

2—THE VICTORIA ADVOCATE, Sunday, July 29, 1990

Henry's Journal

His Poetry Just Wakes You Up

By Henry Wolff Jr.



Sometimes when there's a bunch of people in the living room sitting around saying nothing.

When they all get to looking like they've been to a funeral.

I go to the bookstore and get out C.J. Berkman's first book of poetry, "No More Dues to Pay," and I read a few lines and before anybody notices that most of it doesn't rhyme, they're wide awake and back to talking again.

C.J. writes the kind of poetry that makes a person feel like waking up.

It also goes good with straight whiskey or a shot of tequila.

I don't know the first thing about poetry, so I suppose it can be called poetry that he writes — after all, he's become well-known as the "South Texas redneck poet," and a lot of us can relate to that — and I figure since he's a poet that he must write poetry.

Actually, it's more what you'd call verse — free verse, believe they called it back in the '60s and '70s when contemporary poets began finding an audience in the coffee houses in California and elsewhere, which I suppose isn't all that different than the honky tonks and taverns of South Texas where C.J. tries out his material on audiences today, in between musicians, and I suppose an occasional barroom brawl.

C.J. writes a lot about the South Texas culture, and so he's right at home reading his poetry between the "Cotton-Eyed Joe"

and anything George Strait.

Whether it's poetry or just plain old verse, or something in between, it doesn't matter at all, although I'm certain that my seventh grade English teacher, Mrs. Parker, would have some objections since C.J. doesn't pay any attention to making his verse rhyme — not every other line, nor any line that I can tell.

The only rhyme you will find in C.J. Berkman's poetry is in your mind.

It will strike you, just as it does the sleepheads in my living room when I decide to wake them up with a shot of Redneck, and it has worked just about every time for me.

What does C.J. write about?

Lost loves, of course, like any poet, and working in the oilpatch, on the railroad, riding bulls and broncos, some friends worthy of mention, the cowboy life, and whatever else has touched him in his years growing up in Victoria County and working on the railroad and as an English teacher, and I don't know what all.

For a fairly young man, he's had some diverse occupations — to the above add bartender, oilfield roughneck, guitarist and songwriter, which I guess is what he was doing the last time I saw him since he was playing with a band at the old Brown Bag, as I recall.

I don't remember just when I first met him, but believe it was back when he was teaching English and trying to make some changes in the system, which did give him



C.J. BERKMAN ... the "South Texas Redneck Poet."

some subject material to write about, like a verse on his final day at the high school that appears in his latest book, "South Texas Redneck."

I won't try to quote any C.J. Berkman here, since most of his work needs to be

read in its entirety, and his latest group of verses are somewhat longer than the short pieces that he included in his first book. This book gets a little deeper into his thoughts about his native South Texas and some of the folks he's known, but it's still a lot of fun to read if you like the kind of poetry that speaks out.

C.J. believes in writing what he thinks.

I particularly like a rather long verse at the beginning of the book titled, "The American Dream," about the decline of rural South Texas as it was known to his father and grandfather before him.

I'd say C.J. is a combination of the cowboy poets of old and the poets of the '60s and '70s who got their message across in simple narrative verse without worrying whether it rhymes or not. If you expect nice flowery little thoughts with lines that do rhyme, you might not be ready for the "South Texas Redneck."

C.J. says he will send anyone a copy for \$10.95, however, which includes postage and handling, if you will just mail it to him at 7615 Stone Crop Lane in San Antonio, 78249, and he will autograph it, too.

He says Billy Joe Shaver, Townes Van Zandt, Kinky Friedman, and James McMurtry — Larry's son — are giving a little show Aug. 11 for his official autograph party at the Leon Springs Cafe.

Would kinda like to hear him read some of his stuff sometime myself.

I'd just bet he has a wide awake audience.

Glad You Asked That

Connery Rapped for Women's Pay Comment

By MARILYN GARDNER (c) 1990, North America Syndicate Inc.

Q: On the one hand, Sean Connery has been voted the most sexy man in a magazine poll. On the other hand, he got into hot water during a Barbara Walters TV interview when he declared there was nothing wrong with striking a woman occasionally.



Connery

After having to defend this statement in subsequent interviews, didn't he recently get out of line about women again — this time in the British press? Marrison J., Springfield, Mass.

A: The 59-year-old sex symbol was simply responding to a question being discussed frequently these days about why male film stars get twice as much money as female stars. Concluded Connery: "Women tennis players don't get as much money as the men because people come to see the men. I presume it's the same with the film industry." The same has been said about the reason there are more male recording stars than female. Because it's the girls more than the boys who buy the records.

Q: For years, there's been a rumor that one of John Lennon's songs was inspired by an extramarital affair he had while still married to Cynthia. If true, which one was it? Susan S., Phoenix, Ariz.

A: That particular Lennon song was called "Norwegian Wood."

A QUOTABLE QUIP: "For three days after death, hair and fingernails continue to grow. But phone calls taper off!" — JOHNNY CARSON

Q: Whatever happened to the son of actor Peter Lawford and Pat Kennedy Lawford? Did he become a lawyer like some of the other Kennedy boys? Carol Z., Kaneohe, Hawaii.

A: Christopher, now 35, does have a law degree. But following a brief summer stint at a law firm, he decided he wanted to pursue an acting career. After doing a few TV commercials and some movies, the modest member of the Kennedy clan shrugs that in most of them, he was "principal background."

A BIOG BIT: Chuck Woolery, host of "Love Connection," was once a country and western singer. He was the original host of the top-rated game show, "Wheel of Fortune," from the time it debuted in 1975 through 1982.

Q: Mick Jagger once vowed to quit when he reached a certain age. What age was that? And how old is he now? Vivien L., Arlington Heights, Ill.

A: Now 46 and still going strong, the rock superstar made that declaration when he was in his late 20s. But he and the Rolling Stones are still breaking records at the box office while the cash registers continue to play sweet music. When asked whether he was ready to write his autobiography, Jagger joked that he could never write it because "I can't remember

what happened!"

Q: John Wayne and Susan Hayward, who both died of cancer, co-starred in a film in the 1950s that was shot near the site of nuclear bomb tests. It was rumored there were others connected with this movie who also later died of cancer. Can you fill us in on some of the details, please? Mrs. Margo, McN. Phoenix, Ariz.

A: The movie was "The Conqueror," a 1955 movie epic about Genghis Khan. Filmed in Utah, those involved were only 137 miles away from the site of the 11 nuclear bomb tests just two years earlier. In addition to Wayne and Hayward, Dick Powell (who directed the film) also died of cancer. And reportedly, nearly half the cast and crew of 220 people, later developed the dread disease.

Q: Every time a hit movie comes out these days, there's immediate talk about a sequel. Will that happen with "Bull Durham" which starred Kevin Costner? Rick P., Richmond, Va.

A: It looks like it. A screenplay is now being written. But no word yet on whether Costner and his co-stars, Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins, have agreed to do the sequel.

YOU KNOW YOU'RE GETTING OLD WHEN you reach the other side of so many things that were once in the future!

Q: Is this really the last season of the "Matlock" TV series? Please say it isn't. It's one of our favorites. Mrs. Theresa C., Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

A: Like you, we've heard that Andy Griffith reportedly has decided this is the last season he's doing "Matlock." We hope we've heard wrong. It's always been a quality show. And you don't find too many of those on television these days.

Q: The mysterious "Lady in Black" who used to visit Rudolph Valentino's mansion in Hollywood — was her identity ever revealed? And wasn't she a one-time star of the silent era? David J., Kaneohe, Hawaii.

A: Her name was Dira Flame and she was a violinist and pianist. She first met Valentino when he was a dancer. Only 14 at the time, she became ill and was hospitalized. When Valentino visited her bringing her red roses, he said she was afraid she was going to die and nobody would remember her after she was gone. He promised that if she died, he'd bring roses to her grave every day. "But you must remember that if I go first, I don't want to be lonely either." Wearing a black dress, black stockings, black shoes, black hat and a heavy black veil, this "Lady in Black" came to Valentino's crypt every day for three years, then once a year from 1926 till 1955. She always brought 18 roses — a dozen red and one white for the movie idol. Ironically, although Rudolph Valentino was the personification of romance and sex for millions of women around the world, he died a lonely, love-starved man.

Send your questions to "Glad You Asked That!" care of this newspaper. Marilyn Gardner will answer as many questions as she can in her column, but the volume of mail makes personal replies impossible.