

We Pass This Way But Once

~ by Les Gorn

Life is short, they say, and art long.
Could be.

Below, alphabetically: seven of fourteen Monterey Bay Area writers and poets of the '40's, '50's and '60's, most of them long gone.

Next week: the other seven.

JEAN ARISS, Monterey, married to artist Bruce Ariss. Intimates of John Steinbeck and Doc Ricketts in the '40's, the two built their multi-storied Huckleberry Hill house, room by room, largely out of driftwood cast up by the sea and scrap material scrounged from hither and thither. Though the years, their home — and that of poet John Smithback, next door — begot memorable parties and potluck dinners. The wine of choice: gallon jugs of Gallo, the two-buck Chuck of its day.

The larger-than-life protagonist of Jean's first novel, "The Quick Years," was modeled on Monterey's Ward Moore, widely acknowledged as one of the country's most imaginative science fiction writers of the time as well as one of the most profanely abusive-abrasive-explosive men in the history of civilization.

It was Ward who taught Jean her craft. Daily, she sat a desk opposite his, near the bucket on the floor that caught the drip-drip-drip from Ward's leaky ceiling. Now and then, she would pass some newly written pages to him. In due course, he would peruse them, scrawl some comments, then return them. The comments ranged from "confused," "thin," "trite," "banal" and "dishonest" to a grudging "almost literate."

In 1991, the Ariss house — once described by John Steinbeck as "an achievement defying modern architecture" — caught fire and burned to the ground. Spontaneous fund-raising by friends and neighbors powered the lift-off to reconstruction.

SAUL ALINSKY, Carmel Highlands, was the author of "Reveille for Radicals," long regarded by labor leaders, community organizers and politicians as a classic handbook for activists and agitators of all stripes. Alinsky spent a lifetime organizing the poor and powerless of Chicago, New York, Kansas City, Detroit, Los Angeles and Oakland. I'd never heard of Alinsky until I was invited to share an afternoon with him at the Highlands house he'd rented, a stone's throw from the homes of novelist-screenwriter Alan Marcus, attorney-activist Bill Stewart, artist Ephraim Doner and his wife, cooperative nursery school founder Rosa Doner; folksinger/activists Joan Baez and her sister, Mimi Farina; writer/folksinger Richard Farina; and the storied Williams clan (Grand Lady Cynthia, ornithologist Laidlaw, Post Toasties heiress Abby Lou, novelist Mona, and Carmel bookstore owner Henry Meade Williams.)

I don't remember the specifics of our discussion that afternoon. What I do remember is its tenor.

As far back as 1946, Alinsky had embraced what virtually all liberals of the time regarded as anathema: that the U.S. was riven by class warfare. The "eternal war" against poverty, misery, disease, injustice and despair, Alinsky said, was not an intellectual debate. There were no rules of fair play.

Alinsky's final book, "Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals," put it even more bluntly. "The Prince," he said, was written by Machiavelli for the Haves on how to hold power. "Rules for Radicals" was written for the Have-Nots on how to take it away.

William F. Buckley regarded Alinsky as "very close to being an organizational genius." Playboy magazine described him as "one of the great American leaders of the non-socialist left." Alinsky's organizing skills are widely believed to have inspired both Barack Obama's years as a community organizer and his 2008 campaign strategy for the Presidency.

He won the Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award in 1969.

ERIC BARKER, poet/author of "A Ring of Willows." A key member of the Big Sur community (along with novelist Henry Miller, sculptors Harry Dick Ross and Gordon Newall, and artists Emile Norman



and Emil White), Barker politely declined Senator Fred Farr's nomination as California's Poet Laureate because he believed that a poet should not write poems either to glorify the inglorious or commemorate upon request. Too, he once declined to review a best-selling book for the San Francisco Examiner because (he said) it was written by a non-writer. He did agree, though, to review a slim volume of poetry by — if memory serves — Kenneth Rexroth.

ROBERT BRADFORD, Pacific Grove writer/activist. Brad was co-author — with Ward Moore — of a novel, "Caduceus Wild," and author of numerous articles in left wing journals.

His best work — a literary novel memorably exploring the classic you-can't-go-home-again theme — was written after a long visit to his boyhood home in Delta, Colorado. Turned down by several prestigious publishers, the manuscript then was unaccountably lost.

Today, even its title is forgotten. But key scenes and characters are still vivid in my memory, half a century and tons of manuscripts later — one true test, I think, of literary merit.

RICHARD FARINA, writer/musician/folksinger, a relatively recent immigrant to the Monterey Bay area. He did not arrive here until 1963.

After his marriage to folksinger Carolyn Hester fell apart, the 23-year-old Farina married folksinger Mimi Baez — Joan's sister, 17 — in Paris. The two rented a cabin in Carmel Highlands. There, Farina resumed work on a first novel as well as on the guitar-dulcimer duets he performed with Mimi. The couple's debut at a Big Sur folk music festival won them a record contract and a subsequent tour that solidified their newfound fame.

Shortly afterward, Farina completed his gonzo-esque novel, "Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me," a Kerouacian cult classic described by novelist Thomas Pynchon (the best man at Farina's wedding) as "coming on like the Hallelujah Chorus done by 200 kazoo players with perfect pitch... hilarious, chilling, sexy, profound, maniacal, beautiful and outrageous, all at the same time."

At a party in Carmel Valley celebrating the publication of the novel and Mimi's 21st birthday, a guest offered to give Farina a ride on his Harley. The bike was travelling at an estimated 90 miles an hour when it strayed off Carmel Valley Road and plummeted through a barbed wire fence into a field. The driver survived.

Farina's grave, marked with a peace sign, is in Monterey City Cemetery.

His poetry and short stories, collected by his widow, were published as "Long Time Coming" and "Long Time Gone." Among his best known songs: "Pack up Your Sorrows" (co-written with Pauline Marden, the third Baez sister), "Birmingham Sunday" (the theme song of Spike Lee's "Four Little Girls," sung by Joan Baez), "The Quiet Joys of Brotherhood," "Reno, Nevada" and "Morgan, the Pirate."

Joan Baez "Sweet Sir Galahad" commemorates her brother-in-law's life and work.



ROBINSON JEFFERS, a Carmel poet/environmentalist with a towering reputation. I never so much as glimpsed the man, and I know no one who did. Perhaps he preferred the solitude of his stone aerie and its magnificent view of the sea to close contact with the specks on the beach.

MARTIN FLAVIN, a playwright and novelist who won the 1944 Pulitzer prize for "Journey in the Dark," was an extraordinarily prolific writer. Between 1920 and 1962, he wrote four screenplays, six novels, twelve Broadway plays and thirteen books of non-fiction.



ALAN MARCUS, writer/musician/activist. A onetime Guggenheim Fellow with a gargantuan literary appetite, Alan first came to Carmel Highlands in the late '40's or early '50's, on a brief vacation with his wife, Lotte. There, he met Cynthia Williams, notorious for taking struggling writers and artists under her wing and providing them with affordable shelter in one or another of her Highlands properties. No sooner did Cynthia become convinced that Alan would be an invaluable asset to the Highlands community that she helped make possible his purchase of the sprawling property he still occupies, just as she later became convinced that vacationing artist Ephraim Doner and his wife, Rosa — lovable, vivacious people both — must be persuaded to stay on by making an offer they couldn't refuse: a valuable lot on which to build a studio/house and join Cynthia's extended family.

Alan's first novel, "Straws to Make Brick," made a literary splash in 1952. His second, "Of Streets and Stars," was repeatedly rejected as a downer before it won praise from such luminaries as Dorothy Parker, Saul Bellow, Granville Hicks and Archibald MacLeish, and then was singled out by Saturday Review (the former Saturday Review of Literature) as one of the ten best novels of the year. Two of Alan's postwar short stories were "Atlantic First" winners.

His "Here Comes the Brides" was a popular ABC television series in the '60's. His screenplays include "Kiss Her Goodbye," (1959) and "The Marauders," (1955).

Les Gorn, Pacific Grove
Autobiographical: pertinent background: author, *The Anglo Saxons*, a novel reprinted in soft cover as *The Greater Glory*; teacher (story lab, world literature, great plays), Monterey Peninsula College; S. F. Black Writers' Workshop (its only instructor and only white guy), and University of California Extension; screenwriter, three movies better forgotten; and a stint as book editor and daily columnist, San Francisco Examiner.

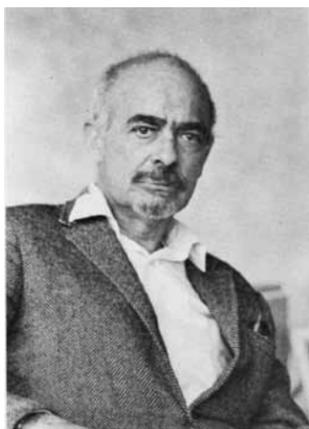


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The first seven appeared in our Jan. 6, 2012 issue. Please see our website for the essays as one piece.

MILTON MAYER, Carmel writer/pacifist. In the early '50's, when Senator Joe McCarthy was riding high, I worked as news editor of a tiny radio station, KTIP, in Porterville, south of Tulare. One weekend, I visited the Monterey Bay area with my wife-to-be, Winnie, to attend a lecture by Milton Mayer at Asilomar. Ordinarily, I shun lectures by anyone and everyone, anywhere, so the Asilomar trip was -- to put it mildly -- an unusual one for me. Although I did not share Mayer's pacifist convictions, I was enormously impressed by his views, eloquently and elegantly expressed monthly in the *Progressive Magazine* (Madison, Wisconsin). Some years later, when I moved to



Milton Mayer

the Highlands, my regard for Mayer's work spread to the man himself.
Among his books: "They Thought They Were Free," an account of his postwar year in a small town in occupied Germany, bridging the chasm between himself and ten Nazi neighbors.
Other notable books: "If Men were Angels," "Biodegradable Men" and "What can a Man Do?"

HENRY MILLER, Big Sur. Like Carmel poet Robinson Jeffers, Miller is well known to the public. His novels, banned in the U.S. at the time, were routinely smuggled into the country by tourists returning from France during the '50's. Constant attempts by the gendarmes to stop U. S. publication thrust Miller into the middle of some sensational courtroom dramas.
As book editor of the *San Francisco Examiner* in 1961-62, I'd once testified in a Marin courtroom against censorship of Miller's best-selling "Tropic of Cancer" -- porn, I thought, with what the lawyers call redeeming social value -- but my personal contact with the man was limited to the day I bumped into him while on a visit to a friend who'd briefly rented a house near Miller's on Partington Ridge.
The introductions were a bit strained, I thought. In my daily column at the *Examiner*, I once had compared the dignity shown by George Orwell in the pages of "Down and Out in London and Paris" to Miller's begging bowl pleas for money from his readers to ease the hardships of his Paris days.

It turned out the "strain" was imaginary -- Miller had never heard of me or my column. Moreover, he came off as likable. That shouldn't have surprised me. After all, he'd won the esteem of Ephraim Doner, a mensch whose bountiful vitality, laughter and joy went limp in the presence of phonies.
Even my belief that Miller was a shameless money-grubber turned out to be shaky. A lengthy, surprisingly in-depth interview of Miller in *Cavalier* magazine (1963) by Lionel Olay avers that Miller -- then age 70 -- "owns but one suit, has only a bicycle to take him where he has to go and, aside from a gourmet palate and a fine nose for expensive wines, is still as disinterested in cash as ever."

"I still have a list in my notebook of my debts," Miller is quoted as saying, "the \$2, \$5, \$6 kind of debts. As I pay them, I cross each one out."

RAYLYN MOORE, Pacific Grove poet/writer/teacher. Like her husband, Ward, Raylyn published numerous short stories in the top science fiction magazines of yore. Her books included "Wonderful Wizard, Marvelous Land" and "What Happened to Emily

Good?" But it was her poetry that won the greatest admiration and esteem of fellow writers.
A week or two before Raylyn's unexpected death in 2005, she gave a poetry reading at the Barnyard in Carmel. I've rarely seen an audience so moved. Like Eric Barker and many another poet of excellence, Raylyn never gained the recognition she and her poetry merited.

WARD MOORE, Monterey. A bearded, yarmulka-wearing volcano of a man, Ward sometimes joined the writers, artists, would-be's and newsmen at lunch on the terrace at Ring's, the popular Munras Street restaurant-hangout run by Vic and Bessie Knight. Invariably, Ward's presence created a stir. Diners at nearby tables edged closer. Ward played no favorites. Everyone in the vicinity was equally entitled to benefit from his literary pronouncements.

Not that his literary pronouncements lacked substance. Almost invariably, they were authoritative. Sometimes they were brilliant.

Although Ward was best known for his science fiction, his finest work was "Melons of Egypt," a literary blockbuster destroyed by the author after several publishers adjudged it (accurately, I think) a non-moneymaker, a fate similarly accorded Bob Bradford's open-eyed, fictional look at his growing-up years in Colorado.

In 1978, Ward was stricken by a stroke and confined to a wheelchair, paralyzed from the waist down. I drove down from San Francisco to see him. His long beard, now snow-white, had transformed him into an Old Testament patriarch. He could utter only three words, which he transmuted into one eloquent three-syllable word, endless repeated. "Goddamit! Goddamit!" He died about a week afterward, sweet Raylyn by his side.

Among his more popular books: "Greener than You Think," "Bring the Jubilee" and "Cloud by Day."



Ward Moore

LIONEL OLAY, Pacific Grove. Lionel's published work included two novels, "The Dark Corners of the Night" (crime) and "The Heart of a Stranger" (Hollywood) and a number of magazine articles, including a moving tribute to Lenny Bruce at his death; a long, hard, freewheeling look -- for *Cavalier* -- at San Francisco's purported myths and fantasies; and -- for the *Monterey Herald*, if I remember -- a probing piece on what Lionel took to be the Monterey Bay area's illusions and realities.

Hunter S. Thompson regarded Lionel as his close friend and mentor.

According to William McKeen, "Rolling Stone's" managing editor in 1970, Thompson greatly

admired Lionel's "take-no-prisoners/no-compromise style."

Thompson's tribute to Lionel, titled "The Ultimate Freelancer," explored his originality, integrity and intellectual honesty. "After fighting the good fight and serving alongside Castro," Thompson said, "Olay died

of a stroke, not yet of middle age."
It's difficult to reconcile Thompson's Lionel Olay with the Lionel Olay I knew, although the swashbuckling charm does strike a faint bell.

Very faint.
During the off-season, low-rent months of 1957, I lived on Balboa Island, near Laguna Beach. It was there I met Lionel and his likeable femme fatale wife, Kay. Since the island (shaped like a cigar) was only about thirteen short blocks long and one to three blocks wide, we (my wife, Winnie and I) saw them frequently. Lionel was not averse to frequently dropping in at dinnertime.

As April loomed, the talk turned to the impending high rent season and the need for impecunious writers to move on. Instead of returning to Hollywood and renewing the struggle for a toehold there, I'd decided to follow a friend's suggestion and move to Monterey. Lionel listened with keen interest. The next morning, we had a visit from his milkman. (Yep, we had milk delivery at the time.) Lionel had vanished. The milkman wanted to be paid.

Over the next few days, we had several such visitors, including Lionel's landlord and auto mechanic and newspaper delivery boy.

We were reunited with Lionel in Monterey. Unabashed, he gave us a hearty hello. We saw quite a lot of him until he went into his second vanishing act. Among the friends and creditors he'd stiffed this time was a *Herald* newsman who -- moved to lend a helping hand to a talented and charismatic newcomer -- had rented Lionel an apartment at a scaled-down rental rate.

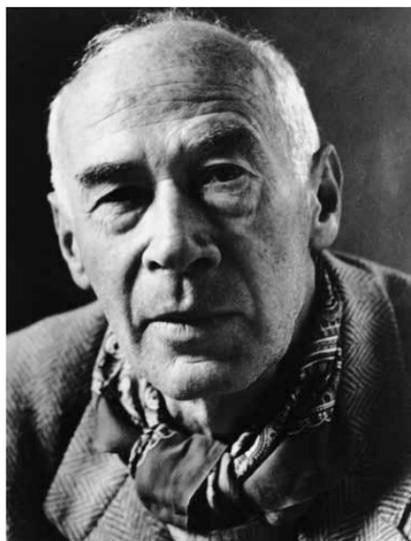
How all this equates with Lionel's having fought the good fight here and in Castro's Cuba is more than I can fathom.

JOHN SMITHBACK, Monterey poet. In 1966, John opened the Bull's Eye Tavern on Washington Street in Monterey. Instantly, the pub -- beer on tap, wine by the glass, dartboards, ear-splitting rock, pulsing strobe lights -- became a popular hangout of the with-It young and won *Esquire* magazine's imprimatur as "the only place to go in Monterey." On occasion, things got a bit obstreperous in the crowded bar, and John found himself a new talent -- that of bouncer.

All good things, they say, come to an end. Inevitably, another Monterey pub opened its doors to gain instant cachet, and the with-It young promptly abandoned the old for the new, as the young are wont to do.

In 1976, John opted for a change of scene. Selling his house and possessions, he conquered his long-time fear of flying and took off to Hong Kong, where he quickly landed a University job teaching English. There, he met and married Ching Yee, a pretty nurse with a gift for cartooning. Combining talents, the two began doing a daily feature for a Hong Kong newspaper: a cartoon illustrating a particular English idiom with a caption explaining the idiom's meaning. The feature caught on and soon was syndicated to other newspapers in the Far East. Today, John and Ching Yee are the co-authors of some forty "language learning" books and games under such titles as "Idiom Magic" and "Fun with Idioms."

A book of John's poetry, "Silent in the Dawn," saw publication last year.



Henry Miller

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Autobiographical: pertinent background: author, *The Anglo Saxons*, a novel reprinted in soft cover as *The Greater Glory*; teacher (story lab, world literature, great plays), Monterey Peninsula College; S. F. Black Writers' Workshop (its only instructor and only white guy), and University of California Extension; screenwriter, three movies better forgotten; and a stint as book editor and daily columnist, *San Francisco Examiner*.