis but didn't meet him after the performance. Benny, her boyfriend at the time and later her husband and the father of her first son, knew about these encounters and wanted to get even with Elvis. Benny probably fantasized about punching Elvis but that wasn't his style. The third time Elvis came to town he performed in the Parkview Coliseum at the fairgrounds. Benny went into the parking lot, found Elvis's 2- or 3-year-old Cadillac and slashed all four tires.

Grover's mind always seemed to work well even when he was drunk or stoned, so it's hard to believe that he thought he was describing a real incident at the honky-tonk in Wichita Falls, and it's equally hard to believe he would make up a story that could be so easily discredited. Since you described your piece on Grover and Journalism as friendly, I imagine you tried to point out that shortcoming as judiciously as you could.

I don't think Grover had a gift for poetry or fiction, but I think the kind of journalism he did is among the best Americans of this era have produced and I like to think that's not friendship talking. Two of his best pieces, in my opinion, weren't included in the SITSG Reader: the article he did for the St. Petersburg Times comparing the movies of the 50s and the 80s and the piece on Gus Hasford, the Vietnam vet whose novel became the movie, *Full Metal Jacket*. Grover wrote 2 articles on Hasford; I like the second one better. Gus served time at the prison in Lompoc, CA for stealing hundreds of library books, co-wrote the FMJ screenplay with Stanley Kubrick, and died of untreated diabetes in Greece in his mid-forties. Hasford was the kind of colorful, brilliant eccentric that Grover always gravitated toward.

Grover told me that he and Rae had met you at a book signing (I think in Santa Monica) a couple of years before Grover died. He mentioned that you'd had a cordial meeting and brief but good conversation. He also commented that all the acclaim and success hadn't changed you—unlike some people he had a high regard for who "went Hollywood." I reminded him that you had told me that when Grover first met you he thought you were a hopeless hick. I think you probably recall his response: "I never thought that. Larry was kind of young and country but he was intelligent and well read." Grover was brilliant in many ways as a young man, also irresponsible and self-indulgent. Although he had more than his share of demons, he became much wiser and calmer in the last years, and during the 23 years he and Rae were together she was a calming and stabilizing influence.

I've always believed that extreme fatigue gives us a kind of lucidity that allows us to see what really matters. For the last 5 or so years, Grover was a bit like Dylan Thomas's black sheep with a crumpled horn but his agility with language, his quick and subtle

wit, and his Jeremiah-like response to crooks and charlatans in high places never diminished.

The most animated argument Grover and I ever had was over the movie, *The Deer Hunter*. I liked the beginning but thought the movie was cynical and unrealistic, anti-heroic but still a simplistic Hollywood focus more on the grotesque than the tragic. Grover thought it was brilliant. He did concede though that the director overstated the case when he described harsh critics of the movie as "scabrous traitors."

I've decided to write a memoir—not because I have accomplishments worth writing about but I've met many good, interesting and talented people in unlikely places. I told an old friend, a history teacher at Corning Community College who describes himself as a 19th Century liberal, that in a 27-month period, I made a trip around the world—beginning and ending in San Francisco. I ran out of money in Paris and again in Tehran, was arrested in East Germany, threatened with expulsion from the Soviet Union, denied entry into China, locked up in a Japanese immigration detention center and went on a hunger strike for 9 days, then after 57 days I was deported. His response: "Well, Rodger, I've always admired people with principles even those whose principles are as misdirected as yours are."

On many occasions the toughest and smartest people I've met have befriended me. You may not remember but when I moved to San Francisco in the fall of '62 to study Spanish and linguistics at SF State, you drove me around the city for 2 or 3 days until I found a place to stay, and you and Jo invited me over for dinner many times. I hope I thanked you at the time but I might not have. That year in SF was the best political education I ever got. I went to many demonstrations and meetings of groups like the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. One day you said to me: "I'm curious to know what motivates you to get involved in all these activities. I have to admit that l really don't care that much about people I don't know personally." "Nobody's raised that issue before," I said, "but the first thing that comes to mind is that we have to assume that the part of humanity we don't know must be pretty much like the part of humanity we do know." The next time I saw you, 3 or 4 weeks later, you told me that you'd been doing some volunteer

work for the Democratic Party. I told that story once to some self-righteous radical friends in SF and one of them asked: "Why didn't he work for a progressive party?" I like politically enlightened people and aspire to be one myself someday, but people all along the spectrum need to learn and apply the Texan's Prayer: "God, help me to find the truth and save me from those who've found it." In politics and religion I prefer single-mindedness to certainty.

I never told you directly how much I respect and appreciate all you've accomplished as a writer and I admire the wisdom and humanity of your politics. I've always appreciated intelligent, accomplished people who remember where they come from. Take care of your health and keep doing what you do so well.

Best wishes,
Rodger

Typesetting *Desperado* Magazine

Typesetting *Desperado* magazine was more work than I'd expected, and Kendall was pushing me to meet a deadline he and the printer in Raton, New Mexico had agreed on. Kell was also writing—and calling me collect—to remind me that I was holding up the process.

Proofreading is always hard work, even for the best and most experienced; but all the effort seemed to have succeeded and around 2:30 a.m.—after many long nights—I was convinced that I had caught and corrected the last error or typo. After sleeping a few hours, I printed out the final copy and saw no need for further proofreading since I was sure the manuscript couldn't have changed in the few hours I'd slept. I took it to the post office and mailed it to Kell. Three or four weeks later, Kendall sent me five copies of *Desperado*. The beige cover was striking—with a black-and-white photo of Kell standing on a wide sidewalk beside a mirror in Ft. Worth holding his guitar; and **DESPERADO** in bold black 36-point type was printed just below his boots. Kendall had spent $2,000 to print 500 copies.

The next day I got a call from Grover. "What the hell happened to the magazine?" he shouted. "Have you seen it?"

"I got it in the mail yesterday but I haven't read much of it."

"Somebody fucked-up my work. I've called Kendall but I can't reach him and Kell doesn't have a Goddamn phone. Open the magazine and look at the first page of my piece." I'd known Grover for more than 20 years and he had never been that angry before.

I picked up the magazine and went to the first page of his article. In the third line of the first paragraph, what should have read "...Hank Williams **Jr.'s** 11:30 p.m. closing-night performance" read "...Hank Williams **Gurus** 11:30 closing-night performance." I was shocked—stunned. "I don't know what happened, but it's got to be my fault. I typeset it."

"Well, somebody fucked-up, and I want 'em to stop distributing the magazine." Grover was upset with me but more with Kell and Kendall. "You screwed up on typesetting but that's why you have an editor and a publisher. What the hell were they doin'?" The conversation lasted another five minutes. The only other point I recall: "There's nothin' worse you can do to an artist than fuck-up his work."

It didn't take long to figure out what had happened. In the whole magazine that was handsomely printed, there were 17 typos, and 15 of them were in Grover's article on Hank Williams Jr. The most damning and embarrassing part for me was that I had caught and corrected all but two of those typos; however, out of caution and technological stupidity, I had saved an extra Microsoft Word file in case the working file got deleted accidentally—as had happened to me on a few occasions before starting the magazine project. And when I printed out the final copy, I printed the wrong file and didn't take time to proofread it a final time. Spell-checkers, like voice-to-text programs, are powerful and useful tools when they're used intelligently and cautiously, but they can create bizarre disasters that far exceed human negligence. What more convincing example than "Hank Williams Gurus" for "Hank Williams Jr.'s"? Haste does indeed make waste and rushing to meet a deadline increases the odds exponentially.

In a few days, Grover pardoned me for my negligence but he sent letters to Kell and Kendall and left multiple messages on Kendall's answering machine: "You mangled my work. You're hobbyists and vandals!"

When I spoke with Kendall, he had already mailed out more than 50 magazines; and after lengthy negotiation, Grover grudgingly agreed that Kendall and Kell could continue distributing the magazine if we inserted an errata page that began with a one-paragraph narrative. I drafted the paragraph and read it to Grover over the phone:

> We apologize to Grover Lewis for mangling his article, "ON THE ROAD WITH HANK'S KID, 1978." The typesetter was negligent, the editor was drunk, and the publisher was in a hurry.

Grover responded: "Sounds like Mark Twain."

I waited months before telling him the final episode: After explaining to Kendall how I had printed out the wrong file, I asked him why the printer had never sent the galley proofs to Kell.

"For one thing," Kendall said, "Kell was drunk for six weeks, and maybe that's what was in the boxes under his bed."

Kell Robertson, Kendall McCook and Young Musicians In San Francisco

In 1999 Kell, Kendall McCook, three young singers and musicians, Jason Eklund, Jan Bell, and Mike Goode, came to San Francisco. Jan Bell had set up performances for them in San Francisco and Santa Cruz. I hadn't seen Kell in more than 15 years. He'd lost some hair, gained a few pounds and had slowed down a bit but his mind seemed to have the scope and velocity he'd always had. He complained about arthritis and said his hands "didn't cooperate sometimes" but his music sounded as good to me as it had the first day I met him—and during performances when he was sober enough to finish strong and walk off the stage.

Maria-Theresa and I had an apartment half a block from Alamo Square Park and less than three blocks from the Painted Ladies, the five Victorian houses that tourists from all over the world photograph with the San Francisco skyline in the background. We managed to put them up for almost a week.

Kell played and sang and read some of his poems to an English class at San Francisco City College, and the four performed at a pizza place on Haight Street and at Vesuvio's, a bar and restaurant next to City Lights bookstore. In the English class I requested that Kell sing "Madonna on the Billboard," which was based in part on porn star Marilyn Chambers' Ivory Soap commercial. The students loved it. At Vesuvio's, Kell's best number, in my view, was "Tell 'em Who I Was," a song about an old man on skid row who had been a powerful, influential figure but was offering to sell his leather vest for 50 cents. Kell was in good form—and good company with a large black-and-white photo of James Joyce looking over his shoulder.

Maria-Theresa and I had two dogs: a small tan female Chihuahua named Mota we had inherited from relatives in Brooklyn (Maria-Theresa's older brother Efrain, his wife Magaly, and their three

daughters spoke Colombian Spanish at home, and in Colombia, "mota" means "smudge" or "mote" as in the Biblical "mote in your eye"—unlike "mota" in Mexican slang, which means "marijuana") and Mr. Gou, a dog we had brought back from Chonqing, China 12 years before.

Since Mr. Gou considered it his duty to attack the mail or any other object that came through the mail slot, I had attached a medium-sized plastic wastebasket below the mail slot to catch and protect everything that came through it. That also turned out to be a convenient place to keep the dog leashes. As usual, around 6:30 on a bright summer morning I reached into the wastebasket to grab the leashes and discovered they were covered in at least two inches of water. I looked through the glass-paneled door into the living room. Kell was sound asleep on the couch. I emptied the urine into the commode, rinsed the wastebasket and washed the leashes then took Mota and Mr. Gou to Alamo Square Park.

Around two hours later when Kell got up, I told him what had happened. "You don't think I pissed in that, do you?" he said. "Some other drunk did that—not me." Kendall was drinking coffee and listening to the conversation. He smiled and said, "Yeah, some other drunk did that; Kell would never do somethin' like that." When I related that episode to George Lewis, who was less charitable toward Kell than the rest of us were, he said: "You should've poured it in his hat."

Around 9:30 in the evening Kell, Jan Bell, and I were sitting around the kitchen table. Kell was drinking his 10th or 12th beer of the day. Maria-Theresa was watching TV in the bedroom and Kendall and the two other musicians had gone to hear a friend perform in a North Beach coffee house. Kell wasn't falling-down drunk but it was clear that, as usual, he'd had a lot more to drink than to eat that day. Kell mentioned that he and a friend had gone to Larry McMurtry's bookstore in Archer City, Texas a few months before, and McMurtry had given him a copy of Thomas Hornsby Ferril's book of poetry. "Why do you like Ferril so much?" I asked.

"His sense of time. The same thing that turned me on to Sam Lightnin' Hopkins. Sense of time. Those spaces in between words." Kell stood up,

went into the living room and came back to the kitchen carrying the Ferril book of poems. He took the book with him everywhere he went.

"Like 'Magenta' here," he opened the book and started reading:

> Once up in Gilpin County
> When a long blue afternoon was standing on end
> Like a tombstone sinking into the Rocky Mountains.
> I found myself in a town where no one was
> And I noticed an empty woman lying unburied
> In a pile of mining machinery over a graveyard.
> She was a dressmaker's dummy called Magenta.
> I named her that because all of a sudden
> The peaks turned pink and lavender and purple
> And all the falling houses in the town
> Began to smell of rats and pennyroyal.

"That's why. When I first read this, it was like when I first read Shelley, I went insane—and Yeats. The first time I heard Hank Williams, man. My mama took me to see Hank Williams. It was at the Louisiana Hayride the only time I saw him. He was so drunk he knocked the mic over. He just got up there and started singing 'The Lovesick Blues.' I knew right away this was something I've got to learn how to do—and how to find."

"Did you say before that you'd met Ferril?" I asked.

"Yeah, I met him, went to his house. I guess Kerouac years ago went up there too. Ferril had a modern train up in the attic that went around and around, and we went up there and played with his train." Kell raised his arm and made circular motions. "He was a friend of Carl Sandburg and about the same age. Sandburg got famous, but he didn't necessarily and I think he was a better poet than Sandburg. That's just my opinion. There's a picture of him playing a ukelele and Sandburg playing a guitar and they're singing these old folk songs they'd put together. Ferril was just one of my favorite people in the entire universe, and he gave me $20 for the road."

Kell's right hand was resting palm down on Ferril's book. He picked

up his cigarette and took a long draw then continued: "Ferril said, 'I want to buy you lunch, boy.' He used to have a newspaper, *Rocky Mountain Herald*. He took me down and introduced me to a chick and said: 'This is one of Grat Dalton's granddaughters.' The Dalton boys, yeah she was one of them, and she's a meter-maid. He bought me a steak, breakfast and dinner. We just had a whole day together; and when I left town to go to New York City—and Keith Wilson had given me those electric-blue cowboy boots—I was a midnight cowboy. Ferril was just such a gracious gentleman. He gave me 20 bucks and said: 'Spend it on the girls, boy. That's what life's all about.' And he put me on the Greyhound bus."

Kell held Ferril's book at eye level. " 'Nocturn at Noon' is my favorite poem of his. Course there's nothing in here that's not good." When Kell started reading aloud "The Long Dimension," I couldn't imagine Ferril or anyone else in the world doing a better job of reading that poem; and it was at least a minor, worldly miracle that an old man as drunk as Kell had been 20 minutes before could suddenly be as sober as I'd ever seen him. He was like a messenger proud of the news he was bearing or a child opening a present. On two occasions, he choked up and stopped reading. "I'm sorry, but this poem makes me cry."

"It must be a good poem if it makes you cry." I said.

"It makes me cry; I don't know about anybody else."

He read the last lines of another poem: "What if the crotch of a tree outgrows a boy and an old man stares at a falling leaf at sundown." Kell shook his head: "I love this guy; he's one of the greatest poets I've ever read. He's as good as Yeats and it's hard to be as good as Yeats. I keep quoting Yeats: 'The intellect of man is forced to choose perfection of the life or of the work and if it choose the second, we must refuse a heavenly mansion raging in the dark.' "

Kell read for another 40 minutes: more of Ferril's work, then Bienvenido Santos' fine long poem, "Lament in April," and several of his own poems from the book, *A Horse Called Desperation*. I asked Kell which of his own poems he liked best. At first, he frowned and said: "I don't know" with some impatience, then said: " 'Answer the Cries of Birds.' "

Kell took us into a moment of the world when the human mind and a man's voice became part of that long journey of our being—from stars in the darkest sky to the rain of summer afternoon, to the city lights of evening. The music of language is at home in both the mind and the soul. Of all the times I spent with Kell, that evening was the best.

I emailed a copy of the manuscript on Grover to Kendall McCook and received this response on Jan. 25, 2016:

> Rodger,
>
> I just finished the Grover book. I enjoyed the many pieces of Grover's own writing, especially the Hank Jr. article we fucked up in the Raton *Desperado*. Kell sold 3-4 hundred. It's what kept him alive in '93 when Betsy threw him out and he pulled a gun on me—she drove him to Folsom where he holed up at Foreman's cabin. Sold copies of *Desperado* at the town bar. Grover couldn't have known what a mess our lives had become. Kell needed money, and those magazines were all I could spare.
>
> I also want to remind you of what a treasure *A Horse Called Desperation* became. As you recall, Kell was living at the St. Elizabeth homeless shelter in Santa Fe after Ace finally put him out for bad behavior. December 23rd I received the box of books in the mail and drove to Santa Fe to deliver them to Kell. It was the best Chrismas gift I ever saw anyone receive. Such a beautiful book. Kell laughed with delight. I bought 2 and headed home for the holidays. Kell left the shelter and headed back to the streets, but he hung out at the Cowgirl Hall of Fame (a local bar) where he was able to establish his reputation as a well-published poet. Grover's request and your fulfilling it gave Kell a new dignity and many good years as a Santa Fe legend. I'd like to see that noted in your book .
>
> The Grover book is a monumental tribute to friendship and artistic integrity.
>
> By the way, I'll be reading some of Kell's work from HORSE on March 12th at Silva's Saloon with Larry Goodell and Bill Nevins.
>
> Kendall

Woody Guthrie

In a 1990 *Los Angeles Times* book review of Woody Guthrie's *Pastures of Plenty*. Grover wrote:

> Doubtless, *Pastures of Plenty* will hold small appeal for yuppies, anti-semantic deconstructionists or other elements of the post-modernist mob—not to mention political reactionaries who probably will always regard Woody Guthrie as a "red" enemy. But anyone broadly interested in American music or radical politics or recent U.S. life and history will welcome Guthrie's hitherto-uncollected writings with open mind and arms.

Grover also had a near-infallible sense of when language worked for him and others. In that same review, he begins a paragraph with a quote from Woody:

> "I ain't a writer," Guthrie claimed with characteristic underdog modesty in 1941. "I'm just a little one-cylinder guitar picker." In the same vein, he signed many of his letters, "True as the average." But the father of the American folk-music movement never wrote untruer words. From young manhood onward, Guthrie showed every sign of being a special one-of-a-kind person with talent bursting out in every direction.
>
> Among his 1,000-plus songs, the "Dust Bowl Ballads" of 1940, plus the later Grand Coulee Dam song series, along with the achingly mournful postwar ballad "Deportees" (Plane Crash at Los Gatos), assure him immortality in our national song bag. "This Land Is Your Land"—by now as ubiquitous as Frank Capra's film *It's a Wonderful Life* at yuletide—has been seriously urged as a second, or new, national anthem.

Grover assesses the purpose of Guthrie's second book:

> The collection, it seems to me, serves two important purposes. First, it confirms the raspy-voiced little Oklahoman as a powerful literary figure whose best writing doesn't need analysis, just praise. What an author like James Agee, say, achieved from the point of view of a middle-class radicalized intellectual of the Popular Front period, Guthrie accomplished as a largely self-

> schooled—and authentically broke and sometimes homeless—member of the working class.
>
> The book's second achievement is that it shows persuasively that Guthrie was a patriot and a fairly solid citizen as opposed to a "subversive" hobgoblin. True, Guthrie's life was far from tidy, and he certainly performed at "red" functions and wrote for "un-American" publications—but he also served as a seaman on three ships that were sunk by Nazi torpedoes during the European war.
>
> In philosophic outlook, Guthrie was more a Wobbly unionist than a Communist—anti-fat cat to the teeth, without any dialectical trimmings. Just as he rose above his raising in matters of race, he hated injustice in all its myriad varieties.
>
> My hunch is that he never joined the American Communist Party, probably much to the Party's relief. Who, after all, would have "disciplined" such a wild hair? As Guthrie wrote in a letter to Alan Lomax: "I don't care what they call me. I ain't a member of any earthly organization…."
>
> In our morally shabby age, when even the term "liberal" has been blackened by the right-wing fat cats of our ruling class, it occurs to me that perhaps we need a little more grit in our diet. *Pastures of Plenty* offers up a homely but filling bill-of-fare of firebrand dissent, and reacquaints us with one of the most glorious and uniquely American voices of the century.

And like ol' Woody, his hero, Grover was more a Wobbly unionist than a Socialist or a Democrat, he also rose above his raising in matters of race and hated injustice in its myriad varieties, and he was also a wild hair who didn't belong to any earthly organization. It occurs to me that since Grover didn't have heroes in his family or neighborhood (with the qualified exceptions of his uncle, Cecil, whose prison sentence for bank robbery was commuted so he could enlist in the Army, then went on to die in combat during the Second World War; and his great uncle, Spook, who treated Grover like a little brother and taught him moral values that guided him through life), Grover took his heroes from history, literature, movies and the news. He picked good ones and then did a better job of following their examples than most of us who had heroes that we could actually talk to.

Robert Frank

In March 1994, Grover reviewed for the *Los Angeles Times* the third printing of Robert Frank's book of photography, *The Americans*. The first edition had been published in Paris in 1958. The second in the U.S. in 1959. Both U.S. editions contain Jack Kerouac's introduction. Frank and Kerouac had traveled across the U.S. in 1955 on an assignment for *Life* magazine, but the editors rejected Frank's "hard-edged roadside pictures...because they looked too much like Russia." But in 1966 "sponsored by the patrician Walker Evans, Frank won a Guggenheim and spent the following year driving around the country in a clunker car with his family in tow. The entourage must have resembled a hip version of the Joads. In Arkansas, Frank was arrested for possessing a suspicious accent, a stubbly beard and New York plates. (Say cheese, indeed.)"

As a writer and person, Grover had firm convictions on matters of the heart and the mind and almost never hesitated to express them—a quality that got the attention of those he encountered on life's many stages.

I'm a still photographer with more experience than talent or accomplishment, and I was surprised by Grover's perception of and attention to light, color, and detail. I had a cranky old professor of Greek and Spanish at Texas Tech who looked and acted 15 years older than he was. His two prevailing digressions were bureaucratic waste and unexamined reliance on technology. His favorite visual aid, he said, was a book. Grover shared that view, and nothing changed him as much as his lifetime of meeting exceptional people in books. And since reading was so difficult for him—having to hold the page four or five inches from his eyes and move his head jerkily back and forth to finish one line then go back to begin the next—his comment astounded me: "I always try to make my writing as visual as possible." How could intellect and imagination enable someone like Grover, who was virtually blind, to love photography and to see in life and in photographs the images, patterns of light and gradations of colors that people with excellent eyesight can't—or choose not to—see?

Robert Frank was among the talented, creative people with colorful

eccentricities that Grover was attracted to.

Grover begins the review:

> Photography, goes one clear-eyed definition, is a record fixed on silver of the light waves reflected by or radiating from objects. The human eye, like the camera, can collect these rays, but it fixes them only in memory.
>
> The scarcely ambiguous footage of the Rodney King beating to the contrary, such images constitute dead-on accounts of an event such as a crime, or a relative close-up of a place as trackless to the naked eye as deep space. The "information" obtained by such means is real and reliable, part and parcel of the process of comprehending "truth." Still, the camera is merely a tool, capable of no more than mechanical honesty. The individual photographer must supply the aesthetic and make any attempt to distinguish between a random, meaningless moment and the rare moment of reality revealed, existence cast in a new light.

Minds with agility and imagination don't need respected institutions, expert advice or empirical direction "to create," as William Faulkner put it, "out of the materials of the human spirit something that didn't exist before."

> Many of the spate of "art photography" books available in overpriced editions these days seem to be trying to get away with art, rather than delivering it. Photographic work of a wholly different and higher order is represented in Robert Frank's knife-edged masterpiece, "The Americans," now available again after a shamefully long period out of print. The volume was first published in Paris in 1958, then in America by Grove Press in 1959. Frank, a Swiss-German emigre, studied with Henri Cartier-Bresson in Paris before settling in New York in 1947. His early images of street life—dark, intense, often disturbing—established him as a premier talent in a photographic lineage that includes Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine, Walker Evans, W. Eugene Smith, Weegee and Dorothea Lange.
>
> You can get a pungent sense of Frank's youthful life and force in Patricia Bosworth's well-researched "Diane Arbus: A Biography"

(Knopf, 1984). Frank and his sculptor wife Mary lived in a grungy loft with their two wild children while he eked out a bare existence shooting fashion spreads and photojournalism at $50 a throw for *Fortune, Life and Harper's Bazaar*. The Franks, known as a "pagan couple," were part of a loose-knit arts community that encompassed old-style Greenwich Village bohemia, the Abstract Expressionists and the Beats. In the lockstep mid-1950s, when the Man in the Gray Flannel Suit was our national symbol, Frank personified the dissident artist, and his stark, subversive imagery constituted a form of fugitive expression akin to samizdat. Just as you had to "dig" to understand bop, you had to "have eyes" to dig Frank.

[Frank] kept shooting photos of highways and windows, flags and juke-boxes, crosses and blaring TV sets and rural death-recurring motifs that reflected the juiceless complacency of the Eisenhower-McCarthy era and its undercurrent of emptiness for those who dwelt outside the hallowed System and who perhaps once in a while entertained "un-American" thoughts.

Prowling through the era's metaphoric lonely crowd, he singled out cowboys, young stud hustlers, a soldier and his whore, a Southwestern Indian bending over a Las Vegas jukebox—mostly solitaries and outcasts. Respect and sympathy are implicit in Frank's selection of images, and each shot has a specific sense of character, location and time that puts the viewer in the heart of the moment that the photograph records.

In "The Americans," Frank went searching for America's soul and found avatars of Desolation Row, prophetic images of the counterculture before there officially was such a thing. He influenced, I am tempted to say, the best minds of my generation—not only other photographers, but musicians, poets, painters, scholars, and journalists, including me. With his outsider's eye and his human finger on the trigger, Frank gave us clues about who to watch, what to see, and a way to see it. In shots like quick incisions, he showed a society where, for the first time, anything could happen. Much like De Tocqueville a century before him, he charted a hidden America where mysteries abound and apocalyptic truth—or ragged beauty—always hides just around the next hairpin curve. Thirty-five years after its first appearance,

> "The Americans" is both an enduring testament to Frank's artistic purity and a towering artifact of its time.

Grover, like Robert Frank, learned from unexpected situations "to find your way by intuition, not by intelligence but by intuition." Maybe supreme intelligence relies on intuition to liberate the literal. Einstein said, "Creativity is chance but chance favors the prepared." Einstein, our great poet of the universe and the universal, never met Grover Lewis, and I don't think he met Robert Frank but I believe he understood—and encouraged the rest of us to understand—that science and art, the literal and the figurative, search and discover together.

Lash Larue

In the early 1970s Grover traveled to St. Petersburg, Florida, and did a piece for *Oui* magazine on Lash LaRue, the B-grade cowboy star who always dressed in black and dealt as much misery to desperadoes with his bullwhip as his pistol. LaRue discovered late in life that religion and marijuana were both good for the soul and teamed up with an ex-carney evangelist who called himself John 3:16 Cook and dressed more flamboyantly than a rock star.

When Grover first mentioned that he was going to do a story on LaRue, I told him that Lash had come to Lubbock in the early 1950s to do a live performance at the Arcadia Theater, which was on Avenue H half a block south of the Post Office. That part of town, known as the beginning of East Broadway, had almost all of the pawnshops, most of the country and western clothing stores, the only movie theater that ran films in Spanish, some dry goods stores and restaurants that couldn't have survived without the fall business of the Braceros—and few merchants in the area were members of the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce. Since the Arcadia didn't run major studio pictures, the theater attracted middle-class patrons only when it had live burlesque or "educational" films showing a live birth or people with venereal disease. LaRue—who was much more modest and articulate off screen than on—performed during an extended matinee intermission. From my seat in the second row, it looked real to me when he took the cap off a coke bottle with his bullwhip from a distance of 10 to 12 feet,

removing the cap completely on the third try.

That night he made a guest appearance at Hubber Field, the minor-league baseball stadium owned for a few years by Paul Dean, Dizzy Dean's younger, less talented brother. Robert Ayres, one of the few guys from my neighborhood who would admit to reading books that teachers hadn't assigned, was working in the concession stand renting cushions. Robert had written a serious theme in junior English the previous spring on why he wanted to be a hobo. Ayres watched LaRue signing programs and autographs after the game. When most of the fans had left, Ayres walked up to the actor, who was dressed completely in black, as he had been for the afternoon performance, and was packing two long-barreled revolvers with his bullwhip coiled and looped over the handle of the pistol on his right side. "As a grown man, aren't you a little bit embarrassed to walk around dressed like this?" Robert asked.

"Son, when I was your age, I was taught to respect my elders," Lash responded, looking more pained than angry. Robert smiled faintly, nodded and started picking up cushions that the fans had left in the stands.

Ayres finished high school the following May and got a job with the municipal power company. After a storm had brought down power lines in various parts of town, he was trying to retrieve a line entangled in the branches of a large elm tree and was electrocuted.

(After doing the piece on LaRue, Grover worked sporadically for years on a novel about an old B-grade cowboy star like Lash LaRue kidnapping a movie idol like John Wayne, but Grover eventually abandoned the book.)

In one of his pieces, Grover described a woman jogger as "having a body about as relaxed as a clenched fist." His assessment of Rush Limbaugh: "I'd say he's a fat boy who knows how to talk."

"Farewell To Cracker Eden"

In Grover's autobiographical piece in *Texas Monthly,* "Farewell to Cracker Eden," he described his experience in high school with star athletes: "You get used to being treated like dirt by scum." In a part of that article that was cut, primarily for space considerations, Grover observed of Dallas County Commissioner John Wiley Price, an outspoken African American who had been picketing the Dallas Morning News for 66 days over its racist hiring policies: "Price seemed incendiary to me, only in his intelligence."

In 1993 PEN West, the international writers' organization, selected "Farewell to Cracker Eden" as one of the five finalists in the journalism category. In that piece, Grover describes his visit to the high school he'd attended over 40 years earlier:

> Corrupt politics debases the plain truth, and debased language in turn empowers corrupt politics. As I walked to Adamson High School, two blocks north of Jefferson, I was thinking about my grammar teachers there in the fifties. Stiff old biddies, they showed you the muscle and blood of language—Latin, even—through strict and frequent class drills, backed up by unceasing homework. What I hadn't understood at the time was that it's rare for the establishment to grant its misfits access to such useful and subversive knowledge. In the decades since, "dumbing down" along with the rest of America, official Dallas had moved to plug the leak.
>
> Time and attrition had picked my old alma mater to the bone. In my time, Adamson dwarfed the neighborhood. Now it was the other way around. The school stood like a becalmed ship in a sea of rotting tenements.... I kept encountering the strange dwelling with the familiar. What was once grand about Adamson had dimmed to utilitarian drab. I made my way upstairs alone and found my old locker, then leaned for a minute in a window well, lost to memory if not exactly to nostalgia. The third-floor corridor

> was empty, silent. I peered into an unused classroom, recalling one of the stiff old biddies who had taught me how to diagram sentences. I'd worked and reworked an English theme for her about my chance discovery of Clyde Barrow's grave and what it meant to me. Mistaking her shock for enthusiasm, I blurted out my hopes of becoming a novelist or some kind of roving correspondent. A kindly woman in most things, she tapped me on the shoulder with a blunt finger: "You'd best think about something you can actually accomplish." She marked my paper A for composition and D minus for content.

Grover visited the North Oak Cliff Library, which had replaced the old Carnegie Library he had gone to so often when he was in high school, and four cemeteries—going first to his grandfather's grave:

> I was standing over Matthew Bailey's marker in the Sunset Gardens section of Restland, near Richardson, within an hour of touching down at DFW. It was eerie to think of that man of wild commotion enshrouded in such stillness. I had attended his funeral in 1960, too old to cry by then and determined not about to break down in front of the pecksniff Baileys. Matthew was in hell now, I presumed. Wherever. Thinking about him made me realize how little our explanations explain. In the years since I had worn his shade like an inner skin—like memories of the ghostly streetcars on Jefferson or Oak Cliff's furnace-red sunsets—and scarcely a month went by that I didn't recall his smell of cheap pipe tobacco and whiskey. During our last conversation—he'd taken on a load of hundred proof to deaden his pain—he blurted out his rancor at the world, or perhaps it was his vision of eternity: "The women won't screw you, sonny boy, but the men will. Ha! Watch out for the sons of bitches!"

Grover, who inherited or absorbed more than a predictable share of Matthew's audacity, told me about living with his grandfather for a short time in a house next to a "holy-roller" church, where the singing, wailing and speaking in tongues went on until late into the night. Grover said that one night Matthew had gone to bed as usual around sundown since he had to get up at 4:00 a.m. After the congregation had

awakened him two times, the old man got out of bed, took a ball-peen hammer from his tool box and started for the church. Matthew walked up the aisle in his long-handled underwear waving the hammer. He stopped in front of the preacher and threatened to use the hammer on him if those "babblin' and screamin' idiots" woke him again. Grover said the congregation never disturbed Matthew after that.

Bonnie Parker's grave in the Crown Hill Memorial Cemetery, facing a run-down pod mall in Dallas' Walnut Hill area, was decorated with a little dime store American flag on a wooden staff. She and Clyde had died in a mythic squall of bullets the spring before I was born, but they were still a presence in my mother's house when I was a child. Opal responded viscerally to their narrow, doomed lives, not so much with reason as with heart. I remembered tears coming to her eyes when Bonnie's name would come up, and once, years later in a Yankee city, I'd dreamed of the two of them together, smoking cigarettes without inhaling, and making up poems.

The Barrow family plot, including the graves of Clyde and his luckless dumb-bell brother, Buck, lay in the old West Dallas Cemetery overlooking a gruesomely sleazy stretch of Fort Worth Avenue on Oak Cliff's northern verge. When I'd first discovered the place around 1950, it was overgrown with brush and tangles of knee-high grass—a quiet, murmurous glen sunk in birdsong and neglect. Finding Clyde's marker there had rocked me with a primal force, offering a direct link to my own folks. Afterward, I would return to the cemetery time and time again, making it a private sanctuary where I could mull over my feelings about Opal and Big Grover, mourn them, make peace with them a little.... Now the old grounds were fenced and fresh-mown, courtesy of a local church, but the smell of fast food, oil, and metal hung over the tombstones, and dead-eyed pimps watched me come and go from off-plumbed doorways.

At the other end of Fort Worth Avenue—the Fort Worth End—Lee Harvey Oswald was buried somewhere in the 87-acre Rose Hill Cemetery, the exact location being kept secret to discourage kooks. I searched fitfully for his plot, then gave it up

> and spent an hour or so just wandering the rows of stone, letting my thoughts wander too, hearing what sounded like explosive bursts in the distance. Oswald's "crime of the century" lay 29 years in the enigmatic past, and Lee himself had since disappeared into a blur of disputed roles, his true connective threads obscured by decades of cloud over myth bleeding into legend, turning into smoke. According to the Warren report, he had been a misfit driven to kill by resentment, envy, and madness. Perhaps—that's not wholly inconceivable. But I'd known a dozen Lee Oswalds when I was growing up—quintessential Oak Cliff losers mired in a hopeless system that denied lateral entry. The bottom line was always drawn just above their names.... I sat for a while in a patch of shade, smelling gunpowder. Whether Oswald was guilty or not, I just wanted to bow my head an instant for the poor bastard. The crump-crump-crump in the distance, a passing caretaker told me, was the sound of gunfire from a police training academy across the road. It went on every day. Even unto the grave, Oswald was destined for steerage—the ultimate patsy. "Family," I wrote in the cemetery registry.

There was another connection to Oswald. In the early fifties when Grover was in high school, he worked at the Texas Theater, where Oswald was arrested the day President Kennedy was assassinated:

> At the age of seventeen in 1926, Clyde Barrow worked briefly as an usher at Dallas' Palace Theater but soon quit over the paltry $12-a-week salary. Twenty-five years later, I started work as an usher at the Texas Theater for $19 a week—still a pittance but enough to see me through high school. The experience jerked some complex knots in and out of my young life, and I finished growing up very quickly.
>
> In the early fifties, the Texas was the principal seat of allowable public pleasure in Oak Cliff—a spit-and-polish place where Daddy took Mama to the show on Sundays. Already twenty years old by then, it was well kept up, not even close to being run-down. But as Jefferson withered, the once-venerable movie house started falling to pieces....

Grover went to the theater and learned from the manager and her husband, the doorman, who had been on duty at the time Oswald was arrested, that the Texas had been saved from demolition and partly restored:

> The lobby looked frayed, sad, smaller than I remembered. We mounted the foyer stairs, passing a mawkish amateur mural of JFK, and climbed to the balcony.... I wandered along the center aisle, glancing by reflex toward the last rows in front of the projection booth where the riffraff of Oak Cliff's hillbilly gene pool had traditionally gathered—the dreaded "balcony rats." In the watery light, I found my old spot by the A stairwell. While I was still a green hand, but a tall one, I was stationed there to keep a lid on the general anarchy. After a couple of grueling break-in shifts, less terrified of the badasses than about failing, I bought an oversized flashlight that suggested a club. The bluff worked pretty well for a year, until a beered-up lummox from West Dallas flung himself at me over four rows of seats, and I did the first thing that Matthew or Spook would've done—bopped him on the ear. The injured party went bellowing to the lobby, alerting the manager, who had him hauled off for drunk. As a sort of reward for "cutting it," I was transferred downstairs to the candy case, a choice job compared to standing aisle.

I always appreciated Grover's lively, intelligent and carefully crafted articles on films and music, but for many years I'd encouraged him to write a book about his people—as did others, I'm sure, who knew about the tragedy and oppression of his childhood and his iron determination to make something of his life. Grover's response was generally the same: "I know I should and someday I will, but it's still too painful." After finishing the piece on Oak Cliff, Grover knew he had come to terms with that part of his life.

Texas Monthly got many letters in response to the article and mailed them to Grover. He sent me one of the letters from a woman in Dallas and his response to her:

Dear Mrs. Sternberg,

I was very touched and honored to receive your letter concerning my *Texas Monthly* piece about Oak Cliff.

By now I've heard from a wide range of readers, and the response has been for the most part heartening and friendly.

None more so than your letter—and none quite as eloquent, either.

Your comments about Texans being a breed apart were well taken. In my experience, I've never encountered kinder—or crueler—people anywhere. I've lived like a fish out of water in California since the late 1960's, working as a journalist and editor, and as you might guess, I look back on my youth and young manhood in Texas with mixed feelings and sweet-and-sour memories.

But yes indeed—those experiences formed my character, and my character is pretty much as you perceived and described it. It seems to me that misery and hardship either tend to make you a full human being or deprive you of the capacity altogether....The love I felt and found as a boy was hard to come by, but all the more precious for it.

I don't know if you're much of a movie fan, but I wonder if you've ever seen the Robert Mitchum picture, "The Lusty Men." Horace McCoy, one of my Oak Cliff inspirations, wrote the screenplay, including the sad, sweet scene where the Mitchum character crawls underneath his former home—a rural shotgun shack—to retrieve the treasures of his boyhood from a Prince Albert can.

I thought of that sequence often as I searched around Oak Cliff for my own past.

It was a cleansing and healthy experience to return there, and the response so far has encouraged me to think about expanding the piece into a full-length memoir. To that end, I'll be returning to Texas this spring with my wife Rae—she's a Utah rancher's daughter and my dear partner in everything—to tend some graves and continue retracing my steps....

In any event, thank you sincerely for understanding what I intended to convey and caring enough to write in response. In my book, "you done real good," too....

I passed on Grover's article to Bienvenido Santos, the Filipino-American novelist, short story writer and poet, who won the American Book Award in 1981 for his collection of short stories, *A Scent of Apples*. In the fall of 1993, Santos had just finished writing his memoir. He stopped off in San Francisco to visit Maria-Theresa and me before making his yearly trip to the Philippines. When I got up around 6:00 a.m. to take our dogs to the park nearby, Ben, who was over 80 years old, was sitting at the kitchen table in his pajamas and robe reading the piece. As the dogs and I passed by, Ben said: "This is brilliant. I wish I could write like this."

When Ben finished, he handed me the magazine: "Why didn't you show me this article before I wrote my memoirs? If you had, I would've done a better job or not written them at all."

In the early 90s during one of Grover's short visits to San Francisco, we were driving around the Embarcadero and Grover told me about the last time he had seen his uncle, Cecil Lewis. It was during World War II and Cecil had just gotten out of Huntsville Prison, where he'd been serving time for bank robbery. Within hours after robbing the bank, Cecil and his brother Lester had been captured by lawmen as they were trying to hide in a cotton field. Consistent with a universal and historical tradition, Cecil was released from prison to join the army and go to war.

Grover's recollection of Cecil:

> Cecil was in his olive-drab uniform when he took us across town on a city bus. He was near the end of his leave and would soon be sent to Europe in the infantry. The best thing he knew to do for my sister and me was to take us to a movie and buy us a milkshake afterward. I was moved because we didn't get things like that very often and he wanted to do something for us before he left. After prison he was a broken man. I think Cecil sensed he probably wouldn't survive the war. He died in the invasion of Sicily—just a few hours after being sent into combat.

Grover described the Lewis brothers—his father, Lester and Cecil: "Big Grover and those boys were wild. They had tender, gentle parents, but they were wild in a discreet way. Les and Cece were never really outlaws—they were thugs that mainly just stole things from people. Salt-of-the-earth, white trash pioneer Texans." After Big Grover and Opal married, they lived in Jacksboro and hung around with Lester and Cecil and their outlaw bunch for around a year. Opal realized that Big Grover was likely to end up in the penitentiary with his brothers, so she convinced him to move to San Antonio: "It was the depth of the Depression but there were WPA jobs. Big Grover got a job at the insane asylum—whacking unruly patients with a bar of soap in a sock. Meanwhile, Lester and Cecil were running the backroads—thieving and picking cotton. Moonlighting thieves, but otherwise lovable and well-behaved boys."

Grover believed that Bonnell Purgeson (the husband of Opal's sister, Shorty) had told Big Grover where to find Opal, in spite of his threats to kill her for divorcing him. Only a few people knew where she and the children were, and nobody else would have told him because they knew he was capable of killing Opal. Grover tried to tell the family that Bonnell had betrayed Opal, but Cecil was the only one who would believe an eight year old. Grover thought Opal's family didn't want to believe him because they were trying to get Bonnell and Shorty back together after Bonnell had moved out of the house.

Five days before Grover died, he recalled telling Cecil how much he hated having to be around Bonnell, who, after the killings, pretended to befriend and comfort Grover and his four-year-old sister:

> Cecil was one-half Bonnie and Clyde and one-half Dillinger. In reality he was just a middle-aged, declining country thief. As he was leaving, he took Bonnell aside (Bonnell always had a fawning attitude toward Cecil, who was half a celebrity because he had been in jail) and whispered something to him. I have always believed it was a threat—because Bonnell left soon after that.

Cecil gave me in one stroke a sense of justice and purpose. In a quiet, human way Cecil led me away from the impulse to kill. He dealt out homemade justice to Opal's betrayer. Cecil understood my plight and helped me keep a sense of my own humanity. In dispatching my mother's betrayer with a few whispered words, Cecil showed me that life could have a purpose and a meaning beyond mere survival, and his example bound me close to the juices of universal—not just Texas-style—humanity. For example, my first national story was about the old down-and-out blues singer Sam 'Lightnin' ' Hopkins, and my last was about a photographer who chronicled an old backwoods innkeeper in rural Mississippi.

Moro Bay

In the fall of 1985, Grover proposed that he and Rae, Maria-Theresa and I meet about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco to discuss typesetting and re-printing *Thieves Like Us*, a novel of Texas writer Edward Anderson's that was long out of print and in the public domain. We met in the California coastal town of Morro Bay on Highway One.

As we were walking around town the next day looking for a place to have lunch, Grover gestured toward the large, ugly Pacific Gas and Electric plant near historic Morro Rock and said: "That's an example of corporate lawlessness in the extreme. Those bastards knew exactly what they were doin' when they put that monstrosity here. They said: 'We're gonna mar the beauty of this remarkable place and there's not a Goddamn thing anybody can do about it.' "

At lunch in a restaurant overlooking Morro Rock and the PG&E plant, the waitress recommended pecan pie for dessert. Rae and I followed her recommendation. Seeing the large pecan halves in the pie reminded me of my dad peeling pecans with his pocket knife, with the halves always coming out unbroken. I recalled aloud the many times I'd tried to follow my dad's example—even with his knife—but never succeeded. "In another 30 years," I said, "there won't be a man in America who can peel a pecan with a pocket knife." Grover took out his small notebook and said: "You mind if I use that?"

(Grover was generally more sympathetic toward, than critical of, the hippies but it troubled him to see so many talented and generous-spirited young people burned out or destroyed by drugs. And finding the hippies a bit too fluent in platitudes, he coined the term "bliss ninnyisms.")

Our Canaries in San Francisco

In the mid-1980s when Grover was visiting Maria-Theresa and me in San Francisco, the three of us were sitting at the kitchen table around

midnight. She and Grover were smoking cigarettes and drinking Courvoisier VSOP cognac. Grover took out a joint from his shirt pocket, lit it and took a couple of deep tokes, then leaned over and put his arm around her: "How are the two of you gettin' along these days, hon?"

"Oh, okay, I guess," she said, "but he still criticizes me for drinking and smoking." Grover put his head a few inches from hers and smiled: "Why, hell, you knew when you married him he was a Goddamn Puritan, didn't you?"

Grover was intrigued by our canaries. We had started off with one pair in a small cage. When they increased to nine, we kept them in two large cages; then a friend worked seven weekends to build a cage 30 by 30 inches and seven feet tall. He used bamboo skewers to make the bars. To broaden the gene pool, we bought some other females and males. The most striking was a beautiful black-and-white female that Maria-Theresa named Zelda. One day I counted 30 canaries in the large cage. Grover loved to watch them and listen to them sing. He didn't know that only the males sing or that after the eggs hatch, the males feed the babies and the mother. Grover asked if we would be willing to part with a pair. I suggested that he talk to Rae and if she agreed, I'd drive to Santa Monica with the canaries and a fairly large cage.

When Rae and I spoke, she said Grover had been depressed and she believed having canaries in his work room would cheer him up. Like most people, she didn't like seeing any creatures in a cage but thought the canaries would be well fed and cared for—and that they'd feel appreciated. I drove the yellow-and-black female and the all-yellow male to Santa Monica in April and, even though Grover had been born in November, we decided the canaries were for his birthday. He liked the idea and said: "That's the best birthday gift I ever got."

Grover and Rae named them Freddie and Ginger, and it was over a year before I learned that they had named them after Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers.

Freddie sang when Grover used his printer or ran the vacuum, and

Grover helped to take care of them.

When I visited Grover and Rae five years later, Grover said that Freddie's nails needed trimming. Grover held him as gently as he could and I trimmed the nails quickly. But when I put Freddie back into the bottom of the cage, he fell over on his side and didn't seem to be breathing. I picked him up but he was gone. Grover didn't say anything. He looked at Freddie then at Ginger in the cage. Rae brought me a kitchen-sized match box. I wrapped his body in a white handkerchief and put him into the match box. I brought him back on the airplane with me and buried him in the back yard. That night I wrote a poem about him and sent it to Grover and Rae.

Freddie

Freddie knew five years
of southern skies and sea air

The calendar of canaries
has different moons
but the same beginning
and the same ending

Freddie and Ginger traveled by car
from San Francisco to Santa Monica
on a warm day in April
maybe he sang of that trip
or of tropical islands
beyond the grey sea of memory

Grover and Rae never had birds before
When Grover ran the vacuum or the printer
Freddie sang with the passion
of a brilliant tenor

We trimmed his long nails this morning
he struggled some
then for the same reason
all creatures know
but none of us remember
the breath of life

and the stillness of death
came together

Like an honor guard
with the body of a soldier
I brought Freddie back
to San Francisco in a match box
and buried him near a fir tree
beside his brothers and sisters

I laid a yellow flower on the match box
then put three more on the fresh earth

Tomorrow and many tomorrows
Grover will turn on the computer
and start to print but the little friend
of a species with as much right to be
as our own
won't be there to sing.

An Old Blind Man Lookin' for a Seat

I admired Grover's willingness to take on anybody intellectually, but it made me uneasy to hear him say things like, "I would've knocked him down," since he was speaking literally and was no match physically for most healthy 12-year-old boys. When I mentioned my admiration for him as a samurai of the mind, he said: "I always thought I didn't have much to lose, and I figured I'd come out pretty well anyway." Grover knew how able and accomplished he was, and he would no more have described himself as "humble" than he would've as "pious"; however, he was genuinely modest, even self-effacing, at times. The last time he came to San Francisco, I went to the airport to meet him and mistook another man for him from a distance. Then when I located him and got within hearing, I said: "I saw an old guy that looked like you near the check-in counter and thought Rae might've traded you in for an older model."

Grover shook my hand, "Or a paler model," he said, grinning.

Three days later when he was returning to Los Angeles, the United attendant allowed me to board the airplane with him after I told her

he didn't see too well. Grover sometimes had difficulty finding a seat and getting his hand-carried luggage stowed, especially when the flight was crowded. He mentioned the time he had bumped into a Black man sitting in an aisle seat: " 'Hey, watch it, man,' the guy said. I apologized but maybe he thought I was some honky tryin' to push him around, but I was just an old blind man lookin' for a seat."

Grover saw more than his share of humanity's darker side, especially as a child, and he never doubted the wisdom or accuracy of William Hazlitt's conclusion: "If mankind had really wanted what was right, they could have had it long ago." But Grover always managed to find people he admired: tough little guys like Woody Guthrie and Audie Murphy and intelligent tough guys like Lee Marvin, Robert Mitchum, Aldo Ray—and my friend, Chuck Edward, one of the best and smartest people I ever met. Since Grover and Chuck were like brothers to me, I was pleased that they became friends and respected each other.

Aldo Ray

Grover did a piece on Aldo Ray for *Movieline* magazine. Since Ray was being treated for lung cancer, they agreed to meet for the first interview in the cancer ward of a large VA hospital:

> The Veterans Administration Hospital in the Northern California town of Martinez sits on a bald, sun-scalded hillside above the busy traffic flowing past on Highway 4. It's a vast, scary institutional pile of a place—acres of masonry and misery located just a few minutes' drive from Aldo Ray's hometown of Crockett in the East Bay opposite San Francisco.... He'd been a major Hollywood leading man in the 1950's and '60's, but his subsequent history had been one long bruise capped off professionally in 1986 by his expulsion from the Screen Actors Guild for the heresy of working in non-SAG films, and on a personal level, by his diagnosis for a malignant tumor in late 1989.

Grover knocked on the door of his room—3-B North, No. 364.

> Ray stood up quickly from his neatly-made bed and took a short step forward. He was wearing a chocolate-brown robe over pajamas and slippers. Instantly recognizable, he was craggier and stockier now, but still baby-faced handsome and spiffily groomed. He stuck out his hand and we shook hard. "Are you still up for this nonsense?" I asked. With an easy smile, he said he was feeling better than he looked, indicating several raw, peeling spots on his face and neck.
>
> He was backlit by the room's single, off-center window, and he seemed, I thought, remarkably cheerful. With a tentative sense of relief, I began to grasp that he might not be as ill as I'd feared. We bantered for a while, sizing each other up. Within a few minutes, I knew some of the essentials about him. He was manly in the old-fashioned sense, and he had nerve and grace in a complicated mixture. Despite his volubility—his Italian blood and all that—he was innately reserved, shy and stoic at the core. I took him to be wounded, vulnerable, still an innocent of sorts, acutely intelligent, and tough as billy hell. He reminded me a little of Jack Kerouac, another bright jock and drinking man who'd been cursed with stardom.

Grover found Aldo Ray to be a tough, quick-witted maverick who understood Hollywood and stood up to people who had the power and inclination to bully the people they worked with. Grover liked Aldo's stories and used several of them in the piece. At the age of 22 Ray had been elected sheriff of his hometown, Crockett, California. He and his brother, Guido, responded to an ad in the *San Francisco Chronicle* for extras in the movie, *Saturday's Hero,* starring John Derek and Donna Reed. The director, David Miller, gave Aldo a part in the movie and signed him up for a seven-year contract with Columbia. The next big break was landing the male lead in *The Marrying Kind*, directed by George Cukor. Afterward Cukor wanted to cast Ray in the MGM movie, *Pat and Mike*. Producer Harry Kohn agreed, but on the condition that Ray was to get star billing with Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn:

"Spencer says, 'You mean the sheriff of Crockett...we're giving the sheriff of Crockett star billing?' " Aldo boomed out a laugh that bounced from wall to wall.

"But Cukor convinced them, and Tracy told me one day, we were walking along: 'Kid, I don't know what it is that you got, and I got, and some of us have, but you can work in this business forever.' That made me feel good, you know, coming from a guy like him. I never bowed down to anybody at Columbia or anywhere else, but my overall idea was, I'll do whatever they tell me because it's their business, not mine, and I've got to learn it."

Ray described a run-in he had with Humphrey Bogart:

"Before I went to Paramount to make *We're No Angels*, some friends at Columbia had warned me: 'Bogie always picks a patsy on every picture, so don't let him shit on you. The minute he gets on you, go back at him.' Sure enough, we're up to the 17th take on a scene where something mechanical kept going wrong and Bogie yelled at me: 'What's the matter with you, you green S.O.B.? Why don't you learn your craft before you work with the pros?' The glitch wasn't my fault, so I walked over to him and said, 'You talk to me like that again and I'll drive you through that goddamn concrete.' 'What?' 'You heard me.' Bogie says, 'Come with me, pal.' We went to his dressing room and he poured two tumblers of scotch. Boom, boom, chugalug! And every night from then on, we got half-gassed in his dressing room."

Ray worked with John Wayne, who starred in and directed *The Green Berets*. Grover asked him about Wayne.

"Ow, John Wayne," he said with a grimace. "I never considered him much of an actor, much less a director. Wayne was just a personality—I mean, I'm a personality, too, but he was *all* personality.... One day he was telling me how to do a scene a certain way, and I said, 'John, maybe that's the way *you'd* do it, but it's not the way *I'm* gonna do it.' 'Hey, I've been in this business for 40 years and I was a star for most of that time.' I said, 'I don't care how long you've been in the business—you've never learned a fucking thing.' "

In response to a question about Charleton Heston, Ray described him as “a nice fellow but a real hamola.”

Aldo liked the piece in *Movieline* and told Grover that it had helped to revive his career. Grover and Aldo recognized that their mutual respect had turned into friendship and they kept in touch, mostly by telephone. Months later Grover called me and reported that Aldo was back in the hospital. “I know he doesn’t have much time, so I want to visit him.”

Grover flew to Oakland. I picked him up at the airport and we drove to the VA Hospital and spent a couple of hours with Aldo, Maria Da Re (his mother, a lively grey-haired woman in her eighties); Aldo’s lady friend, Sandra; Don Allen, president of the Aldo Ray Fan Club; and Aldo’s younger brother. Aldo received Grover like an old friend. They talked about the *Movieline* article, Aldo’s memoirs, which he wanted Grover to read and advise him on, and several Hollywood personalities. At one point I asked Aldo which actor he respected most, and he answered almost by reflex: “Spencer Tracy, without question. He had a great gift.”

“He was my mother’s favorite actor,” I said.

“She had good taste and a lot of people agreed with her.”

When we left the hospital and drove toward the freeway, Grover was quiet at first. “I’m glad I got to see him one last time.” A few weeks later Aldo died.

Articles in the Washington Post

In the mid-1980s Grover did a piece for the *Washington Post* on the old character actor, Elisha Cook, Jr. Cook played characters that were sometimes likable, sometimes petty and belligerent—but always as recognizable as the people we meet in homeroom classes, army platoons, neighborhood bars, and at work. The two characters I associate immediately with Cook are Tory—the small, proud farmer from Alabama in *Shane* that Jack Palance, the hired killer, shoots down after goading him into a fight—and Wilmer, the gunsel in *The Maltese Falcon* that Humphrey Bogart repeatedly confronts and outwits. The

article on Cook ran in newspapers throughout the country. Grover and Cook became friends, and he kept in touch with Grover and Rae, mostly by telephone.

In 1986 a *Washington Post* editor suggested that Grover write a longer article on American movies. Since the article could have been written from several different perspectives, Grover relied more than usual on the editor's suggestion to compare the movies of two decades: the 1950s and the 1980s. When another editor criticized Grover for taking that approach, Grover concluded that editors working for one of the finest newspapers in the country ought to have a modest amount of common sense and be able to communicate at least as well as professional wrestlers. He withdrew the piece and sent it to the *St. Petersburg Times*, a respected newspaper with several former *Post* writers on the staff, which ran the article under the title "The Decline of Movies," followed by distinctly un-Post-like captions: "Comedies Without Laughs, Plastic Goon Shows, Junk Fare for Airheads," and "Rambo and his Macho Dumbos." And during a lean time when Grover had little income from his writing, the *St. Petersburg Times* paid him one-third or one-fourth what the *Washington Post* would have paid.

One of the first things a boxer or a street-fighter learns is to land the first punch. As a writer, Grover was similarly inclined. "Time was," he began, "when going to the movies tended to draw us together as a culture, rather than isolate us into wacko gangs."

Grover described the movies of the 1950s:

> Ideally, they had well-constructed story lines, attractive and credible stars and a professional sheen in all respects. To succeed at all, they had to have the minimum capacity to entertain.
>
> Movies back then were a broadly reliable yardstick of assimilation, a kind of weekly gauge for what everybody was willing to agree or disagree about. Trashy pictures were commonplace—but they usually came flagged for what they were and posed no realistic threat to overwhelm the market-place.... The better class of pictures—regardless of budget—celebrated or

at least touched upon the possibilities of decency, compassion, change and growth. They reflected our native optimism and our notions of the heroic. The very best pictures made you want to go and live in them for longer than their running time. They quite literally shaped our dreams.

For my generation, the combined physical and moral and spiritual impact of seeing movies regularly was incalculable. Hollywood's penny entertainments defined the shapes of reality for the age, and shaped the nation into a community of shared experience. All of us learned the proprieties of love and war at the picture show. The movies were a garden of dazzling light, and the verities were familiar and comforting—basic decency and unsullied justice and the promise of happy endings for all….

How the movie business whistled off the broad public and transmuted itself into the profit-glutted but sickly film industry of the 1980s makes for an involved but instructive story. In plain terms, why aren't movies any good anymore in general? Why do most of them strike most of us above the age of 12 as rancid drivel? And weren't most movies clunkers back in their supposed heyday as well?

To answer the last question first—no, not really. Judged by present standards, make that no in thunder.

Consider the pictures the public went to in large numbers in 1956. Virtually all of them were major-studio productions, cast with stars of great candlepower and constructed to exacting professional standards.

Most derived from literary sources, ranging from classic and popular novels to Broadway vehicles crafted in the era of the "well-made play."

The year's biggest pictures were extravagant epics lavishly shot in the last good Technicolor and mounted to show off the new wide-screen processes of the period: *The Ten Commandments, Around the World in 80 Days, The King and I, War and Peace, Moby Dick, Giant....*

It was a satisfying season for moviegoers and moviemakers alike, and a few more reasonably like it would follow. Meanwhile, the movie business was being ripped asunder by the blacklist, the major producing firms had been forced to sell off their theater

chains by federal edict, the top stars were free-lancing, and television was preparing to subsume the movies and rejigger them—as celluloid scrap to be cut up and piddled with between commercials. To cap off the whole mess, the old studio chiefs were going or gone by the end of the '50s, jumping or being pushed out of power.

The moguls who had built the studios into world empires were tough and often abrasive characters, little noted for their enlightened views—but they were passionate about movies and they possessed an almost voodoo intuition about how far the public would bite without snapping back. As producers, they favored red sails in the sunset, plenty of fast or funny action and, of course, coming in on budget. The movie tycoons themselves came in high and low models, but the best of the lot were hustling showmen in quest of the universal crowd.

The legacy left by this old guard was a kind of secret weapon, if it had been properly used. Greater than any star-studded cast or even any individual studio was the studio process itself. A collective creation improvised out of necessity, the studio system was part art, part craft, an amalgam of talent, organizing principle—and the industrial capability for generating polished and generous entertainments from start to finish. The old moguls had hand-picked their talent pools as an elite corps of sorcerers on demand. They had always hired the best talents available, including the crazy geniuses whose main sport was trying to chump the boss. Where else would *Citizen Kane*, say, have come from?

The post-mogul generation of executives took power and promptly junked the studio system.... In a blink, the studios lost the intrinsic means to tell a convincing story, and soon afterward nobody in the front offices had any experience at making pictures anymore. Over the next several decades, the new order of leadership seemed to specialize in riding with both hands conspicuously off the handlebars.

Counting "executive teams," which became popular to spread the cumulative blame, scores of hacks and saviors-without-portfolio passed through the production pipes in a wild fire drill of administrative chaos. Well-connected amateurs who knew no

> more about making movies than you or I plied the market with flat novelties and pale remakes. The "youth producers" materialized in the late '60s when the radical impulse was to foment upheaval and hack apart the connective tissue of tradition. They easy-rode us, kung-fued us and lifestyled us, in the process helping to create noisy but artificial subcultures. With the advent of "cult" and X-rated features by "auteur filmmakers," it was every crackpot for himself.
>
> Entertainment lawyers and former talent agents took control of the movies in the '70s. By that time the mass American audience of past years had ceased to exist except as Neilsen numbers, so the new studio bosses—frosty bottom-liners—settled for the children, plus ancillary rights. As a group, these producers were better educated than any of their predecessors, the epitome of what came to be called yuppies. Their worst failing was that they signed talents just like themselves.
>
> The studios at present are run by people who would be middle management in any other industry. Few have ever been moviemakers themselves, nor do they seem to possess the zeal for movies characteristic of the founding moguls. Today's executives are wrong an astonishing 75 percent of the time in gauging the tastes of the public (although they rarely err in calculating their own percentages).
>
> The tale of the unraveling of the movies takes curious turns. It intersects with thorny problems of performing technique and even the latest pop version of high aesthetic theory.

Grover describes Sylvester Stallone as a "flesh nobody" who "was L'il Abner only a generation ago" and also observes that "the screen's handful of serious actors also have trouble 'adapting their instruments' to the service of credible entertainments."

> Superstars routinely reserve the right to tailor any script to their own whims and caprice—and even then the level of acting often rings hollow. The hitch here is due chiefly, I think, to the lingering baleful influence of the Actors Studio. Resident gurus there once taught a shamanistic discipline of acting to neophyte talents such as Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift, who added personal

> magic to the mix and soared. The technique seems mannered and sadly pat today.... The Method by now has probably killed more good actors than whiskey.

Grover was most critical of the filmmakers he associated with The Post Modernist Literary Temper:

> Ultra-hip filmmakers sniffed the cultural climate in the ′70s and with the support of trendy producers, began to make bad pictures on principle. Post-modernist taste has it that straightforward narrative is passé and that chic static is vastly preferable to ordinary human sentiment. So the auteurs concocted "little," personal films—drenchingly photographed solecisms, really—without the minimal capacity to entertain.
>
> Filmmakers at work in this vein include Robert Altman, Sam Shepard, Terence Malick, Alan Rudolph and David Lynch, among others. Shepard, by virtue of his grossly overblown reputation as a playwright and his handy knack for PR, is the maven of the group.
>
> *Paris, Texas*—directed by Wim Wenders from a script of Shepard's—is emblematic of the current anti-entertainment film. In its portrayal of a loser father enticing his son from relative stability to life in the gutter with a loser mother, the picture is staggeringly untrue to life. It turns reason on its head and passes off the result as sage wisdom. The auteurs' contempt for the public—and for common-sense values—is virtually palpable. When "The End" rolls up, a dazed moviegoer from the mainstream has to wonder in some resentment if the creators of such jaded bunk think we're as stupid as they are.
>
> Movies come to us as damaged goods nowadays. Three out of four of them are throwaways, malarkey for the marks. The methods producers use to pitch pictures expressly to marginal demographic tastes foreclose even the possibility of consensual taste and splinter the audience into hostile camps, clamoring for ninja horrors or preppie cartoons. Fade to black on the quaint notion of shared pleasure in the presence of a common convincing

story. The movies divide us now and the worst of them don't just drive away intelligence, but help to stamp it out.

None of this does any good for the society at large. While it is pointless to enter a reactionary plea for a return to the basics of yesteryear's entertainments, we shouldn't dismiss the corruptive influence of today's sleazoid fare on the national character.

When Paul Foreman, a Texas writer, small-press publisher and prospector, visited us, I passed on the article to him, commenting that I regarded the piece as one of Grover's best. Foreman read the article and responded: "I think ol' Grover was too hard on Sam Shepard, and I certainly disagree with him on *Paris, Texas*. I think it's a good film; but whatever Grover writes is lively and intelligent."

Grover and Rae first met Paul and his wife, Foster, in San Francisco in 1973. In principle, Grover always supported small presses, but he was critical of three practices he associated with small press publications: inept editing, decisions to publish based more on personal ties than quality of work, and the hyperbolic descriptions of the contributors' literary accomplishments. When I introduced the two couples, Grover, who knew that most of the Foremans' publications had been small poetry books and magazines, spoke first: "I think there should be a four-year moratorium on poetry in this country." Foster bristled: "Do you also burn books?"

"No, I don't burn books," Grover said; "I write them." Years later after the relationship between Paul and Grover had improved, I reminded Grover of that meeting. He smiled: "That wasn't exactly the best way to start things off, was it?"

Grover and I had occasional differences of opinion. I always thought he was too critical of Texans and reminded him that they (we) couldn't be any better or worse than the rest of humanity. The most spirited difference of opinion we ever had, however, was not over something of consequence but rather the movie, *The Deer Hunter*. He regarded it as brilliant and I thought it was cynical and simplistic, even by Hollywood standards.

In the mid-1980s, Grover urged me to stop traveling to El Salvador: "I respect your willingness to go but it's too dangerous. I hate to see you make those trips."

"It's bad PR to kill gringos."

"I'm serious. Those military bastards would kill you in a minute if they got the opportunity."

In 1985 Maria-Theresa and I brought Grover a hunting knife in a hand-tooled scabbard from the central market of San Salvador and a poster of Augusto Sandino, the Nicaraguan revolutionary and patriot, which he put up on the wall of his work room.

Gus Hasford

Grover and Rae's apartment was a refuge to life-weary and lonely friends. Gus Hasford, whose novel on Vietnam, *The Short-Timers*, was made into the Stanley Kubrick movie, *Full Metal Jacket,* was living in his car when Judith Coburn, a journalist and friend, said to Grover in 1982: "I know this psycho vet novelist you ought to meet. Maybe I'll bring him by." She did, and by the end of the evening, Grover and Rae knew that Gus would be a presence in their lives. And the friendship that began that night lasted until Hasford's death in 1993.

Grover did two articles on Hasford: The first was an interview in the *L.A.Times* Sunday magazine in 1987 when Gus flew to Los Angeles for the release of *Full Metal Jacket*, and the second was the cover story of the June 4-10, 1993 edition of the *L.A. Weekly* after Gus had died of untreated diabetes in Greece at the age of 45.

In the L*.A. Weekly* article, "The Killing of Gus Hasford," Grover describes Hasford at that first meeting:

> In his early 30s then, a tall, beefy lad in mismatched wash-and-wear clothes, Gus shook hands formally with my wife, Rae, and me, declining a glass for his beer, and launched into a stream-of-consciousness commentary that ranged from Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry tactics to Lion paperbacks, cheerfully finding a thread of comedy in everything.... He had a huge, open, frequent country laugh, and as he paced back and forth with his arms swinging, his eyeglasses and high forehead glinting, he seemed very much like a large child coming on as a swaggering Marine drill instructor. Amiable and eager to please, he was a ceaseless note-taker. If you said something he liked, he jotted it down immediately in the little leather-bound notebook he always carried with him....
>
> In style, he was a master of bombast, invective and insult repartee—but his heart belonged to books. He spread his arms and said he owned over 10,000 volumes. "My God, where do you

keep them?" "In a rental locker up in San Luis Obispo. It's my research library."

He clucked approvingly of my collection of hard-boiled titles, and pulled out a volume of Ambrose Bierce's short stories. He read aloud a favorite passage from "Chickamauga" and said he was planning to write a biography of Bierce, plus a multivolume saga on the Civil War. Plus a novel about an American woman president, which he was presently working on. Plus a sequel to "Shorty" called *The Phantom Blooper*. Plus a series of six L.A. private-eye novels. His notebook was color-indexed to various ongoing research projects, including Mark Twain, anarchy, the Alamo, van Gogh, screenwriting and Abraham Lincoln—all subjects about which he expected to write books eventually.

If Gus was chasing rainbows, it was on a Renaissance scale. He laid out his writing plans with such implacable certainty that you had to nod.... As a journalist, I specialized in playing fly on the wall to star misfits, and I recognized an utter original as Gus offhandedly related the bare bones of his back story. When he was a high-school kid in backwoods Alabama, he'd somehow managed to publish a nationally distributed magazine for writers called *Freelanc*e. Then at 18, he'd joined the Marines to get away from Dixie and Mama. After the war, he'd floated through a decade of shit jobs up and down the West Coast while he honed *The Short-Timers* to a fine and polished point. Now, he was trying to get the bread together for a look-see trip to Australia with an idea of settling there permanently. He rejected American Civ wholesale—except for maybe Sizzlers and used book stores. Full of outrageous opinions, he loathed "the brass" in all forms, whether military or industrial....

Our conversation carried on into the night, and something subtle and intensely personal began to flow between us, keyed to the fact that we'd both grown up poor in the cracker South. Beneath his mock-macho manner, Gus projected unspoken miseries, unvoiced suffering—an undertone of vulnerability and isolation that he carried like a shadow. We compared notes on growing up, and I observed that neither of us had been properly raised—we'd escaped. Gus wrote it down. I began to feel protective toward him even as I laughed at his one-liners....

Rae, who'd seen Hunter Thompson puke on his shoes and survived, said after Hasford had gone, 'Sweet guy. We'll have to get him some clothes.' We agreed that he was a heartbreaker. Before turning in, I made a few notes of my own, sensing that Gus was going to be a part of our history, not so much as a subject but as someone who taxed my abilities to sum him up.

As a hardcore eccentric, Gus either charmed people on the spot or scared them off quick. Full of an astonishing array of tics, tropisms, quirks and peculiar habits, he was alarmingly innocent about some things and deeply cynical about others. Everybody found him unreliable about time and totally resistant to sane advice.... Part of him was a sunny boy and another part was permanently angry—over his childhood, the war, his poor luck with women.

Shortly after *Full Metal Jacket* was nominated for an Academy Award, Gus was sent to jail for having hundreds of stolen and overdue library books in a storage locker in San Luis Obispo:

"The best work of fiction about the Vietnam War," *Newsweek* called Gus Hasford's *The Short-Timers* when it was first published in 1979. The slim hardcover sold, like most first novels, in the low thousands, but established its author as one of the premier writing talents of his generation. In the tradition of Stephen Crane, Hemingway and James Jones, the book summoned up the horrors of war in an unrelenting voice with all the potential for world-class success.

Hasford's critical stock rose even higher when Stanley Kubrick filmed the book as *Full Metal Jacket*. Released in 1987, the picture received one major Academy Award nomination—shared by Kubrick, Michael Herr and Hasford himself for best screen adaptation. At a stroke, the struggling, rootless young novelist entered the upper realms of "A-list" Hollywood. But in a skein of envy, spite and the inexorable grinding of bureaucratic "justice"—all of them compounded by Hasford's own obsessive passion for books—his newfound celebrity backfired, and he was sent to jail on bizarrely exaggerated charges involving stolen and overdue library books.

> It all combined to kill him.
>
> Gus died alone, as he had mostly lived, in Greece on January 29 at the measly age of 45 from the complications of untreated diabetes. His death coincided eerily with the 25th anniversary of the Tet offensive, the campaign so graphically described in *The Short-Timers*. Two weeks after the shock of his death, 20-odd mourners had gathered in the chapel at Tacoma's Mountain View Memorial Park. Gus' kin sat close to the front—his mother, Hazel, a gaunt and visibly ailing Alabama native with Gus' younger brother, Army Sergeant Terry Hasford, and Terry's Korean wife, Soo. Back of them a couple of rows were the Snuffies, a cadre of Gus' brothers-in-arms from the Vietnam days, all wearing their battle ribbons on sweaters or lapels, the five men who'd managed to attend representing a total of eight Purple Hearts....

Rae told me that Grover was moved when the highly decorated comrades-in-arms made him an honorary Snuffy.

> The noon ceremony was spare, simple and elegantly offbeat. Steve "Bernie" Berntson, chief archivist of the Snuffies, spoke a brief eulogy and then set out bottles of Jack Daniel's, fruit juice, Evian water and California wine. Nine other mourners, including myself, offered personal tributes to Gus, concluding with toasts to his memory. A local Presbyterian minister, a little nonplused by the procedure, toasted God.
>
> At the service's conclusion, the Marine honor guard fired four volleys of salute outside the chapel, followed by a bugler playing taps. A smart-stepping Marine SNCO presented Gus' mother with a folded American flag. "In behalf of a grateful nation, ma'am, we present this flag as a token of your son's honorable and faithful service to the United States of America." Mrs. Hasford sat with her eyes lowered, softly fingering the cloth. "I never could understand that boy," she'd told one of the Snuffies a few days before, "just never could."
>
> In a caravan of cars, the memorial moved en masse to Berntson's house in a nearby suburb, where the post-mortems continued through the afternoon and into the evening in a glow of sipping whiskey, fond remembrance and brusque camaraderie.

> Many of the characters in *The Short-Timers* had been modeled on the now-middle-aged Snuffies, and the men were strapping proud of the distinction. In Vietnam with Gus, they'd all been Marine combat correspondents, equally adept at filing dispatches or fighting hooch-to-hooch. At Gus' wake, circulating from bar to buffet, they openly discussed his jail sentence and its effect on him. None of them approved of his transgressions, but none of them had rejected him, either. As men who'd shared life at its worst, they viewed Gus as family—and whatever had happened, they loved him....
>
> Bernie told perhaps the best "Gus story": "It's peculiar, but this happened exactly 25 years ago today. I'd set up a base camp in Hue City, and Walter Cronkite rolls up with a camera crew. He was doing a stand-upper with some pogue colonel, asking about rumors that our guys had been looting. Just then Gus busts in with two black onyx panthers and a stone Buddha on his back. 'Hey, there's a whole temple full of this shit,' he hollers. 'We can get beaucoup bucks for this stuff in Saigon!' I hustled him outside quick, and Cronkite, of course, came back home and declared the war unwinnable on national TV…."
>
> Another round of toasts commenced after dinner. Every Snuffy present had helped Gus out of various hapless jams during and ever since the war.... Bob Bayer ("Mr. Short-Round") recalled driving hundreds of miles to rescue Gus from his latest broken-down lemon car. "He could start out to meet you with a thousand bucks in his pocket, walk past a bookstore, and then you'd have to spring for dinner." Earl Gerheim ("Crazy Earl") nodded and smiled: "Gus had a 45-year childhood—the childhood the rest of us missed, I guess." There was general agreement that Gus had been a zany, wonderful, generous, naive, impractical homemade genius, maybe too pure in his way to die of old age. Bernie raised his wine glass. "To those of us who are near," he said, "and those far away, and those who are beyond the wire."

Three months before Hasford was released from the jail in San Luis Obispo, he broke off contact with Grover and Rae—even though he had promised to call them regularly. Years earlier when Grover had learned that Gus "liberated" library books, he criticized the practice.

And in telephone conversations when Gus was in jail, Grover tried to persuade him not to dissipate his energy attempting to expose the people inside and outside the criminal justice system for exacting punishment far more severe than the "crime":

> Getting brushed off without cause was a bitter pill for me to swallow.... In the end, Rae and I settled into thinking of Gus as an absent friend. We assumed his delusion or whatever the hell was bugging him was temporary, and we expected to see him at the door again when the fit had passed....
>
> What Rae and I didn't know was that the disgrace and ritual humiliation had already started to kill him by the time he left the San Luis Obispo lockup. Ravaged by a cold and then intestinal flu, Hasford had dropped 40 pounds as a prisoner. In time, he gained back some of the weight, but he never really regained his health or strength or spirit.
>
> Bob Bayer started telling me the end of Hasford's story as we drove along a commercial strip in suburban San Diego, headed for a location Bayer wanted to keep secret. "When he first got out, Gus was in pretty rocky shape. It took him a long time and a lot of effort to get his stuff back from the police. Cost him a bundle, too. And things were missing—a collection of $20 gold pieces, for one. I'm not sure what else was taken, but they got him coming and going—whacked him for stealing, and then stole from him when he couldn't do anything about it.
>
> "Gus started drinking around that time—drinking a lot of beer and wine at night. Said he couldn't get to sleep otherwise.... He was living in a motel in El Cajon so he could be close to his books, which he was reorganizing after trucking them down from SLO. I was recycling cans home, and he'd bring over big trash bags full of tall Colt 45 empties every couple of weeks. He drank those by the case. Plus, wine—a *lot* of wine.
>
> "He just wasn't ever himself again after going to jail. It weighed on him heavily, you know, on his mental attitudes. He was afraid to take planes afterwards, and he talked a lot about applying for political asylum in France. And that big expose′ he was going to write—hiring private dicks and everything. I told him, 'Gus, nobody's gonna care about this shit three years from now—it's a

smalltime legal deal. Focus the energy you've got on your bigger projects.' But he wouldn't let go of it."

I mentioned that I'd had an almost identical conversation with Hasford.

Bayer nodded, grinning ruefully. "Gus just totally lacked common sense. His diabetes, for instance. When he got his books back in order, he went up to Tacoma to stay with his mother and brother in a real small apartment, sleeping on the floor. He was still drinking all the time and feeling lousy constantly, so Bernie Berntson dragged him—almost physically—to a V.A. hospital. They ran tests and gave him an insulin shot on the spot. After that, Doctor Dave, who'd moved his practice to Seattle, kept after Gus to get his diet regulated, get his weight down under proper guidance. Dave told Gus he probably shouldn't be going to Greece. Everybody else told him the same thing, but Gus went anyway last April. By the fall, he'd moved into a *pensione* in Aegina, about 45 miles by boat off the Greek coast. By that time, he was hardly even writing letters anymore, so I called him in December and asked if he was under a doctor's care and so on. 'Yeah, yeah, yeah'—you know the drill. Apparently, he was alone when he died. The woman who owned the *pensione* found him in his room."

Bayer took Grover into the storage area where Hasford had kept his books.

Massive cardboard boxes filled with books and papers crowded almost every inch of space.... Bayer and I rough-counted the cartons, arriving at a tally just under 900. Gus had believed he could master any subject if he could find the right books to study. Books, the printed word, had been his college, his tabernacle—the secret labyrinth at the corner of which he lived.

Bayer tapped his toe against a Marine-issue footlocker stenciled with Hasford's initials. "It was fun being Gus' friend," he said, shaking his head reflectively. "It wasn't always easy, but it was always fun."

Grover had been confronting the deaths of people close to him since he was eight years old and the inevitability of death never made the timing or the circumstances any easier to accept:

> I was still tasting bile over Gus' death—the sheer, needless waste of it. He'd died by many hands, including his own, but basically, I thought he'd been pecked to death by chickenshits. His real crime was being hopelessly different from most people in a claptrap culture where everything was considered transient, talent a mere currency....

Gus had more than his share of contradictions. His diverse imagination, acute loneliness and intense concentration shaped an elliptical moral consciousness that allowed him to pursue his greatest dreams but also isolated him from the people he needed most.

> Hasford still taxed my ability to sum him up. But I could say for certain that he was irreplaceable. Full of shortcomings and human failings, not a grown-up at all on some level, afflicted with built-in buzz-saw cussedness and a deadly book jones, he had been nonetheless gallant, large-hearted, steadfast—a man of honor with complicated gifts and brave, bad attitudes in a wretched time, a Southern romantic to the core and forever a soldier. Hollywood hadn't even looked up from its chips at his passing, but among those who'd taken the time to see him clearly, Gus was well-loved. I wondered if it was something he ever fully knew.
>
> *The Short-Timers* stood as his major testament. To write it, Hasford had outwitted poverty and class prejudice and his own callow ignorance and lack of education. As long as the Vietnam War was recalled, his book would be read as one of its defining documents—raw and galling and true as spilled blood....
>
> I'd thought in advance that coming to see Gus' locker would be my last step with him, but I knew now that I'd never be through with Gus. Maybe I'd get down to Alabama to visit his grave.... For sure, I meant to go for a walk on San Clemente beach when the sunbathers were in force. Laughing and joking, Gus had talked a blue streak about the beach and all its lustrous beauties. When he died, he'd say, he wanted his ashes scattered there so all the gorgeous girls could sit on his face for eternity.

Grover was extremely disappointed when the *L.A. Weekly* piece on Hasford, which was one of the five finalists in the PEN West Journalism category, didn't win since the same thing had happened the year before to "Farewell to Cracker Eden," Grover's autobiographical piece in *Texas Monthly*. I asked him why he thought the panel hadn't selected his article.

"Poor boys never win."

"Are you being literal?"

"Not quite. It's just politically correct bullshit. I read the article that won and it's just not better than the piece on Gus. I know what I can do as a writer and I'm at the height of my powers. I don't need an award to confirm that but it would've been nice to win."

Grover was drawn to people generally regarded as marginal who had the ability and will to overcome the long odds, and he loved to tell their stories; and the best, in my judgment, were his own and Gus's—stories that show the human spirit is as real as roses on a white trellis or a dove in the afternoon sky or the voice of a friend.

People who paid their dues more often than they collected the benefits were always Grover's constituency. He rose through the ranks of life from an orphan who was almost blind to a general in the corps of writers and thinkers, but he always marched—and drank—with the troops.

Grover and Rae's Apartment in Santa Monica

Rae and Grover's clean, orderly apartment was always filled with books, tapes, records, photography and paintings that revealed as much about their character and values as the vocabulary and precision of their speech. For 13 years they had lived on the fourth floor of an apartment building that was five minutes walk from the beach in what right-wing wits and income-property owners weary of rent control call "The People's Republic of Santa Monica." As we were walking in that extended neighborhood a few years before, Grover, always a docent of human geography, pointed out the building William Holden had died in and the house where Bertold Brecht had lived. And as we passed individual houses, he commented on literary projects, social experiments and even an unsolved murder case that were, I'm sure, as distant from the consciousness of the contemporary residents of that staid community as Grover believed social responsibility and artistic integrity were from the concerns of a troubling number of Hollywood film makers.

Visiting them had always been a time of quiet celebration. Whenever I traveled to the L.A. area for union conventions or other meetings, I always managed to spend a night or two with them. I felt as welcome in their apartment as in my parents' home. Grover and Rae treated me like a brother and a prodigal. If I'd made a list of my five favorite places in the world, their fourth-floor glass-enclosed balcony that served as a dining room would've been number one. Gus Hasford, the Marine veteran and writer, named it Cafe Cafard.

It's a moment of light when you realize that there is no better place in the world for you to be than where you are.

In the spring of 1983, I went to an American Federation of Teachers convention downtown Los Angeles. I had intended to leave around noon to visit Grover and Rae; but I wasn't able to reach them.

When more than 100 of the delegates returned to the convention hall after protesting U.S. intervention in El Salvador, we learned that President Reagan was in L.A. and that AFT President Albert Shanker had invited him to address the convention without consulting the 3,500 delegates. Around 400 delegates called a meeting to try to determine the most effective way to protest Shanker's decision and Reagan's foreign policy—especially in El Salvador. My suggestion, which got some support but didn't prevail, was to stand up and turn our backs on Reagan and continue standing in silence until the end of his comments. The majority judgment, however, was to wear black arm-bands and sit together, then stand up and walk out as soon as he started speaking. We were informed that, "for security reasons," we couldn't take placards into the convention hall. I decided to make my own mini-placard and took two sheets of legal-size paper and wrote with a black felt-tip marker:

WE SHALL OVERCOME—EVEN REAGAN'S IGNORANCE
on one side and

SUPPORT EDUCATION, NOT GENOCIDE IN EL SALVADOR
on the other

The 400 or so dissenters sat together on the right side of the hall. When President Reagan started speaking, we all stood up. Some of the sergeants-at-arms shouted: "You people have to sit down!" We shouted back: "We're walking out!" We walked forward to the horizontal middle aisle and turned left. As we reached the vertical middle aisle, everyone in front of me turned left and started toward the exit at the rear of the convention hall. Until that time I had been holding my mini-placard next to my chest. I raised it at arms-length above my head, turned right and started walking toward the stage. When I approached the TV camera crews, someone shouted, "Cut the lights," but no one approached me or said anything to me. I continued walking until I was a few feet from the stage—and was within 10 or 12 feet from Shanker, who was scowling at me but didn't say anything because he was close enough to Reagan's microphone that any message to me would have been to the TV audience of America. I was close enough to President

Reagan to see the make-up on his face for the television cameras. He didn't look at me or depart from his speech. I couldn't tell whether he was ignoring me or was so focused on his speech that he wasn't aware of my presence.

I made a 360-degree turn with the mini-placard above my head then walked toward the exit. Sitting in an aisle seat in the last row, a chubby, middle-aged woman in a grey gabardine security guard uniform scowled, shook her heard and hissed: "Oh, Jesus Christ." I said, "Yes, ma'am," and left the hall.

Lung Cancer and Radiation

After Rae and Grover got the terrible news that he had lung cancer and the radiation treatment had begun, Rae called and said Grover wanted to talk to me. He got to the point quickly. "I've promised Rae and I promise you that I'll keep an open mind and do everything the doctors tell me to do. But after a certain point if there's no hope and I'm in pain and a burden to Rae, I don't want to go on and I don't intend to."

"I understand."

"There's a difference between endin' your life and takin' your life. I'd never take my own life. This brings me to what I wanted to ask you. Can you get the pills and find out exactly what we have to do?" When I said that I could, he continued: "The plan is for the three of us to drive to our place in Utah. I don't want to have to go to a motel and blow my brains out. I want to end life with some dignity. If you can't do it, tell me. I have to know."

"It'd be sad and hard but worse to see you suffer without any hope."

"Then I have your word?"

"When it's time, have Rae call and I'll fly to L.A. and we'll rent a van and drive from there."

"That eases my mind; you don't know how much. Now, I can focus on other things. I'd like to finish the book but I don't think there's much chance."

Each time Rae and I spoke by telephone one of us made a reference to the plan. In early April Rae mentioned June as the likely time. Grover said something to her. "Wait a minute," she said. "Grover says it won't be that long." Around a week later, Rae left a message on our answering machine. I returned the call late in the afternoon. "Grover's too weak to make the trip to Kanarra and wants to see you. Can you can come down for a visit?"

"I can fly down tomorrow afternoon."

"He wants to know if you can spend the night." I told her that I could. She didn't say whether to bring the pills I'd accumulated and I didn't ask. I decided to take them—and the book *Final Exit*, a manual on death as intelligent and readable as Strunk and White's little book, *The Elements of Style*.

Rae was standing in the open door a few steps from the elevator. We hugged each other and she took me by the hand to their bedroom. I recalled her attempts to prepare me in our telephone conversations ("Grover weighs around 120 pounds and he's too weak to walk.") I also thought of the comments of a Bay Area woman in a similar condition who miraculously survived after all the doctors had given up hope: "The worst part," she said, "was people treating me as if I were already dead. Love and morphine helped me more than chemotherapy and radiation." When Rae related her comments to Grover, he said: "I'd put it 'morphine and love.' " Grover, who was in the hospital bed they had rented, propped up by pillows, extended his pale, thin arms to embrace me: "Glad you could come."

"I appreciate your askin' me to come," I said, as his head rested on my shoulder, "I wouldn't have missed seein' you."

Rae asked if he wanted to change positions. He did and instructed me to bend down and let him interlock his fingers behind my neck and pull himself forward while Rae rearranged the pillows. When all the medical tests confirmed that Grover had lung cancer that had already metastasized and that the constant pain we thought was from a back injury was instead from a tumor on his spine, I couldn't resist hoping that Grover's remarkable strength of mind and spirit would allow him to find a way to walk the edge, to beat somehow the overwhelming odds the way a lone tree survives a lightning strike. But when I saw him, I knew there was no hope. I took his hand and said: "We've been down lots of roads together, Son, but I never gave much thought to this one." I couldn't continue. He patted me on the arm and when I apologized for not being able to stay in control, he said: "That's nothin' to be ashamed of."

In our long talks, he had the same acuity of judgment and gift of expression he'd always had—in spite of being near death, confined to the bed, and totally dependent on Rae and the home nurses, who came at odd hours to clean him, to install the intravenous morphine pump and to ensure that the pump was working properly.

It was after midnight when the home nurse with long dark-red hair prepared to leave. She accepted my offer to walk her to the car. I told her that Rae was with Grover most of the time but occasionally had to leave him alone during the day while she ran errands or went to work for brief periods. "Are you sure he won't be in pain?"

"Absolutely," she said, "morphine's a remarkable drug."

"Do you have any idea how much time he has left?"

"It's hard to say; he's very weak. It could be a matter of hours or days—or even weeks, although that's not likely. The morphine'll gradually shut down the system."

The next morning Grover wanted to learn how to increase the flow of morphine if the pain got stronger. I showed him what to press. He put his right index finger on the control, pressed it until he had doubled the dosage, then smiled and looked up at me: "This round's on me."

Grover didn't shed a tear or express any fear of death or bitterness at the timing, even though he mentioned the irony of doing in the final months of his life his best and most important writing. He also regretted not being able to finish the book that could have given him the financial reward and place in American letters that he deserves.

Grover's uncommon wisdom came from some unlikely sources. On that warm April afternoon, I was the one taking notes. He said: "In art and life all things are eclectic. You sit back and see where you fit in the picture and you do it without illusion. You pick an ideal of excellence and some good rules to help get you there. I respect people and have always tried to be responsible. I knew I had to find my own way, avoiding the trendy and the facile. I filled in the blanks according to my true curiosities. I also knew I had to weave my mental pursuits into real life. My credo as a journalist and a literary voice was to find out the discoverable truth and to describe it in unmistakable terms and tones. I did that for thirty years, always embracing the humanity

I encountered."

I was astounded that Grover could be so weak and still concentrate the way he always had: "Where there's breath, there's an idea."

He smiled and nodded his head one time then asked for a cigarette. Rae mentioned earlier that the doctor had told Grover there was no reason for him to stop smoking at that point. I picked up the pack of Luckies on the bedside table. "No, I want to roll my own," he said. I handed him the stainless steel bowl he kept the Gauloise tobacco, roller and cigarette papers in. He licked the edge of the paper then put it and the tobacco into the roller. When the cigarette came out, he shaped it with his fingers.

"That reminds me," I said, "when I was a kid, watchin' the old cowboys sittin' in the saddle and holdin' the reins in the left hand, then takin' a sack of Bull Durham from a breast pocket and rollin' a cigarette with the right hand."

Grover looked toward the window: "Those guys could roll a cigarette better with one hand than I ever could with two. An old one-armed sheepherder named Shorty, who worked for Rae's dad, was just as good. When we'd sit around and talk, I loved to watch him roll his cigarettes with that one hand."

"You remember the time I called you and Rae in Kanarra and asked how you were doing? It was in the dead of winter and you said, 'To tell you the truth, winter here is as cold as the Arctic Circle and when the Mormons want to celebrate something, they kill a mutton.' "

"I think I remember sayin' that and yes, it is that cold and yes, they do." Grover and Rae lived in Kanarraville, a community of 160 people in southern Utah, for three years. Most of the people there—predictably enough, like people everywhere—came to appreciate Grover's wisdom, decency and wit, and didn't find it strange that he reciprocated. Wherever he went, Grover saw the thread of humanity and practiced his own interpretation of the Golden Rule; and he always found good people to talk to—and drink with—even in Mormon country.

Grover talked about learning to love movies when Opal used to take him to the best Hollywood films of the early 1940s. A small, slender hotel waitress in her mid-twenties and her half-blind seven-year-old

son would go to a soda fountain in a drugstore after the Sunday matinee and talk about what was good in the movie and what wasn't— and why. Both of them needed to remember that there was a world beyond the places they lived in that never became familiar—and that most people didn't have to keep running away, as they did, from a well-meaning and hardworking man whose love turned to rage and violence when he got drunk. "If Opal hadn't taken a special interest in me and known how to draw me out, I probably would've turned out to be a hopeless geek stuck in a mindless job my whole life."

"I'm glad Opal set you in the right direction but I think you would've found a way to do what you did."

Grover closed his eyes for a few seconds. I asked him if there was anything he wanted me to do or anyone he wanted me to contact. He asked me to write two people to let them know he held them in high regard: Todd Moore, whose epic poem on John Dillinger Grover had reviewed in the *Los Angeles Times*; and Chuck Schwanitz, an old journalist who had been a close friend of journalist and novelist Edward Anderson. "Rae can give you their addresses. And I've got a message for Kell." Grover shared the view of many others that Kell was at least as faithful to hundred proof alcohol (although on principle he didn't discriminate against weaker brews) as he was to his art and his steel-stringed Martin. Grover sometimes saw more evidence of Kell's humanity and insight in his work than his life, and their friendship over 25 years knew as much alcohol-accented dissension as civil discourse, but the bond of friendship between them was strong and each had great respect for the other's work. It was Kell's turn to make amends after the *Desperado* magazine fiasco, and he intended to but he didn't realize Grover had so little time. "Tell ol' Kell I love him and to do the best work he can."

I reminded Grover of the time, in the mid-70s, when he, Kell and I were having a beer in the back room of a little Greek deli and liquor store on Potrero Hill in San Francisco. I looked out the west window. The spring afternoon had about two hours of light left and I could see all the way to the ocean. In this city of so much beauty, that's my favorite sight. I've gone back to that area several times but I couldn't

find the place. I also realize that if I found it, the light wouldn't be the same and the whole scene would be as different as a painting or a photograph of it. Kell reported to us that Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the Beat poet and publisher, had put up the writer Charles Bukowski for several days at his house a few blocks from the deli. "After Bukowski left," Kell said, "Lawrence came home and found that Bukowski'd shit on the bedspread."

"What the hell does Lawrence expect?" Grover said, "I wouldn't let that syphilitic son-of-a-bitch in my house."

Grover nodded. "I remember the incident and the conversation. Back to ol' Kell, I'd like to see somebody put out a decent book of his poems. Nobody has and he certainly deserves that."

I told Grover I would write the two letters and give the message to Kell. I also promised to start a small press and publish a book of Kell's poetry. "I know you're not religious, but—"

"No, that's not right," Grover interrupted; "like Faulkner—and I'm not comparing myself to him—I believe in the human soul and in the qualities that make us different from other creatures."

Grover's life is as instructive as his writing. He read and appreciated modern and classical literature but much of what he learned came from movies, newspapers and television. His interest in good movies and well-written, independent newspapers was understandable, but I found it curious that he was so attentive to television. TV, like the clips of life recorded in memory, offers choices in the extreme of human behavior and of social and individual reflection: from brilliant documentaries on "Healing and the Mind" and "The Civil War" to sitcoms that illustrate what questionable value we place on the ability to think analytically and to speak coherently. In a medium of unexamined redundancy and hedonism of the mundane, Grover always managed to find brilliance and originality.

Without being an opportunist or individualist, he insisted on dealing with the world on his own terms. As a child, he embraced the values of the people he respected and did battle with or shunned

those who oppressed him and others close to him. As an adolescent surrounded by fundamentalist and racial bigotry as well as material and intellectual poverty, Grover learned about the world from the best books in the English language—and many that were translated from other languages. As a graduate student and journalist, he wrote about human questions that intrigued him rather than waiting for teachers and editors to assign him his tasks.

Grover's moral and intellectual will committed him to the solitary task of writing and he became one of the best at the kind of creative journalism he practiced. I regard his poetry as the least exceptional of his work but he was as much a poet as journalist. The poet brought us the morning light of understanding and the symphonic flight of language, and the journalist showed us that moral consciousness is as clear an index of intelligence as wit, common sense, and social grace. Always standing with the "little man" that Harry Truman lobbied for, that Woody Guthrie and Lightnin' Hopkins sang about and performed for, Grover invariably saw the human side of an issue—no matter how obscured by fashionable nonsense or ethical ambiguities—also the starkness and beauty that define the world.

I can't say that the 35-year friendship with Grover made me a better or wiser person but I couldn't help learning from him what a versatile instrument the mind is and how the human spirit can can find, or imagine, a single yellow flower next to the wall of a house left in ruins after a bombing raid. And how a child whose mother was murdered can hear her voice for more than five decades until the end of his life.

When an eight-year-old boy learns his mother has been shot eight times, then the next day his father also dies after being shot with the same gun, the world can become a borderless prison.

I believe Grover's subtle wit was born of the kindred tragedy that guides comic genius and reconstructs the border between light and darkness. He came to know that a mind of great energy in a frail body would inevitably encounter individual adversaries and oppressive institutions, but his uncommon insight and persevering curiosity—and the courage that remains after seeing death then walking away—taught him to outwit the wardens of the world and the jailers of souls.

On the last day of my visit, Grover asked if I could stay until the end "because I don't want Rae to be alone when the time comes."

"We talked about that today and she said that David [her brother] would come immediately. I told her that when the time comes, I'll be here in a few hours and stay as long as she needs me." It's painful to recognize that my response was more reasonable than generous. My dad would drive 1100 miles from the Texas Panhandle to Southern California to see his children and their families then leave after a two-day visit. Weeks later it struck me that Grover had stopped eating and drinking juice when the home-care nurse hooked up the intravenous morphine pump. He decided it was time to go but I was not very observant—and not as loyal a friend as he took me to be since he died less than 36 hours after I left.

Grover nodded and asked me to read to him from the *Los Angeles Times*, as Rae and I had done earlier in the day.

It was late in the afternoon on Good Friday when I put my bag by the door and made sure I had the airline ticket. Rae took my hand as I went to tell Grover goodbye. I leaned down to hug him. I couldn't help knowing that would be the last time I'd see him, but instead I said: "This may be the last time we see each other."

"No doubt about that," he said.

"I'm proud of what you accomplished, and there's nothing in life I value more than your friendship."

Grover died Easter Sunday morning sometime between 3:30, when Rae checked on him and noticed that his breathing was labored, and 7:20, when she touched him and realized that he had gone.

He tried traditional and non-traditional therapies as he battled the pain, oppression and indignity of lung cancer in the advanced stage—without spending a single night in the hospital. High on morphine

and cared for by a woman who loved and respected him, Grover died without fear or self-pity in a clean, comfortable room surrounded by the treasures of the human spirit that he had created and collected.

When Rae called Easter Sunday morning to tell us that Grover was gone, we didn't talk long. I walked back to the bedroom and told Maria-Theresa. As we hugged each other, she said, "He won't have to suffer anymore." It was easier to nod than talk. "How's Rae taking it?" she asked.

"She seems calm and strong. She and Grover both showed more courage than I did."

I went to the bookcase and took out Grover's two books. I opened his slender book of poems, *I'll Be There in the Morning If I Live*, and read the inscription on the title page:

For Rod,
My oldest and truest friend
Coraggio,
Grover

Grover understood that truth does make us free because it separates fear from reason and helps us to confront the inevitable with grace. When the voice is silent and the mind still, the end and beginning are two beats of the same heart, two distant rivers flowing to the sea.

In a world of pain, injustice, misery and absurdity, there always have been—and probably always will be—people like Grover Lewis and Woody Guthrie who were as heroic as they were ordinary. They found brilliance, strength and character in unlikely places. When they came upon people with those qualities, they walked with them then told their stories, and in the telling they encouraged us all, including themselves.

About the Author

Rodger Scott was born in Aspermont, Texas in 1936, the last of nine children in a family of farmers and ranchers who moved into town because they couldn't survive working other people's land. Rodger was a juvenile delinquent in junior high, and in high school was suspended or expelled six times in five semesters, but loved college and received a B.A. in foreign languages from Texas Tech at 20. He has an M.A. in English also from Texas Tech and a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of New Mexico.

Scott has been a teacher for 48 years in five states of the U.S. and in Japan, China and Colombia (as a Peace Corps volunteer). He served two years in the U.S. Army between the undeclared wars in Korea and Vietnam. He has held union posts for over 40 years and was president of American Federation of Teachers Local 2121 at San Francisco City College. Scott is co-chair of the Social and Economic Justice Committee of the San Francisco Labor Council and active in organizations like Justice for Mario Woods Coalition that are committed to stopping unjustified police killings, especially of young people of color, and the San Francisco Living Wage Coalition. He supports struggles for racial justice, affordable and accessible higher education, and progressive unions with ties to community and human rights groups—unions that advocate for society and humanity, not just their members.

Scott describes himself as a photographer and videographer with more experience than talent or success. In theology and ideology, he prefers single-mindedness to certainty and acknowledges being more cautious than courageous. However, he has been arrested in East Germany, Mexico—and recently for civil disobedience in California. He was deported from Japan in 1969 after 57 days in Japanese Immigration detention centers for anti-Vietnam War activities and sailing on the Quaker yacht "Phoenix" from Nagasaki, Japan to the People's Republic of China.

Some of his favorite quotes:

"If there were no cowards, there would be no bullies."

—W.R. Scott

"You must make your enemies live by their own rules."

—Saul Alinsky

"Nothing in the world is more dangerous than a sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity."

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Books are humanity in print."

—Barbara Tuchman

Scott admires the book title *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, and he appreciates the wit and wisdom of A Texan's Prayer: "God, help me to find the truth and save me from those who've found it."