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ON LINE

One million Germans can't be wrong.

get your name in *LIGHTS*
get it up there in
8½ x 11 mimeo
Charles Bukowski

THE AMAZED DOCTORS lanced boils on his face the size of small apples with what Bukowski remembers as a wood drill. He resented being surrounded by complacent kings of the hospital, men with big homes, paintings and willing nurses.

"How do you feel?"

"Wonderful."

"Don't you find the needle painful?"

"Fuck you."

The hospital was better than home, dominated by his father, "a cowardly vicious brute of a man." During Saturday afternoons, while the other kids were playing baseball "and growing up to be normal human beings," Bukowski meticulously cut the lawn. His father would stretch out level with the grass and inevitably discover an uncut blade.

"HE MISSED ONE! I SEE IT! I SEE IT!"

"Ah, Shame, Shame." Bukowski's mother would answer, as Dad got out the daily razor strap. For years Bukowski thought his mother secretly took his side. Then he realized he didn't have a side.

Disfigurement, nightmare parents, and Los Angeles during the Depression. The out-of-work fathers stood on the porches to watch their sons engage in lengthy fistfights. Bukowski remembers those hard times with his usual perverse affection.

Around 1944, when he was 24, he began a 10-year drunk's tour of American back streets. A Philadelphia bar provided him with free drinks for running errands; at night he slept in the alley, covered with lime. "I liked to do this because trucks ran up and down the alley and I felt that any time might be mine. But my luck ran bad."

Back in LA he lived in little bungalows rather like auto courts, wings facing each other across a piece of dirty lawn. Hollywood built them for the movie industry in the 1920s and 1930s; the middle class moved in for a time, and then abandoned them in a decrepit state to losers and social misfits like Bukowski.

For about 14 years, from 6 p.m. to 2 or 2:30 a.m., he worked for the post office in less than an executive position. Work, sleep, drink, bet the horses, write poetry. According to his publisher, John Martin of Black Sparrow Press, for much of that period he had "no friends, no women, no communication."



Charles Bukowski And Friend: *Poems "about three times tougher than he looked."*

Martin had made a success of a printing shop. He was literary, and he had been impressed by a photograph which made Bukowski look like Bógart with real scars. "Then I read a poem about three times tougher than he looked."

He paid Bukowski a visit, and after no doubt tripping over empties and old pizzas he found discarded on the floor of a closet "hundreds and hundreds of poems." Later he offered to pay at least \$100 a month "for life," if Bukowski would quit work and write full-time. Bukowski got the rent knocked down to \$60 a month, quit the post office, and within three-and-a-half weeks wrote the first draft of his first novel. "Fear," he told the surprised Martin, "will accomplish anything."

He had "zero reputation," but by 1979 a turnaway Vancouver crowd of 500 at the Viking Inn on 828 East Hastings would pay \$6 each to hear Bukowski say, "The sight of this audience sickens me."

He bragged about his income and his accountant, drank the wine the promoters provided and pathetically begged another bottle from the crowd. An empty whisky bottle flew over his head. Drunk and mean, he began to bad-mouth cripples. It is the look in their eyes. . .

Europe treats Bukowski like a rock star. He has sold one million books in Germany. A Munich publisher just paid 300,000 DM

for the paperback rights to his second novel *Factotum* (1975) and a story collection called *South of No North* (1973). Millions watched French national television as drunken Bukowski said to another member of the literary panel that if she showed him more leg, he would tell her if she were a good writer.

The German royalties for 1979 were \$200,000. Bukowski now lives in a typical middle-class California stucco house in San Pedro, on a hill overlooking the harbor. He drives a BMW to the racetrack.

His typically autobiographical new novel *Ham on Rye* (Black Sparrow Press, \$9.25 pb) deals with his childhood and teens. Some of the anecdotes have been told before in the stories, sometimes more vividly. Martin, who chooses to publish about half of Bukowski's uneven output, says the next novel, *Streetwalker*, will involve Bukowski's unfortunate first love. She got around more than a little, and drank herself to death.

Martin guards Bukowski's unlisted number; he mentioned that Bukowski had just ejected a girlfriend (Linda Lee Beighle) who was interfering with *The Work*. We complained that at one time Bukowski was available to anyone who knocked on his door bearing a six-pack.

"Yeah," said Martin, "that was when five people knew he existed." ●