

I met Al and Arl when I came to Berkeley in the late 1960s. We were part of one of those outbursts of creativity occasionally occurring in the United States. We enjoyed Jazz, Art, and literature.

Al and Arl were 60s people, but there was something very 1940s about them. Al Young could have been Clark Gable's understudy. Arl, Joan Fontaine's. Al and I were workaholics. He was prolific, writing screenplays for Sidney Poitier, Bill Cosby, and Richard Pryor.

He always had some good stories about his encounters with these stars. Films that can still be seen, like Richard Pryor's "Bustin Loose" and "Sparkle," were written by Al. He still needs to receive the credit.

He wrote fiction and non-fiction as well as producing a steady flow of poetry.

He was a musician. But of all of these, Al, at heart, was a poet. The poet of love. His parody of the period's hate poetry made their creators seem so silly that they abandoned the genre. *The Nation* magazine thought that O.O. Gabugah was a real person, so adept he was at mimicking.

He was gentle during a time when we liked it rough.

Al and I were editors of *Yarbird Reader*, which we founded with Glenn Myles and Doyle Foreman. We published writers who are now part of the canon. We even published my students—Terry McMillan and Mona Simpson, now *The Paris Review's* publisher.

*Yarbird* ended because one of the partners kept a grant that was supposed to go to the magazine.

He and his allies sought to direct a grant awarded to me by the California Arts Council to their benefit. One of our antagonists had ties with an officer at the University Ave. and the San Pablo branch of Wells Fargo. She refused to release the grant money to me. During a tense scene at the bank, I told the bank to get my New York lawyer on the phone. He told them if they didn't release the grant money to me, he'd challenge the Wells Fargo charter. He was a Park Avenue lawyer.

They released the money. Al and I produced *Calafia*, an anthology of California poetry with the grant. The great Betye Saar designed the cover, revising the picture on the state seal to depict a Black Amazon queen because, according to Gaelic and Spanish legend, what is now California was ruled by a Black queen. An irate librarian sent a letter of complaint. She said that her family had lived in California for a few generations, and she wanted to keep California "spic and span." Her chauvinism reminds me of Adam Nagourney calling Joan Didion "The Voice of The West." Mr. Nagourney must not be aware of a Spanish tradition in Western Literature that dates to the 1600s. Try Captain Gaspar Perez de Villagra's epic poem, *La Historia de Nuevo Mexico, 1600*.

The breakup of *Yarbird* happened just as the magazine was on the brink of gaining an international audience. Harvey Shapiro, then editor of *The New York Times Book Review*, devoted a whole page to the magazine, and Random House drew up an agreement to distribute and subsidize the magazine.

Al and I continued with *Y'Bird*, but the antagonists went to court, and the judge ordered us to drop that name. We continued with *Quilt* and printed five issues until we ran out of money. *Quilt I* included an exclusive interview with Truman Capote conducted by Cecil Brown.

The last issue of *Quilt* included the first published stories by Frank Wilderson and Teresa Wiltz. They were Dartmouth students. Teresa is now an editor at Politico. In 1978, Grove Press published *Yarbird Lives!*.

The antagonists told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that they would continue with *Yarbird*, but they couldn't, even though the court turned the company's assets over to them.

Ever forgiving, Al Young maintained a cordial relationship with the man whose selfish actions destroyed the company. A man who sought to smear our reputations. He wouldn't be the first.

The antagonist whose selfish behavior led to the magazine's collapse accused me of being a "One Man Band." That was good advice. I began *Konch* in 1990, and in 2008 was helped by my daughter. Now, *Konch* is managed by my daughter Tennessee.

In my last conversation with Al, he remarked about my combativeness.

I don't hide it. People credit me with coining the phrase "Writing Is Fightin'." Muhammad Ali coined the term, but I'll take credit for it.

During our literary partnership, Al was the good cop, and I was the bad cop. But people took advantage of his optimistic and sunny nature. He was the poet laureate of California. He had written a poem for Arnold Schwarzenegger's inaugural. He was told that Maria Shriver had chosen another poet. That hurt him. When he asked for an explanation, he was given a flip answer.

His treatment by the California College of the Arts during the last two years of his life was cruel. He did work for the College without compensation. He took three buses to get to work. They never clarified their relationship with Al. I asked whether they were to hold a memorial for Al. I never received an answer. Close to death, he still hadn't received a response about whether City Lights would publish his book of poetry. This caused him much anxiety for months. They can't find the manuscript. Maybe they lost it. Al was the most thoughtful person I've known. He remembered birthdays and anniversaries. But Arl and Al were fortunate to have Michael as a caretaker and guardian of their legacies.

In 2011 Al and I performed for Litquake. I played the piano while he sang. "We'll Be Together Again." It includes the lines

Times when I know you'll be lonesome

Times when I know you'll be sad

Don't let temptation surround you

Don't let the blues make you bad

For parting is not goodbye

We'll be together again.

What did I say about Al being both sixties and forties? Some people said that he sounded like Johnny Hartman.

Ishmael Reed