

ALLEN GINSBERG

2ND INSTALLMENT

This is the second of four installments of the Allen Young interview with Allen Ginsberg. The interview first appeared in its entirety in Gay Sunshine #16.

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The adhesiveness that Whitman spoke of is latent in all of us now and ready to be opened. In the last ten years, god knows how many younger boys I've run across that I just sat and held hands with and felt love feelings toward them, and they toward me. Gay is too much of a category.

YOUNG: I think definitely a tension exists today between gay freaks and straight gays. There are some people in gay liberation who say, "I have more in common with a heterosexual freak than with a gay person who's into very short hair and alcohol." And then there are other gay people who say, "My loyalty is to other gay people, and the freak culture is very macho."

GINSBERG: The form I felt it in was between the heart-felt, populist, humanist, quasi-heterosexual, Whitmanic, bohemian, free-love, homosexual tradition, as you find it in Sherwood Anderson, Whitman, or maybe Genet, versus the privileged, exaggeratedly effeminate, gossipy, moneyed, money-style-clothing-conscious, near hysterical queen. Of course, there's nothing more ancient or honorable than the old shamanistic transvestite that we see running up and down Greenwich Avenue or, among the American Indians, a shaman who dresses himself up like a woman and even takes a husband. The screaming young queen — there's something very ancient and charming about that; great company, total individuality and expressiveness. Sometimes you fear it's the screaming, hysterical outside of somebody who's going to have a nervous breakdown and wind up in the church, or something. But then there's also the pettish, spiteful, anal retentive, disciplinarian.

But when I was younger the split was more between the grubby, beatnik, open-hearted...the nameless, gnostic lovers and the monopolistic queens who had privilege and money. The distinction was more between the cold-hearted and the warm hearted.

YOUNG: In the gay bars of New York did you find both?

GINSBERG: Oh, I found both definitely. There were lots of outspoken, funny old sailor queens from the twenties; and then there were all sorts of prissy mouthed, paranoid, fearful, conservative-reactionary, short-hair, worried, advertising martinets. And everything in between. There is a manneristic fairydom that depends on money, chic, privilege and exclusive, monopolistic high style, and I would say that it is usually accompanied by bitchiness and bad manners and faithless love, too. I like homosexuality where the lovers are friends all their lives, and there are many lovers and many friends.

GINSBERG Orlovsky

YOUNG: Could you say something about your relationship with Peter Orlovsky?

GINSBERG: We met in San Francisco. He was living with a painter named Robert LaVigne in '54. I was having a very straight life, just trying it out, working in an advertising company, wearing suits, living up on Nob Hill in an apartment with Sheila, who was a jazz singer and worked in advertising. Things were somewhat unsatisfactory between us. We'd been taking peyote, so we were into a psychedelic scene, too.

We got into an argument, so I wandered down one night into an area of San Francisco then called Polk Gulch, now known as a notorious gay area with lots of gay bars. It was then more of a bohemian section, somewhat gay, artistic. Hotel Wentley was there, right on the corner of Sutter and Polk, and a Fosters cafeteria. I went and sat in the Fosters, late at night. I ran into Robert LaVigne and got into a big, interesting, artistic conversation about the New York painters I knew — Larry Rivers, deKooning & Kline. LaVigne was a provincial San Francisco painter, so I was bringing all sorts of fresh poetry, art news from New York.

He took me up to see his place and his paintings, about four blocks away on Gough Street in an apartment that I subsequently lived in for many seasons and still use now. I walked into the apartment and there was this enormous, beautiful, lyrical, seven-by-seven foot square painting of a naked boy with his legs spread, and some onions at his feet, with a little Greek embroider on the couch. He had a nice, clean-looking pecker, yellow hair, a youthful teeny little face, and a beautiful frank expression looking right out of the canvas at me. And I felt a heart throb immediately. So I asked who that was, and Robert said, "Oh, that's Peter; he's here, he's home." And then Peter walked in the room with the same look on his face, a little shyer.

Within a week Robert said that he was going out of town or breaking up with Peter, or Peter was breaking up with him. He asked me if I was interested in Peter, and he'd see what he could arrange. I said, "ooh, don't mock me." I'd already given up. I already had had a historic love affair with Neal Cassady a decade earlier. So I was already a tired old dog, in the sense of the defeats of love, not having made it, not having found a permanent life companion. And, in 1955, I was already 29. I wasn't a 20-year old kid with

romantic notions. That night we were in Vesuvios bar. Robert had a big conversation with Peter, asking Peter if he was interested, sort of like a "shachun," a matrimonial arranger.

Then I went home one night. I went to Peter's room. We were to sleep together that night on a huge mattress he had on the floor. I took off my clothes and got into bed. I hadn't slept with too many people. Never openly, completely giving and taking. With Jack or Neal, with people who were primarily heterosexual and who didn't fully accept the sexualization of our tenderness, I felt I was forcing it on them; so I was always timid about them making love back to me, and they very rarely did very much. When they did, it was like blessings from heaven. If you get into it, there's a funny kind of pleasure/pain, absolute loss/hope. When you blow someone like that and they come, it's great! And if they touch you once, it's enough to melt the entire life structure, as well as the heart, the genitals and the earth. And it'll make you cry.

So...Peter turned around (he was in his big Japanese robe), opened up the bathrobe — he was naked — and put it around me and pulled me into him; and we got close, belly to belly, face to face. That was so frank, so free and so open that I think it was one of the first times that I felt open with a boy. Then, emboldened, I screwed Peter. He wept afterwards, and I got frightened, not knowing what I'd done to make him cry, but completely moved by the fact that he was so involved as to weep. At the same time the domineering, sadism part of me was flattered and erotically aroused.

The reason he wept was that he realized how much he was giving me and how much I was demanding, asking and taking. I think he wept looking at himself in that position not knowing how he'd gotten there; not feeling it was wrong, but wondering at the strangeness of it. The most raw meat of reasons for weeping.

Then Robert hearing, seeing the situation, came in to comfort Peter a little bit. I was very possessive and I pushed Robert away. That got me and Robert into a funny kind of distrust that lasted for a year or two before our karmas finally

resolved. He then realized he was well off on his own; and I was burdened with the karma of love.

Peter was primarily heterosexual, and always was. I guess that was another reason he was shocked — the heaviness of my sadistic possessiveness in screwing him. For the first time in my life I really had an opportunity to screw somebody else! I think that wounded him and thrilled me a little bit. So we still had to work out all that in our relationship over many, many years. It's painful sometimes.

We slept together perhaps one more time. Then I had to go to New York for my brother's wedding at Christmas, '54. I came back and moved into that apartment where they were living, at their invitation. And then there was a triangle of Robert, me and Peter. Peter had not made up his mind whether or not he wanted to make a more permanent relationship with me. I had my eyes on Peter for life-long love; [I was] completely enamored and intoxicated — just the right person for me, I thought. Robert was not sure he hadn't made a mistake, seeing the flow and the vitality that was rising up in both me and Peter. And Peter began withdrawing. He was caught in this rivalry between me and Robert, and, at the same time, there was his unsurety of me and his relation to me. Basically he liked girls anyway, so what was he doing lying there being screwed by me?

So I moved across from the Hotel Wentley and got a room. I was working in a market research job. I had the brilliant inspiration that all the categorizing

and market research I was doing could be fed into a machine, and I wouldn't have to add all those columns any more. So I supervised the transfer for the company, and that left me out of a job just nicely. Then I got unemployment compensation.

I was being psychoanalyzed at Langley-Porter Clinic, an elite extension of U.C. Berkeley medical school. It was a very good doctor, and I said: "You know, I'm very hesitant to get into a deep thing with Peter, because where can it ever lead. Maybe I'll grow old and then Peter probably won't love me — just a transient relationship. Besides, shouldn't I be heterosexual?" He said, "Why don't you do what you want. What would you like to do?" And I answered, "Well, I really would just love to get an apartment on Montgomery St., stop working and live with Peter and write poems!" He said, "Why don't you do that?" So I said, "What happens if I get old or something?" And he replied, "Oh, you're a nice person; there's always people who will like you" — which really amazed me. So, in a sense he gave me permission to be free, not to worry about consequences.

So then I waited for Peter, and Peter stayed up at the Gough Street apartment and went to school. I got this room and started writing a lot and waited and waited for Peter. Neal Cassady came by a couple of times. I made it with Neal. I can remember one of the last really wild times I made it with him, because I had a room of my own and there was privacy, finally. He was lying there naked, and I was sitting on his cock, jumping up and down, trying to make him come.

And I just waited and waited [for Peter]. There was nothing I could run after or pursue, because I couldn't claim anything by force. Things got too difficult where Peter was living, so he got a room himself in the Wentley, across the street from where I was. And there was embarrassment, coldness — not knowing where each other was, what we would do. I was waiting for him to make some sort of decision. A couple of times we drank a little to see if we could get over the low. We didn't sleep together at all, though I was longing to.

Then one day he was lying in bed, and he started crying again. He said, "Come on and take me." I was too overwhelmed and frightened to even get a hard-on. I didn't know what to do. We both had our clothes on. I was afraid he was interpreting it as me screwing him again, rather than really just having each other. But that soon got resolved, and we moved in together, into an apartment in North Beach. We found an apartment, and it had a room for him, a room for me, and a hall between us; and a kitchen together. So that gave us both a little privacy, and, at the same time, we could make it when we wanted.

He was very moody, very sweet, tender, gentle and open. But every month or two months he'd go into a very dark, Russian, Dostoevskian black mood and lock himself in his room and weep for days; and then he'd come out totally cheerful and friendly. I found after a while it was best not to interrupt him, not to hang round like a vulture; let him go through his own yoga.

The key thing was when we decided on the terms of our marriage — I think it was in Fosters' Cafeteria downtown about three in the morning. We were sitting and talking about each other, with each other, trying to figure out what we were going to do, who we were to each other, and what we wanted out of each other, how much I loved him, and how much did he love me. We arrived at what we both really desired.

I'd already had visionary experience: an illumined audition of Blake's voice and a sense of epiphany about the universe. He had had an experience, weeping and lonesome, walking up the hill to his college, and having a sense of an apparition of the trees bowing to him. So we both had some kind of psychedelic, transcendental, mystical image in our brains and hearts.

We made a vow to each other that he could own me, my mind and everything I knew, and my body, and I could own him and all he knew and all his body; and that we would give each other ourselves, so that we possessed each other as property, to do everything we wanted to, sexually or intellectually, and in a sense explore each other until we reached the mystical "X" together, emerging two merged souls. We had the understanding that when our (my particularly) erotic desire was ultimately satisfied by being satiated (rather than denied), there would be a lessening of desire, grasp, holding on, craving and attachment; and that ultimately we would both be delivered free in heaven together. And so the vow was that neither of us would go into heaven unless we could get the other one in — like a mutual bodhisattva's vow.

That's actually the bodhisattva's vow — "Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to enlighten them all. Passions are numberless, I vow to quench them all, cut them all down. The nature of the dharma, the doors of nature are endless, I vow to enter every single one of them. Buddha path very high and long and endless — vow to follow through all the way —

Buddha path, infinite, limitless, vow to go all the way through." Sentient beings, numberless, unnumbered — countless, vow to count every one, enlighten every single one of them. Basically a vow to be reborn as everybody, one after another, every stone, every leaf blade, vow to be every individual part of the universe at one time or another, and accept the fate of that particle, so to speak.

Well, this is like a limited version of that, almost intuitive, the vow to stay with each other to whatever eternal consciousness: him with his trees bowing, me with Blake eternity vision. I was more intellectual, so I was offering my mind, my intellect; he was more athletic and physical and was offering his body. So we held hands, took a vow: I do, I do, you promise? yes, I do. At that instant we looked in each other's eyes and there was a kind of celestial cold fire that crept over us and blazed up and illuminated the entire cafeteria and made it an eternal place.

I found somebody who'd accept my devotion, and he found somebody who'd accept his devotion and who was devoted to him. It was really a fulfillment of fantasy, to a point where fantasy and reality finally merged. Desire illuminated the room, because it was a fulfillment of all my fantasies since I was nine, when I began to have erotic love fantasies. And that vow has stuck as the primary core of our relationship. That's the mutual consciousness; it's the celestial social contract, valid because it was an expression of the desire of that time, and it was workable. It's really the basic human relationship — you give yourself to each other, help each other and don't go to heaven without each other.

There's this mythology of Arjuna, from the *Baghavad-Gita*, getting to the door of heaven. He's got this little dog following him, and they say, you can come in but you can't bring your dog. And he says, well, no, if I can't go in with my dog, I won't go. And then they say, oh, come on, you can go in, just leave him behind, it's only a dog. And he says, no, I love my dog, and I trust that love, and if I can't bring that trust in, then what kind of heaven is this? And the third time, he says, no, no, no, I'll stay out and put the

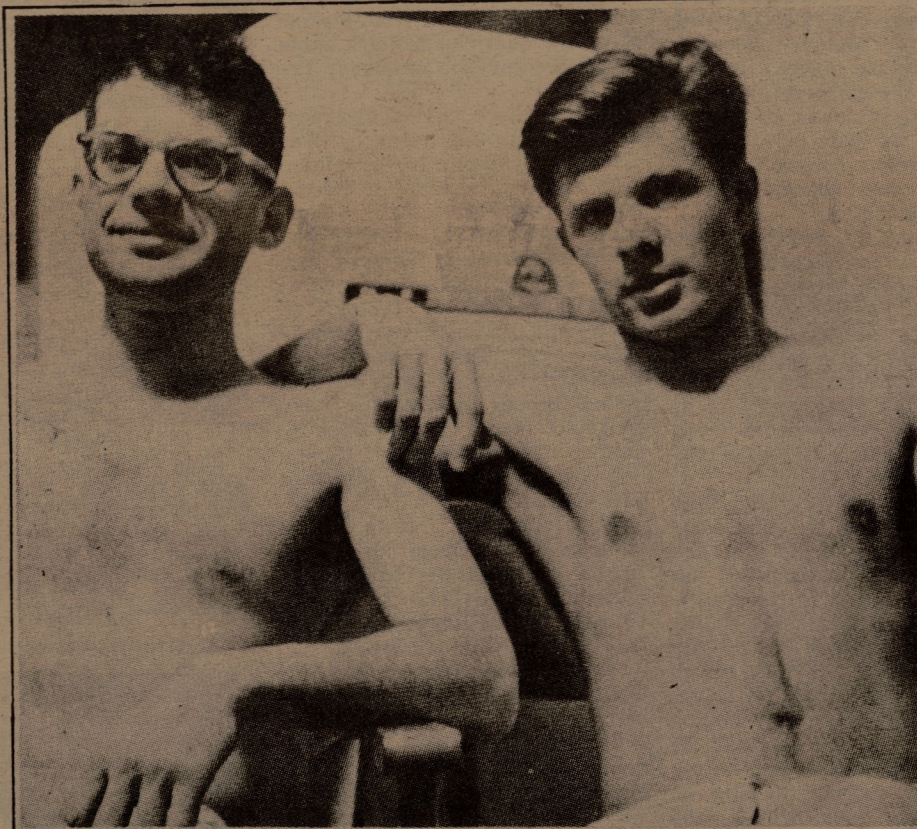
freakery in the mid sixties which really strained things. We had times of hostile screaming at each other such as happens in the worst of homo and hetero sexual marriages, where people have murder in their hearts toward each other. That burned out a lot of the false emotion of youth, and the unrealistic grasping, cravings, attachments and dependencies. So he's now independent, and I'm independent of him. And yet there's an independent curiosity between us.

GINSBERG Cuba

YOUNG: There were some vague stories going around about your visit to Cuba in 1965 and departure. I'd like to know more about what you did in Cuba and what you said that eventually got you deported.

GINSBERG: Well, the worst thing I said was that I'd heard, by rumor, that Raul Castro was gay. And the second worst thing I said was that Che Guevara was cute. The most substantial thing was that I went around wondering why their marijuana policy, as of 1965, was so unscientific. I didn't accept the answer I got which was that the Batista soldiers used to get high and shoot at them, because I didn't think that was true. By hindsight, it doesn't seem really relevant to their needs, but at the same time, the denial of marijuana doesn't seem relevant to their needs, either.

There was persecution of homosexuals in the primarily gay-oriented theater group at the time. Instead of finding a place for that, they tried to break it up and sent everybody out to the sugar cane fields to work. This was an attempt to humiliate them, to use sugar cane for humiliation rather than community. And it wasn't in the newspapers. It was a secret campaign, with all the young Communist League party hack, flag-waving kids, like the Nixonettes, so to speak, accusing every-



Allen and Peter.

dog in heaven but I won't go in without the dog. I vowed to tears with my dog, I can't leave my dog alone. And so, finally, after the third time, the dog turns out to be Krishna, the supreme lord of the universe and heaven itself. He was only trying to get heaven into heaven. And his instinct was right. And our instinct was right. It was enough to bring us through very difficult times — all through the change of status, beat generation and fame, the alteration of social identity that fame entails.

Our relationship has lasted from 1954 to 1972. The terms have changed tremendously. Peter's gone through a lot of changes, and we've separated for a year at a time. And always come back. We've gone through a lot of phases of sleeping with people together, doing orgies together, sleeping alone together. Now Peter sleeps with a girl. I very rarely sleep with him. But the origin of our relationship is a fond affection. I wouldn't want to go to heaven and leave Peter alone on earth; and he wouldn't leave me alone if I was sick in bed, dying, gray-haired, wormy, rheumatic. He'd have pity on me. We've maintained our relationship so long that at this point we could separate and it would be all right. I think the karma has resolved and worn out.

The original premise was to have each other and possess each other until the karma was worn out, until the desire, the neurotic attachment, was satisfied by satiation. And there's been satiation, disappointment and madness, because he went through a long period of speed

body they didn't like of being faggots.

It was considered bad form to wear beards and long hair, even though that was the characteristic style of Castro and the liberators up on the main drag, La Rampa. People were being stopped by the police and busted for having long hair, accused of being existentialists and degenerates. A bunch of young kids belonging to a poetry group I knew, El Puente (The Bridge), were being bugged by the police, not allowed to publish, and were called fairies. The whole group of Escritores del Encuentro Inter-Americana, sponsored by Casa de las Americas, went to the theater. We were joined there by a whole bunch of the young poet kids. When we left the theater, they were all stopped by the police, arrested and told to stop hanging around with foreigners. Some of the young poet kids were translating my work.

There was a police bureaucracy in Cuba that was very heavy and was coming down heavy on culture, in terms of beards, sexual revolution tendencies, sociability, and homosexuality. In other words, there was no real cultural revolution; it was still basically a Catholic mentality. As in many Communist countries, the police bureaucrat Party hacks were like Mayor Daley ward-healers: flag-waving, fat assed square types. Self seeking squares, not at all spiritually communist, were getting control of the police and emigration bureaucracies and setting themselves at odds against the people who screw with their eyes open, listen to

the Beatles and read interesting books like Genet, and fought at the Bay of Pigs against the Americans. Even people who had been up in the mountains with Castro were very secretive about smoking grass. The press was monolithically controlled and boring, and the newspaper reporters for the press reminded me very much of the self-righteous newspaper reporters from the *Daily News* as far as their opinionation and argumentativeness.

I just continued talking there as I would talk here in terms of being anti-authoritarian. But my basic feeling there was sympathetic to the revolution. I had friends living there, was invited there as a guest, and I took part as a judge in a literary contest. The worst thing was the talk about homosexuality and the challenge to the official position about it. Castro had taken an official position in a speech at the university in which he had attacked homosexuality. He called it degenerate or abnormal, saw it as a cabal, perhaps, a conspiracy. I think he praised the Young Communist League for turning in fairies.

I suggested to Haydee Santamaria that they invite the Beatles and got the answer: "They have no ideology; we are trying to build a revolution with an ideology." Well, that's true, but what was the ideology they were proposing? A police bureaucracy that persecutes fairies? I mean, they're wasting enormous energy on that. Some of those "fairies" were the best revolutionaries — people that fought at the Bay of Pigs, Playa Giron.

I slept with one young poet, secretly. I took one stick of grass one day, walking along a shady street with a bearded fellow who said he'd been up in the mountains with Castro and that they had smoked up there.

I thought one of the most brilliant and interesting results of gay liberation was the confrontation with the repressive, conservative police bureaucracy in Cuba. I think the confrontation between the Venceremos Brigade and Gay Lib showing the Cuban mental block on the subject of homosexuality was one of the most useful things that gay lib did on an international scale. At least it brought the question to front-brain consciousness. Gay lib people went there to offer themselves and, I think, less to confront the Cubans than to find out what the scene was. They were, obviously, faithful in terms of change and sympathy with the revolution. Since it was a gay lib group [that did this], the right wing, capitalist press couldn't take advantage of the confrontation to put shame on Cuba, because otherwise they'd have to defend gay lib! So, it was gay lib taking the bull by the horns, within the context of brotherhood, challenging the Cuban macho, repressive mentality in a constructive way. I don't think the Communist Party there reacted very well. What was the result?

YOUNG: In the interim period the brigade has adopted a policy of excluding gay liberation people. There was a fifth brigade that did not have gay liberation people on it. The Cubans have since come up with a detailed, rather specific policy statement on homosexuality, declaring it to be a "social pathology." The pro-Cuban Venceremos Brigade people have related with hostility to the radical gay lib movement. Large numbers of New Left people who formerly were very sympathetic to Cuba have reduced their expression of sympathy for Cuba because the gay question. The Cubans, basically, have forced a lot of people to choose between the Cuban revolution and gay liberation, and they're quite surprised to find people choosing the gays.

GINSBERG: When Castro originally had his revolution, he said it's a marxist revolution but still a humanist revolution. If it's a humanist revolution, they cannot put down gays. Otherwise, it's double talk. I think it's important to support any separation from American imperialism and conspicuous consumption, and any sort of independence from American psychological domination. But, on the other hand, the reason for doing so is to become human and independent again.

If the definition of human and independent means sustaining an old, authoritarian viewpoint toward sexuality — the monotheistic, Catholic viewpoint — then it would be better that American radicals at least realized that they're dealing with human beings in the Cuban situation rather than with divine authorities. I am willing to accept the fact that the Cuban revolution is a genuine relief from Mafia capitalist domination, the previously corrupt society of Cuba, and a release from America.

In other words, I feel the Cuban revolution is important and should be supported. They'll learn, soon enough. They're gonna see the end of the world anyway and end up with long hair and pansexualities. They're going to have to take it as state policy before they're over, just to relieve their population problem. I think gays are dealing in the long run from a position of great strength, because their position is founded in ancient rules of mammal behavior and ecological necessity as far as the future and the recognition of common humanity. CONT. NEXT WEEK