

Howard Snow

by Jan Kelly

It has taken me a long time to write this piece. I want it to be a literary view and not a sad portrait. Now with three days of rain and fog, with the flats stretched out under a new moon, I can put down quickly what I've been thinking through for weeks. It's the time and weather to think of a Wellfleet oyster man, philosopher and poet who froze at Newcomb's Hollow Beach last January. When I think of Howard Snow I think of salt, salt of his oysters and his sea, salt in his speech and salt in his wounds he kept so tidily from us. He would tell you just enough; he would take from you just enough. No soap opera living for him. Yankee self reliance kept him straight. His nature also had a romantic balance and a love of the physical world around him. His book of poems is his self portrait. The poems have a sameness to Howard's mind.

The poems ask the same questions but don't give the answers. He leaves that to us. You can do your own thinking. Howard Snow was not known to all people on all his levels. Besides having an oyster man look that Hollywood could never duplicate, being a raconteur of perfect timing and humor, a self-taught historian and a lover of the sanguine life, Howard Snow was an intelligent man with an individual quest to understand the why and what of life—the quest and questioning went on all his life.

We all knew Howard as a gentleman in denim and bandana. He was sociable, even gregarious, pleasant and interesting company. He was particularly courteous to women. That Don Juan and white knight quality shows in his poems. He cared not the age, size, coloring or skills of women. He was courteous and comfortable with all of them. His wife Florence was fortunate to enjoy that quality in her husband. We remember Howard on the flats, in the library, at the Foc's'le and at Piggy's dancing. That's where I first met Florence. That's a wide range for 70 year olds. The poems of Howard Snow have the same quality—to live more fully, to question life with that temporary separation, rather like Aristotle's *The Unexamined Life Is Not Worth Living*. I like to think that that's the way it is now: "a temporary separation." Because when I pick up the book and read his poems, as I often do, there he is again. Bandana, jolly abrupt laugh, whimsical ways, and a wonderful mind, bright and full of wonder.

The book had been in the works for a year. Howard Mitcham, crony of Howard's, poet, author, artist too, and Florence Snow got to work discussing this publication. No easy task—Mitcham phoneless in New Orleans, Florence phoneless in Wellfleet. The letters did it all. Florence collected all the scraps of paper from books, drawers, and shelves, Emily Dickinson fashion, and handed them over to Edith Sweet to type. Off to Mitcham in New Orleans and his Hermit Crab Press. Florence put up \$1000 for the publishing. The edition is a memorial one and a lot better idea than a stone. Howard spoke about publishing his own poems often, but never got around to it. Florence did.

The poems have a sympathy to nature. They portray a love of freedom and an appreciation of women and show an effort to understand and enjoy all that moves around us. The poems are one method Howard used to express his coping with life. Most of them were written while Howard was in his twenties, a romantic and philosophical youth, who struggled with his resulting emotions.

In his poem *My Moon*, he courts the moon, anthropomorphizes her and ends up the fatalist, pleasantly doomed.

My Moon

*We watch each other, moon and I
Just beyond each other's reach;
A golden goddess in the sky,
Mortal man upon the beach;
Yet we can only gaze and sigh,
She nor I can span the breach.*

*A gleaming path across the bay
My moon low above the land
If we could only meet half way
If she could be with her man
We know that we would softly say
Little things we understand.*

*Oh grand would be our happiness
Could we be alone and free
Our deepest feeling to confess
Yet our longing cannot be
For she must keep her destined course
While I drift on aimlessly.*

Another Side of a Wellfleet Oysterman

POEMS *by* HOWARD SNOW



A MEMORIAL EDITION

Again, in *To A Willow Tree*, Howard realizes "Our lives are weak and a willow tree is more of a constant thing than we." And, in *Autumn*, he empathizes with a lone cricket who will soon expire following nature's plan because *Nature is never concerned with death, and ever eternally out of the dust she must create again.*

For Howard Snow's love of freedom, the book begins with the *Call of the Wild Geese* and watching the flight and listening to their freest, wildest song, the poet realizes he is *a thing of earthly clay with a spirit that strains and strains* and in *Oh, For A Wind*, he curses comfort and contentment like a young Baudelaire and ends that thought *Oh for a wind, a strong fresh wind, a Ruthless wind to force My being's flame ablaze again, My voice to keen discourse*, and his freedom from his own history is evident in *The Pasts. Ask me nothing of my pasts I pray know me only as I am today.*

And for Howard's appreciation of women be it the moon, Rugosa Rose, Evelyn across the Brooklyn Bridge, Mary, *Mistress of His Careless Youth* or his tormented *Wish. I'd rather you were far away So I could wish you here Than having you with me today So far and yet so near.*

The Outcast and *The Vow* show the darker side of romantic love, also.

The poem Mitcham wanted to open the book with is *Upon A Frozen Beach* where Howard half a century before it did happen, questions the star, the wind and ocean waves as to the course of his destiny. Florence preferred not to start the book with that intense and shaking power and so it rests on page 35. This poem makes us all feel and think more deeply, seeking that other level that Howard Snow sought with his full time attitude towards life. This poem would be well placed on slate, old New England style, and on the grave of Howard Snow.

We all miss Howard Snow and are not yet adjusted to our loss. One way we can be in touch with him again is through this worthy volume of poetry. *Another Side of a Wellfleet Oyster Man, Poems by Howard Snow, A Memorial Edition.*

The book is available at the Provincetown Book Shop and the AIM Thrift Shop in Wellfleet. Buy the book and enjoy the poems as well as Molly Benjamin's biographical sketch.