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LOOKING INWORDS

Reflections on the Writing Life

BOXING UP BUKOWSKI

By Darren Miller

On Sunday, I boxed up Bukowski. I boxed up Bangs. And Talese, too.

With the recent sale of our house and a move forthcoming, my wife and I spent the weekend packing. The basement is stacked with boxes—all soon on their way to a storage unit.

It was when I got to this room, where I sit now, empty and ready box in hand, that the significance of what I was doing hit me.

There goes Pynchon and Joyce and Thoreau. Hentoff, Friedman and Dowd. Hersh, Capote, Kafka, and Kidder. Hundreds of others as well. All packed tightly—and carefully, mind you—into boxes, on their way next weekend to a storage unit.

This is the room where I write. On an iMac, which is on an antique-looking, colonial-style desk, which is in what I like to call my library (a cozy little space with deep red walls, cherry-stained bookshelves and, of course, books). Most of my modest collection—400 books or so (and still growing)—call this room home.

Until now. Until, that is, the boxes arrived.

The shelves that line the wall to my left, however, are empty now, and so too is the room, the atmosphere. Before tonight, whether writing or reading, I never felt alone, inspiration never far away. Tonight, the journalists, the poets, the observers, the thinkers, the rock critics, the astronomers, the geographers, the playwrights, the storytellers, the truth-tellers are all eerily quiet. Silent.

It was nice—comforting, really—to be able to reach over to the top of the bookshelf and grab a Bukowski collection. Perhaps tonight, being that my wife and I sold our house with no real point on the map targeted as the next move, I would have reached for *What Matters Most is How Well You Walk Through The Fire* and flipped to page 408. Only it's not there. Neither is the psychological warmth usually generated by the thousands of painstakingly crafted pages of carefully chosen words. Tonight, just me and the word processor—and empty bookshelves. Which brings me to this one simple point: *All writers must have their own library.*

Size, at least in this particular case, doesn't matter. Quality is what counts here. Fill it with the works of the writers you love, or want to read, or want to write like. Let the voices in; surround yourself with those who inspire you to “write as well as you can.”

William Zinsser, too, is all boxed up. Woodward, Twain, Melville. Orwell and Roth. Hemingway and Whitman. Irving, Wolfe, and Mailer. Hunter S. Thompson, Gore Vidal, and Studs Terkel. Hundreds of others as well. All boxed up—muses temporarily indisposed.

While I've realized for quite some time the importance and value my personal library holds, the silence stifling this empty room at this moment makes this point even more pronounced, more palpable. *All writers must have their own library.* There's no better way to write than to do so in the company of heroes.

It was hard for me to box up Hank, Lester and the others. Soon, though, I will be slicing the tape on those damn boxes and restocking my shelves with the inspiration they afford. Soon I will open up a Bukowski again and “the nights will flame with fire.” Until then Bach and Satie, Modest Mouse and Pearl Jam, Cabernet and Pinot—in no particular order—will have to suffice.

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