

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

History of the No Borders Free Bookstore, 1999-2024

Introduction

8/31/2024 - 8:57 a.m.
Bungalow Cee - Attic Study
Milkrose, Massachusetts

About noontime today, so an hour or so from now, my beloved KD & I will carry an armful of chapbooks to our house’s front lawn, specifically to a cypress-green-colored Little Free Library (LFL) we purchased a few weeks ago. Built by the Amish in Wisconsin, & shipped to us last week. We set it up last night.

Little Free Libraries look like big mailboxes from a distance. Like a box on a post, usually in front of someone’s house or apartment. Closer up reveal inside shelves of books, & perhaps some trinkets too. Usually bear the owner’s name affixed on a metal nameplate, & a sign that encourages one to “take a book or leave a book.”

According to *Wikipedia*, there are over 150,000 of these free public book exchanges in 115 countries. The first one was built in 2009 by Todd Bol, in Hudson, Wisconsin, in the shape of a one-room schoolhouse, as a tribute to his late mother, a schoolteacher who loved books. From that first LFL set up on his front lawn, he & his partner Rick Brooks helped to spread the LFL idea far & wide.

Our LFL’s nameplate reads:

Little Free Library
No Borders Free Bookstore
scriptorpress.com

As our current LFL version of No Borders Free Bookstore is relatively small (18" x 22" x 14.25"), we are only putting out a portion of our sum total of 78 Burning Man Books, 22 *Scriptor Press Samplers*, & 9 *RaiBooks*. Will rotate titles in & out. And no *Cenacles*. Too tall to fit.

And here is where the current moment begins to connect back for me, more than two decades, to my first trip to the Burning Man Arts Festival, located in Black Rock City in Nevada's Black Rock Desert, in 1999, & to the first iteration of No Borders Free Bookstore I brought there with my friend Mio Cohen.

Culled from my *Secret Joy Amongst These Times: The History of Scriptor Press*, & other sources, as well as with this new introduction & conclusion, & containing photos not gathered for publication before, I will tell the story of No Borders Free Bookstore, so far, as it hits 25 years, & counting.

Burning Man Arts Festival, August 30-September 6, 1999

In August 1999, because jobless & on summer break from graduate school at Emerson College in Boston, I was able to devote my full time to Scriptor Press's newest project: Burning Man Books. Working with my new friend Mio Cohen, we produced five chapbook titles intended for the 1999 Burning Man Arts Festival, to be distributed there at our "No Borders Barter Bookstore & More" (as it was originally called). We traveled together a week in her car the 3000 miles from Boston to the festival's location, Black Rock City, in Nevada's Black Rock Desert.

We also brought several other new Scriptor Press publications: *Scriptor Press Sampler | 1999 | #1*; my *RaiBook #1, Orpheus & Eurydice: Making the Lyre*; & *RaiBook #2, Ric Amante's Ferry Tales & Other Poems*. The *RaiBooks* were created by my dear artist friend Barbara Brannon & myself.

Burning Man Books inaugurated a "special projects division" of Scriptor Press. Its 1999 volumes include:

- *Let the Beauty We Love Be What We Do: Selections from Poems of Jelalludin Rumi*;
- *Are You Ready for Burning Man 1999?* (a coloring book);
- *Beauty Crowds Me Till I Die: Selections from the Poems of Emily Dickinson*;
- *All Things Flow From The Holy Ghost: Selections from the Poems and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*; &
- *Strawberry Fields Forever: A Short Anthology of Writings about Psychedelics*.



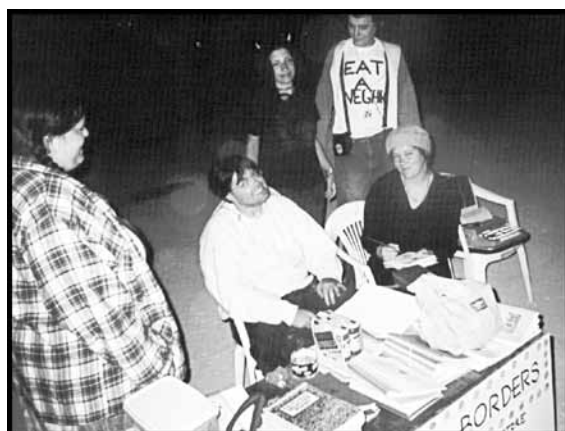
These books (save for the coloring book, which was for fun) contain vital Art that is not often enough



gotten into the hands of people who simply cannot afford to buy volumes of them in bookstores. The point of disseminating Art has nothing to do with commercial gain; Artists wish to share their visions, their struggles, their joys, the ways they've found to make it in this world.

Art brings edification & entertainment to the many people in great need of these. No profit has been or ever will be sought from these titles. A higher moral purpose is at stake: to make people happy, encourage them to keep trying, show them they are not alone with their struggles & woes, & that Art is there is heal, and that there are people who want to make sure its healing powers are spread as far & as wide as possible.

We arrived at the festival & spent several days with many others helping our friend Chuck Nichols erect his Temple of the Eternal Mysteries (TOTEM). On 9/3/1999 & 9/4/1999 we set up our bookstore near TOTEM, & bartered our books for seashells, necklaces, fire-dances, stories, smiles. It was fantastic. I also wrote poems for people on request because I think it's a shame so few people have had poems written for them. Every person should have at least one 😊

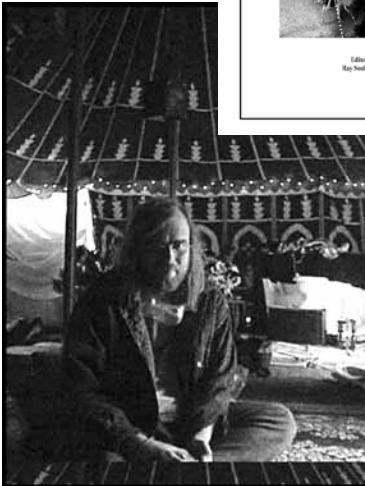
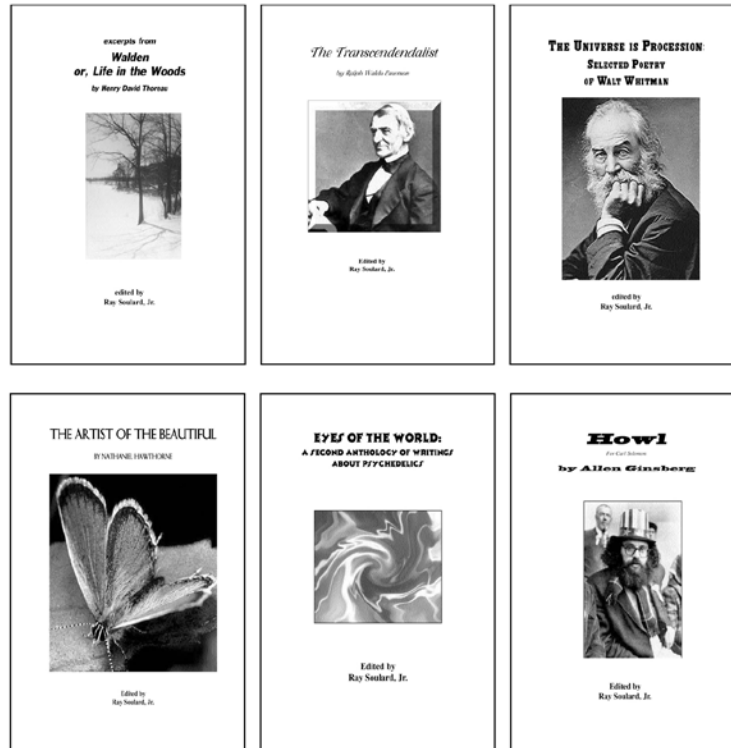


Burning Man Arts Festival, August 26-September 4, 2000

That summer I spent working on contract at Harvard Business School Publishing, going off to dance at Phish shows near & far, & readying for my return to Burning Man. This time I traveled to it by plane.

I determined to bring a No Borders Free Bookstore again (now better named), & toward this end created a half-dozen Burning Man Books 2000 volumes:

- Henry David Thoreau's *Excerpts from Walden*;
- Ralph Waldo Emerson's *The Transcendentalist*;
- *The Universe is Procession: Selected Poetry by Walt Whitman*;
- Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Artist of the Beautiful*;
- *Eyes of the World: A Second Anthology of Writing about Psychedelics*; &
- Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*.



Sadly, the TOTEM camp remained an un-built shambles this time due to uncooperative soil & poor planning. Having no set location to gift out books, a campmate of mine named Renée & I walked through the streets of Black Rock City, handing them out grab-bag style.

Burning Man 2000 was one full of personal strife for me, & a frequent sense of isolation & loneliness. One night, very high on

acid, I writhed in my tent, leaving it via a kind of out-of-body experience, rising, rising, looking down at the great & tiny thing that was Black Rock City below, & was told somehow that I did not have to go back. A chance to opt out of this plane, it being one of infinite number. I chose to remain, for the time being, though I wondered what would have been discovered in my tent had I chosen to depart. *Heh.*

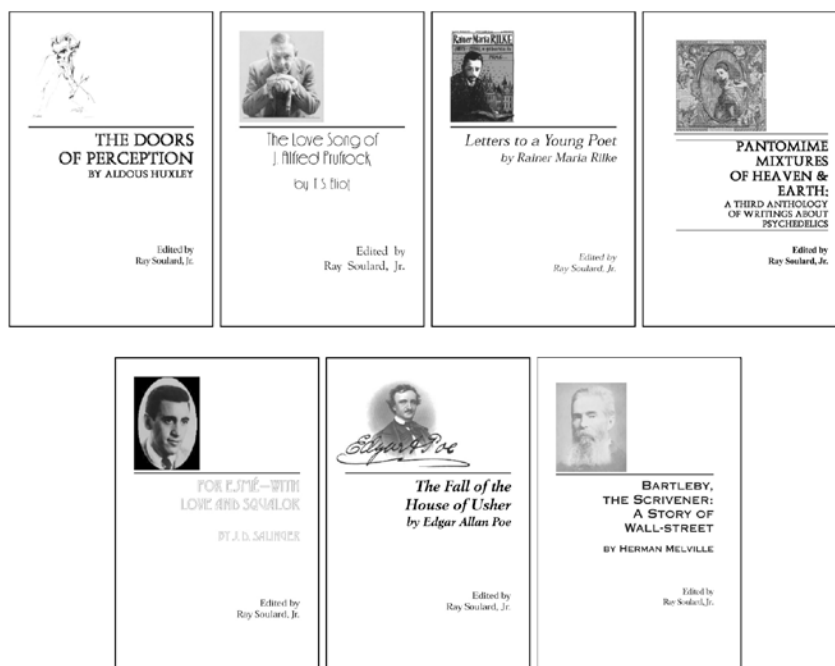
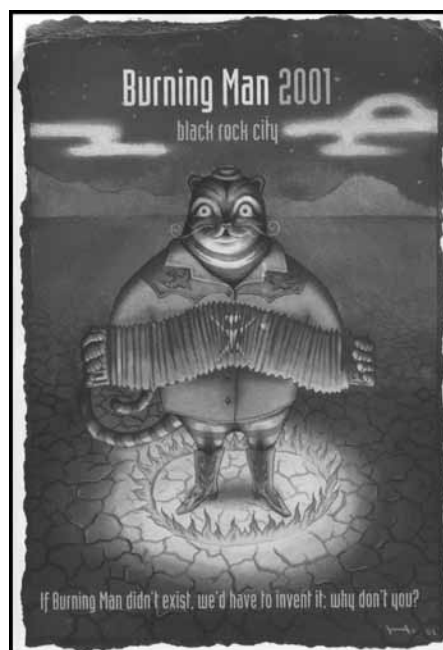
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Burning Man Arts Festival, August 27-September 3, 2001

Unemployed, again. And Burning Man preparation took the most of my energy, work, focus, & money anyway. I determined to go, & what money I didn't spend on rent & bills, & long distance phone cards to call a girl named Lisa who I liked very much then, I spent on readying for my third annual trip to Black Rock City.

Burning Man Books 2001 features these volumes:

- Aldous Huxley's seminal essay on mescaline, *Doors of Perception*;
- T. S. Eliot's early important poem *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*;
- Rainer Maria Rilke's profoundly influential *Letters to a Young Poet*;
- A third anthology of writings on psychedelics, *Pantomime Mixtures of Heaven & Earth*.
- J. D. Salinger's beautiful & cryptic fiction *For Esmé—With Love and Squalor*;
- Edgar Allen Poe's classic story *Fall of the House of Usher*; &
- Herman Melville's genius tale *Bartleby the Scrivener*.



Seven books in all to bring the series to eighteen total, & hereon to publish six a year. More meaningful than this, however, was the adding to the series works profoundly important to me. Rilke's letters taught me how to write, how to think. Salinger's story showed me the great raw potency of storytelling. Huxley's essay arches over societal prejudices about psychedelics, about the unlimited depths of the world, & humanity itself, to reveal strange goodness & clutching beauty at the heart of creation. These three among a dear group of works were what I carried with me to the festival & its many highs & lows. The nights wandering the desert, ragged & high & weirdly happy . . .

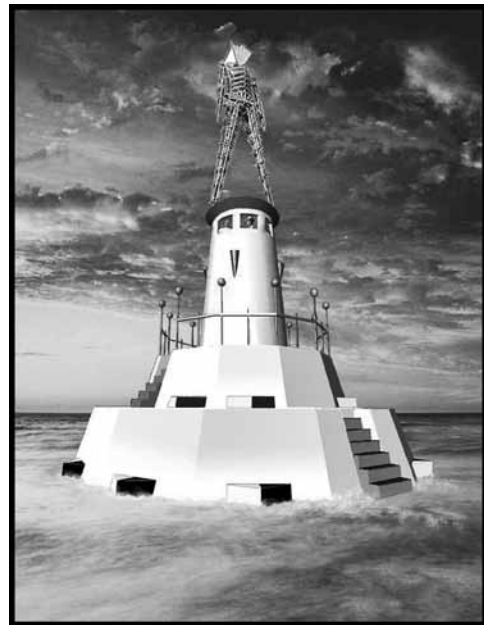


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Burning Man Arts Festival, August 26-September 2, 2002

Finally moved out west, to stay with my Burning Man friend Sean Lamont in Seattle, & to pursue romance with Lisa down in Portland, fruitlessly. When summer came, I got Scriptor Press back in gear, & set to making new books for the fourth annual appearance of No Borders Free Bookstore at Burning Man.

As I had before, I engaged my friend & collaborator Barbara Brannon to design & lay out the books. I selected the authors & works, & did the printing & binding work. Just as my dear friend & brother Jim Burke III taught me much of how to pursue artistic visions, & my dear friend & brother David Hartley taught me how to rent consensus reality's limiting perceptions, so too my dear friend & sister Brannon taught me countless things about how to craft beautiful vehicles to deliver these visions & perceptions.



The Burning Man Books 2002 volumes include:

- *A Terrible Beauty is Born: Selected Poems of William Butler Yeats;*
- *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka;
- *Dig and Be Dug in Return: Selected Poems of Langston Hughes;*
- *Everything Carries Me to You: Selected Poems of Pablo Neruda;*
- *The World Will End in Fire: Selected Poems of Robert Frost;* &
- *I Am You and What I See Is Me: A Fourth Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics.*

Yeats' poetry sings & growls, reaches & reaches wildly far; Kafka's fiction elaborates the nightmarish diminishment of the individual in the modern world; Neruda's poetry has a rough, burning hide to it, affects deeply what it touches; Frost's poems are boney & plain, smart lovely wastes; the anthology continued my work of getting out to the counterculture words wise & pretty about the psychedelic



outlands; the Hughes volume I included for Lisa; she called him a favorite poet. I made this volume for her from diminishing love's best impulse; he is a good poet, so no regrets.

With fast-going money I took the book-masters Brannon sent, & spent days at making them into chapbooks at a copier shop near the University of Washington. The Afghan family who ran the place was friendly, & took care of me & my project. At night I returned to my friend's home & bound the chapbooks using a special stapler.

I went to Burning Man 2002 with a desperate need for relief, for kindness, for rest, for clarity. I asked for everything. I was given much. It was a long week in the desert with my sadness & fear, knowing I had no money left, heart broken, having to make it on my own out West soon, or give up. No Borders Free Bookstore was its yearly success. I returned to Seattle ready to renew my struggle.



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Burning Man Arts Festival, August 25-September 1, 2003

Slunk back East, to Connecticut, empty as a pocket, staying in a spare bedroom in my dear friend G.C. Dillon's apartment. Fortune struck me when a resume I sent to a local weekly newspaper yielded a hit. I was hired to copyedit the *Hartford Advocate* for six weeks while its regular copy editor was on sick leave. I had not had a job I so liked in years. It was a pleasure to bus into Hartford, several days a week, & read copy. I could have gladly done this job for years.

As it was, the experience helped me feel a renewed sense of good self, & to save money to get West again. I could barely afford this fourth annual trip to Black Rock City, & the costs of preparing my No Borders Free Bookstore, but I sunk all into it, hoping I could heal some chasms, & figure where next my path.

And so another summer of making Burning Man Books. I employed my new-used copier to generate the pages, & my reliable old Macintosh did its part too. My friend Brannon helped me one last time to make the books good.

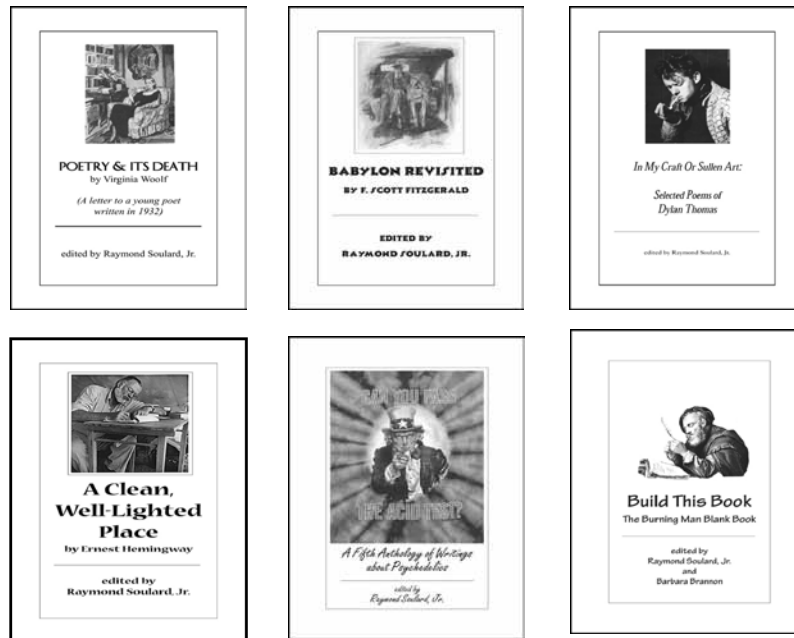
There's no real explanation as to what this project means to me, then & now, how removing my life for a week a year to a Utopian community in the desert affects the rest of the year. I manifest truly there, & thus bear a model for the other 51 weeks.

The Burning Man Books 2003 volumes include:

- Virginia Woolf's *Death of Poetry*, the text of a letter to a young poet friend of hers, a hopeful, funny missive shot through with despairing prose;
- F. Scott Fitzgerald's lovely, elegiac *Babylon Revisited*, clean prosy music lifted high on humility gained & loved realized;
- Dylan Thomas' *In My Art or Sullen Craft*, a collection of his rowdy mystic poems, anger & want elegantly bawled;
- Ernest Hemingway's *A Clean Well-Lighted Place*, a very short but striking fiction, one I first read when I was 18, in a book on existentialism that I'd found in the 3/\$1 bins in front of long-gone Huntington's Bookstore in Hartford;
- *Can You Pass the Acid Test?: A Fourth Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics* (contents including, among others, pieces by William James, Huston Smith, Jay Stevens, & Alan Watts); &
- The first non-text book since 1999's coloring book, *Build This Book: A Burning Man Blank Book*, decorated with quotes from previous Burning Man Book titles. It seemed inevitable that an event devoted to self-expression would find a pile of blank books gifted in its midst.

It was a good bunch of titles, & I also brought *Scriptor Press Sampler | #2 | 2000 Annual*, long delayed, featuring writings by Soulard, Ciccone, Amante, Shorette, Dillon, and a cover by Brannon. How come & gone.





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Burning Man Arts Festival, August 30-September 6, 2004

Back in Seattle, for the long run this time, now with KD, & she became the third collaborator I had worked with on the Burning Man Books series (Mio Cohen, 1999; solo, 2000; Barbara Brannon, 2001-2003), & gave the project exciting new impulse. We worked especially closely on volumes by Octavio Paz & Bashó. The Burning Man Books 2004 volumes include:

- Flannery O'Connor's savage tale *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. O'Connor is a favorite writer I share with Brannon. Her fiction is merciless in its drilling in for the subtle, hard morality of a situation or character. Truth, as she knows it, wins. Angels & devils both live & die according to this truth;
- Carl Gustav Jung's essay *On the Nature of Dreams* is an old favorite of mine, & one whose ideas color my own in thinking about the collective unconscious. I do pursue their sometimes insightful, even prophetic qualities a bit farther than he does;
- Octavio Paz's long poem *Sunstone* conjures sweet recollection of its being chosen for our series. I knew I wanted something by the Mexican master, but not sure what. KD & I went to the Seattle's famous Elliott Bay Bookstore one day, & sat with a volume of his collected poems. Perhaps on a whim, she began reading me this 600-plus-line poem, & didn't stop till its end. The selection was made. Later she read it to me again, its crazy swoops of meaning & melody, as I typed it on my Macintosh;
- James Joyce's short fiction *The Dead* was another old friend, culled from his collection *Dubliners*, which I'd first read many years ago in grad school. I am also a fan of John Huston's 1987 film version. A quite visceral tale of love & regret, it sounds its highest note in conclusion: "His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead";



- The sixth annual volume of psychedelic anthologies is called *Stones of Your Mind*, a line nipped from John Lennon’s brilliant song “Mind Games.” Its featured authors include Theodore Golas (*The Lazy Man’s Guide to Enlightenment*), Robert Hunter (“The Withering Away of the Revolution”), Ralph Metzner (“Seven Phases of Social-Cultural Transformation Catalyzed by LSD and Psychedelics”), Alexander Shulgin (“The Agony & Ecstasy of Alexander Shulgin”), & Jorie Graham (“Same Time”); &
- The last of the half dozen new titles, Bashō’s *Songs of Cherry Blossoms Falling* is, like the Paz book, especially dear to me. It began as an anthology of haiku, meant to cover a wide space of centuries, but the scope narrowed as time went on. Anthologies to be successful must be sharp in focus, summed in a short phrase. KD & I looked at many books of haikus (evolved from the haikai no renga) & eventually chose the progenitor of the form, the seventeenth-century poet Bashō. We read through many many of Bashō’s poems to choose three dozen, & thus create the best of the best of his work. Poems like:

Midfield
attached to nothing
the skylark singing

and:
The whole household—
each with white hair and cane—
visiting a grave.

At one point we sat together in the Seattle Public Library & read a children’s storybook detailing Bashō’s wander across Japan. I think indie presses like ours are built soul-up to receive such blessed hours.



KD & I brought Scriptor Press's many books & publications, 24 copies of over 40 titles, each day to Black Rock City's Center Camp, spread them all on a blanket, & mixed in with the crowds going by, stopping to see. This was No Borders Free Bookstore's sixth year & my favorite so far.



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Burning Man Arts Festival, August 28-September 4, 2005

The summer proved an especially busy one for publishing-related events. We attended an event called Stetset, a gathering of local indie & zine publishers, at a downtown Seattle bar & cafe. It was fun for KD & I to see our local peers. We also attended the Portland Zine Symposium, a larger event in downtown Portland. To the first event we stayed up all night readying copies of *Cenacle* 54 to bring. To the latter we brought *Cenacles*, *Scriptor Press Samplers*, *RaiBooks*, & Burning Man Books, a whole array of projects to gift away.

These events were new to us, a way to expand where our work touched & whom we met. Our trip in August to Burning Man 2005 was, of course, the summer's highlight & what our work finally pointed toward. We drove our crimson 2000 Pontiac Grand Prix SE, Sydnee, our bikes hanging from her trunk, our week's worth of water, supplies, tents, & crates of chapbooks. No Borders Free Bookstore open for business at Black Rock City for a seventh year.



What made the trip more poignant & precious was the money difficulties we faced that August. My editing job at an online travel agency ended suddenly. Panic at the time; looking back, good riddance. But scrambling for new work while readying hundreds of chapbooks still made for tense days.

It worked out. I scored work, & even was able to have time off from the new job to travel to Burning Man. I was happy it played out as it did. What mattered, bluntly, were the paychecks clearing, & our freedom to leave Seattle for a week for our other home.

The volumes in Burning Man Books 2005 include:

- Herman Hesse's lyrical *Strange News from Another Planet*;
- William Faulkner's horrific *Dry September*;
- Jorge Luis Borges' cryptic *Circular Ruins*;
- Philip K. Dick's sweet *The King of the Elves*;
- *All is Dream*, a seventh volume of writings on psychedelics; &
- Dear to me especially, for the work KD & I did on it together, *Many Blooms: An Anthology of Modern Women Poets*.



Many Blooms was conceived by KD, who wanted to make a volume devoted to women poets. We tried out various ideas, asking ourselves what range of times & places could we fit into a 40-60 page chapbook.

After reading widely & thinking out loud to each other many times, we chose six American & European poets: Wisława Szymborska, Elizabeth Bishop, Jorie Graham, Adrienne Rich, Marianne Moore, & Margaret Atwood. This book works because its focus is whittled sharply enough, & its contents are chosen carefully enough to create a coherent whole.

The selection process for Burning Man Books has become more complex as the library of titles has grown. For the first several years, I simply selected my favorite writers; more recently I began to seek a balance, a range. More female writers, more non-Western writers, & more pre-modern writers. Slowly, this plan has been working, while the literary quality of the library has grown from its variety.



The short fictions in 2005 brought several major voices into the collection (Faulkner, Hesse, Borges) &, unhooked from his genre grotto, the great Philip K. Dick. *All is Dream*, the newest psychedelics

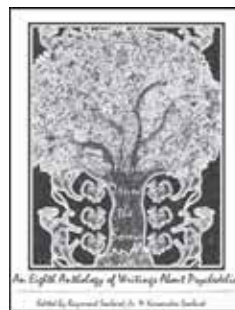
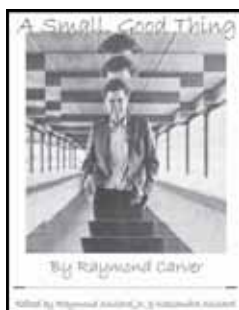
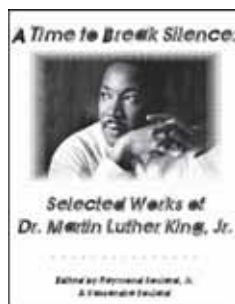
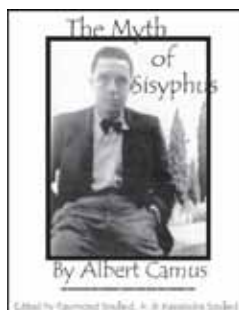
anthology, continued Scriptor Press's open mission to educate the counterculture old & young (& anyone else willing to read) about the profound & continuing effects of psychedelics on human development.

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Burning Man Arts Festival, August 28-September 4, 2006

July and August, KD & I spent in preparation for bringing Scriptor Press projects to the Portland Zine Symposium, & then to Burning Man 2006. This was the second year we'd brought books to both events. The volumes in Burning Man Books 2006 include:

- *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus, a brief potent essay I'd read as a youth in a volume of existentialist writings;
- *A Time to Break Silence: Selected Works of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* which includes "Letter from Birmingham Jail," "I Have a Dream," & "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence";
- *All Paths Lead Where: Selected Poetry and Artwork of E.E. Cummings*;
- Raymond Carver's short fiction *A Small, Good Thing*;
- Carson McCullers's short fiction *A Tree • A Rock • A Cloud*; &
- *We Have Drunk the Soma: An Eighth Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics*, which includes: "How Psychedelics Informed My Life and Sex Work" by Annie Sprinkle, "The Long, Strange Trip Continue" by Jim DeRogatis, "The Mysteries of Eleusis" by Albert Hofmann, "The Electric Kool-Aid Medicine Test" by Terence McNally, & "Number Fifteen: Broderick Street."



What is especially contrasting about the two events, beyond the Zinefest's sedate Portland State University ballroom setting, versus Burning Man's sometimes brutal dusty desert city, is that No Borders Free Bookstore is a bit more in its native element amidst the semi-anarchy of Black Rock City, & its gift

economy, than the roomful of zinesters & freaks in downtown Portland. Yet both matter very much; both events were successfully attended.



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Burning Man Arts Festival, August 27-September 3, 2007

While preparing to move in mid-September from Seattle down to Portland, where I actually had a job waiting, KD & I worked on preparations for Scriptor Press's third appearance at the Portland Zine Symposium, & ninth appearance at the Burning Man Arts Festival. Core to this preparation was adding six new titles to the Burning Man Books series.

Sometimes I've chosen to include writers that I would argue should be considered as among the best of the best, while others would disagree. On the other hand, some of the "greats" (such as William Blake & D.H. Lawrence) may never be represented. It comes down to a few criteria: *Do I like the writer very much? Can his or her work be enjoyed without a presumed knowledge of many other books? Can his or her work be fairly represented in a 40-60 page chapbook?*

The last few years the selection process has become more a collaboration between KD & me—and I've had to do more research to find new additions to the series. I have usually begun the work in January & KD would join me not long after. Burning Man Books 2007's picks include:

- *Infinite Coincidence: A Ninth Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics* (its title from a song by the indie rock band Bright Eyes), this volume includes a chemistry discussion of psychedelics by Rick Strassman; a vintage 1966 essay on LSD from the underground journal *Ramparts*; an essay about the Eleusinian Mysteries by Carl A.P. Ruck; a 1983 interview with the scientist John Lilly; a 2006 British press piece about ending the taboo on psychedelic psychotherapy; & a list of recommended psychedelic websites.
- Joyce Carol Oates' fiction *The Witness*, a story selected after reading dozens of her short fictions;
- Joseph Campbell's mythology essay *Bios and Mythos* includes a glossary for some of its more challenging diction & terms;
- Plato's *The Myth of the Cave* is a work I had read long ago in a philosophy class, & decided it would aid the series in touching on classical philosophy;
- Sherwood Anderson's *Selections from Winesburg, Ohio* is another old favorite, despite my belief



that I have no old favorites left to publish; its challenge was to cull a chapbook of pieces from a story sequence too long to publish as a whole; &

- *If There is No God: Selected Poetry and Prose of Czeslaw Milosz*, a book KD & I worked pretty hard to create; Milosz, an amazing & prolific writer, was new to both of us.



The Portland Zine Symposium went well for us, although the basic presumption there was that wares are sold or traded. Some people shied away from our free bookstore. Others, however, were very enthused, & so made the experience worthwhile.

Burning Man 2007 was its wonderful, overwhelming experience. We not only brought *Cenacles*, *Samplers*, *RaiBooks*, & Burning Man Books (new & old), but we'd proofread every Burning Man Book to fix old errors. Took weeks but why bring over 1000 books to such an event if they are not close to error-free?



Burning Man Arts Festival, August 25-September 1, 2008

This was the tenth year I'd assembled the No Borders Free Bookstore, fifth year with KD. Burning Man Books 2008 volumes include:

- Rachel Carson's environmental essay *Mother Sea: The Gray Beginnings*;
- Gabriel Garcia Marquez's short fiction anthology, *Fugitive Survivors of a Celestial Conspiracy*;
- W.S. Merwin's selection of poetry, *Walking at Night, Between the Two Deserts, Singing*;
- Fyodor Dostoevsky's short fiction *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*;
- *Out Here We is Stoned . . . Immaculate: A Tenth Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics*; &
- Hakim Bey's underground socio-political classic, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone*.



The festival itself was fun as always, though again I was attending it unemployed. But ten years of living out the year & then making it to Black Rock City was a reward in itself. Biking the desert deep into the night. Handing out hundreds of chapbooks that would travel around the world.

KD & I worked hard to get there & make the week a good one. Driving in Sydnee from western Oregon to northern Nevada, we had many a good adventure away from Portland. A forested area of central and southern Oregon called the Oregon Outback Scenic Byway marks for me a waking life counterpart to my fiction's "White Woods."

We also brought No Borders Free Bookstore to the Portland Zine Symposium, third year in a row, first time while living there. It's a great event, but in truth Scriptor Press did not quite fit in there. Not sure why. Different kinds of weird, maybe.



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Burning Man Arts Festival, August 31-September 7, 2009

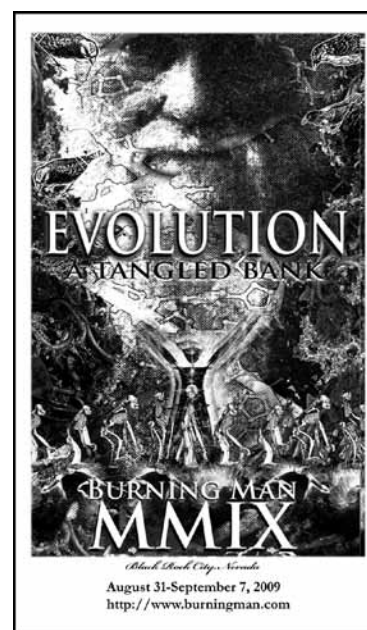
So once more I began my preparations for us to bring No Borders Free Bookstore to the desert fest. As I mentioned earlier, back in 1999 the process had been so much simpler. For one thing, that first time picking the titles meant choosing among the many, many writers I admired. By 2009, I'd gone through 50 of my favorites. *How many does any one person have?* As the years had gone on, I more & more had to seek out new writers, experiment, test, or dredge up writers I recalled reading years ago & see what I thought of them now.

It was a subtle process in that I had to police myself with the following test: *can I talk up this writer's work with my greatest, most unalloyed enthusiasm?* If I didn't believe totally in the little books we sat in the desert under a big tent handing out to hundreds of strangers, *what was I doing then?*

This exploration, I can see more clearly now, took its toll. My reading habits began to revolve more & more around which writers might provide good material for chapbooks. This bothered me some even as it was a challenge I rose to for a number of years running. I determined to make each year's half-dozen new books as fine a crop as those of the previous years. It mattered as much in 2009 as it had every year running back to 1999. As I contemplate the next new titles in the Burning Man Books series, my thoughts remain the same: *do it fucking right, no question.*

There was a shifting external context to the preparation of those last half-dozen books, & the printing of the whole series, plus the *RaiBooks*, the *Samplers*, & the recent *Cenacles*. My new job in downtown Portland was by no means a sure & long-term situation. It hardly seemed it would last the six months offered in the contract. And the Portland job market was awful for new prospects. So we thought of Burning Man 2009, in part, as a chance to talk to a lot of San Francisco-area residents about life further down the coast, & what we might find there.

And, unusually, work on the next issue of the *Cenacle* drifted into July. Plus I was producing my radio



show, *Within's Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution*, every weekend, as well as helping get about a dozen other shows broadcast on SpiritPlants Radio (which we had taken over running in 2008). And I was writing my various works (*Labyrinthine*, *Many Musics*, *Bags End News*) as often as possible. In sum, it was *a lot* to be doing. Yet I am still proud to say that the 2009 Burning Man Books produced were worth the efforts of many nights' work. These volumes include:

- *The Long, Perfect Loveliness of Sow: Selected Poetry of Galway Kinnell*;
- *Fate Isn't What We're Up Against: An Eleventh Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics*;
- *The Story of Sindbad the Sailor from the Arabian Nights*;
- *Silent Snow, Secret Snow* by Conrad Aiken;
- *The Secret Sharer* by Joseph Conrad; &
- *Slouching Toward Bethlehem* by Joan Didion.



There are some strange crossovers in themes among these titles. *Sindbad* & *Secret Sharer* are both about ocean voyages, & bear mysterious atmospheres. *Silent Snow* is all mysterious atmosphere & ends so terrifyingly that it stayed solid in my memory since I read it a quarter-century before. Didion's essay was KD's pick, & I can't help but think that its portrait of Haight-Ashbury San Francisco fit well with the San Francisco-created Burning Man Festival of four decades later. I was led to Galway Kinnell's poetry in part by studying & featuring the work of his friend W.S. Merwin in Burning Man Books 2008. Finally, the eleventh psychedelics *Anthology* pleases me in several ways, from its cover portrait of a broken steps leading to a tree, to be found in a park in Portland not far from where we lived, to its continuing our mission to educate people about the promise, possibilities, & *seriousness* of psychedelic materials.

So we packed up Sydnee & drove our days & miles from Portland to Black Rock City, Nevada; put up our tent; set up No Borders Free Bookstore for four long, hot, worthwhile days of gifting out chapbooks; wandered the strange city at night; made many friends for a moment, an hour, a few days; sent me out on a couple of long solo bike rides into the night while KD rested from the day's heat;

enjoyed one more time the spectacular burning of the Man come Saturday; packed up on Sunday; & returned with a bit of a meander in Oregon, through Bend, to Portland.



* * * * *

First Hiatus, 2010-2015

It began with a lack of enthusiasm in December 2009, to begin the prep work, gather new material for No Borders Free Bookstore. Simply put: I discovered that I *didn't* want to. I had *never* not wanted to before. I didn't know what this meant. Further mixed in to it was further discussing with KD leaving Portland, & where to next? Seemed most likely San Francisco or Boston. But the former didn't really interest me as once it had. Perhaps if I knew people, & jobs were easy to come by. Or if I had arrived with one, like had been true with Portland in 2007. So, in 2010, we moved to Boston, which I had left for the West Coast, to be nearer to Burning Man in part, back in 2002.

I did some research on what could be next a good host for No Borders Free Bookstore, but no easy luck. I worked grindingly slow, for years, on the next half-dozen new Burning Man Books. For example, by 2013 I was reading through the novels & poetry of Richard Brautigan, toward his entry in the series, whenever the series continued. I just didn't know how hard it would be to find a successor. But finding Burning Man itself, online, back in 1998, had been a fluke in itself.

For a while I played with the idea of renaming the series TransArtsBooks, & working toward a 2012 launch. No go. Still, simply put, the No Borders Free Bookstore idea never left me, never lost its lure & charm in my mind & heart.

Then, in early 2014, I did some looking into a Burning Man regional event, called Firefly, held annually since 2003, around July 4th, up in the Vermont woods. I emailed with lots of people on the Firefly e-mailing list, liked their vibe, & decided it was time to actively re-join the Burning Man world, and do it this time at the event in Vermont.

I was hopeful that this change of locale would be a good one. Dust off my old camping skills, but also learn about the challenges of an environment very different from the Black Rock Desert. Something both familiar and novel in this new experience. I also liked that Firefly is a regional event, and so the chance to involve in its community year-round was another good lure.

I applied for a 2015 Creativity Grant for No Borders Bookstore, intending this to be the year I went, but then decided not to go. I wasn't ready.

* * * * *

Firefly, June 29-July 4, 2016

It's about three hours from where KD & I live up to Bethel, Vermont, to the Laurelin Retreat whose lands the Firefly festival is held on every summer. Closer than any previous instance I'd had of getting from wherever was home at the time to the Burn.

And this was *not* Black Rock City in the Black Rock Desert. These were Vermont woods, where many years ago I'd danced & died on a lot of acid one beautiful night at the Bread & Puppet Festival, in Glover, Vermont (about two hours north of Bethel). Maybe that cherished memory led me curiously back up there.

I just wanted to *resume*, & I was ready. By April, I was busy printing the 2016 Burning Man Books. KD helped me every step of the way, but did not come this time. Traveling by bus, my load was slimmed down to a big hiking bag, tents, tent chair, & three crates of chapbooks. Plenty of anti-tick wipes in my gear too, for the hot woods.

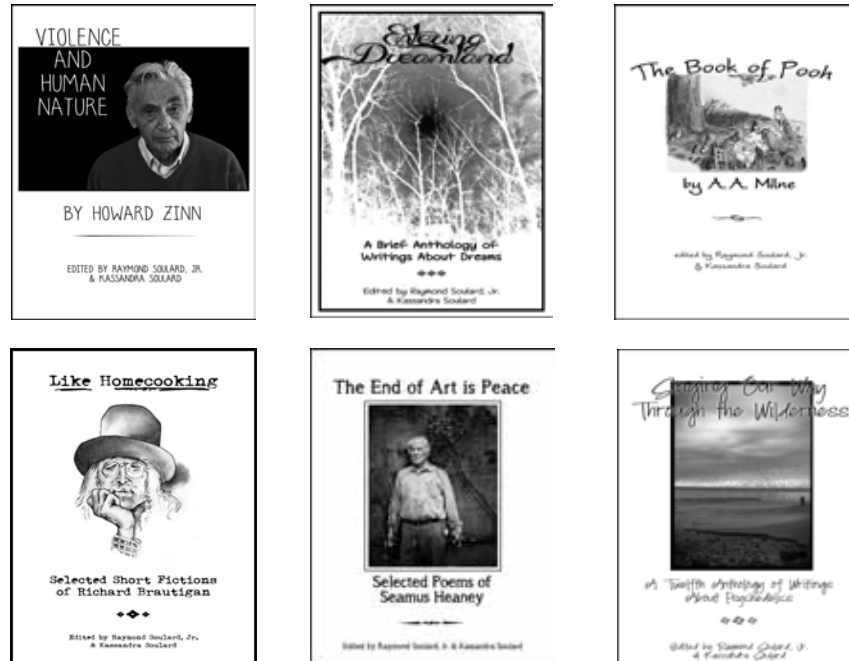
I'd joined up with a camp called the Steambath Project, who let me be part of their traveling crew, & pay my membership fee for water & food they hauled up. My bookstore was not directly relevant to what they were doing, but they provided me with a big shade tent & tables to set up No Borders Free Bookstore, on a lovely hill overlooking the many activities below. Kind folks.

In addition to *Cenacles*, *RaiBooks*, & *Scriptor Press Samplers*, the 2016 Burning Man Books volumes I brought include:

- *Violence and Human Nature* by Howard Zinn, a well-known American intellectual & writer, long a favorite of KD's. This piece has these wonderful lines: "It is true that there is an infinite human capacity for violence. There is also an infinite potential for kindness. The unique ability of humans to imagine gives enormous power to idealism, an imagining of a better state of things not yet in existence";
- *Entering Dreamland: A Brief Anthology of Writings About Dreams* is a volume that had gestated in my mind a long time, my wish to focus more attention to both the value & the mysteries of dreaming. It includes fiction as well as various kinds of non-fiction pieces;
- *The Book of Pooh* by A.A. Milne, with decorations by Ernest H. Shepard, of course; these were excerpts from another author whose imaginative world is writ deep through my own;
- *Like Homecooking: Selected Short Fictions of Richard Brautigan*, one of whose last books I had found in a bargain bin when I was a youth; this time I read *all* of his books start to finish, & a fat biography to boot; labor of love to decide which pieces to include here;
- *The End of Art is Peace* by Seamus Heaney, a brilliant Irish poet, favorite of many of my writer friends, & a lovely pleasure to spend hours among his words; &
- *Singing Our Way Through the Wilderness: A Twelfth Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics*, & the happy delight of continuing this series-within-series of volumes. Led it off with Dr. Timothy Leary, a man I profoundly esteem. Good contents throughout.

It had taken seven years to get to this point of return, living in a home KD & I had bought, live in now, working for a better employer than I had had versus most of the jobs I had held, & having chosen a local version of the big event to ease back in. The long-time planning & preparation was pretty damned good. I was ready as I could be.

But . . . in the course of stapling the many chapbooks, which I had done *thousands* of times before, this time sitting at this selfsame Driftwood Table, I stapled *wrong* somehow. It's a physical act, but not one



I'd *ever* been hurt by before. Nonetheless, even before I was packed up to go, I had suffered a strained right quad muscle. That's a muscle located in one's upper thigh. It's the kind of injury athletes will suffer, in practice or in games. They know enough to stretch their bodies before & after play.

Did not know this. And was going to go if I had to *drag* myself there. So I went. Taxi with gear to the Firefly bus running from Boston up to Vermont. Limped me & my bags to the place where the Steambath Project was camped. Set up my tent. Very hilly place. Eventually set up No Borders Free Bookstore. Tried to smile & be friendly to all I met.

Fuck, did I hurt. And it kept me from enjoying this event as much as I might have. Firefly gets a thousand people or so coming up each year, versus Burning Man's 60,000 or more these days. But walking was a pain; sleeping was a torture. I worried the tick season I'd come to, despite the meds I'd brought.

I made a friend who sat with me for many hours gifting out books. I journeyed into the nights as best I could. I tried to grok all that I was able. It was the best return I could muster for No Borders Free Bookstore, & yet the injury, needless if I wasn't ignorant of physical health (better in the intervening years, in part *because* of this event), I would have enjoyed it more.



Limped & hauled my stuff back to the bus back to Boston, thanked everyone I could for letting me join in, wishing I could have done more.

And that, again, was that, for a number of years. Ultimately, I had decided that I had to get back to Burning Man at Black Rock City in the Black Rock Desert.

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Second Hiatus, 2017-2023

So I had managed to successfully pull off another iteration of No Borders Free Bookstore, & learned that I *can* do it outside of Black Rock City, if needed, & yet I prefer *not* to. This learning has stuck with me since, in my decision-making process.

Another Firefly trip was out. Too small. Too many ticks. Not the desert. *Not* Burning Man, though *not-not* also. A personal way of thinking, no more.

I was slow to get to the next step. That great job went downhill, & I was laid off in 2019. Burning Man is far, & it costs a LOT of money to attend, especially in recent years. I had to have good work to afford it, additional to helping finance our usual quality of living.

But then two things hit that totally clashed. First, the COVID-19 Global Pandemic in March 2020 shut the world down, & changed it forever. No matter the cultural amnesia, or just plain lazy stupidity of most, *nothing* has ever returned to like it was before then.

Second, because of the Global Pandemic, in the fall of 2020 I lucked into a good contract working for a synthetic biology company in Boston, one helping with the COVID-19 virus testing. Worked hard, & got to be full-time there after a year or so. Good money, enough to afford the more expensive trip to Burning Man.

But Burning Man didn't occur in 2020 or 2021. Too dangerous to pull it off. So I had the bread, but no event to go to.

2022 came, & this time I meant it. But the event had become . . . weird, in new ways hard to deal with. Expensive, yes, but also tickets selling out. Bureaucratic nightmares to sort through. And how to get there? Driving was not going to work. And I tried to get into a camp, but found that maybe I had lost my chops on how to do this even. So I didn't go.

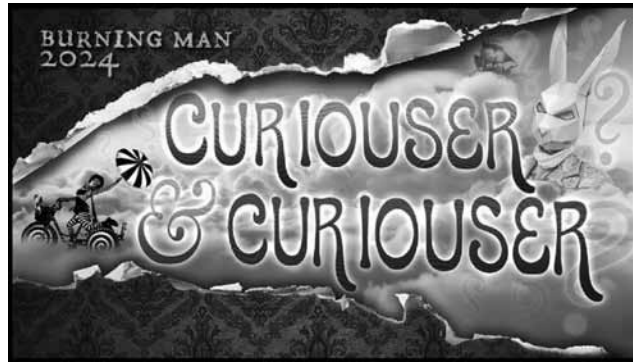
Then that good job went bad too, and 2023 was too awful for me to do anything about any of this. Only just to keep along, & keep dreaming.

Laid off in August 2023. Thinking: Burning Man 2024.

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**Burning Man Arts Festival, by way of Little Free Library,
August 25-September 2, 2024**

*I so wanted to go to Burning Man 2024 this year. I so wish I was there right **now**, this moment, in that hot desert, little sleep to my name for days, waking up in a dusty sleeping bag, thirsty, spent, exhausted, & exhilarated. But the world prevented this, its iniquitous handling of the Global Pandemic these last several years. Sickness & death on a **daily** basis for thousands that did not have to occur if it wasn't generally decided that convenience & economics matter more than human life.*



*Nobody can EVER tell me that what has been happening, & is happening now, is not a collective crime against humanity that **nobody** is innocent of committing. Even those of us who are still sheltering in place. We are intent to survive to better vaccines, unnamable hopeful days to come. But could we be doing better? **Yes.** Humanity is guilty. No devil or space alien or monster from the depths to blame. **We** did this to ourselves. It **continues** to happen.*

That said, I did not go in person again this year. But it was months ago that I began to think of different ways to go that *were* safe, given how the world is now. And I looked into a few options. Someone was planning a Virtual Reality Burn. Or maybe I could find kind souls to carry Burning Man Books to the festival, to Burn Night, gift a few along the way, toss the rest in the fires.







Nice ideas, yet I did not pursue them hard. They remain in my back pocket. But, for this year, I needed something that did not primarily involve others than KD & me. So I began to think more & more about the Little Free Library idea. We have a nice front lawn; I mow it most Sundays from spring to autumn. In our back-when Burning Man days, we'd lived in apartments.

So, if we purchased one of these LFLs, what would go *into* it? What did it *mean* to do this? Was this like Firefly, trying to find some way to go to Burning Man *without* going to Black Rock City? Some *easier* route, if it worked?

No. What it means for me is that I am acknowledging both that I *want* to go back, & yet this year I cannot *safely* go back. The travel to get there, that would be hard enough, but doable with heavy masking. But then, once there, not to be able to safely share air with my fellow Burners? *How would I be part of something I am terrified of? How is that a return? Hand out chapbooks with a smile under my mask?*

No, this LFL idea is a way of going . . . from here. And it hurts me to do so, but not going at all, *yet again*, hurts me more. So we picked out a nice LFL, placed our order, & once again got ready to host No Borders Free Bookstore at Burning Man 2024 . . . from here.

And, that much decided, I wanted to up the game. Bring new issues of *everything* Scriptor Press New England publishes. 2024 Burning Man Books, six of them, of course. *Scriptor Press Sampler* | 22 | 2020 *Annual*, catching that series up. A new *RaiBook*, first in nine years. And *Cenacle* | 125 | Summer 2024, a “skinny” issue for the short time table to create it.

 <p>THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES</p> <p>by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle</p> <p>Edited by Raymond Souland, Jr. & Cassandra Souland</p>	 <p>EXISTENTIALISM</p> <p>by Jean-Paul Sartre</p> <p>Edited by Raymond Souland, Jr. & Cassandra Souland</p>
 <p>THE GOLDEN KEY</p> <p>BY GEORGE MACDONALD</p> <p>EDITED BY RAYMOND SOULAND, JR. & KASSANDRA SOULAND</p>	 <p>MALCOLM X</p> <p>HIS FINAL VISION</p> <p>Edited by Raymond Souland, Jr. & Cassandra Souland</p>
 <p>Ward No. 6</p> <p>by Anton Chekhov</p> <p>Edited by Raymond Souland, Jr. & Cassandra Souland</p>	 <p>A THIRTEENTH ANTHOLOGY OF WRITINGS ABOUT PSYCHEDELICS</p> <p>Edited by Raymond Souland, Jr. & Cassandra Souland</p>

No fooling & no shit. This was no retreat of an idea. This was me pushing the line, *hard*.

Of all of these, the *RaiBook* was most surprising. The idea that emerged from several that didn't, yet, was to make this my third book in the *RaiBook* series, *Dream Raps, Volumes One-Six*. Wildly unexpected but, yes, it's done. It's out there, in the No Borders Free Bookstore in that LFL on our front lawn.

KD & I created the new Burning Man Books together, like we have for twenty years now. The authors chosen ended up being all mine this time, but the book covers & interior designs were all done by her brilliant self. The 2024 Burning Man Books volumes include:

- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* came about because, back in 1986, I was given a small check & a volume of Doyle's as an honorarium for being named "Outstanding Graduating English Major of the Year" at my old college, Central Connecticut State University. Cashed the check then but carried around with me this volume all these years, till the Global Pandemic found me with more time to read, & wish to read. Glad I did.
- Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existentialism*, like the piece in the Hemingway volume from Burning Man Books 2003, was one I first read in William V. Spanos's *A Casebook on Existentialism*. Had long ago lost my copy; lucky Amazon.com.
- George MacDonald's *The Golden Key* is part of MacDonald's amazing body of fantasy writing that I only just discovered during the Global Pandemic. This story is everything a fantasy story can be at its best. So happy to publish it.
- Malcolm X's *His Final Vision* was his last public speech, given at Ford Auditorium, Detroit, Michigan, on February 14, 1965. A week later, he was gunned down. I've admired Malcolm X's philosophical evolution from the time I saw Spike Lee's amazing 1992 biographical film about him, starring the brilliant Denzel Washington.
- Anton Chekhov's *Ward No. 6* came into this series late, because other possibilities were not working. I'd had this piece in my Burning Man Books notes since 2009 or so but, though I had read & admired his work back in graduate school, I had not read this story. I don't know why it became the one in my notes. I sat down earlier this month, read it, enthralled, & that was that.
- *Many Worlds, Many Doors: 13th Anthology of Psychedelic Writings* was one I wanted to reflect the best of what I had been reading since 2016. I think it does.

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Conclusion

9/1/2024 - 4:00 p.m.
Bungalow Cee - Driftwood Table
Milkrose, Massachusetts

We didn't get the No Borders Free Bookstore | Little Free Library up till early yesterday afternoon. So noontime, by the way of how time works in Black Rock City. And then the work to complete *The Cenacle* did not finish yesterday as I had wished, to be followed in evening by the Jellicle Literary Guild meeting, & along the way a burn pit hour or two in the back yard, live-streaming the Night of the Burn in Black Rock City along the way. That was the plan.

But no. This is all finishing up a day later, tonight. This piece, & the yet-unwritten *From Soulard's Notebooks*, will wrap it up. Then the JG. Fire pit. Burn on live stream or recording. Things take as long as they do to finish up & become ready.

I believe that going the weird route I have gone, & to be still caring so deeply about all of this says plainly to me that there is more than old sentiment that causes me still to be wearing a Burning Man 2003 pendant on my neck. The challenging thing in life is to discover ways to keep what is important close, be it persons, Art, events, dwellings, ideas, & so on. Life challenges us to care, & continue to care. Through moments of suffering & celebration both, & the many dull ones too, to *keep* caring. By caring, we retain the better, & at least some of the best, of who we are, over the long times & travels of a life.

Writing this piece has been cathartic for me, in that I have never told this story in this detail before. It has always been one stream of many. Now, having given it its deserved attention, I happily realize that I *will* get back to Black Rock City, when it's safe to do so, & that some of it is here with me right now, every day, & that some of me is there, right now, in Black Rock Desert, *having never left*.



Raymond Souland Jr.
9/1/2004
Wilkrose, Mass.



