

Thought-provoking and emotionally resonant, the book sheds light on the complex issue of addiction and its impact on families, with characters so well-drawn we feel like we're living through the experience with them. A must-read for anyone who's been touched by addiction and seeks to understand the power of forgiveness, healing and redemption.

DENISE BARON, Ayurvedic practitioner and
wellness expert, *Wellness 360*

One of the most powerful messages of this memoir is its emphasis on the importance of compassion and understanding in healing family relationships. The author demonstrates that, no matter how destructive the effects of addiction may be, there is always hope for healing and renewal. By embracing the principles of recovery and working together as a family, even the most shattered relationships can be mended or transformed into something stronger and more resilient. Highly recommended, with honor.

ASHLEY B. COOK, M.Ed., LPC, LMHC, NCC, ABC
Therapies, Mind & Life Empowerment

What was most interesting to me was the author's family karma, the patterns of alcoholism and abuse passed down from generation to generation. But talents are also passed down. Although Kennerly's dad, a clever writer with a gift for word play and a sharp mind, lacked the self-discipline, fortitude, and support to become a published author, his legacy lives on through his daughter's strength, wit, and commitment to sobriety — and having his and her voices be heard.

DJUNA WOJTON, spiritual healer, astrologer, and
author of *Karmic Healing* and *Karmic Choices*

**letters from east of
nowhere**

letters from east of nowhere

Daddy's Words to Live, Drink & Die By: A Memoir

F. Kennerly Clay

I have done my best to recreate events, locales, and conversations from my own memories of them. To protect privacy, in some instances I have changed the names of people and places.

Copyright © 2023 by F. Kennerly Clay | Eclectic Content Publishing

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

contents

1. Unlikely Legacy	1
2. Left Unsung	9
3. Come Gather 'Round People	19
4. Love-Haight Relationship	31
5. Revisionist History	61
6. They Called Him “Dad”	103
7. Everything Out the Window	117
8. Showing Up	139
9. Dad In Detention	169
10. Worn Out Welcomes	223
11. Endings	241
12. Legacy	257
13. Love Lost, Such a Cost	263
14. Explain Me	279
15. Epilogue: The Briefcase	291
16. East Of Nowhere, Chapter 2 - 1966	305
Acknowledgments	313
About the Author	315
Also by F. Kennerly Clay	317
From the Author	319

*“To write a letter is to send a message to the future;
to speak of the present with an addressee who is not there,
knowing nothing about how that person is (in what
spirits, with whom)
while we write and, above all, later:
while reading over what we have written.
Correspondence is the utopian form of conversation
because
it annihilates the present
and turns the future into the only possible place for
dialogue.”*

—Ricardo Piglia, *Respiración artificial*

*“The only way of knowing a person is to love them without
hope.”*

—Walter Benjamin

*To Jimmy, Shannah, TJ and Jeffrey:
We were all meant to be here.*

*And to my mother,
who carried that weight a long time:
You done good, Mama.*

one unlikely legacy

“An outlaw can be defined as somebody who lives outside the law, beyond the law and not necessarily against it.”

— Hunter S. Thompson

My father’s mugshots are strewn all over the internet, permanently recording the places he got arrested for being drunk and disorderly the last 15 years of his life. He wore out his welcome with cops and with family in places like Brunswick, Maine; Greenville, Maryland; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Vero Beach, Florida.

In one forlorn photo, his green eyes bleary and a little worse for wear, his hair is still kempt. In another, his face is bloated and unshaven, and his hair has gotten long. He looks rough.

My sister Shannah cringes at these photos out there for the world to see.

Me? I kinda like it.

It’s as though my father’s stubborn stance against any form of oppression or persecution has prevailed in some way, and now he’s immortalized like his favorite outlaw heroes, the fictitious western cowboy Josey Wales and the real-life Beat author Neal Cassady.

Daddy shows no remorse in these pictures. His weary look seems to be saying what had been said many times before, that all he wanted was to be left the hell alone so he could live life on his terms—even if that meant drinking it away.

The letters

East of Nowhere is the novel my father—Francis Edward Clay, Jr., better known as Ed, and alter egos he took on, like Eddie Armadillo, Barry Dingle, and Sergeant Thrillhammer—never finished writing. He scrawled pages and pages of it as he made his way to Maryland, Texas, Colorado, California and back. He was convinced it would be a best-seller. It was full of Kerouacian hedonistic delights, all told in my father's particular way, but for those of us who occasioned upon a page here and there, it was mostly undecipherable and raunchy. I remember some scene involving lewd, drunken sex with Mexican women. Ultimately, just about every portion of the unfinished novel was stolen in a hobo bag along with what little my father possessed at the time.

Perhaps it could have been a good book, if Daddy had been a different version of himself, not the one beleaguered by alcohol and a lifetime of regrets he said he never had. He was a decent writer, after all—philosophical, perspicacious, amused by it all. But that version of my father never made it into a book. Instead, he flexed most of his writing muscle in letters, many of them to me.

The ones to me began early, since we were the first family he left. I was born at the height of the hippie era, and after my parents split up, my father went on to remarry and have four other children. The first, Jimmy, arrived when I was seven years old, followed by Shannah a year later. The youngest two boys, TJ and Jeffrey, arrived when I was 14 and 15 years old. When I was a kid, they were my “half-siblings,” but we’ve long since dropped the half crap. I always refer to them as my brothers and sister. Aside from Clay humor in common, we each followed my father’s lead—genetically and environmentally—becoming alcoholics ourselves and carrying our own daddy-baggage around for occasional display.

Among the dozens of letters I’ve saved from my father is a giant

postcard Daddy sent me as a kid. It is of the Empire State Building and it's cut out in the same shape, from back when he was trucking in and out of New York City. After high school, his letters arrived at my own Manhattan addresses, from my first year in fashion school to right before I moved out to San Francisco, my birthplace and his old stomping grounds, to finish my bachelor's degree at the University of San Francisco. He would write, then I would write, and back and forth it always went.

I recently noticed for the first time that Daddy wrote upside-down peace signs on the back of envelopes in later years, just like my mother still does. "Turn peace up."

I have bundles of letters addressed to me from Daddy when I lived in Kobe, Japan. I spent three years there teaching English and wrote prolifically to friends and family. Later, he and I had weekly letter exchanges when I landed in Philadelphia and was engaged.

After I got married, every letter he ever wrote to me was addressed to Mrs. Kennerly Phillips, Mrs. Kirk D. Phillips, or some variation thereof. Given that I never changed my maiden name, my father was one of very few people who ever addressed me like that. I wonder if he wanted to honor my husband in some way, perhaps thinking Kirk would see the letter when it arrived.

At some point, after he became completely untethered, he would sign off with pseudonyms. "I love you," he wrote in 1990, followed by the name "Pancho." Later, in Florida, he became Tony Turtle, and eventually the Reverend Eddie Chowan, named after the river that ran near the old Clay farm in Harrellsville, North Carolina.

Carolina Sunrise

The Chowan flowed like a razor

I rowed it,

For dear life.

I took its

Name

There is a

Going back
Always.
"Shure."

Since I've gone through so many of Daddy's letters these past few years, I appreciate how much letter writing was a part of our lives not that long ago. And some people's letters you saved because they were just so good. For me, it wasn't just what Daddy wrote—it was how he wrote it.

He randomly switched between capital and lowercase letters, but all written very neatly across the lines. Certain letters always seemed to be in caps, like E and R and N, a particularly obstinate bunch, demanding to be capitalized, even in the middle of a sentence. No one could tell *them* what to do—just like Daddy.

Sometimes he transitioned to cursive for no reason, but clean print was his main style. And whenever he began a letter, if there were any throat-clearing or small talk to be had, it was usually written in clever form to amuse.

- "The splendiferous view from my jail cell ..."
- "Greetings from the southwest baboon's asshole..."
- "I thumbed for six weeks and 10,000 miles..."

He wrote stories in these letters, stories that you were never quite sure were true but were just plausible enough to *maybe* be true. Like the letter he sent to Jeffrey about playing an afternoon of pool with a one-armed midget whose car bumper sticker read, "If you drive too close, I'll flick a booger on your windshield!" Or the story about slipping on bear shit while hunting as a boy (TJ later figured out that one was made up). And did Daddy and Grandfather really go on a six-figure Vegas binge? Or the one he told Jeffrey about having a box-cutter held to his throat in San Francisco, then pushing the guy out a third-story window (Jeffrey mused it may have been the only time our father went looking *for* a cop).

Daddy sent poems he'd written (*East of Nowhere*, in fact, began as a

poem) and he wrote dirty limericks. His fine vocabulary made for expressive, engaging writing, and he was well-read and culturally attuned. Even today, I look things up online that I never knew the meaning of at the time.

He'd tell me stories of me as a baby and would reference my mother and our former life in California. There was always this abiding love and approval of me in his letters. In fact, my father never disapproved of any of us, for who we were or for anything we did. Quite the contrary, he *championed* us—in direct contrast to the lifelong, overt disapproval of his own father.

My sister Shannah and my youngest brother Jeffrey and I had each saved many of our letters over the years and talked about putting a book together at some point. We thought we'd gather up the letters and select the ones that had some wit and wisdom to impart to future generations, then determine how much we'd be willing to reveal about our dad. After all, our children would be reading this stuff. But to imagine a cleaned-up version of our father was laughable, and it was impossible to pick and choose pieces of the story. Here was a man with an education and a family and people who loved and cared about him, yet at mid-life found himself jobless, homeless, hitchhiking inebriated across the country, getting his teeth knocked out God knows how. Then out of the blue, he'd send a letter from East of Somewhere that was clear as day, perennially optimistic, never cynical, always full of warmth and good wishes for his children.

Daddy had this uncanny ability—and I suppose the great genetic good fortune—of being able to clean up right good once his hair was combed and his shirt tucked in (which it always was). As my brother TJ remembers, “He was always tan, always generally better looking than he had any right to be”— and by the looks of him you'd never know what a whirlwind of shit he'd created and survived.

Discomfort zone

At some point, it became clear to me that a larger story had to be told. Splicing together a bunch of letters and commentary without context wouldn't tell the real story.

But immediately I recognized there would be risk involved. Risk that I'd have to give up something of my carefully preserved relationship with my father. Risk that I'd have to tell the truth about some things and take a chance on hurting people's feelings.

As I started to realize what was at stake, I saw how suppressed I was about revealing my own life story. I grew indignant: Why on earth should I be so afraid to tell my *own* story as an adult woman while I had to live this family's life all those years?

I became eager to push past the perceptions my siblings had of our father, and past my own while I was at it. So, I started to ask other family members and friends to share about him, starting with his first cousin, who was really dear to him. She revealed aspects of who he was as a child, and in the safe space of their lifelong friendship, she was the only one to whom he ever squarely admitted the grip alcohol had on him. Conversations with an old friend of his from college provided a melancholic glimpse into who Daddy was as a young man and over fifty years of friendship.

I also didn't want this to be just my story about my father. I wanted to give voice to my three brothers and sister, doing my best to imagine their lives in relation to him. I know that I have at times here been so insistent upon making my own story known that I may have quieted theirs. That was not my intent; it is simply overcompensation for what never was.

From a very young age, I had developed a protective bond with Daddy, since he and my mother were divorced for as long as I could remember.

Sharing my relationship with him out loud makes me feel like I'm going to lose something of what we had. Fear—no, more like terror—creeps into my chest and throat, threatening to strangle my entire existence. My relationship with my father, I have discovered, is profoundly visceral because when I start going deep, everything hurts.

Hurts like the time I was two years old and my mom yelled at him over the bookshelves. I've had this memory my entire life that I always equated with their final straw. Daddy wasn't building something the way she wanted with cinder blocks and slabs of wood. She got mad and yelled. He yelled back and stormed out of the house. It's only in the last

few years that I figured out why the memory was so deeply ingrained and painful for me: He never said goodbye.

So I have given myself permission to hold back nothing. No feelings spared. No secrets withheld. This is life the way I remember it, this is all of us coming through it all pretty darn well, and this is our dad who was, well, our dad, and I can't think of any other dad I would rather have had.

"East of Nowhere" '98-'99

GIVE ME SOMEWHERE REMOVED
FROM NOWHERE
Gotta' have another chance.

GIVE ME NOWHERE REMOVED
FROM SOMEWHERE
WHERE WENT ROMANCE?

It's ONLY ME', It's ONLY YOU.
East of NOWHERE,
NOWHERE TO GO.

FIRY FURNACE smok IN smoke
CABOOSE ON runaway freight.

East of NOWHERE
IN your hands

Lowlands like glue,
Maybe a different job to do.
Perhaps dying with you.

Back to somewhere like
ancient. shore
Ideas clinging in
abstract blue
Give to me and ten-fold to you.

WE walk like prehistoric
as once we were
Poaching fire at random
and called a jolly crime,
who'll EVER KNOW
ME OR YOU?, East of Nowhere?

THE PENTHOUSE BURNS
IN smoky chartreuse
THERE IS NO NOTICE BUT MINE
and I won't tell.
What is THE USE?

East of Nowhere, have law
in broken thumb
Hob-nailed boot on carcass
MONEY running through all
like greased lightning.
God forgive me - A .38 is a necessity,
I will live with quiet fury.

The original "East of Nowhere" poem that spurred writing of early chapters of my father's unfinished novel

two left unsung

“Where words leave off, music begins.”

— Heinrich Heine

December 8, 1980. The day John Lennon was shot in front of the Dakota residence where he and Yoko and Sean lived in New York City. Until that day, I had been only vaguely aware of the Beatles. *Yellow Submarine* was one of my first LPs when I was seven years old, along with The Who's *Tommy*. But on that day, when I saw my mom crying and I heard the news all over the radio about this rock icon being murdered, I knew it was something awful, much bigger than the death of the person. It was the silencing of a voice and a generation.

Yoko had called for a vigil to be held that night in Central Park, and although we were four and a half hours away on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, my mother lit candles and turned out the lights, and we sat together in quiet solemnity, sending prayers to Yoko and mourning the loss of Yesterday, when all our troubles seemed so far away.

I'm pretty sure my mother called my father at some point during that time. The music of the 1960s was integral to their early life together. They had shared pain. And as with anything that I saw as a

child that brought my parents together in some way—even though they'd been apart since I was so little—I grabbed onto it, teased it out, made it part of me, because I was a part of the “them” that no longer existed except in the recesses of memory, which they would both share with me from time to time.

My mother had more than 400 albums, all in alphabetical order by artist, from The Allman Brothers to Warren Zevon, lined up on four horizontal levels of shelving. I went to the Bs to look for The Beatles and found titles like *Abbey Road*, *Let it Be*, *Magical Mystery Tour*, *Revolver*, *Rubber Soul*, *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and the *White Album*, all in alphabetical order by artist, then title. As I had been trained to do, I carefully pulled out the album before *Abbey Road* (that was the way you marked your place to ensure the records got put back in order) and slipped it off the shelf. I pulled the paper sleeve from within the record cover, then guided the record out of the sleeve carefully between my thumb and middle finger, touching the round paper label in the center and never the vinyl itself. I positioned the album hole over the spindle, side one up, glided the arm from right to center to hold it in place, then pushed the button that released the album with a smooth *clack!* The needle arm lifted, jerked slightly, then hovered over the lines of the first track and descended with that familiar crackling sound and first moment of silent anticipation: “Come Together.”

By the time I got to “Golden Slumbers,” tears were rolling down my face for something I couldn't quite grasp. Music and memories that weren't even mine spoke history that were, in fact, a part of me. I devoured The Beatles for days. This was just after the release of *Double Fantasy*, so Lennon songs were playing constantly on the radio. Back then we would read the album inserts cover to cover, memorizing the lyrics, playing albums on repeat until they got into our bones. Every time Lennon's voice sang about beautiful, darling Sean, my heart ached for his kid and the wife he left behind. I, too, had been separated from my father, not in the same way of course, but that sort of thing breeds empathy.

When I went off to summer camp in Vermont over the next few years, I took with me a handful of cassette tapes I'd discovered in a black vinyl crocodile pattern carrying case on the bottom of my mother's

album shelves. These cassettes had my father's writing on them. It was like discovering lost treasure, relics of him I'd never known about but was now ready to discover. Buffalo Springfield. Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. The Doors. Old homemade tapes where, if I listened carefully, I could almost hear my father there in the background, inhaling a fat joint in San Francisco, immersed in sweet smoke and music, the lyrics speaking through him like a message to me 12 years later.

"Tell me why," Neil Young crooned. Every time I heard the line about making arrangements with yourself, it was as though the lyrics were written about my father. I imagined myself singing those words to him, now that I was getting older and could see things more clearly, or I could imagine him singing those words about himself, bemused perhaps at how he ended up where he was in life.

I remember playing that "After the Goldrush" tape over and over at camp one summer, giving into melancholy and latching on to the lyrics that threaded through our distant lives. I now understood that "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" and wondered if the world that fell apart was the one we once shared.

Those songs dug into my soul, bonding me with my father even though we hardly saw each other.



The front door knocker smacked twice, a little after one o'clock one day when I was maybe eight years old. I bounced out of the living room chair where I'd been sitting, bored out of my mind, waiting, and took a deep breath. Without looking to see who it was, I clacked the bolts open, expectantly.

"Hey, Pooh Doll," Daddy said as he ducked through the doorway, bringing with him a waft of Old Spice I wished would never leave. I could feel him sizing me up as he smiled in disbelief. I knew I'd gotten taller. It'd been what, three months since he last saw me? He stooped down to embrace me with a loud whisper and a hint of Miller beer on his breath. "Sure is good to see you." Daddy's arms were long and encompassing, though his hugs always felt apologetic, for much more than being late.

Never mind he was supposed to be here two hours ago. He was just in from back-to-back weeks of being on the road, driving a big rig halfway across the country and back again. I figured he was tired, with a familiar pang of sympathy that bubbled up when I thought of my father and hard work and two families. I said nothing about his lateness because I understood. I *always* understood.

I was able to see clearly from a pretty young age the strains of life, the dynamic of ex-wife and divorced kid vs. new wife and new kids. Not enough time or money to go around, working his ass off all the time. The bind he was in was obvious. For many years, my mother covered for him on the latenesses and no-shows, trying to protect me. What was really going on was that he was either drinking and incapacitated, or he was spending what little free time he had with his current family, and by the time that happened, he had tied one on, or it was too late to drive all the way down to see me and then drive back in time to be in his truck the next day.

Except for the tantrums I threw for my mom when Daddy didn't show up, I didn't allow myself to dwell on it. What was anyone to do about any of it? What would I fight for? Create more challenges for my father than already existed? I took what I could get, kept my mouth shut, and buried any grievances. Even though I fully understood he'd made his own choices in life, I mostly felt pity and sadness for my father, and I was quick to defend him, a protectiveness I carried into adulthood.

Behind the blariness of fourteen-hour trucking shifts and alcohol, my father's eyes were true green, not just hazel, and warm and kind, the way that shows up in some people's eyes. I rarely made eye contact with him, though, as a kid. We only had a few hours together at a time, the first part of which I'd have to get over the shyness of not having seen him for a while. Looking him square in the eye would have been too confronting.

In later years, I longed to look into his eyes, to be connected, but by then his eyes had become a bit shifty. If I caught his gaze for too long, we'd both know he'd been drinking, then I'd look away to spare him the embarrassment of my knowing and judging.

The same thing happened with promises he'd make to me. He knew

and I knew they were not going to happen, but if we never locked eyes, we could pretend that he was going to deliver. I could allow him to experience his own good intentions without overtly doubting him.

“Hello, Du-WARD,” my mom drawled playfully, stressing the second syllable of Edward like “card,” cordial as always. She looked pretty, with loose, dark brown curls and big, gold hoop earrings. Bare-foot, she was tiny next to him.

To my surprise, he pulled her in and gave her a perfectly platonic kiss on the forehead. This made me momentarily uncomfortable, as I knew he would never have done that in front of his current wife. I also knew there wasn’t a chance in hell that my parents would get together again. But something about that little show of affection showed me that love had been there between them. Once.

In one of my baby-book pictures, the three of us are sitting on a picnic blanket in Golden Gate Park. I’m about a year old, and Mom is smiling, peering out through round-lens hippie glasses, long dark hair cascading down to her waist. Daddy seems happy and in the moment with us. You can make out his trim sideburns and boyish features. I had seen this photo throughout my life and always sensed this was a time when love really did live between my parents. In that captured moment, it appeared like we were a real family—a whole unit—the way it once was, but hardly ever would be again.

I always joked with some amount of cynicism when telling people about having been a product of the San Francisco scene. “My parents just missed the Summer of Love—it was kind of metaphorical,” I’d say. Daddy had arrived just after, in fall of 1967. I was born a year later, and then in August of 1969 my parents were wed in Golden Gate Park. In 1970, we were on our way back to the East Coast, and by 1971 or 1972, Daddy was headed to Florida looking for work.



Us as a family, Golden Gate Park, 1969

Because I was so young when my parents split up, I didn't have to go through what an older child would. I wore their divorce like a badge of honor in the 1970s, long before all the other kids started wearing it. As I got older, I could observe my parents' faults—my mother's controlling behaviors, for example, and my father's lack of responsibility—while they individually shared with me their reasons for not having been able to make their relationship work.

Your mother is incredibly smart but she has no common sense. I loved her but we just couldn't live together.

After your father got drunk and wrecked my car, that was pretty much the end of it. Although I should've seen the writing on the wall when he was pissing out the window of our house in San Francisco.

Even worse, my mother added, was him pissing down the inside wall of their two-year-old's bedroom in Maryland a couple years later.

If I were to imagine them together for even a split second, a shit-storm would pop up in my young mind so fast I'd look away before the tape reel could play out in my head. I could see my father sauntering away, yelling over his shoulder, "Kiss my cornbread ass!"

And my mother using all the English language expletives in one breath, "Goddammutherfuckingsunnuvabitch, just take your shit and get out!"

The storyline became cemented even more once my mother got sober when I was in high school, and still more five years later when I did. Everything then was seen and talked about through the lens of greater sanity but filtered with righteousness and disdain. Suffice it to say, throughout my entire life, I not only never entertained the notion of my parents being together again after they had split up, I knew that it would be a terrible idea. In fact, through my mother's telling of events, it never seemed like their being together was a great idea in the first place. Mostly because of the alcohol.



Music continued to keep the lines of communication open between Daddy and me. For my twelfth birthday, he brought me a Walkman cassette player with headphones. For my fourteenth, an all-in-one turntable with radio and cassette. My gifts to him were often record albums my mom knew he would appreciate, like the latest Eric Clapton, or Bob Dylan's *Slow Train Coming*.

"You gotta suhvuv some-bodday," Daddy would croon like the Black gospel backup singers, then half-laugh, amused at himself. It always seemed like something witty was yet to come, so I often giggled along, teetering there on the precipice, finding the funny in just about everything, just like my father did.

If we were out somewhere and observed the odd behavior of a random stranger, or we happened to eavesdrop on somebody's conversation, taken completely out of context, Daddy would toss his head back.

"Hideous!" he'd say, with that half-laugh, or sarcastically, "Out-

standing! Yes, just outstanding!” Just being around Daddy being amused was the funniest thing of all.

The times we were together with family, Daddy and my Uncle Ray would banter back and forth, bullshitting and cutting up, teasing my grandmother about something inane and watching her feign offense, their giggles turning into howls because the more she said in her oh-so-polite, slightly clueless-but-not-really, sing-songy Virginia way, the unintentionally funnier it all became. She was especially mock-offended by farting, often demonstrated around the dinner table and a topic of much conversation that we all took great delight in. Just listening to my father and Uncle Ray jesting back and forth and giggling was funny enough. Uncle Ray says he’ll never forget my dad’s “hee-hee-hee!” giggle before the outright laughter, “like an uncontrollable laugh from the heart.” Makes me realize there’s some things I’ll never laugh about again in quite the same way, because the people who made it so hilarious aren’t here anymore.

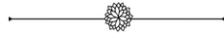


*Uncle Ray, Daddy, Mammonk, Grandmother, Jimmy
and Shannah*

I remember my father’s sheer delight when he heard I was reading J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* in school, saying it was one of his all-

time favorite books. Literature, too, became a shared interest. In high school, I was soon drawn to Kerouac novels from my mom's bookshelves, where I knew I was drinking from the same fountain as my father. In my mother's paperback collection, I discovered the likes of Carlos Castañeda, Henry Miller, Ken Kesey, and Anais Nin. Years later, my father turned me on to Richard Brautigan, another late-Beat generation writer with a collection of short stories, including one haunting one called "The Abortion" set in San Francisco in the 1960s. Brautigan had been a voice for the Summer of Love, and parts of his top-selling book, *Trout Fishing in America*, were first published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the legendary proprietor of the City Lights bookstore where the Beat poets and authors all hung out. Ferlinghetti was still there during my time in San Francisco and for many years after. He died in February 2021 at 101 years old. My father preceded him in 2011 at age 64.

Remember - Melville died in a fetid hotel room. Poe on the streets of Baltimore. Clay on the highway. Be like Henry Miller. Never stop putting it all down.



As I grew into adulthood, my mother, too, made musical references that became part of the narrative of an earlier time.

"This song was out when your father and I were breaking up," she said to me, driving in the car one day and listening to Carole King's "It's Too Late."

As my mom drove along and sang in tune with the radio cranked, I internalized the lyrics as apropos of their relationship. To this day, I call it my mother and father's break-up song.

And sometimes it was just listening to rock-n-roll. Maybe Jefferson Airplane on the radio and Grace Slick belting out the first lines of "Somebody to Love" would trigger a concert memory or a San Francisco vignette of life when I was a baby and my parents were still together. Through these fragments of memory and song lyrics that ran deep, resurrecting an earlier time and place and continuously speaking

to me, I cobbled together my own life story. Music was mortar holding everything together, always there in the background.

I really disapprove of your reading Brautigan. Then, not again, you shouldn't miss him altogether. Incidentally, his 2nd wife was Japanese and some of his poems and lamentations are based in Tokyo. (His funniest work by far is 'Confederal General from Big Sur.') I think you can easily find his stuff in Japan. Glad I didn't strike out there.

— March 2, 1997