

BOBBIE LOUISE HAWKINS

Writer, Age 48

Interviewed by Gloria Frym
February 27, 1979, Bolinas, California

When I asked to interview you, you told me you had kept your writing private for many years. What did you mean by that?

I mean that there's a formative period, when what you want is to arrive at an originality that isn't an invention of originality. And I don't mean originality like, gee, this is great, nobody's done this before. I mean originality like origins. I believe that thought activates thought, that writing activates writing. Some people say that real life activates art, but I think that art activates art. I'm thoroughly in favor of people keeping their writing to themselves for years, until they're good enough to go public.

Are you suggesting that a person who wants to make art might put themself through an apprenticeship?

Yes, and the person to apprentice yourself to is yourself.

What were you doing during your years of apprenticeship?

When I was married to Bob (Creeley), I met a lot of writers and a lot of people who were involved in his work. One of the reasons that Bob and I got together was out of a mutual concern with

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ROBERT THOMAS HARRIS

BOBBIE LOUISE HAWKINS/2

articulation. We spent millions of hours around endless kitchen tables all over the world talking. The conversations would not be specifically about writing usually, but I think they fed those aspects of my nature that was in fact the writer in me. I have always wanted the world articulated, it isn't that I feel more secure because I can have a name on everything like Adam, but that for me, articulation itself is a sensual experience. If you're a word person, talking is as sensual as color is to a painter. Since I had that appetite as a reader all my life, then I had it as a talker, the next natural move was to be a writer!

During that period of time, you were known as a visual artist...

When I was young, it was thought that I was going to become a painter.

Did you think of yourself that way?

Yes, and I also thought of myself as a person who had chosen between being a painter and a writer, very early on, when I was about sixteen.

Did you pursue painting on a formal basis?

When I was nineteen, I married the first time. I was going to the University of New Mexico and had been in the painting department for six weeks. I was completely broke and couldn't pay the second half of my tuition and I met this Dane who started giving me lunch

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and proposing. I told him I didn't love him and he said that was okay. Two weeks later, we were on a Greyhound bus out of town. What a sophisticated possibility for a nineteen year old girl from a very poor family. We went to Denmark to live with his family. His father was in charge of all the Danish police forces. A complete shift of social circumstances for me. Then we went to London and for a year I studied art at the Slade.

Were you painting throughout the marriage?

Somewhat, though we moved around a lot. We lived in Belize for two and a half years. I did volunteer art lessons at the missionary schools. And of course, I had a rather grand notion of myself. Then we went to Japan and I did some radio work and some acting. When I lived in Albuquerque, I had originally used acting to get rid of my Texas accent, part of my self-improvement regime.

Then you tried other arts?

Well, I don't know how involved I was in the actual art of acting. There's this curious behavior that's particularly available to women. It's the kind of behavior that makes little girls stand in the middle of the room and recite. Women get a lot of good feedback on that little flash. There's a particular predilection in Southern families toward encouraging the girls to perform. It's thought to be quite charming. When the girl grows up, she thinks that that cute performance is the same as opting for art.

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Did you have any ⁱⁿ _^ tention of becoming an actress?

I don't think so. I think it was just part of my self-cultivation program. After acting in Japan, I came back to the States to get a divorce and got a job as a disk jockey in Albuquerque.

Were you painting at that time?

Well, every time I painted it was bad. The ones I can remember were terrible. Romantic and crummy and imitative. I could draw pretty well. I wasn't very actively painting anyway, I was just trying to make a living for me and my kids. I worked in an ad agency, then a television station. That just about ruined me. I started reading Kafka at the same time. To be doing something as abstract as selling television time and reading Kafka just about made me think I was gone crazy. I got it into my mind that the earth's crust might be very thin wherever I was going to put my next footstep.

Did you have any aspirations to become a great painter?

I had them, but then my attitudes about myself were always highflown. What I lacked was resources. I had been riding on the resources of the Dane. Plus the jobs I had to take required total attention and time and I hated them, so they exhausted me. When I wasn't working, I was with my kids. So I was being completely used up. My art began to float into the background as mistaken aspiration.

Is that the way you thought of your painting?

I thought of myself as a person who was hanging fire, who was having to deal with this practical aspect of my life and perhaps sometime in the future there'd be another possibility, you know. My mother's people are farmers, and none of them went beyond the fifth grade. And they're all very practical. There were times when my mother was working as a waitress and we'd have like 10¢ worth of cheese and a 5¢ box of crackers and that'd be our food for the day. And I had rickets. And my history was very classic. When you've been that poor, it puts a level of fear in you and makes you very practical. So much so that even now when I make any money, it immediately goes toward whatever the next thing is that has to be done on this place. I'm always thinking about how I can get this place into shape because it gives me my living. When I applied for a N.E.A. grant, I thought, great, that's \$10,000 I could use to do some of the work on the house!

Were you writing during the time you were married to Creeley?

Yes. But to be a beginning writer in the context of people who are accomplished writers would have been an embarrassing situation for me.

They weren't accomplished when you first started living with Creeley, were they?

Oh yes. When Bob and I first met, he wasn't famous, but he'd already taught at Black Mountain. He was already a person who was recognized as interesting by persons such as Pound and Williams!

What was your feeling about your writing during that time?

I wanted to improve myself. I didn't want to be public until I could be competently public. I was already public enough. Being Bob Creeley's wife meant that people who paid attention to him would include me in that attention. Actually, I had a lot of people treating me better than they would have treated me normally. It's a very confusing situation for any woman married to a famous man. I was writing some, but my personal inclination has always been to achieve some level of expertise privately before I make it manifest. It's like what musicians call woodshedding. Nothing worse than a musician who can't keep the chord changes right... But writers tend to go public very fast.

Why is that?

Well, the implication is that there's inherent worth in the subjective aspect of writing. You don't question feeling. Incompetencies in the work are thought to be above criticism.

You sound as if you had a well-defined critical judgment of writing before you became public about it.

Well, first of all there was the fear aspect of going public.

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I was afraid I would make a fool of myself! In terms of my life, over and over, I've saved myself by having an ability to conceptualize and imagine. I was an only child and I was reading as soon as I was able to and creating possibility off that reading. I was creating what might be me as a future person, ahead of myself, as art tends to be, but thinking of it as myself.

Is that a kind of self-censorship?

I think it's a notion of the ideal. What is it that makes a sculptor look at a shape and think of it as not right? The implication is that somehow that the sculptor has not achieved the ideal shape the thing was meant to be. You've got to get a piece of art as close to your personal projection as possible for it to have any validity. That is extra to what social attitudes will say about it. The thing you make has got to have validity in your eyes first.

That takes a person who has a firm sense of herself, in order to be self-validating...

Well, you see, that's one advantage to being a late bloomer. The older you are, the more you can have a sense of yourself. For some people, such a sense of themselves proves destructive. But my personal prejudices are in favor of honing in on a particular energy. And I adore people who do that, I love cranks, so long as they've got some degree of expertise. I like to be around persons who've opted for their own and gone for it. That's the

sense of originality I was talking about, not that there's no one else doing it. What you do is not original unless you've managed to come by this interior validity that allows you to arrive at your own origins. Williams says, culture is still/ the effect of cultivation/to work with a thing/until it be rare. And that takes compulsion. I don't believe you can have artists unless you have compulsives, because you don't get any rewards back in the early stages.

When did you come to this interior validation and acknowledge to yourself that you were a writer, that you had the stuff and wanted to publish it?

When I was forty.

You were still living with Creeley then. That means you've been sitting on your writing for a long time?

Yeah.

Why suddenly at age forty?

I think it's what happens to a lot of people at age thirty. They realize that time is passing, that if they're ever going to make a statement, they'd better get on with it. You come to a point when you don't like the idea of living the rest of your life without making yourself more overt about what you truly

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care for. I didn't feel it when I was thirty. And according to the brainwash, it's downhill after forty. So I thought, if that's so, then I'm really in trouble because everything I'd done was still internalized, even though I had pages of it. That refers to the visual art work as much as to the writing. What I did was get together a folio of work and a book of poems. And I went to the city and got a piece of a show in a gallery.

Did you have to beat some doors down?

No, I just asked a gallery owner to look at my stuff. The same day I was there, I watched the owner reject a young man who had come in with his slides. That's enough to make you bitter, experiencing rejection at the same time you're trying to get your chops up!

How have you dealt with that?

I never had to with my visual art. The place where the work was happening was never confused in my mind with the showing. But with my writing, it was very hard for me, because I am a process person. It's tough for me to drop the curtain and say, this is now finished and ready to be published. It's like having to deal with your own residue. You just have to make the next move. The first thing was to make it overt that I was writing and that happened in Bolinas. Bolinas gave me a context in which I could surface. I was finally in the

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midst of enough people who were all writing, and they were writing unevenly. A part of what happened was that Joanne Kyger and I and others used to get together to read what we'd been working on. We wanted to get out from under that big cliff hanger that art is. We brought work in process.

Did you ever have to push your writing? How did you get published?

I got published by my friends. I think if you're in any kind of company, your company expands the word that you're good. You sure can't depend upon somebody telling you you're good! The work can't be peddled. Sometimes people come up to me after a reading and say they've been writing and have 150 poems and want to publish a book and how should they do it. I can immediately say I'm the last person to ask because I was a late bloomer and my friends found me.

But getting some recognition also feeds the ability to work. Are you saying that breaking out of obscurity comes naturally if you're any good?

If you get to be good, other people will promote you. It's like Ginsberg carrying Kerouac's book in his pack. The word spreads. By good, I don't mean you have to be a world shaker. The ones who flash high are rare. Just getting to be so that you're a pleasure to read is rare.

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who flash high are rare. That getting to be so that you're a
pleasure to read is rare.

Would you also say that judgment about the quality of your own work comes naturally?

Yes. Normally when you begin anything, you're like Alice in Wonderland, you're floating in that ocean and history is what floats by. You see no landmarks in sight. You're incapable of discriminating whether your work is any good or not because you're young at it.

You can't really see your own primacy?

Right. Then you begin to arrive at discrimination. What makes judgment an unnatural act are things like college classes, where you are forced to read a book with an end in view, not for the sake of reading. Instead of being taught how to discriminate good writing from bad, you are being pre-empted from the good of a piece of literature a lot of the time. A good piece of writing will pick you up and carry you along. But you'll feel you've just finished making a mistake, oh hell, you'll say, I just read twenty pages and I didn't take notes and I didn't pay attention to what was happening between the characters. Suddenly you become guilty that you got sucked into the work. This guilt retards your ability to discriminate. I think that writers are people who have been readers. And one dilemma in a classroom situation is that you get forced to read authors you're not ready for and make judgments you're not ready to make. That's when you get bored and turn off, to writing and reading.

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What once bored you when you were younger and now holds your attention?

The first time I read Virginia Woolf and the first time I read Henry James, I absolutely hated them. Henry James bored me for years. He was one of those writers I kept pushing myself on, because so many people I respected adored him. Now, they didn't get any points by insisting on James. It was clear they were getting an experience off James that I couldn't. Every time I picked him up I thought he was dull, dry, and told me far more than I wanted to know.

How does a writer tell you more than you want to know?

Well, you have a tedium threshold. When someone tells you more than your threshold is capable of bearing, you're bored. That doesn't mean that you're making a value judgment relative to the thing. A lot of things have bored me, but what was really going on was that I couldn't grasp them! Of course, I didn't know that at the time I started trying to read James. There's a Texas phrase for how I felt... "I've enjoyed about as much of this as I can stand."

Do you think there's such a thing as premature education, that the mind just isn't prepared, at certain points, to accomodate certain ideas or styles?

Oh yes. I do believe that different people are capable of enjoying different things in different sequences. It's your own sequence

difficult things in difficult situations. It is a long and arduous
of law. I do believe that excellent people are subjects of enjoyment

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that becomes important. It's part of the self-validation I was talking about. Since I wasn't educated in the traditional way, in the course of reading things that fascinated me, I'd read right past things I had no understanding of. I don't know how it happened, or how it continues to happen, but I think of my mind as a larger filter than my understanding. Every so often I hit upon a new piece of information and suddenly I click, I can just feel the geography of my mind adjust itself. Information that I still don't understand is still holding itself in my mind in layers.

You're a person who would obviously encourage a long gestation period in preparation for making art?

Yes. Just because you're capable of the experience of art doesn't mean you've already arrived. You muddy up your condition thinking that. I think that a lot of bad writing comes when people believe that as soon as they opt to be an artist, they've made it, that everything they do is art. You have to think of much of what you do as throw-away, or at least, you have to think, this is not the final product, this is sharpening up my goods. That's what I mean about a period of apprenticeship. The great thing you can do in pictures that's much harder to do in writing is to do the same thing over and over again, to draw the same image until you're finally so bored that your system refuses to tolerate it and finally says, oh my god, I'm not going to make that particular curve again. That's when you come up with something new! When you stop feeling satisfied and start feeling nauseous and force

yourself to come up with a new image. It's like that fairy tale in Grimm's, of the sister whose brothers were turned to swans. The sister was not allowed to speak for the length of time it would take her to haul in nettles and weave them into fabric and make the fabric into coats for her brothers. When she had made seven of these coats, she could speak. By that time, she'd been married to the king and it was decided that she was a witch. She was tied to the stake and they were going to burn her alive, when suddenly the seven swans come flying down. The sister has the seven coats with her and she throws them over her shoulder and the swans turn into young men and now everybody understands! That's the mythic time required to let what's supposed to, come true. That time exists mythically within yourself, with you as your own protagonist. And you will not be good until you are. En route to it, you will be unevenly good. And that's what sustains you. You simply have to develop and there's no shortcuts.

Given the historical circumstances of women, do you think it's harder or different for women to live with the unevenness, the insecurities of making art?

I think the thing that's hardest for women is marriage and children. I think that small children demand and deserve a lot of time. Some women can take that on and sail through it. I think if a woman is going to be an artist, she should seriously question traditional domestic relationships. A few men are able to share in family life

and not assume that the woman is going to carry the load. But then there's still the physiological imperative, the pregnancy, the breast feeding. When you feed any creature, that creature responds to you differently from the other persons around who aren't feeding it.

Is that why you choose to live alone now?

Well, my children are grown. I stopped living in a ^{standard} 'family' arrangement three years ago. If my energies were being used up by small children, I'd see no possibility for work. The fact that I'm living alone is absolutely crucial to me. It means that the only energies I'm expending are practical daily ones and those toward my work. Even any idea of romance at this point would be a catastrophe!

Do you really think it's necessary to keep yourself monkish in order to make art?

The surface look of it is asceticism. The fact of it is trying to get priorities on my energy. When romance was part of my life and I was making children, I continued to be a dilettante at the things I wanted to do.

What do you mean dilettante?

I mean, without art being a major commitment in my life. Actually, if you keep maintaining this dilettantism while you're raising

or

if you have any information about the activities of the group, please contact me.

I would appreciate your help and cooperation in this matter. Thank you.

With best regards,

Yours truly,

and I am looking forward to your reply. I am sure that you will be of great help to me in this matter. Please let me know if you need any further information.

In order to take care of

the work, it is necessary to have some more information.

Before you can do that,

you need to know what the situation is. I am sure that you will be able to help me in this matter. Please let me know if you need any further information. I am sure that you will be of great help to me in this matter. Please let me know if you need any further information.

It is very important to have this information.

Thank you for your help.

I am sure that you will be of great help to me in this matter. Please let me know if you need any further information. I am sure that you will be of great help to me in this matter. Please let me know if you need any further information.

Thank you.

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Do you see any hope for a woman who wants to both create a family and art?

Only in rare circumstances. The women of the past who flashed free socially got better goods going than the women who stuck to social convention, right? But they were declass . They chose not to be circumscribed. Now a woman can do all kinds of things and the question of declass  doesn't exist. You aren't beyond the pale of social understanding if you have lovers.

Well, then it's limitless now, isn't it? There are no boundaries to behavior...

Well, but see, all that is only what men have always had. All I can tell you is what I did. Most of my young life was involved with my children. Throughout that time I continued to believe, in the back of my head, that I was some kind of artist. That belief was essential to my sense of myself. But my guess is that an artist has to go it alone.

What about women who want to stay in a family situation?

Well, here's a funny negative turnabout. You see a man and woman marry and she raises the kids mainly and he works on his art.

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Well, here's a funny negative turnaround. You see a man and woman marry and she raises the kids mainly and he works on his art.

They get to be in their thirties and he's put in enough time to be producing something that actually has value in the world. At this point she begins to want to develop other aspects of her nature. Say that he tries to change. Say that he tries by doing things domestically that keep him from doing this thing that he does well and that's already defined. What she's doing is equivalent to a kid taking ballet lessons because maybe some day she'll become a great dancer. This syndrome creates a lot of buffoonery. There's got to be a larger overall notion of what the possibilities are.

But who knows how much she can develop, given the chance?

The question is not that the woman doesn't deserve to get on with it. The question is, if she's with somebody who's actually arrived at an advanced level, should that be sacrificed? It could go the other way too. It just so happens that one thing the traditional social structure does do is allow the man to get on with his stuff while the woman's taking care of the kids. But to hold it against him, that she spent the time raising kids, is trashy. You know, the Hopi say we're in the Fourth World, the world of turning, in which we come from the depths and we can now start the turn that lets us go back to heaven. So we're in a U now. And in the Fourth World, all good and evil are present. In the Fourth World, no matter what you deserve, you're only gonna get what you're capable of asking for. You have to be able to somehow create the concept of your desires. My sense is that you can only do that one at a time, by yourself.

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Then women have to create a social structure that allows them to get on with their stuff...a pretty big order considering there aren't too many models to go on...

As soon as you know you require something, it's up to you to get it. Nobody is going to give it to you. Nobody's going to give it to men either. If you know what your needs are, you're already lucky. If you don't go fill them, but choose to describe that lack of filling as some social disorder, you're begging the issue.

But isn't that part of the problem for many women?

That they haven't known their needs, that the knowing has been blurred and unclear?

Well, it's true, women have been shelved to domesticize and men have been shoved into the world. Neither are such great values. But now women have one major task: how to get out of the house and into the world. If you wanted to be an astronaut, you'd have to learn how to be an astronaut. You have to learn how to identify your needs. For a woman who wants to be an artist, getting into the world is just one more thing to learn. The task for men is to learn to get out of the world. Once I was in Boston visiting Denise Levertov. Denise was packing up her jail kit because she was going to be involved in an act of civil disobedience the next day and she knew she'd be arrested. She said that the last time she was put in jail for civil disobedience, the men were in a distressed frame of mind and the

circumstances, the men were in a state of confusion and the
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was seen through the window;

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women felt strong. When they were in jail, the women had been very tender and caring toward one another, understanding when one was experiencing pain. The men had dealt with the jail situation very stoically. They hadn't created an atmosphere of tenderness. Now, tenderness is a skill. And it's just one more. So Denise said, obviously the men are going to have to work on that! The skill of getting out into the world looks tough because women have always had home to go back to. For some men, getting into the house is trying because the world feels safer for them!

Do you think women, in general, write differently than men?

I don't know. I think the artist defines the art. I think everybody writes differently from everybody.

But as a whole, given the female experience of childbearing, and so forth...

That's only experience. Sure experience is everything. If you aren't having those experiences, you'd be having others. But you have to stay away from righteous dogma or blame. You can think in dogma forever. The dilemma with dogma is that you have to stay still for it. If you're trying to get better at your art, how can you stay still for even a piece of dogma? If you start focusing on your experience to describe why it is

It was a great pleasure to meet you and to
hear from you. I am glad to hear that you
are well and hope you are enjoying your
time. I am sure you will have a very
successful trip. I am looking forward to
seeing you again. I am sure you will
have a very good time. I am sure you will
have a very good time. I am sure you will
have a very good time.

With love,
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Your affectionate friend,
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I am sure you will have a very good time.

I am sure you will have a very good time.

With love,
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Your affectionate friend,
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With love,
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that you're not the person you want to be, where's that? You're not a person extra to the person you are now that you should have put your efforts into instead! Your experience is just that, you've got to get on with it. You know what Sarah Bernhart's motto was--it's one French word and it means "despite."

So for you, experience is like an excuse, if you use it to apologize for your deficiencies?

More than that. It can turn you into a politicizer of your event, when you didn't mean that. You can sit around wondering, well, why am I so bad when I wanted to be so good. Why am I such a lousy writer when I know the difference between good writing and bad writing? My feeling is that you're gonna be a bad writer until you're a good one anyway. If you start filling in the slack with descriptions of why you're not what you want to be, it's gonna take you longer to get better. And meantime, you'll get bitter!

In one of your stories, you shun disillusionment, by saying that 'pain is the least interesting part' of experience.

I think some people use disillusionment to defend how they've worked themselves into a dark corner. Life used to be more fun and now it isn't and what happened. They decide that their past

innocence, that feeling of delight they once had, is gone. But all they've really done is covered themselves over with stuff that isn't akin to their nature really. Their own nature is so obscured that all their energy goes into carrying around that extra stuff. Sometimes they opt for comfort instead of their own particularities. Apollinaire said that one cannot go about forever carrying the corpse of one's father. Once you realize that you're hopelessly lost, that you've got this weird grief in you that's sort of stuck in you because you really wanted it to be apple pie forever and suddenly you're a responsible person now, you can't allow yourself to be resentful. At some point you have to stop leaning on your 'unhappy childhood'. And you know something, the people I care for and find interesting all seem to have had unhappy childhoods! It's no longer considered a disadvantage!

Why do you choose to live in Bolinas?

One reason is that I don't have to explain myself here. I've been in this community for eight years and I don't have to go through preliminaries with people here. I don't have to deal with talking to a man and a woman and when it's her turn to talk, she looks at him and he talks. I don't have to wonder if a guy thinks I'm coming on to him as a response to my natural intensity.

Do you have these problems when you're traveling?

Well, as soon as somebody starts questioning me in their mind and I get that subliminal reflection, as soon as somebody has a negative attitude toward me, I'll believe it. If somebody gives me a compliment, I'll think it's because they're feeling good that day. I don't know what it is.

You don't appear nervous, you seem so self-possessed...

A part of that is staying in places where I feel secure. If I go out into the world, it's with a definition already laid onto me, even a partial definition as a poet. But the partial definition lets me off the hook. You see, when I live my daily day, my friends, or at least many of them, are present here. I like getting adjacent to people in a daily way. Another thing is that I can get flashy in Bolinas, do a performance, and the next day it just fades back into ordinary life. Now it fades everywhere, people come up after a performance and they tell you how great you are and the next day you wake up feeling as if you've lost two-thirds of your substance. And it's just you again. But here I can get back into normal goods immediately.

Doesn't a small town make you feel claustrophobic?

Not really. You see, a point that Valéry makes is that as artists get progressively more defined in their work, they get further and further out on a limb. That's why I think it's essential to pay particular thought to what your daily goods are gonna be. Especially in my case, I need to be around a

small group of people, since I don't live with my family anymore.

What are some of your stumbling blocks as a writer?

I'm bad structuring my daily life. That's something new to me because when the kids were around, they got me out of bed and through breakfast and that started the structure of the day. Also I tend to constellate, that's an advantage, but I can easily be enticed into doing stuff that isn't writing.

How do you deal with the fact of being alone after living with others for so many years?

Well, I think it's part of the condition of choosing to be an artist. You realize you're moving into something that looks progressively more lonely. The more particular you are, the lonelier you'll be. And it's fear of loneliness that will make a person choose not to make art. But very often you can deal with loneliness consciously, by increasing the richness of your input. One real problem when you're creating is that you're in an output situation. You can simply drain yourself and go around like an Appalachian vitamin deficient. But writers are in an enormously advantaged situation because books are almost always available. When you get lonely, you've got to remember what your original dope was, reading.

And, as you said earlier, conversation. Do you find enough people to talk with?

Well, it's hard, but it's important to remember that as you grow more articulate, you're not always going to be in the midst of articulation that feeds *into* your content. I don't find that many people who want to talk that much. If I get around other writers, the conversation becomes circumscribed sometimes. In terms of your own writing, when you're really trying to get onto your own thought processes, if you try to share them, they might get bounced. I once let a book get dissolved in the void. I made several poems out of an idea and the work got reinforced almost too much. When I tried to create this book, every time I would come to the poems, they would have that weird shimmy of knowing that people liked them. It's so hard to read past a line when it's been handled, you know. Eventually I let the book dissolve because I became an enthusiast over the original poems.

Do you experience cycles when you can't work?

Oh yes. I go way up and way down. Those cyclical states of despair come back on you whether you're producing anything or not, whether you're being an artist or not. It happens to everybody. I get into one of those downs when I'm too depressed to make the kind of move to get out. I'll hit one of those downs when I'm perfectly capable of going to bed for a week and just doping out reading the TV Guide. Then there will be a point where I have the thought, I'd feel better if I got up and played my guitar. Of course, remembering you can help yourself is the first step up. You've already made the turn.

Did you experience cycles like that when you were living with your family?

Sure. And one thing about the family circumstance is that those cycles get battered back and forth. The cycles of the people around you bounce off one another.

What have been some of your writing problems?

Well, for years, my inclination has been to say whatever I had to say on the page succinctly. But I used to feel guilty about that. When I was working on pictures, I wouldn't paint anything for months and then suddenly I'd create thirty pieces. And then I'd feel guilty again. I used to think that producing things so quickly and so in bulk had no value. I mean, the final thing does or doesn't hold its own, but I bought that brainwash that a picture worked on for three years was inherently valuable. When I started writing, my problem was how in god's name can I write 100 pages? Suddenly I'd have told one major aspect of the story in a paragraph! For a while I thought that a story had to be between five and seven pages! I started reading Fielding Dawson and Richard Brautigan. I used them to validate a feeling I'd had that there's no such thing as a theme before you get there and there's no such thing as a size.

But surely you must have some idea of what you're doing when you sit down to write? Some intention?

Yes, but that's different. One of the things I'm talking about is muscles. Once I went to a lady psychiatrist who said that the reason I was afraid of making decisions was that every decision I was faced with was cataclysmic and huge. And I just didn't have my muscles up for making decisions. She told me, every time you get a chance, make specifically low risk decisions and build up the muscles. In writing, you have to work on your allowance muscles. However it works is the it of it. You're going to do it that way, in order to find out what it is that you do. Because you don't really know what you do until you begin to have a panorama of your work. The worst thing in the world is to have an attitude prior to your doing, that influences the doing, so that what you see over and over is a reiteration of the attitude that you had before you began to do!

You're talking about some sort of intuitive trust in your abilities, that self-validation again...

Yes. The writing is ahead of your thought. And you're the first reader of it. I read my work, loving Lawrence, Conrad, Dreiser and suddenly I'm looking at what I just wrote and it's trash! I think, next to them, this doesn't hold up! That's a problem! But somehow, you've got to extricate yourself from what it was that made you a writer to begin with, namely that you adored reading or that you have heroes. Franz Kline once said that there was a point where he realized that his shapes, the ones that look like gigantic brush strokes, that those were his shapes, and it was an enormous disappointment

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to him. His heroes' shapes were in his mind and they were apparently not available to him. He didn't say that his were inferior, only that these are my shapes, and wow, I thought they'd be closer to where my taste is! But to accept that in yourself! That's something!

How did you come to go on the road with your work?

Well, I like to perform. There was a point about two years ago that I wanted to be more active. I knew that if I left it up to somebody else to invite me to do something, it was never quite the way I wanted it. I wanted to travel, so I thought about who would I particularly like to travel with. The first thing I thought, I didn't want to be the only one who knew how to cook and be effective. I wanted to travel with women who had some level of expertise, who if there was a car crash and everybody but one person was disabled, that one person could deal with it. I happened to know just the right people, who wanted to spend some but not all of their time on the road. Terry Garthwaite and Rosalie Sorrels were perfect. They're experienced performers and competent individuals.

How do you feel about the combination of performance and literature?

It's great. One of the reasons I love it is that two parts music gives a respite from poetry. Performance is an ideal

way to deal with the problem of not having many personal relationships. When you're not having relationships in depth, you don't ever get used up enough. When I'm performing I get to come out on stage and just pour everything I can think of into it, as powerfully as I can. And then I walk away and I haven't made a twenty year commitment! And I get used up! And it's fun, great fun.

How has performing and touring affected your writing?

don't know, but it makes me have a more interesting life!

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And you've been performing and touring and writing your writings?

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