

WRITE

THE MAGAZINE OF
**THE WRITERS'
UNION OF
CANADA**

VOLUME 48 NUMBER 1
SPRING 2020

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THE WRITERS' UNION OF CANADA

WRITERS' HOW-TO SERIES

THE ONLINE COLLECTION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PUBLICATIONS
FREE FOR TWUC MEMBERS

ANTHOLOGY RATES AND CONTRACTS provides notes on contributions to anthologies, suggests minimum rates, and provides a suggested anthology contract.

AUTHOR & EDITOR (by Rick Archbold, Doug Gibson, Dennis Lee, John Pearce, Jan Walter) describes the relationship between author and editor including a list of dos and don'ts for both parties.

AUTHOR & LITERARY AGENT offers guidelines and responsibilities governing the relationship between the author and the literary agent.

EVERYTHING YOU NEVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT TAXES (by Joel Fishbane) is a practical tax guide for those in the business of writing that covers types of income and expenses, details about the GST, and incorporation.

FROM PAGE TO SCREEN is a reference guide to options and film and TV contracts for original literary works, including information on minimum and maximum rates paid.

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GLOSSARY OF PUBLISHING TERMS is a user-friendly guide for authors dealing with the book publishing industry, usually during contract negotiations.

HOW TO SELF-PUBLISH (by Eve Silver) covers the why and how — and how much — of self-publishing, from editing and design to distribution and marketing, for authors with unpublished and previously published materials.

THE LAST CHAPTER: ESTATE AND LEGACY PLANNING FOR WRITERS (by Susan Goldberg) covers wills and powers of attorney, literary estates and appointing a literary executor, and how to plan your literary archive.

SELL YOUR BOOK: AN AUTHOR'S GUIDE TO PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION (by Suzanne Alyssa Andrew) provides ideas for publicity and promotional activities that work, including a blueprint for your own personal book-marketing plan, and is filled with advice from authors and industry experts.

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CONTRACTS SELF-HELP PACKAGE helps writers evaluate and negotiate contracts offered by publishers.

MODEL TRADE BOOK AGREEMENT is a comprehensive model contract, complete with a model royalty statement, which provides reasonable minimum terms for trade book contracts and is a useful comparative tool for evaluating your publisher's contract.

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Deadline for Summer issue May 26, 2020

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Design soapboxdesign.com

Layout Gaeby Abrahams

Cover Illustration Daria Domnikova dariadomnikova.com

Views expressed in *Write* do not necessarily reflect those of The Writers' Union of Canada. As a member magazine, *Write* provides space for writers' individual opinions. We welcome a diversity of views and respectful debate in these pages. All submissions are welcome.

Services advertised are not necessarily endorsed by the Union.

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout Canada.



Canada Council
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We acknowledge funding support from the Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Government of Ontario.



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Write is produced four times yearly by The Writers' Union of Canada,
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Writers Who Retail: A Reality Check

BY LI ROBBINS

When I was a kid, my parents, avid readers, talked about opening up a bookstore in a small prairie town. The town was best known for car shows, power tobogganing, and a failing newspaper — possibly not the ideal marketplace. But many book lovers will relate. To be surrounded by books, talk books, make a living from books? The dream.

Among those book lovers are, of course, writers. Still, given the typical requirements of the writing life (solitude; more solitude) you might think the dream would begin and end there. Surprisingly, it has not. At least, not for the half dozen Canadian writer-slash-bookstore owners who shared their thoughts with *Write* on the feasibility of being writers who retail.

Novelist Michelle Berry, owner of Hunter Street Books in Peterborough, Ontario, was the one writer interviewed for this

piece who didn't, in fact, start with "the dream." Her motivation was based on something more down-to-earth: she wanted to get out of the house. Publishing, she knew. Espresso-making, she didn't. So, opening a bookstore made more sense than opening, say, a café.

"I was tired of teaching online," Berry recalls, "of not getting out and seeing people, of writing in solitude, and so I thought, why not? I had no idea how difficult it would be. And how life-changing. And how fun. And exhausting."

“I had no idea how difficult it would be. And how life-changing. And how fun. And exhausting.”

Perhaps because opening a bookstore wasn't a fantasy of Berry's, the reality has proven to hold few disappointments. "It's lived up to what I wanted it to be," she says, "and that's something that's changing and growing every day. Something that, so far, excites me."

Today, Hunter Street Books, with its pride of place in Peterborough's small but vital café district, is part of the city's cultural fabric. "I feel a sense of pride that my vision has connected to Peterborough," says Berry, "and that there are other readers out there who support what I'm trying to do. It's been an amazing three years so far."

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Bookstore as community and cultural hub is definitely part of the dream dreamed by Jason Purcell and Matthew Stepanic, poets and owners of Glass Bookshop in Edmonton, Alberta. The store currently operates as a pop-up, but the plan is to move into a permanent location later this year, one that's in the vicinity of a number of Edmonton arts organizations.

"We saw the need for another community space to promote marginalized writers, smaller publishers, and host events that were accessible to everyone in the community," say Purcell and Stepanic jointly by email. "We're delighted that our pop-up has already captured the welcoming atmosphere central in our conception and planning. It's also gratifying to hear customers notice our unique selection and the ways in which we prioritize queer, BIPOC, and other marginalized writers."

Whether premeditated or not, an independent bookstore is perfectly situated to create, shape, and respond to community. The question is, what kind of community, and how do you go about building it? Novelist JoAnn McCaig expected her dream bookstore to be a home for literary events. But when she opened Shelf Life Books in Calgary, Alberta, in 2010, she wasn't sure how to wrangle the writers. She needn't have worried; people literally came knocking.

"One writer knocked on the window when we were still renovating and weeks from opening. She said, 'When you get the store open, can I launch my new book here?'" says McCaig. "We've never looked back."

DOING THE DISHES

At its busiest, Shelf Life now hosts three or four events a week. McCaig enjoys the excitement and celebratory atmosphere events create, although she admits she didn't anticipate quite so many dirty dishes. (Not to mention "grocery shopping, arranging crackers on cheese trays, making coffee, and loading the dishwasher.") She's also had to reckon with her own degree of interest (or lack thereof) in the actual business of running a business.

"I'm not a retailer at heart," says McCaig. "At an event, I'd be standing up front, welcoming the author and the audience and saying 'Oh, isn't this great, isn't this wonderful?' and my business partner Will [Lawrence] would stage whisper from the back, 'Remind them to buy books!'"

For some, partners are definitely essential to the enterprise. The owners of Lexicon Books in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia — poet Alice Burdick, YA novelist Jo Treggiari, and children's book enthusiast Anne-Marie Sheppard — suspected as much when they opened their store in 2015.

"The partnership is a very sensible way of organizing the business," says Burdick. "We three all do different things, but there's a lot of overlap too. We're the primary employees as well as being the bookstore owners, so we know exactly how the store is operating at all times."

Burdick adds that as "mothers and single parents" there's also a shared understanding of how to balance the demands of the bookstore with the rest of life. But, despite the clear-headedness with which the trio entered the market, Treggiari says initially the response to their plan was doubt.

However, Treggiari says that "independent bookstores had already been on the rise again in the U.S., so we knew it was only a matter of time in Canada. People like to shop in welcoming places with knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff."

Purcell and Stepanic concur, noting that the market research they did prior to opening Glass Bookshop showed that "not only are print book sales steadily on the rise but that most independent bookstores in Canada are profitable."

Of course, that doesn't mean that running a bookstore is a path to untold riches. Or to riches, period. However, for some in this

“Not only are print book sales steadily on the rise, but most independent bookstores in Canada are profitable.”

group of writer-owners, it has meant a more consistent income stream than what Purcell and Stepanic characterize as the “feast-or-famine” freelance lifestyle. Still, what of that matter of writing, now squeezed in between bank statements, boxes, and dishes?

TRYING TO WRITE

Purcell and Stepanic, still in the thick of early days, acknowledge that getting a business up and running means less time (and mental energy) to write, but say they hope to eventually find a “new way” to balance their writing projects. Sadly, anecdotal evidence to support the likelihood of reaching this goal appears to be thin on the ground. Although JoAnn McCaig offers a note of hope — after nearly a decade of running Shelf Life, and with considerable help from her “hardworking and capable staff,” she’s found both time to write and a publisher for her new, recently released novel.

So, something to aspire to. Meanwhile, Michelle Berry notes that “actual full writing days are few,” saying that even when wintry storms empty out the store for hours at a time, there are still the boxes, the accounts, the inventory, the books, the payroll, and the general “blah blah blah” that needs doing. Jo Treggiari shares a similar story, saying her dream of “sleepy cozy days writing on my laptop in the bookstore haven’t really panned out.” For her, writing continues to be chiselled out of “home time and kid time.”

But owning a bookstore still beats plenty of other ways of paying the bills, says Burdick. Greater responsibility, yes, but also greater satisfaction, derived in no small part from supporting other living authors. Bonus: For Burdick the constant supply of books in all genres has had a positive impact on her work, helping her to stretch as a writer. Being surrounded by books really can be fuel for one’s own fire, or, as Treggiari puts it, “Creativity in others inspires creativity in yourself.”

Of course, running a bookstore isn’t only about a) the daily slog, b) the quest for writing time, or c) turning to your wares as a source of creative inspiration. There’s also d), those people on the other side of the cash register. And, as anyone who’s ever worked in retail knows, customers can be a challenge. Berry jokes, “Sometimes running a bookstore is like being a

psychotherapist.” But she’s also quick to add that more often than not her customers are “fun and interesting and kind and informative” and, ultimately, a source of inspiration. Her peers in the biz without exception share that sentiment. Bonus: Not only is owning a bookstore a direct conduit to the book-loving-and-buying public, it’s also a straight shot to the publishing industry itself.

“The more we interact with publishers, organizations, and individual authors,” say Purcell and Stepanic, “the greater sense we have of what is happening in Canada’s literary landscape and how we can best respond to it, in the bookshop and in our own work as writers.”

So, writers with the dream, don’t give up. For one thing, reports of the death of the independent bookstore have turned out to be greatly exaggerated. For another, it’s clear that being a writer-bookseller may have both financial and creative rewards. And, for any home-office-based writer who feels isolated (i.e., most writers), one thing is for sure: Owning a bookstore really will get you out of the house.

Li Robbins is a freelance writer based in Peterborough, Ontario. Her work has appeared in The Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, The Walrus, Toronto Life, and on CBC.ca among other publications and websites. She was the communications director for the Writers’ Guild of Canada from 2013 to 2018 and prior to that worked as a CBC website and radio producer. She plans to tweet more frequently in future @LiRobbins.

Editor’s Note: The Winter 2017 issue of Write ran several stories on bookstores in Canada, including Hunter Street Books and Lexicon Books. We are happy to say that, at time of writing, these bookstores have weathered the gloomy forecast caused by the rise of digital media and are thriving as independents.

Dispatches

NOTES ON THE WRITING LIFE

MENTORSHIP /

Creating Space for Writers of Colour



Farzana Doctor



Anuja Varghese

In October 2019, The Writers' Union of Canada and League of Canadian Poets hosted BIPOC Writers Connect, a half-day conference for Black, Indigenous, and racialized emerging writers. The event featured workshops, panels, and one-on-one mentorship. Here, two writers reflect on the mentorship experience.

LEARNING HOW TO BE A MENTOR BY FARZANA DOCTOR

2002: I'm sitting in Maria Meindl's office. She's the first "real writer" I've ever met. I'm sweaty, and my body is numb. She looks up from my pages and says, "This is a novel." I don't believe her — I haven't yet had the courage to imagine my work as anything that could be published — but at least I can feel my legs again. I go home with my head bursting with her feedback. I resolve to continue editing, even though I'm sick of editing.

2005: I'm at my first writers' conference, "Written in Colour," an event for Indigenous writers and writers of colour, organized by the Toronto Women's Bookstore. It's both comforting and intimidating to be around so many BIPOC writers. Wayson Choy

is on the stage. With a laugh, he announces that he feels like an imposter, even after writing three books. Three books! It dawns on me that feeling like a fraud is normal.

2008: I'm in Pearson's Terminal 3, awaiting my flight to Jamaica, and I notice Lawrence Hill sitting nearby. My companions urge me to go say "hello." Heart in throat, I approach him — apologetically, shyly — and express my appreciation for his work. He reaches out to shake my hand and I introduce myself. He wants to know if I'm a writer too, and when I nod, he asks the title of my recently published first novel. He tells me he's headed to the Calabash Festival. It's inconceivable, but I realize he's speaking to me as a colleague.

These were the memories that sprang up when TWUC staffer Jessica Kirk sent out the group call to prepare for BIPOC Writers Connect. She'd asked us to share tips and advice for how we'd approach our work as mentors. I was mentally revisiting the vulnerability and insecurity of being an emerging writer, but more importantly, I was recalling how Maria, Wayson, and Larry had modelled the conduct of a mentor: encouragement, intentional self-disclosure, prodding to do better, and respectful and empathic engagement.

Writing can still be an insecure and vulnerable experience for me, but less so today because of the many privileges and opportunities I've been afforded (including being hired as a mentor at BIPOC Writers Connect). As an intersectional feminist settler, it's important for me to help build supportive, liberatory writing communities. We need spaces where marginalized people are not the tokens, where we don't have to explain our existence,

where we can imagine an approach to writing that isn't based on scarcity and competition. When I arrived at BIPOC Writers Connect, scanned the crowd, and felt the excited (and socially awkward — writers, right?) vibe, I sensed it would be just this sort of space.

Later, I sat with the three talented writers who I'd been matched with: Anuja Varghese, Leanne Toshiko Simpson, and Valérie Bah (yes! look them up!). The conversations we had that morning were about refining craft, writing characters with marginalized identities, getting published, avoiding stereotypes in our stories, finding agents, queer sex in writing, editing, and revision. Important conversations.

Twenty years ago, I didn't know how to be a writer, and the countless mentors that have entered my life, both formally and informally, helped me to figure it out. And they continue to lead by their example, teaching me how to be a mentor.

Farzana Doctor is a Toronto-based author of four novels: Stealing Nasreen, Six Metres of Pavement, All Inclusive, and the forthcoming Seven (August 2020). Farzana was recently named one of CBC Books' "100 Writers in Canada You Need to Know Now." She is a proud member of TWUC's Equity Task Force and is also a part-time psychotherapist and amateur tarot card reader. farzanadoctor.com

MENTORSHIP, CONNECTION, AND INSPIRATION BY ANUJA VARGHESE

Like most emerging writers I know, I celebrate every acceptance. Sometimes, I even celebrate the nice rejections. But when I received an acceptance from The Writers' Union of Canada to not only attend their inaugural BIPOC Writers Connect conference, but also to participate in a mentorship session with an established Canadian BIPOC writer — I was nervous. Unlike other conferences I had attended for work or school, I knew no one else attending, and as I walked into the airy conference space and surveyed the sea of unfamiliar faces, I wondered if anyone else shared my fears about being mentored, being seen as a writer, and being a little out of place. As it turned out, it was exactly that shared feeling of displacement that brought a room full of strangers together for a day made meaningful by mentorship, connection, and inspiration.

My mentor was award-winning writer and activist Farzana Doctor. Throughout our session, Farzana offered insightful feedback on my work that prompted interesting avenues for

revision. She was generous in sharing her own experiences navigating the publishing industry and took the time to introduce me to other mentors and encouraged continued connection-making. Even after the conference, she has remained supportive of my journey, and I am grateful to know I can always reach out for guidance and sound advice. I could not have asked for a richer mentorship experience.

It was over lunch that we attendees began to break the ice, chatting about our work and our lives, all the ways our names had been mispronounced in countless spaces, the ways we often felt out of place as writers (most of us women) in BIPOC bodies. Many of us have stayed connected through social media, cheering each other on as we all find our footing in the CanLit landscape, and perhaps feeling just a little less out of place by virtue of taking up more space together.

The conference wrapped up with an industry panel featuring Terese Mason Pierre, Léonicka Valcius, and Anita Chong, three inspiring women of colour who filled their time with humour, warmth, and candor. I suspect all three would make excellent mentors in their own right, and I know I was not the only writer in the room who ended the day with the sense that we had created a space full of creative energy where we could be our full selves — storytellers, poets, and people — empowered to keep moving forward, wherever our writing paths may lead us.

Farzana's mentorship helped me shape my work into a cohesive framework for a debut short story collection, and after learning about Ontario Arts Council granting programs at the conference, I successfully applied for funding for this project. I also became a TWUC member; continue to celebrate (and sometimes commiserate) with conference connections; and in moments of soul-crushing, self-doubting, writing-alone-in-the-middle-of-January despair, find myself returning to my conference notes time and again. The words of wisdom, encouragement, and inspiration I jotted down throughout the day from Farzana, from the panelists, and from my fellow BIPOC writers remind me that to take risks, to tackle the page, to simply write in my body and my voice, is always to be exactly in the right place.

Anuja Varghese is a Pushcart-nominated writer based in Hamilton, Ontario. Her work appears in The Malahat Review, Humber Literary Review, Hamilton Review of Books, and others. Anuja holds a degree in English Literature from McGill University and is currently pursuing a Creative Writing Certificate from the University of Toronto while working on a collection of short stories. She can be found online at anujavarghese.com.

Writing to Heal

BY BEN NUTTALL-SMITH



“Writing is a compulsion” sounds like a cliché. Writing has neither brought me fame nor fortune. I’ve spent more on my scribbling than I could ever hope to earn from such an endeavour.

I’m sure most would-be authors have discovered as much. Even good writers struggle to make ends meet. However, once started, I was unable to stop. Sound familiar?

I began writing to heal. I was experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, and in the midst of dealing with it, I was overwhelmed with myriad thoughts and confused memories of being eight, nine, and ten during the London Blitz, living a twofold terror with my pedophile uncle. To deal with such vivid flashbacks and a sense of incredible guilt, I found it necessary to scribble notes on endless reams of paper. That *was* a compulsion.

* * *

“*%#*%!” I stood on a hilltop, a short car ride and walk from my “handyman’s delight” in West Sechelt, BC, flinging stones with all the force in my right arm. My son, my sweet loving son, urged me on.

“Great, Dad. Get it all out. Shout and curse as loud as you like. None but I can hear you here on this mountain top.”

He threw his own stones. We both threw and yelled until, at last, exhausted, we sat on a log laughing. My laughter mingled with tears. He, holding me in a complete reversal of roles. Son and Father — Father and Son.

I’d bottled so much up since PTSD. My forced retirement from teaching and resultant marriage breakdown had driven me to live alone in my tumbledown house on its own hill with a view. That yelling session was the catalyst — the moment of permission to express my feelings of anger and frustration. My young son provided what a psychiatrist had been unable to provide: permission to express previously suppressed feelings.

“You can be angry at Mom, angry at God, angry at yourself. Let go the poison. If you can’t yell and scream, write it down. Then read it out and burn what you need to get rid of.”

* * *

Later, after my son returned to university and I sat alone, I began writing. I filled entire notebooks with scribbles of emotion and scattered memories from earliest childhood to my years of teaching.

On sunny days, I cleared the weedy hill beside the house and gradually built and planted beautiful rockeries and gardens with fish

ponds and waterfalls, roses and rhododendrons, azaleas and bushy ferns. On the other side of the house where the ground was more level, I built an abundant vegetable garden with a lush lawn in front.

Through all this activity, I began having flashbacks of childhood terrors, memories I’d pushed from my mind as hidden horrors of filth and shame and an oath of strictest secrecy, suppressed for more than fifty years. All this I wrote down on tear-stained pages.

At last, I began transferring scribbles to computer documents, discarding garbage to an incinerator pile — and the pages mounted up. Thus began the lengthy and often tumultuous process of healing. I had to learn to forgive myself and discover my own innocence, finally washing away “my sins.”

Forgiving is more than mere words. Forgiving involves an active choice — difficult at first but feasible with determination, effort, and time. Forgiving others follows.

We all make mistakes in life. Sometimes we hurt those we love the most. Discovering and acknowledging them makes it easier to forgive others who have hurt us. Not always, but most of the time. Self-editing and submitting to other editors helped me discover this.

More than anything else in writing a memoir, it’s most important to remember that no one wants to hear someone feeling sorry for themselves. Banish sadness, but tell things as they were and are. The future is promising. However, old habits are hard to break.

It took me ten years to upgrade the house and garden to showcase status and, more importantly, to complete the first draft of my healing memoir. I finally sold the house and moved to the city where I met the love of my life — a supportive partner and my primary editor — and many years of love and emotional healing. Following two editions by other publishers and extensive self-editing, Rutherford Press of Qualicum Beach, BC, published *Discovered in a Scream*.

* * *

My spirit healed at last, other books followed. No longer egocentric, I wrote and published poetry, children’s stories, a historical novel, and the biography of one of Canada’s earliest bush pilots. My spirit had been freed and creativity followed at a gallop.

Ben Nuttall-Smith is past president of the Federation of British Columbia Writers and member of The Writers’ Union of Canada. Publications include a memoir, a historical novel, an illustrated biography of a Fraser Valley homesteader and pioneer bush-pilot, several books of poetry, and an illustrated children’s book. Ben’s latest publication, dedicated to his lately deceased wife, is Margot – Love in the Golden Years. BenNuttall-Smith.ca

Poetry

Drunken Laundry Day with Charles Bukowski

BY HENRY DOYLE

It takes a six-pack just for him to get it together
in that dirty underground room of his.
His radio is cranked, "London's calling."
He gets that mess together into a pile.
Condemned rags, he thinks,
and cracks another beer.
With a pillow case and a box of soap
he heads out with that beer-stained
Bukowski book of poems,
The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses.
His rooming house is in the DTES.
The laundromat is around the corner.
The cashier just on his left.
The rat tat tat of a sewing machine
behind the counter.
He heads for the back.
Chairs, tables, scattered newspapers.
He stuffs his stinky rags into a washer.
He stays and reads Bukowski,
puts his workman rags into the dryer,
sinks enough quarters in for an hour,
and heads for that closest bar.
"I'll have two of your cheapest draft,"
he says to the young bartender.
He puts Bukowski's book down
to get at a twenty-dollar bill.
"I think Mr. Bukowski would approve,"
the bartender says. "I read his shit in college.
A lot of us have, dude."
He heads for that dirty-fish-bowl smoking room,
thinks, all right — college students
still read Bukowski.
After the third round and another poem,
"Song of my typewriter,"



he heads back in sunglasses
through a gauntlet of drug addicts
curled up in dirty street blankets.
Syringes scattered with garbage everywhere.
Skinny, hardened rat-faced drug addicts
committing suicide slowly.
He stops as this twenty-year-old kid jumps
in front of him, wrapped in a blanket,
holding a garbage bag suitcase.
Thin, tall, shaggy long blond hair, blue eyes
a sculpted bronze sunken pimpled face, asking
"Do you want to buy some crack?"
He looks at him from head to bare dirty feet,
wonders if he's that fallen angel.
"No, my life is hard enough kid,
I don't have to make it any harder man."
He stumbles into the laundromat
feeling like he just escaped a bunch of zombies.
The place is full of the extinct middle class.
He watches them as they slowly turn into fossils,
feels more pity for them
than the ones that are outside
committing suicide.
He opens the dryer door.
"Jesus Christ, hot as hell,"
he says out loud.
Bangs his head, curses in silence.
Then he hears a little voice.
"Mommy, there's another man arguing with God again."
He turns around, takes off his sunglasses.
A little girl with sun-kissed freckles smiles.
As she sits there, on the table,
her mother continues folding their clothes.
With a smile she says, "Let the man be, Sara."
"My laundry is really hot,"
he says, in his own mad defense.
He stuffs his rags into his pillowcase
thinks only of that other warm six-pack.
Says goodbye to the little girl and her mother.
Apologizes to them and God.

Heads back to that dirty little underground
to drink and read
Bukowski's drunken knowledge.

*Originally published in Geist, Issue 84, Fall 2011. You can find
Henry's story on page 8. To see Henry's powerful video poem, visit
vimeo.com/387885734.*

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