

# Remembering Eddie



Eddie Bonetti ALL PHOTOS BY LYNNE BURNS

NORMAN MAILER once described Edward Bonetti as “a prodigy of talent” and the “best working poet in Provincetown.” He also recognized the soul in the man: “Eddie never cut a corner on a friend,” he said of the man he considered to be one of his best friends. Al DiLauro introduced me to Eddie in the summer of 1977 at Ciro’s Flagship Bar. His book *The Wine Cellar* had just been published by Viking Press. I had never met anyone like Eddie before—and haven’t since. At that time, he had been living for more than a decade in Provincetown and Wellfleet, working hard to meet the standards he demanded of his writing. He earned his living building and fixing. He was a Renaissance man who could sing, dance, act, cook, write, prizefight, and fix anything from a toaster to a car. He even trained his five beloved cats to roll over at the same time. He is remembered for his serious sense of play, his tolerant compassion, and the lush beauty of his writing, which is evident in one of his essays about Provincetown, “Viva,” featured in these pages following this tribute to his work.

Eddie passed away in 1993. I ran into an old friend of his, Mary Ann Larkin, the summer before last. Together, we began searching for Eddie’s manuscripts, with help from Doris Kearns Goodwin and her husband, Richard Goodwin (Eddie was their son’s godfather). Patric Pepper was invaluable with editorial and computer direction.

We are grateful to everyone who helped us gather together this material, especially the contributors of the wonderful remembrances of Eddie in the following pages. Anyone who knew Edward Bonetti has “Eddie stories.” Here are a few of them.

— Lynne Burns

## I REMEMBER EDDIE

By Mary Ann Larkin

I FIRST MET Edward Bonetti when I walked into the Old Colony in 1977 during a nor'easter. Accompanying me was a sexy friend, an ex-nun turned hippy, but Eddie, standing dripping in a yellow slicker, greeted us with, "What are the two of you doing, walking in here like a couple of nuns?" As we laughed and talked in amazement, Eddie went on to tell me he'd just had *The Wine Cellar* published. Jackie Onassis was his editor. "My book's in the window of the Provincetown Book Store," he said. "Oh, so is mine," I answered, "what a coincidence." The Big Mama Poetry Troupe, a feminist group of performing poets to which I belonged, had just published an anthology. "You don't believe me," he countered. It had never occurred to me not to believe him, but he was convinced I didn't. So nothing would do at the end of the evening, as he drove my friend and me back to Mrs. O'Donnell's pristine rooming house, but to look into the window of the Provincetown Book Store, where both our books rested contentedly, side by side.

For the next seven years, until he left the Cape, Eddie fixed everything at my cottage: dinners, poems, toasters, hot-water heaters, water pumps, and old cars. He took nothing in return, but one July I brought him a blueberry cobbler and, despite his resistance, I insisted on cleaning his manfully neglected bathroom. I began by emptying the room, wrapping a rag around my head, and then throwing buckets of water at the ceiling. It was enormously satisfying! When I

finished, I called Eddie in to admire his sparkling bathroom. His response: "Jesus, Mary Ann, I'm going to have to piss in the yard."

However, despite his vast generosity, the best thing Eddie ever did for me was to show me the seriousness of play. One night, after the Flagship closed, we got into his truck to drive Jimmy Randazise back to Tasha's Cottages. Eddie's fertile mind hatched a plan. "Listen," Eddie told me. "You stand at the bottom of the hill here between the cottages, and after I drop Jimmy off, I'm going to rev the truck down toward you. Wrap your sweater up like it's a baby. When you hear me coming, step into my headlights and yell, 'A boon, sir, a boon.'" "Splendid, Eddie, splendid," said Jimmy in his most professorial voice. Hopping from the truck and cradling my sweater-baby, I did as instructed. "A boon, sir," echoed above the revving motor as Eddie blared down the hill.

The cottages lit up: "Jesus, there's a woman out there with a baby." "What the fuck's going on?" "Somebody call the rescue squad." And then, between Tasha's leaning cottages housing the weary, the revelers, and the workers, reality dawned: "Ah, it's just Eddie." "Fuck off, Eddie. We gotta go to work in the morning." Doors slammed as, horn beeping, motor roaring, we skidded away over the gravel, helpless with laughter. For me, Eddie's prank that night ripped the scrim off what passes for an ordinary life. ❧

## MY NEIGHBOR EDDIE

By Jerry Thompson

IN THE FALL OF 1967, my wife, Judy, and I rented an apartment on the second floor of the building on Commercial Street where Fanizzi's Restaurant is now located. Eddie Bonetti, whom I had known for five or six years, occupied the apartment next to us. He was locally well known for his poetry and fiction writing and was also considered a talented actor, a very good cook, and an accomplished auto mechanic who enjoyed a few pops of booze from time to time. Eddie was a prankster who loved to improvise, to create dramatic scenes anywhere, at any time, no matter how small his audience.

One late evening, after having a few drinks with friends at the Old Colony Tap, Judy and I were walking back to our apartment in a thick, milky fog, listening to the mournful sound of the Long Point foghorn and the waves caressing the bulkheads that protected the houses along the beach. As we approached our apartment house, a dynamic baritone voice boomed out. It was Eddie Bonetti reciting the last four lines of one of his poems: "When the hawk claws the moon in crude rebellion / When the glamorous die / And Ahab's eyes like quarters stare / Through the whale-struck wires of the sea . . ." He stopped and called out to us, "Hey, Jerry, Judy, I'm up on the roof. I feel like a fuck'n ghost up here. Isn't it a beautiful night?"

He invited us to join him for dinner at his apartment the following evening. The next afternoon, at about four o'clock, I was in our kitchen when I heard a horn blow down in the parking lot. I looked out the window and saw Eddie

in his Chevrolet with a young woman sitting beside him. (Eddie had three 1950 Chevrolets, the one he drove, and the two he used for spare parts to keep his working car on the road.) I opened the kitchen window and he shouted up to me, "This is Alice. I just met her—she was hitchhiking on Route 6 in Truro so I gave her a ride into town. She's going to have dinner with us tonight." His car lurched forward and smashed into one of the broken-down Chevrolets. Alice's head bounced back from the impact. She said nothing but I could imagine what she was thinking. Eddie backed up and shouted to me, "I'm going to the A&P to get some anchovies and some garlic. Do we need another bottle of wine?" Before I could answer, his car lurched forward again and smashed into the other Chevrolet. Eddie backed up as I called out, "Yes, buy another bottle. It won't go to waste." Eddie shouted, "Okay, I'll see you in about a half an hour." With that, he pulled out of the parking lot and drove away.

All I can remember about the evening was six or seven of us drinking wine and laughing while eating Eddie's delicious signature recipe: pasta with a simmered sauce made up of olive oil, garlic, red pepper, anchovies, lemon juice, parsley, and Romano cheese. The meal was followed by Eddie giving ballet lessons to Alice. He said to her, "It's all in the hands," as he delicately turned his hands in graceful circles. He concluded the lesson by performing a death-defying ballet split leap.

The ballet lesson was followed by a séance led by Eddie. ❧

## EDDIE—A MEMORY

By Michael Lee

*"We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master."*

— Ernest Hemingway

I FIRST SAW HIM in Wellfleet, walking briskly with a small duct-taped case that was just large enough to contain either an Uzi or a trumpet. He had a purposeful gait, as though he were on the way to the bank to collect an approved loan. Some days later, we were introduced at a spaghetti dinner he was cooking at Peter Frawley's house. I say cooking, but it was more a culinary blitzkrieg. A constant cigarette dangled from his lips, the long ash teetering over a bubbling pot, and flecks of ruddy sauce splattered the stove and wall. You became freckled with the sting of sauce if you stood next to him during the frenzied stirrings.

His name was Eddie Bonetti, and he cooked and talked as he walked, with an urgent relentlessness. And he was a uniquely wonderful writer of short stories and poems. His problem with literary matters was that he was a perfectionist.

There are plenty of characters on the Outer Cape, but not all have character. Eddie had more than his share. We became friends as the season moved into winter. Virtually every morning around nine, I heard a tapping at the kitchen door, and within a half hour, a cobalt cloud of mentholated cigarette smoke hung a foot below the ceiling. Eddie would open his famous satchel and, instead of a weapon or an instrument, out came reams of paper. Most were works in progress, but some were complete short stories that he would read to me in his staccato voice. He loved to show me the flattering letter from Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Eddie's editor at Viking.

Opinions of his work mattered greatly to Eddie, but the verdict he valued above all was Norman Mailer's. He and Mailer became good friends and sparring partners during Eddie's days in Provincetown.



"I think it's time you met the old man," he said to me one morning.

That was Eddie's term for Mailer when Mailer wasn't in the room. We climbed into Eddie's car, an old low-slung Ford that he kept running despite the vehicle's many objections and emissions. Careening rapidly on Route 6 in Truro, Eddie dipped into a bag of Red Man tobacco and jammed a gigantic chaw into his mouth. He set an empty coffee can on the transmission hump between us. Every few minutes, Eddie hocked a revolting brown lunger into the can. The car began to stink. By the time we reached the Truro-Provincetown line, it was half full of salivated Red Man and my gag reflexes kicked in. Eddie ignored my retching and told me the story of boxing the great Willie Pep when they were both in the Golden Gloves tournament.

"He kicked my ass," Eddie said, "but he knew he was in a fight. I tagged him a few times." Then Eddie threw a right hook toward the rearview mirror. He had fast hands.

In Provincetown, we took the left turn at the juncture of east Commercial Street and Bradford. That was when the coffee can tipped over, drenching my left sneaker.

"Jesus Christ, Eddie," I hollered, as the juice soaked through.

We pulled up to Mailer's big brick house. Eddie looked at my sneaker and said, "Ah, don't worry about it, Norman won't care."

I squished and gagged my way up to the front door. Mailer opened it and grinned at Eddie; their affection for each other was obvious.

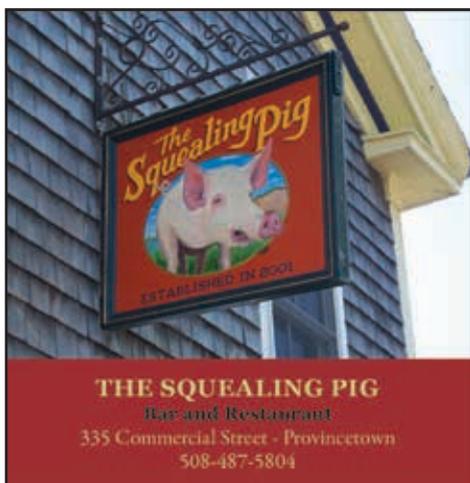
"What the hell's that smell?" he asked me, shaking my hand.

"Oh, Mike's got bad habits," Eddie told him. And so began my thirty-year friendship with Norman, always the smartest guy in the room. Later that afternoon, Eddie and Mailer squared off in a friendly joust. They both had fast hands and laughed as one grazed the other with an open palm. It was the first of many trips Eddie and I took to Mailer's house. And I always kept my shoes crammed toward the door when Eddie dipped.

When Eddie died in 1993, Norman and I drove up to Dorchester for the funeral and talked about him. Eddie was notorious for perfecting a sentence, then a paragraph, before continuing on. His published output was two books and he died while working on a novel.

"Eddie could have been a great writer," Mailer said, "really a great one. But he just couldn't defeat his demons. He couldn't get over the idea to push ahead and go back later for the polish. It would grind him to a halt."

On the way home, we talked less. Mailer was working on *Harlot's Ghost* and asked me if I had ever been in the brig when I was in the Marine Corps. He was toying with the idea of Oswald and homosexuality in confinement. I couldn't help him there and we fell into a silence. It was as though something special had been taken from our lives. And I can't help but think Mailer felt that as well. Eddie's silence seemed so inappropriate. ❏



## REMEMBERING EDWARD “BUNZO” BONETTI

By James Hobin

EDWARD BONETTI did a lot of things well, from fixing an engine to fixing a meal, but mostly he was a good writer. He hammered out his stories and poems on a noisy manual typewriter and took his work with him wherever he went, carrying the manuscripts in a small, beat-up suitcase that had once belonged to his father, an Italian immigrant who used it to hold the makeup kit that he needed for performing in vaudeville.

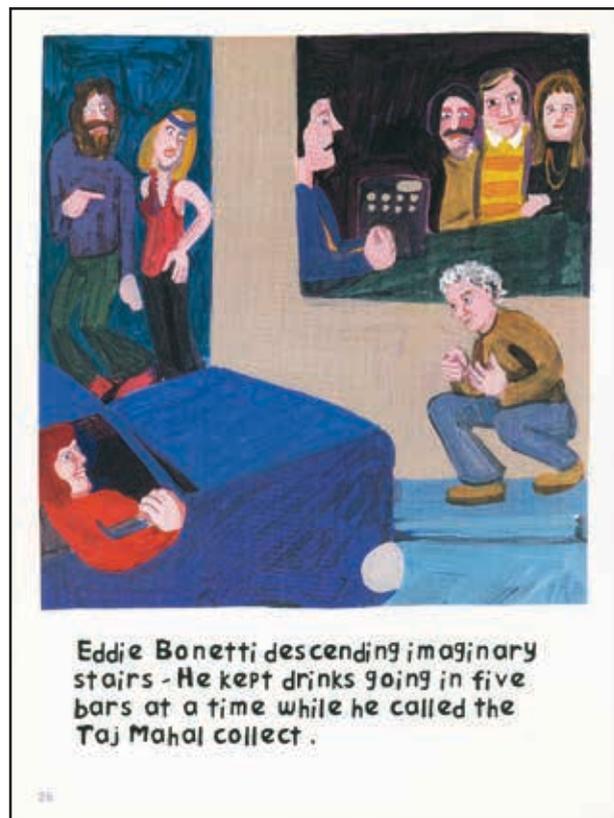
Ed Bonetti grew up in Savin Hill, a tightly knit neighborhood in working-class Dorchester. When I was a boy, I heard neighbors talking about Eddie, the guy who lived in Wellfleet, wherever that was, and was a poet, a word that was equally mysterious to my young mind. I suppose it's possible that his early example planted the seed in my unconscious that germinated into the desire to become an artist myself.

I met Eddie in 1985, in Wellfleet of all places, and we became friends. Later, when he moved back to Savin Hill, I saw him often, especially near the end when he was ill. Due to the chemotherapy treatments, Eddie had lost his hair, and with his head bald and shiny, he kept asking, “How do I look, Jimbo?” “Like a newborn babe,” I would answer. We laughed. Eddie wasn't what you would call morose, but he wasn't immune to occasional attacks of regret.

On one particular afternoon, I climbed the stairs to his apartment and found him seated in the kitchen, hunched over the table, staring intently at the contours of two books. In his right hand was his book *The Wine Cellar*, his left hand held the Edith Wharton book *Ethan Frome*.

The covers were peeled back and Eddie gripped the wedges of paper from each book between the thumb and forefinger of each hand. His head turned from left to right and back again as he compared the amount of pages stitched to the spines of the books. Suddenly, he half-rose from his seat, slammed the books on the table, and shouted, “I've wasted my life!”

Eddie was a scrapper who tried to expiate his rage by struggling with the written word. He once told me that he had spent countless hours writing mostly useless poetry, which he eventually rejected and disposed of. Yet, somehow it seems of more importance that a poem is written than that it is read. So perhaps Eddie hadn't wasted his time. It was the act of writing that had made him a writer in the first place, even if it hadn't made him many poems.



Eddie Bonetti descending imaginary stairs - He kept drinks going in five bars at a time while he called the Taj Mahal collect .

An excerpt from *The History of Provincetown* by Susan Baker, artist, book-maker, and owner of the Susan Baker Memorial Museum in North Truro, Massachusetts.

Trying to encapsulate Eddie's writing career puts me in mind of *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, by Rainer Maria Rilke. In them, there is a passage about the difficulties of self-expression: “One ought to wait and gather sense and sweetness a whole life long, and a long life if possible, and then, quite at the end, one might perhaps be able to write ten good lines.”

Ed Bonetti's life had some sweetness, but it wasn't a long life. Still, he managed to write ten good lines—and then some. ❏

## EDDIE MOONWALKED INTO OUR LIVES

By Peter Scarbo Frawley

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP in Dorchester, I was a part of a gang of kids called the Falcons. Children, hanging out on the corners. Standing. Spitting. When we were about fifteen, we began to hear about a guy from St. William's Parish in Savin Hill who would go into Eddie Connors's bar, hop up on the bar, shut off the TV, and announce to all the drinkers that he was “gonna read some poetry,” and if they didn't like it, tough shit, they could meet him outside and fight him. We didn't know this guy's name. We knew nothing about him, except that he had balls! So, we went looking for a fight. He inspired us. As we grew older, we heard these stories more and more, and each one contained a little bit more about him. This poet was a Golden Gloves boxer, described by two-time featherweight champion Willie Pep as “a

natural.” Then we heard that he was a friend of Norman Mailer's. I was reading Mailer's *The White Negro* at the time. When years later I finally met Eddie Bonetti in person, I said, “I've heard about you.” He said to me, “I've heard about you.” We shook hands and talked to each other as if we had known each other all our lives. We became friends.

Later, he moonwalked, literally, into my family's heart. We came to know his favorite expressions. He often introduced himself by saying, “Bonetti with two t's.” His best advice was “Always lead with your left,” and “Never lose your sense of humor.” And the word *However* was something Eddie said as a lead into winning an argument.

Eddie was a good fighter. Tough. Intelligent. Quick on his feet, like a tap dancer.

Lickety-split with his left jab. Feet planted solidly on the ground when he threw his right. He was a smart fighter—both physically and verbally. He would gently defeat his opponents by repeating their arguments, setting them up the way Marvin Hagler used to do, letting them think he was agreeing with them, seducing them with the false smell of victory—and then came *However* like a sucker punch. Eddie told me that everything Willie Pep said about him was true, but that he, Eddie, didn't have the killer instinct. Eddie's cut man, Leo “The Giant” Pratt, said of Eddie that he was a natural boxer and had the best moves he'd seen. Eddie was good and he knew he was good. Still, it was a deep sorrow and anger to Eddie that his father never came to see him fight.

## PLANS FOR THE NEXT WAR

NEAR THE END of Eddie's final bout, his fight with cancer, Doris and Dick Goodwin got him into an experimental treatment program at the Boston Medical Center. I had been staying some with Eddie at that time, going to and from the Cape. He asked me one day to go with him to the medical center, and, of course, I went. We arrived and went deep into the bowels of the hospital. It seemed barely lit, and it felt as if we were surrounded by a giant machine. We could feel the pressure of the building, and there was a vibrational hum everywhere. We went through a pair of swinging doors and passed by a small waiting room with four couples sitting silently. Silently. Four bald people and four escorts, who were, I guess, like myself. It was like a wake.

Eddie went to the reception desk with his famous black briefcase, which he was seen with almost anywhere. I carried his coat and hat into the waiting room and sat down with the downcast. As I said, it felt like a wake. A few minutes later, I heard a very official-sounding voice saying, "Attention. Attention. Attention." I knew it was Eddie's voice. So I looked up to see Eddie moonwalking in front of us, his black briefcase held with both hands and tucked up under his chin. He looked like Mussolini with peach fuzz on his head. He stopped right in front of us all, there in the waiting room, paused, raised his briefcase, showed it around to everyone and said very seriously, "Plans for the next war." Then he sat down and everyone cracked up. They were all laughing. One lady with peach fuzz on her head was crying, she was so happy. Eddie said, "I'm Eddie Bonetti, with two t's." We all began talking to each other. They didn't talk about the plans, and they didn't talk about their troubles. It was regular talk, like, "Where are you from? Do you know so-and-so?" It was beautiful.

It wasn't long after I went to the medical center with Eddie that I was contacted on the Cape by Pauline, who had cared for Eddie at the end. Eddie had died. She had placed his black briefcase at the foot of his bed. I'm sure it contained plans for his next war. Eddie himself gave us his epitaph:

I fought the best I could  
against the demons I had.  
My only regret is  
I let my teeth go bad.

Even more revealing of Eddie's nature was something his friend Jimmy Randazise told me Eddie had said: "I accept this miserable disease, this cancer, but I won't be defeated by it." Though Eddie doesn't call me anymore, and I never hear him say *However*, I still hear his name, all the time, from family, friends, acquaintances: "Remember the time Eddie..." So, somehow, I believe he really wasn't defeated in the end, either by his demons or by his disease. ❧



## Going Somewhere

By Mary Ann Larkin

Has anyone written of Pauline,  
that tiny tank of a nurse,  
the one who sat behind Eddie  
in third grade,  
the one with the silky pigtails  
who couldn't spell,  
the one he lost track of  
when they both lost track  
of whatever it was  
they were supposed to remember.

Has anyone told,  
after fifty years, drifted by  
the slow way the morning fog  
lifts off the pond,  
how Pauline barreled into Eddie's room,  
to pull up the blinds,  
and shoo away the dust  
that comes with dying,  
to make him a bed of snowy sheets.  
And, though he protested weakly,  
to wash him clean, and say  
she wasn't going anywhere.

And when, with all her doing,  
she could not stop his trembling  
and his fear,  
has it been set down anywhere  
how Pauline climbed  
into Eddie's clean-sheeted bed  
to hold close  
in her strong plump arms  
his beautiful head,  
his slack-skinned flesh,  
to rock him on out  
as far as she could go,  
beyond third grade  
and the lives they lived  
and the lives they hadn't lived  
and the ones they wished  
they hadn't lived.

Has anyone told,  
does anyone know,  
what kind of love that is?

## CONTRIBUTORS

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**MARY ANN LARKIN** is a poet living in North Truro and Washington, DC. She's the author of five books of poetry, most recently *On Gannon Street from Broadkill River Press*. She and her husband, Patric Pepper, are cofounders of *Pond Road Press*, publishers of *Jack Gilbert's Tough Heaven: Poems of Pittsburgh*.

**JERRY THOMPSON's** plays have been produced in theaters nationally, including eighteen short plays produced by the Provincetown Theater. He has written four full-length plays: *Hello, I'm Will Shakespeare*, *Eddy and Benny*, *High Head*, and *First Dance*, which was produced by the Provincetown Theater in 2010. Jerry lives with his wife, Judy, in Truro.

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**JAMES HOBIN** is a painter, printmaker, muralist, and teacher who uses art to help build community in his hometown, Dorchester, Massachusetts. James designs and teaches specialized art programs for K-12 students in Boston schools. He is also a staff writer at the *Dorchester Reporter*, contributing a monthly column entitled "A Round Dot."

**PETER SCARBO FRAWLEY**, a former two-year Fellow at the *Fine Arts Work Center*, is a concrete poet and performer living in Wellfleet. He recently sold several pieces of his work to a MoMA board member.

# Viva

By Edward Bonetti

THE NIGHT WAS living on its toes in Provincetown, dancing high over the wide sky of Commercial Street, lit for the pirouettes of the zany, the gay, the tourists and dreamers, soaring into a weekend of life and jazz and a slow kind of comfortable drowning in the not yet honky-tonk fever and glint of Middle America. We had arrived on the spur of those unforgettable moments fed by destiny or chance—or, if not this, then it was a moment fed by the options that lay hidden somehow in psychic choice: a subliminal dream of love and excitement for whatever human touch we imagined secretly to be at the end of the reach.

It was 1959 and the early years of William Ward's *Provincetown Review*, and the personalities included Daniel Banko (*Not Dead Yet*), Harriet Sohmers, Ernesto and the long-legged jovial Buster Olafson and John Thomas, Mailer, pondering his breakthrough again into literary heights, and some whose names lie in the tomb of one's mind. And yes, it was the last year allotted to Harry Kemp, Poet of the Dunes, about whom this short critique will strain to elucidate, given the doubts that one has about his own nature when laboring to define the character of another. So it will be short, for space demands it, and the dimensions of Kemp as man and poet are too complex for one who knew him only as a symbol of all that was loved in Provincetown: the lead actor in my own play of dreams, the kind Shaman who lived in the dunes and whose way of life filled the well of my own innocence with envy—yes, envy—for his slow human melodies and scents of old Bohemia.

I had met Harry Kemp four or five times, but on each occasion the man behind the mask was elusive as a fly. In his presence you listened and held back the probes of your interest that might have touched the real center of his personality, a privilege reserved only for the elite, his coteries, or for no one. To consider Kemp a great poet is a matter of choice. To consider him an artist is no choice at all: it is a necessity annealed from his act of life. And if romance lies on the other side

of reality as the common stock of good human beings live it, then in the classic sense he was the true romantic. The drift of his poetry was always upward, reaching a hand to the heavens of one's soul. But to find the seed of Kemp's own furies in his work—and who is without furies who takes quill to paper—is hopeless. So my judgment here is optional, but I'll take the option in good stead and compare him to the inward journey taken by his friend O'Neill, a poet whose gifts are unavoidably pointed to the inside of one's reality, and it took O'Neill most of his life to get on the inside of himself, or at least expose his judgments made on personal conflict that was the nut-meat of his drama, his dialectic. Kemp sang the celebration of his dream while O'Neill brooded on the edge of the abyss.

Yes, the last time I saw Harry Kemp the night was dancing and flying to heaven in the Old Colony. Kemp sat at the table with no less than six young beauties admiring his output. They could see that shadow of soul in Kemp that only the feminine eye could reach. They, like all of us, were enthralled by the man and poem mixed. Yes, the night was living on its toes and Kemp

was part of that electric urge, despite his bad leg and his old age. His play was on, and I wondered what it was in the teeth of history that had ordained this man-poet of dunes with grace, or the human lie that endows greatness to some who never wished it or who fight it off whatever else might burn inside of them. I sat and looked into his kind, old face and felt the presence of one who had gone the limit with style and whose style was now irrevocably infused with the labor to keep it going until death made its cleavage from the living and, once dead, so too the secret that gave it force. If art is somehow rooted in the romance of the living, then to know Kemp was to know life as art. O'Neill, on the other hand, either by choice or by the pull of spirit yet untouched by the analytical probe, left Provincetown for the same reason that might have kept the Poet of the Dunes polarized here as a celebrity of outward color. O'Neill feared the celebration that gradually engulfed Kemp in an aura of priesthood on whose shoulders sat both the muse and the anti-muse.

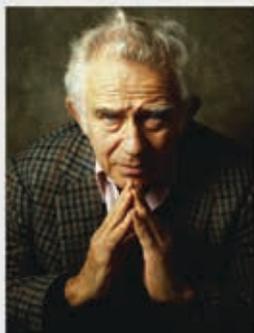
Passion given up is passion that never illuminates the other; both are jealous of the same



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## Provincetown Arts Press

# Silent No More

EDITED BY PETER SAUNDERS, PhD

"This is an important and beautiful book about continuing, about opening up to possibility, and giving voice to budding poets. The fact that these 'budding poets' are all senior citizens only gives greater depth to Peter Saunders's wonderful project. . . .

*Silent No More* should be in every single assisted living facility, every senior community library, every senior center, and nursing home. "

—LIZ ROSENBERG

editor of *Roots & Flowers: Poets and Poems on Family*

## Silent No More

UNLOCKING VOICES OF OLDER POETS



EDITED BY PETER SAUNDERS, PhD

light. Kemp balanced or unbalanced the scales. Who really knows? Only he did, or perhaps that knowledge came on those precise and sometimes frightening moments when one's head first touches the pillow at night. His passion for life was given up to life. He was the last of the classic romantics to move over these streets. His poetry, like O'Neill's plays, starts at the same point: To order fantasy in the loneliness of arrogant definition without standard in a world they were never part of. They are sightseers both and harbingers of truth. And if deprivation is the source of the deepest insights, for the poet, his craft denies that leap. Kemp had then, when I met him, the innocence of virginity and a flare for verbal promiscuity. Whatever trick of the human trade one has in his toolbox, or in the craft of his personality, it was all there full to the hilt in Kemp as I knew him. It was there, indeed, and it was a craft, and it was beautiful in the deepest sense of whatever hope lingers on the edge of the brain of one who needed to love.

So that trip to P-town in the late fifties was ordained by the good muse of destiny. I had met the Poet of the Dunes at the end of my reach. The touch was physically slight but the image went deeper than subliminal dreams. Kemp still walks in the mist of one's thoughts, a gunnysack over his shoulder, limping into the night. Romantic? Yes, romance of life, and possibly the killer of the dream. It is the trigger on the brain that haunts the present, or draws the future into the mold of the present, draws it to the self—sometimes too close to the actual abyss of the self—so that time becomes style and life becomes a living rose; the open heart of one's inner life that no one sees, a purpose in itself indeed of rich blood and rarity of beauty given to it by the grace of old age and time gone by; yes, given to it by the zap of the romantic who never touches the core of life but lingers on: the dirty old man of eternal love. Harry, a little bit of time left over, living his life as art, a dangerous game to aggravate the muse, and yet the only game perhaps for real poets of the dream, the poet-actor who lives behind the mask with the presage of his own history, and the bones of memory dance in the legends of the living who give it voice. Kemp, a true genius of the fruit . . . and the fruit was love. ❧

*Editor's Note: This story of the ethos of the late fifties in Provincetown evokes Norman Mailer in his style, Eugene O'Neill in his legacy, and the legendary Harry Kemp in his enduring presence. "Viva" was first self-published in a limited edition of five hundred copies in 1986 in A Baker's Dozen Plus: New and Selected Poems and Prose by Edward Bonetti. We are grateful to Lynne Burns, Mary Ann Larkin, and Doris Kearns Goodwin, Bonetti's literary executor, for permission to publish.*

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