

Joseph Dane Words



Bill Dane Photographs

I. OBITUARY

Ia. *Librarie bleue*

I wrote my obit when I was ten. The text a draft—we didn't have computers then. I laid out the pamphlet ("blue books" we called them), trimming the deckle, blocking out the title, using my nickname for authorship (as if a step to adulthood!), my vapid prose inspired by covers of "men's adventure magazines" I glanced at guiltily in Day's Variety on Maine Street, it must have been—those Rambo-like heroes in glaring sheen—the mad tarantulas, bears, zebras and cockatoos, perhaps a snowy wilderness...

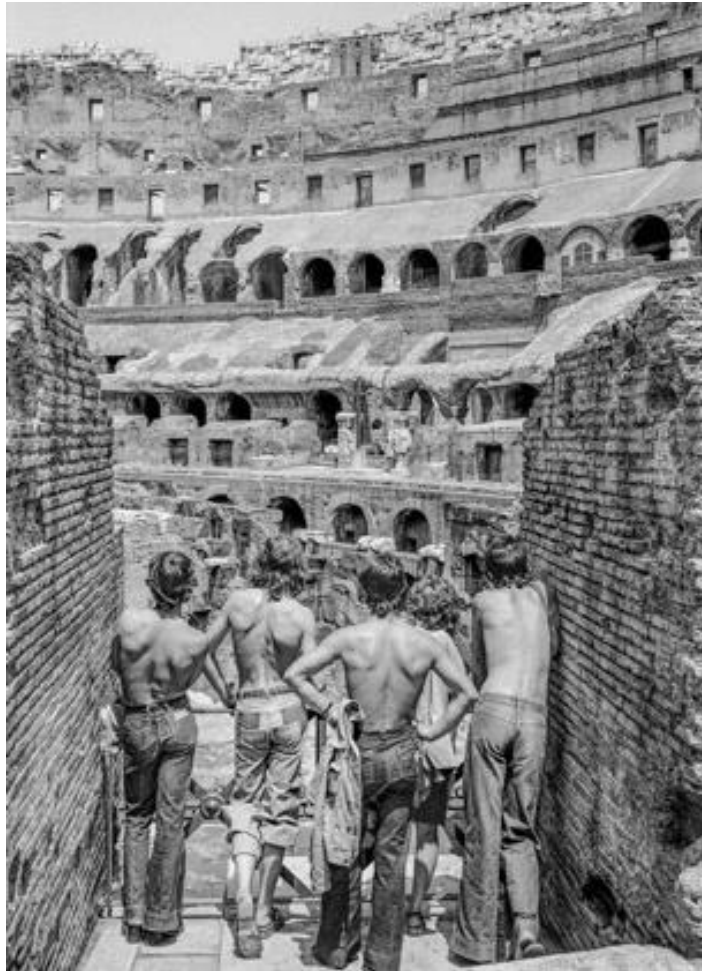
It was the fifties.

Things were different then.



1987 Oakland

I wrote my obit when I was ten
with no sense of what the real obits of life can be,
like those of Bob or Eloise, or Frank or family.
I had it down.
There were no further fears to trouble me.



1976 Rome

I believe in my obit I sailed the Atlantic like the explorers of the history books,
the Pacific of my uncles flying over Midway, the Arctics of my Uncle Duke.
Made the straits always gaining on the left.



2011 San Francisco

A lover too, I would learn to be
(insofar as I could know of that)
schooled by elders who knew everything.
How hard could it really be?



1974 Universal City

It was the fifties. Life was good for us, or most or some of us. Those who hadn't died at Normandy. In those days, we good citizens wished to do things right, though what that was, who knew? For the most part, we just flailed our arms in perplexity.



1978 Berkeley

Ib. Fat James

Now Fat James may have had his own views of the future. Fat James dropped dead at mile four of a Down East road race years ago, and I imagined this was the height of achievement—one's strength stressed to its breaking point, otherwise unknown unchallenged or surpassed, one's feet blistered and tagged in the local morgue. Forget the marathoners of reality—what do they know of endurance?



2020 Albany

James, as others did, saw within himself the Great Late-Twentieth-Century Novel Or Vietnam Memoir—sophistic and ironic and an unflinching critique of American Society, and to start that he had sought and collected copies of all the Letters He had Written from Overseas Complete with their Attendant Wit. Giving him mine must have been the ostensive reason for my visit, after I Cuck-olded my now-Ex (or she me) with her Roommate. He sat amid the orderly piles of his past, reading and re-reading until passing out from the drugs and alcohol.



2015 Oakland

His unwritten prose was like the strain
of his composing, as he strode straight
into your living space, straight to the piano bench
as John had done in his space when he died.
Yet James knew nothing of tonics or dominants,
nothing of tempi or key signatures,
but rather played, or rather I should say
depressed, keys at random with as
ethereal a mien as anyone might want,
eyes raised to the ceiling with the smoke,
and my mother, professional that she was,
would turn her face away in contempt.

“Not music,” she muttered.

“It’s barely sound,” she said.



2014 Oakland

And that too that too. Whether the wall he hit at four miles of road-racing because he had eaten a handful of salt tablets as we were taught to do as school children stupidly imagining that life was simply getting the chemicals right, or the wall you hit on your way to literary glory when your past caught up with you and closed off the future the way it did for him that final day, as you two debated what actors should play the roles when your fictions hit the cineplex or what roles you would play in them yourself and how loud the critical acclaim might be.



1988 Buena Park

We set up the chess board and he spent twenty minutes as if in analysis of each move, however pedestrian, when in truth, it was nothing more than passing the time, waiting for the drugs to hit.



2007 San Francisco

We lay the kings down in defeat,
as Eloise and I would do, our gambits'
failings fixed in our history,
the sacrifice not worthy of the cost of it.



1998 Petaluma

We drank our beer.
It was the seventies.
Things were different then.



1975 Ojai

Ic. Conflux

And so you wrote in your obit or sectioned it: Introduction; *Wanderjahren*; Labor; Domesticity ...

Taciturn he was, you added as a trill,
yet when he spoke,
straight-shooter as he always styled himself to be,
his hearers ...

The ink dried up in the inkwell.

The images of the hero vanished in the air you breathed beneath the factory smoke.



2007 San Francisco

And you suspected then any life was as good as another; any phrase as good as another. May as well him, Fat James, as another; so Molly says in *Ulysses*. Sailing past Gibraltar or just past Pemaquid. A packed or empty house. Your turn at the lectern.

These futures tangled. Those you would please or be mere shadows.



2004 San Francisco

For what did it matter?
Rock-star or Everyman?
Saving the world or crying out for assistance?

What did it matter to you or to anyone?

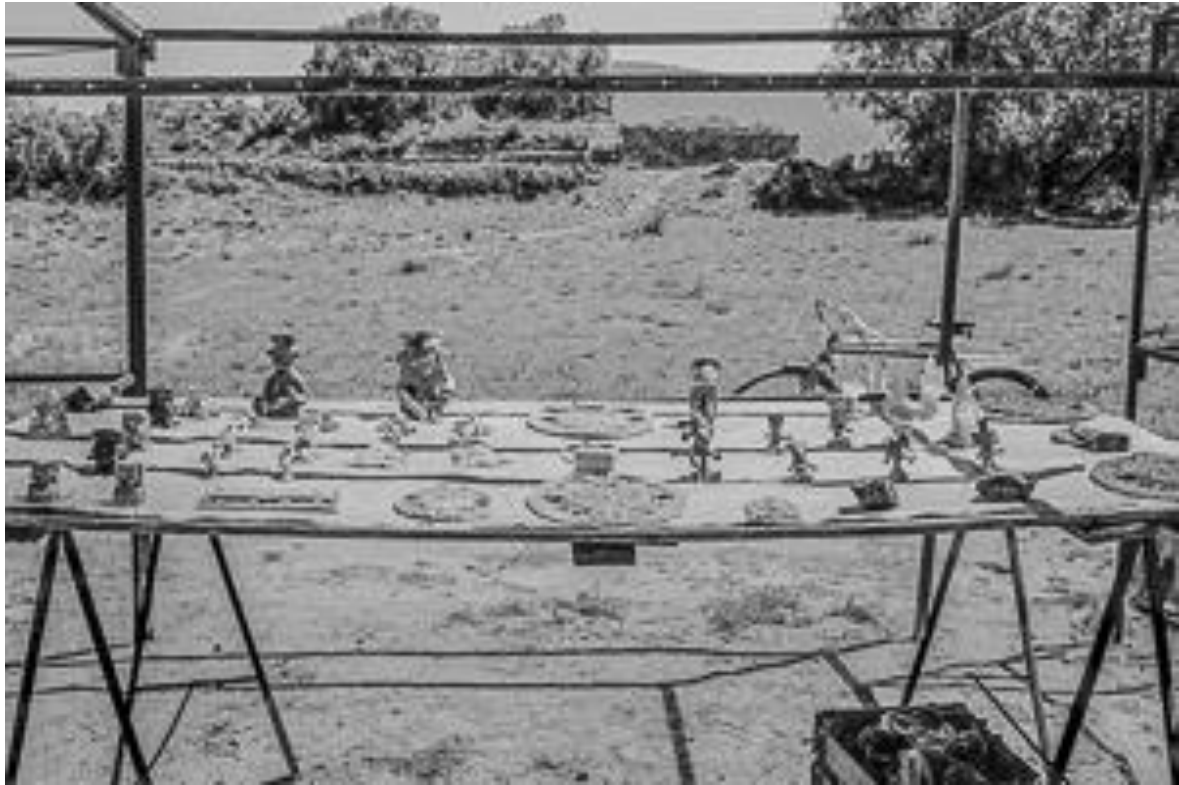


2014 Oakland

Repeat after me, is what he said.
This is what he used to say to me:

Adolescence
Travel
Work and its bourgeois accoutrements
Your art, you know. Your legacy ...

The simplicity of the great cycle of things.
Nothing changes but the arguments, that is to say,
The actants and the game tokens.



1974 Teotihuacan, Mexico

II. TRAVELOGUE

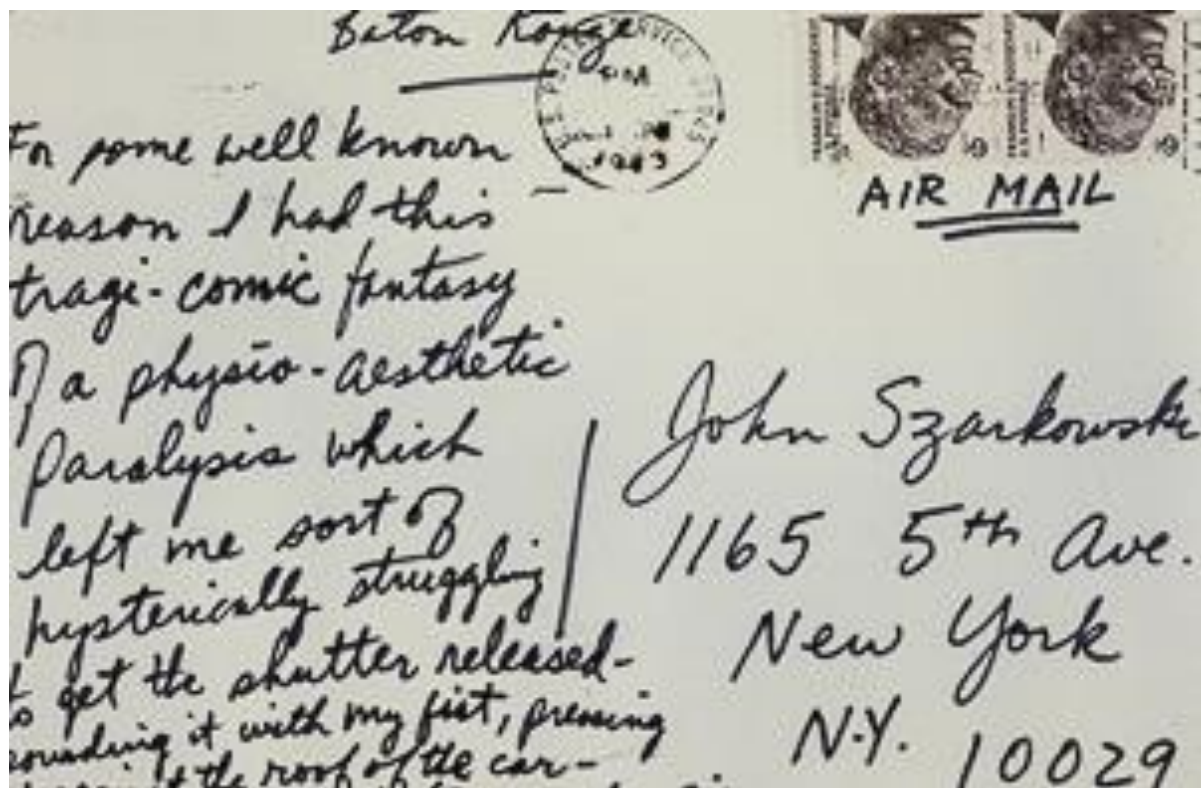
I left behind my cookware. Glasses. Nutmeg bought at discount, bugs breeding in the spice jars' obscurities. Must have been a blanket and old shirt, jackets I would never wear again, all the hair shed by the dog who spent two of those years with me.

Come on, now! Hardly "belongings" in any sense. Just things that found their way to my dwelling space. Stuff to be sloughed off like the split shells of ecdysis. Like memories of the landlord who had not admitted change to his universe and kept the rents down to what he knew in his youth and when he died out in Metairie the new tenants of the garret paid five times more for the place than I had.



2018 San Francisco

It must have been to Paris, so the documents and records say. Off to find myself, I guess, as we were wont to do back then. The spare and phatic prose of the postcards I sent home the gist of it. Penned in the clearest English of course, the ductus fine with lines slanting upward in hope.



1969 [I begin mailing photo postcards]

*And here, led by metonymies of place, I digress without apology.
I digress as tribute to Bob H., who died last week of the virus, one week
short of the vaccine that would have saved him.*

*I digress remembering posing for the camera lens, hardly thinking that
the crucial things in life are never episodes in screenplays.*

They rarely fit the logic of a narrative.



1984 Paris [photo by Theresia deVroom]



1970 Paris

The façades of Paris gleam beneath the soaps of Gide. Whitewash over everything. The land-locked Magyars, strangers everywhere as I was, Gabor himself long dead before this, pose with the tourists.



1985 Paris [photo by Amelia Kunhardt]



1984 Tijuana

I never got the language right. Never found the words and cadences. Never cried out “L’Opéra lui-même!” getting the gender right. Why study local dialects? Why practice what you need to say or what you need to know: where is the restroom? how do I pay for this? What purpose to articulate exactly or even once what I felt for ... what I felt for ... for her, for instance, Marcelline, for the women with Saints’ names ... since doing that, how could I ever construe the answer? Oh moi, moi, tu m’as dit que ... It is all the Grand Guignol of things, I think.

Your friends die.

There is no point to anything.



1969 Resnais, Robbe-Grillet, Last Year at Marienbad

And I returned to Louisiana, where all the soporific greys stolen from Paris now made sense to me, straight to the hotel where I had first stayed years ago. Seven dollars a week with a padlock for security, a place full of hippies and hookers.



1974 New Orleans

I returned there for a visit or, not that, no, but for an “assignation,” as the old romanciers would have it, there to the Hotel Toulouse again, the hippies gone by then, where one of the hookers took pity on me and I all them as we met, each startled, outside the communal shower, she in her florid robe with her face covered in cold-cream as if she were a mime in a mime troupe, her sad eyes barely visible.



2004 San Francisco

We stood in the corridor evincing the stares of the twenty-year-olds we had been years earlier. We stood in that space, our eyes fixed, clumsily wondering where the futures we once had had had gone.



1980 San Francisco

I thought of the Creole john or client down the hall, paying by the day I guess, although it didn't pay to examine the lurid economics of the place, so maybe he lived over on Decatur or someplace out in Jefferson Parish and he had a "thing" (all did in those days) and his "thing" was that he did not shut or latch doors behind him and it didn't matter whether it was the door to his own room had he had one (likely hasped with a padlock like mine), the door to the hotel itself (all that separated us from the street scene), or to the bus he rode to the suburbs, where the tailings piled up as if possessed.



1974 Kamloops

And I kept my appointment, as Beckett says, at the Café du Monde or Morning Call. I breathed in the fumes of the chicory, waiting with the tourists, waiting for Linda Jane with the tourists, but no one waited there for me.



1979 Pasadena

And back to my room I went, *Attic Nights* on the nightstand, abandoned I supposed, stood up by my lovely *assignée* who knew that hotel as well as I did. And just as I gave up on her, all expectations of our tryst now dashed, there she stood in the doorway, three hours late to let me feel the pain of it. And she took off her jacket, jet-black and stylish, hardly greeting me, and for an hour it was as if there were no one in that space at all.



2011 San Raphael

The hippie hitchhikers pile out of the car on the back road through Mississippi; they swarm the gas pumps, showing off their tai-chi skills. I go inside to pay and it is like that scene out of Easy Rider as the entire place, all five of them, red-necks all, falls silent and the proprietor in central-casting overalls stands up with the mock smile and I pay for the gas and Do you have any water we can ...? I ask as genially as possible and the silence deepens, until he raises his thumb and the corners of his lips as well and says with each syllable enunciated slowly and precisely so that there can be no misunderstanding:

“They’s a hose out back.”



2007 San Francisco

III. *ARBEIT MACHT ...*

And then my obit has me join the labor force, if I remember right, model citizen, wage-earning American, and one day I would do so myself just as recounted then and I guess I longed for that life or resigned myself to it even at that age, and it might be factory-work or something grand, like crewing on shrimp boats in the Gulf, feeding the masses.



1979 San Francisco

Or in my work-suit like the *ouvriers* of France raising monuments to sluttish time, as Shakespeare nearly said.



1972 NYC

Perhaps, in time, you would squeeze into a tailored suit and there would be no distinction between your self and the newly pressed one that came from the cleaners, like your grandfather's laundry in Denver with the folding machines you demanded to see at each visit, even after the business shut for good.



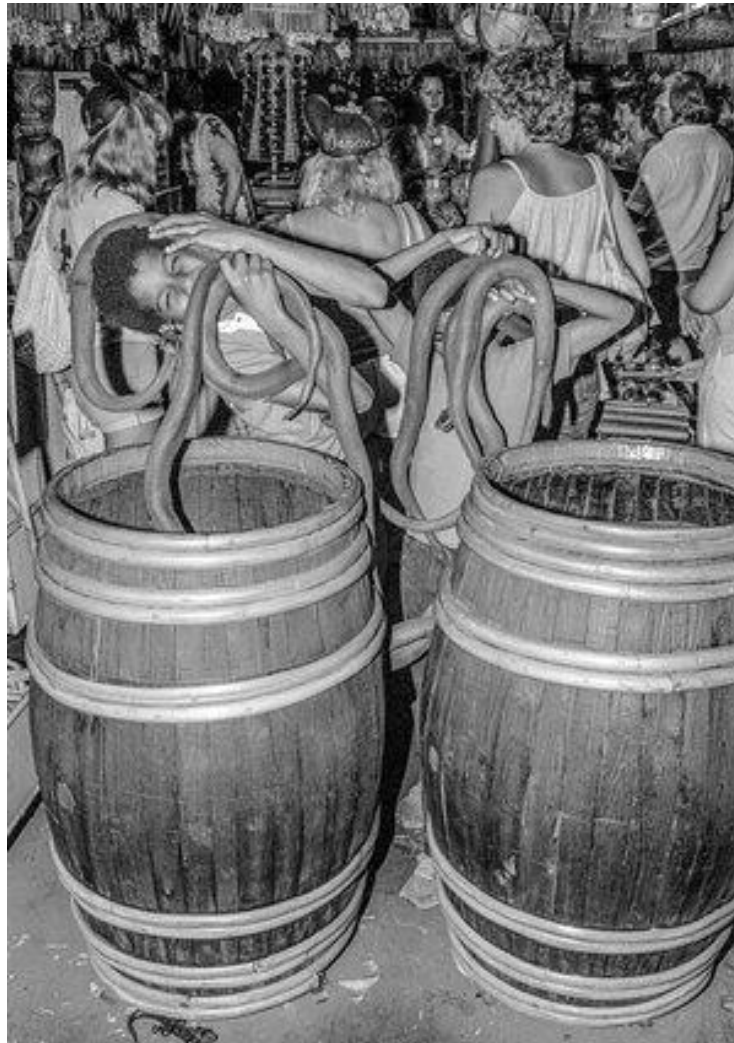
1999 Berkeley

You might invent or operate machines yet to be invented, only an arm's-length from your life-partner.



1972 San Gabriel

Study herpetology, a lover in the best sense,
of words, that is, of paradisal lore.
Or merely cultist in the worst, I guess.



1980 Anaheim

And maybe you would heap up mountains of monographs or Fulbright scholars, verse as otiose as zucchini in August, or shovel dirt out of the hole like in the movies and back into the hole and out again like a good citizen.



1972 Anza Borego

You will stand before your admirers, like James's inexistent instructor of music. You will pretend they listen as they always have, you think.

All will go like clockwork.



2013 San Francisco

For finally it did not matter what you said to them
or what you said to anyone.

You could be talking of Plato or Cicero,
type-casting, or the mating habits of the blue-footed booby
and it would be all the same to them

the same to anyone.



2012 San Francisco

IV. *LE CHARME DISCRET*

And so life went on, and work went on at least for the vast majority, excepting those who died, of course, or at least it went on in the life you wrote in the obit, where you filled in the blanks while taking your ease in the very complacency of things, that life depicted in the paintings of and imagined by your grandparents, the shoulders of the women bared, the servants barely out of view.



1986 San Francisco

The highlights noted in the occasional verse they wrote:

How lovely to see a frog! they penned,
a bird misnamed in the bird-book.



2008 San Francisco

Oh, to doff one's hat, ignored as a dinner-guest.



1993 Calistoga

How heart-felt the thrill of the seascape,



1983 Laguna

the roadway to Modesto.



1972 To Modesto

Their towels now prepped to be folded in thirds for the winter, as the Woman of Today would do at her summerhome, distracting her from the love she had for you.



2016 San Francisco

All that.
The family genealogies.



1981 Ojai

The grandeur of possession.
The very picket fence of things!



2007 San Francisco

And then fuck it
therewasafireintheapartmentonUnionStreet
Where the service wives lined up on the stairwell,
Criedoutinhopesofsavingyou,strippedofwhattheyhad,
Where all your possessions too went up in smoke
Exceptforthedrugsandthewalletstolen
By the pious firemen, screw them I could have used
Atleastthatmoneythen,youthought,thenrealizedNo
'Cuz thanks to them and Revelations From Beyond you
Hadnotlostagoddamnthingandownershipitselfwasbunk.



1993 Sacramento

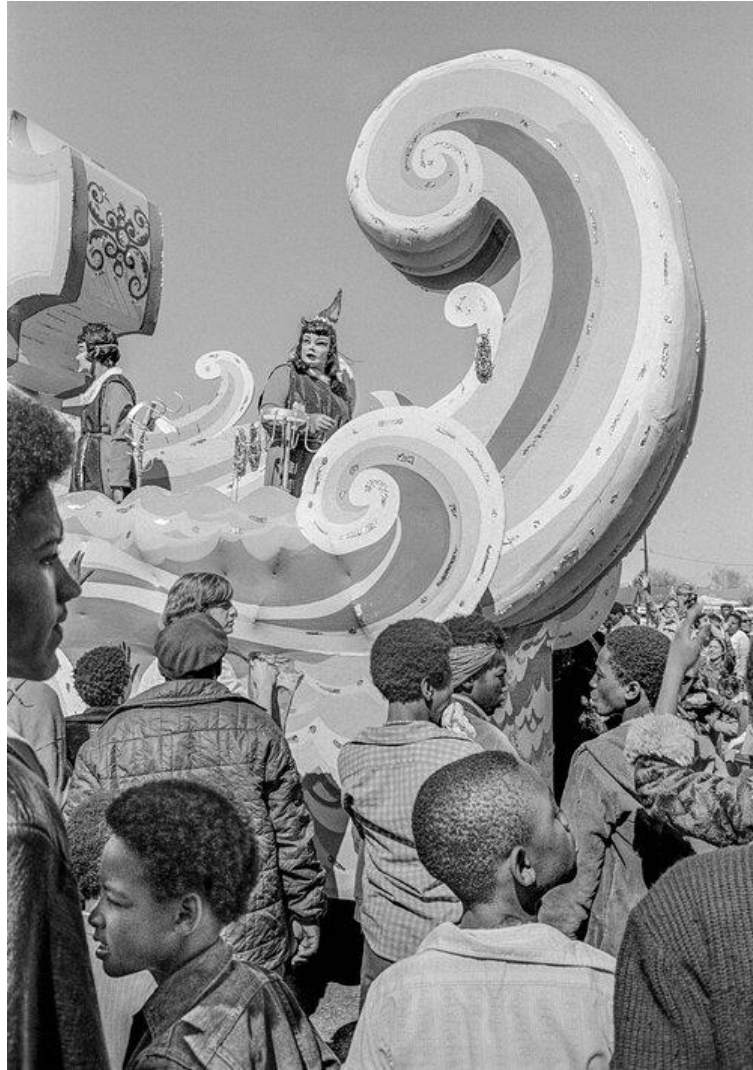
V. *ARS LONGA*

So we danced in the street-lights. Or I did, admiring as others did my Eloise *en pointe* in the street-lights.



1986 Los Angeles

An *entre-chat*, she said it was, posing before the Rose Bowl float in Pasadena as I dropped to my knees in awe of her. It was like pleading for beads at Mardi Gras.



1973 New Orleans

Dancers shape their forms
embody all those silent forms
in the reluctant gazes of the listeners.



1982 Hollywood

How like their suits we watchers are.
Like the patrons of museums.
Like the listeners in the concert hall.
Like the cadre of admirers of the picture frame.



2013 Berkeley

The conductor strides to the podium from the open wing to the perfunctory applause of the celebrants in box-seats.



2007 Mill Valley

The players stand in obedience; it is all the same to them, and all the same to the maestro in his dark suit, nothing more than bows and curtain calls.



1982 San Francisco

But we now know it is not all the same to us. The baton falls and we hear melodies unimagined by the dilettantes, unknown to the performers too, unheard by our loved ones dead in the roadways.



2002 San Francisco

I remember playing years ago in our practice space at home where we played regardless of scores or charts, ignorant of what the notes were, ignorant of theory or history. The chords unsketched on the music stand.



1990 Hollywood

At times we had a grand old time of it. Yet I remember too the empty house at the road house run by the ex-wrestler (an early heel, I think)—not a barfly or pipe-fitter from the Iron Works in the place. We cradled our instruments struck dumb by the silences, shoulders slumped, the beer stuck in the tap, the drumsticks resting on the snare-edge.



2005 San Francisco

And so what?

I would write that we would one day learn to say of this.

So what of what the bourgeois critics say of us.



1993 Granada

That's what I would write
That we would one day cry out to the Philistines.

Who cares that they said Nuts! to the cover charge.



1972 Sacramento

VI. *SI JE T'AIME ...*

And that would be life, but for fires and misfortunes, funerals and sea-burials, unseen photographs and ellipses where the great phrases of the epics fell—all noted in the obit I wrote some sixty years ago. Envious strangers turn to the light in the sitting room, sensing small-talk dampened by the windowpanes. The tasteful paintings centered behind me. All perfectly in place. The cottage at the Colony now buttoned up for the season.



1989 Sacramento

And then things got in the way of all that.



1988 El Cerrito

And I stumbled to her chair across the living room, both of us wasted, and pulled her to the daybed and I dreamed of the memory I had had of us making love on that same bed years earlier.



2009 San Francisco

I closed my eyes and saw my librarian-lover framed in the Carnegie façade in New Orleans, the grand escalier of The Public, the Huntington in San Marino. Her tie still tied as she turns to the camera, ignoring the books we read as our life-work.



2012 San Francisco

All of us now blind to all the *jalousies* of life.
Blind too to all the posing for the camera lens.



2005 Martinez

Perhaps it went like clockwork, as it rarely or never did in life, and certainly did not go when I tried to seduce you that night through the haze of the drugs, and “Rub my back,” she said, and it was like the chess match with Eloise where she claimed I made half the moves for her.



2014 Berkeley

Eloise drives to the gun store, but there was no way you could have known of that when you wrote at age ten and no way you could have known of that on April 5 ten years ago.

It is the last errand she will ever run, and all must go like clockwork.



1996 Los Angeles

The test round shatters the glassware.



2012 Berkeley

CODA: SAILING PAST HOPE I.

And I imagined even then at ten my sailing trips, then freed of safety gear, hull speeds and keel design. No relation to reality.



1984 Vallejo

Maybe I would have us drift past the beachfronts, even rounding the promontory that limited my world as a child in Kennebunk. Hearing stories of Duke, my uncle, father of my cousin Bill, sailing to Antarctica. Remembering scrambling up the cliffs of Great Hill, trying to reach the swallows' nests, while the onlookers look on in admiration of our sailing skills.



1974 Honolulu

I would sense then the south wind coming up at noon, as it so often would, the sails taking on the shapes envisioned by the sailmakers.



1976 Nile River

Sailing then out past the spindle where I sailed with Rose rounding north and east through the islands.



1978 Galveston

Imagining that. Imagining Rose gazing out over the water. Her hands on the pulpit, as instructed, and one foot to windward over the washrail. The wave-crests finally spaced to perfection.



2013 San Francisco

fin



1975. Berkeley



Photo by Philip Davidson

I have never actually met my cousin Bill, although I have admired his work for years. Artist. Photographer. Lives somewhere near San Francisco. Must get up there some day. Maybe with our second cousin once- (or is it twice-?) removed from Colorado! Another relation I met way too late in life.

At some point during the pandemic Bill sent me a copy of *Bill Dane Pictures* ...*it's not pretty* (that quote from Bukowski). I sent something in return, and within a few days, we began to exchange notes. A straight-forward collaboration, I thought. What could be easier than to select a set of these compelling images to illustrate some finished or inchoate narrative? Of course I realized soon that all must be done from scratch: pictures as strong as Bill's can no more serve as ornaments to words than the words can serve that role for images. Banal, I know—but so many revelations in my life have been little more than that

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Joseph Dane
FreeReadPress



Photo by Nancy Dulberg

Joe chooses from my photographs writes his beauty-words sequences does it tech-all !

My pictures are Still Straight Street Photographs
 Amaze Hook Edit Love
 I *with the camera* do fictions
 Now digital camera Digital files edited in Lightroom 5
 To conserve my original sense
 Not multiple-exposures manipulations 50+ years clean

Our life-pieces vitae bs we seem quite *productive *successful *awarded *have us Inside*
 We are who You decide Our book is what You sense
 Cool disconnected paired first-cousins we *Keep On Truckin'... Sailin'...*
 Gift-Culture fellas *small money for our words and pictures*
tuff shit ! lucky we live
 capitalism is savage
 BLACK LIVES MATTER BROWN YOU
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