

SCOUT—Time's Road

Norma Cole

My 8th grade English teacher, Rita B. Temelcoff, was the *Wuthering Heights* fan of all fans. Her cat was named Heathcliff, her daughter Catherine, or so she said. She said that if you needed to write some prose, some forthright expository prose, you should begin by reading some good forthright expository prose by Winston Churchill. I'm not doing that. But going back to thinking about my multimedia piece SCOUT made me think of her and high school. And there's Miles Davis, "Blue in Green," playing in this café where I sit right now. The 50s.

SCOUT happened because my father died. I think of him and/in the 50s. We got along then. I hadn't tried to grow up yet. He was a great guy. At the funeral none of us four kids got up and spoke. We each had our thoughts and kept them to ourselves. Afterwards I seemed to want to write about him. Him and those days. The 50s. And then I seemed to want to speak to the Norman I was named after. Uncle Norman who had died before I was born. A training pilot in the RCAF (Royal Canadian Air Force), in the air with an actual trained pilot, they crashed. This shouldn't have happened. Now it's all about my mother and my grandma Fanny. I asked my mother about Uncle Norman—this was in the 90s—and she didn't remember much about him. He was a great guy. He had friends, he pumped gas. When the war started (WW II) both he and my father had gone into the air force. I wanted to know what he sounded like, what he said when he spoke. I'll never know. This is not much about art yet. Or maybe it's all about it. I can't know everything.

But there I was, thinking about writing something, some things. And I needed a photograph album, the old-fashioned kind, when people had their cameras and took pictures, like now only not as often, because they needed film first and you were always running out of film. You took pictures and had the film developed, and couldn't wait until it was developed and you picked those photos up at the store and looked at them before you even got out into the street. And then you wanted to put them in albums to look at. The leaves in the albums were black, like a kind of construction paper, and the photos were black and white (50s, remember). You glued little corners onto the pages to insert the photos, so they wouldn't be ruined. My sister gave me the album for my birthday that year, the year my father died. I hadn't asked for one. I hadn't told her I needed an album to glue assorted papers, drawing and photograph, parts of them, in. I hadn't written on any of the various papers yet. I hadn't written anything yet. She just knew.

And then I had to find the used portable typewriter in order to write (type) on those crumpled and torn and found papers. By that time I finally had a computer and no more typewriter. I got the used typewriter. Actually eventually I got two that had different fonts. Over the course of the following year I wrote, typed, drew, took photographs with my old-fashioned heavy camera, had the film developed, cut up some old photos too, and put in one photo I took of my sister when she was almost 3 and I was 12. Little by little I glued them down, collaged each page.

This was the first part, although I didn't know it was just the first part. This album would have been it, the artist's book, SCOUT, but someone at New Langton Street (a perfect alternative performance/ art/ reading space on Folsom Street that doesn't exist anymore) asked me if I wanted to "do something" in the space. Never ask me if I want to do something unless you really mean it, because I will do it.

I said yes and then I had to do something. I took my camera with me everywhere for a few weeks, or maybe it was a few months, and took pictures, but not to develop as photographs. I took slides. I thought I'd have the slides projected on the wall at the back of the performance space. It was a beautiful space, with the huge white back wall. And while the slides were being projected I would read what I'd been writing in that album. To that end, as well as taking my camera everywhere I went, I took the album too; that, or xeroxed copies of the pages I'd put into a plastic album because after a while I worried that the glued papers in the actual album would come unstuck and fall out. When I took pictures of all the people in SCOUT, I wanted them to take their mind somewhat off the picture-taking itself, have them look at the book-object as a kind of decoy, ask them to select a page to display. The decoy effect worked differently with different people. And I wound up with a lot of images. I don't remember when I knew I would need two projectors running at the same time but not at the same speed, but that's how it worked. I remember Jocelyn Saidenberg working one projector (or maybe both projectors?). Dark room, huge images on wall, tiny reading lamp for me. I read to the whirring clacking music of the projectors. That was part two.

The slides: some locations—San Francisco, Toronto, Vancouver, Seattle. People and places in no particular order—

San Francisco

Fran Herndon's house. Painter Fran made us dinner. Benjamin Hollander, Elizabeth Robinson, Laura Moriarty, Nick Robinson, George Albon, Dennis Moribe, Rob Kaufman. Fran's drawings on the fridge. "I am always searching for ideas to take me into a painting, rather than just doing it." (Interview with Elizabeth Robinson, Fact-Simile 2011)

Rex Ray's studio space. We were rehearsing "The Vegetable Kingdom," the new play Kevin Killian and Rex Ray had written. (I just emailed Kevin to ask what the play was. I couldn't remember, but after a few minutes, he got it. He's written so many!) They had written Rex into the role of "Al Charmay, host and producer of TV's least popular game show." Kevin Killian, Scott Hewicker, Cliff Hengst, Joseph Donahue, Wayne Smith, Karla Milosevich, Kota Ezawa, Jocelyn Saidenberg, Margie Sloan, me as Stella McCartney, and Rex Ray, fine artist, graphic designer, wry jokester, our beloved friend, who died in 2015.

My yoga instructor Susannah Bruder, and Lita, Marilyn at the yoga studio on Sanchez Street, now a Pilates studio.

What's For Dessert, a family-run café on Church Street at 27th Street. Delicious cakes, croissants. Mervyn Mark, his wife Karen, their kids Jennifer and Jason, his sister Marilyn. The café closed in 1999 and Jason, a chef at a local restaurant, died in 2000, at the age of 30, lung cancer (he never smoked) and Karen died in a car accident in 2013.

Ahmad at the Café Flore, Market and Noe. Ahmad retired, the café was sold although the name remains.

Worker at the copy place on Market Street, copy place no longer there.

Market and Church Streets. Sanchez Street. Illinois Street. 3rd Street. The Embarcadero. Mid-market Street. San Francisco State University. Everett Middle School. Lone Mountain, University of San Francisco. Fort Mason. Ships by the bay. Various construction sites. Horizons, skies, clouds.

The diner on 3rd, no longer there. Now the whole area, miscellaneous buildings like wooden blocks in a Monopoly set, is called "Mission Bay."

16th Street between De Haro and Rhode Island. Blue, very blue building with aluminum trailer out back. Beside the trailer, a fence, behind the fence a field of dirt, on the fence a sign: "Funding for the School Improvement Project Made Possible By MRAD (Maintenance and Recreation Area)." The plot is now an apartment building. The aluminum trailer is still there, behind a higher fence.

Alfred Arteaga, outside my house. Chicano movement poet and Renaissance scholar. I often use his anthology, *An Other Tongue: Nation and Ethnicity in the Linguistic Borderlands*, and a book of his poetry, *Cantos*, in my translation and writing classes. From *Cantos*, "Canto Primero," "A line, half water, half metal." Once, he introduced me at a reading as "the wetback from the North." His heart gave out in 2008.

Michael Palmer in a café, where? Aaron Shurin in my house. Denise Gow, Jesse Zeifman, Susan Gevirtz, Jena Osman, Rose Najia, Myung Mi Kim, Tod Thilleman. Joshua Clover at the SFMOMA café (closed now).

Toronto

My mother's apartment. Photos from the window, snow. Photos of photos on the wall. A framed oil stick drawing of my son. The outside of our house on Castlefield Avenue. Grandma Fanny's house on Danesbury Road. Times Road, Avenue Road. Lester B. Pearson Airport.

Seattle

Outside Laynie Brown's house where she used to live.

Vancouver

Having lunch with Robin Blaser in Vancouver. After lunch, I photographed him outside, holding *A Bernadette Mayer Reader*. Among his many books are *The Holy Forest: Collected Poems of Robin Blaser* and *The Fire: Collected Essays of Robin Blaser*. My favorite book of his is *The Moth Poem*, a chapbook from 1964. From *Blood and Tears: Poems for Matthew Shepard*, “Every particular love is Love,/ dear Matthew.” Robin died in 2009.

Susan Clark at home when she used to live in Vancouver. Now she lives on the island, near Victoria.

The next part was making a CD-ROM (Compact Disc-Read Only Memory). And who knew that CD-ROM drives were only going to last for one, maybe two generations of computers? Then, a cloud was merely a visible mass of drops of water. By then, I had been on the Krupskaya Books collective for a couple of years. At that time, when you’d been part of the collective for two years, you switched out (I was out, and Kevin Killian came in) and got to have a book from the press. Jocelyn Saidenberg (Krupskaya) liked the idea of doing something with SCOUT, the album, but we both felt it couldn’t work as a book, ergo the CD-ROM. Then it would have all the parts, and with the work of Taylor Brady (multimedia production and additional audio), Wayne Smith (audio recording) and Frank Mueller (cover design), it did—until it didn’t.

Long hiatus. (I had a stroke, recovered somewhat, went on living. Some of the brilliant and lovely people featured in SCOUT died. Locations went through, are still going through shock gentrification and beyond. People have had to move out, some moved away....)

Part four, and I think this is the last part. Jerrold Shiroma, Jocelyn Saidenberg and I discussed putting SCOUT up on Jerrold’s Duration Press website. A multimedia wizard, he has done it, and voilà!

<http://www.durationpress.com/multimedia/scout/>