

Interview with Tim Moran
Co-Editor/ Author of *You'll Be Okay*,
Edie Parker's Memoir of Her Years with Jack Kerouac

Conducted by Nancy M. Grace
via e-mail August-September 2007

Nancy Grace: What do you consider to be the value of Edie Parker's memoir to Beat Studies overall and to our understanding of the role of the women in that movement?

Tim Moran: If there is a value to placed on Edie's memoir it's that it offers a first hand account of the lives of a group of students and friends that came to be known as the Beats and the seminal event of Lucien Carr's murder of David Kammerer which would first draw attention to them. Though much has been written about it, there were only three people who were there: Lucien Carr, Jack Kerouac and Edie. In subsequent years, Lucien would never speak of it, Jack essentially only referred to it in his writing, but Edie's memoir offers a detailed account that could only be told by her. These events first brought public attention to their small group of friends and no doubt had a profound effect on Kerouac as a person and writer and the group as a whole - including William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg. *You'll Be Okay* is a collection of memories of a young Jack before his rise to fame. It gives insight to his relationship with his greatest influence, his mother, Gabe, and illustrates 1940s New York during World War II which served as the formative foundation of Jack, Edie and all as they first ventured into a life of independence away from their families.

NG: In terms of this unique vision of history, what's your favorite part of the memoir and why?

TM: I don't know that I have a favorite part. Overall, what I find fascinating is the improbable chance that a group of friends from such divergent backgrounds would become an iconic social and cultural influence on America and the world.

NG: What was the condition of the manuscript when you first began working on it and what kind of editing did you do? Just describe the process as fully as possible.

TM: I received the manuscript as a chaotic conglomeration of pages typed by various people at various times. Much of it was out of sequence, parts were often repeated and it was grossly overwritten. That is to say, though Edie was a fascinating person in her own right independent of her relationship with Jack and ties to the Beats, publishers were only interested in her life as it related to those people and things. When she wrote her memoir, she told her entire life story. All the rejections she received from publishers said virtually

the same thing: there's a great story in there somewhere, but we are not inclined to spend the time to find it. Edie refused to take out what the publishers had no interest in and the publishers moved on.

There were a total of over 2,200 pages. I bought a box of highlight pens and searched out what I felt was important. When I was finished, I typed them all out, then and laid them out in sequential order in a cut and paste type of process. I then typed them all together. Once I did that I had to re-type (I had no computer then, only a manual typewriter) the book several times until I was able to seamlessly splice them all together. Once that was done, I corrected spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. The introduction and afterward were written at the insistence of my agent, Sterling Lord.

NG: It's a shame that publishers weren't more interested in Edie's full story, but I've seen the same thing happen with Liz Von Vogt's memoir of growing up with her brother, John Clellon Holmes, and his Beat friends. Were there sections that you wish you could have included but didn't because of those publishers' focus? I'm thinking specifically about the Joan Volmer Adams Burroughs relationship. Did Edie write more about that relationship? Joan really only appears as a kind of stock girl friend in the memoir, but perhaps that's how Edie related to her?

TM: Edie's relationship with Joan was a deep and close one that carried on well past their years at Columbia. The same was true of her relationship with Celine. There are several letters from both Joan and Celine that are in Edie's collection at UNC that clearly define their friendships. But for a variety of reasons they, unfortunately, were not included in *You'll Be Okay*.

NG: There also isn't much detail in the memoir about Edie's life as a longshoreman. Did she write much at all about that? It's a real Rosie-the-Riveter experience that still fascinates many today, especially young women, and has genuine historical value. Was there just not enough there for you to work with?

TM: There are many fascinating details of Edie that she wrote about and that I came to know. I left much of it out because including it previously caused many publishers to reject her. They were not interested in "her"; they were interested in Jack. "Kerouac" sells, and that is the bottom line. Coming to accept that no one cared about her life outside of Jack was something Edie could never do. Her refusal to cut out 85 percent of herself is essentially why her book went unpublished for so long.

NG: Did you work from models of published memoirs?

TM: I was not guided by any models or other published memoirs and had never attempted anything like it or on such a scale before. I worked solely by instinct, intuition and an

obligation to get it done.

NG: That's truly noble. Did you think then of the project as a continuation of your relationship with Edie? And what was it about Edie that inspired such loyalty?

TM: Working on Edie's book was, in way, a continuation of our friendship. Perhaps more accurately, another phase. Such relationships never end. When you are close to someone, the closeness doesn't end with their death: It continues always in your thoughts and memories and influences you as a person to no less a degree - probably a greater degree because often it is death and the loss of someone that brings you to realize just how much they meant. My loyalty to Edie grew from her unconditional love for me and her devotion to extracting from me the person I never saw.

NG: What was the most difficult part of the process for you? The most satisfying?

TM: Initially, the most difficult part was simply the physical aspect of typing and re-typing. That became only part of the difficulty after I suffered brain damage in an automobile accident that severely compromised my ability to concentrate, retain newly learned information and employ organizational skills which my doctors told me would leave me incapable of such a task and writing at all. This elevated things from difficult to nearly impossible. The greatest satisfaction is that I defied all predictions and fulfilled my promise to Edie to get her story published.

NG: Could you tell me a bit more about the details of the accident?

TM: Sorry, but I'd prefer to not make an issue of my accident.

NG: That's no problem. I understand.

TM: I mentioned it as part of what was involved for me but I don't want to be identified by it. Last week I was on the radio and the host introduced me as the guy living in his car who Edie took in - this was a big hit with me.

I did neglect to mention that 2 1/2 years were taken up by Edie's sister, Charlotte, who swooped into town after Edie died. In all the years I lived with Edie, I'd never laid eyes on her. She sued me in Detroit Probate Court, which culminated in a trial where the Judge threw her case out finding it to be baseless and without merit. Had she won, Edie's book would never have seen the light of day. Nor would her papers have found their way to The University of North Carolina.

NG: Vultures lurk unseen in even the most obvious corners, don't they? Did you receive any financial support to fight this case? Those can be terribly debilitating economically.

I'm not asking for dollar amounts, just how you managed to stay the course and win!

TM: Bruce Nichols, the attorney who represented me, enabled me, in large part, to see the case through. I initially gave him a nominal retainer to take the case. As it went on, he came to be as outraged about the injustice of it all as I was. I was fortunate to find someone who believes that what is right and just is not determined [solely] on one's ability to pay for it. I received some financial help from my brother from time to time to help me my basic needs, but for the most part, I just did without [anything] but the barest essentials.

NG: What was it like to co-edit with Bill Morgan? Did he have helpful insights for you of any kind?

TM: Bill Morgan has been a friend for many years. He believed that Edie was a central figure among the Beats and that without her there very likely would be no Beat. As a scholar, he recognized that her story needed to be told. He also believed in my purpose and ultimately helped me because of it as much as for the reason I previously state. Bill is a consummate professional, with integrity and honesty, which, in my experience, is rare.

NG: Did you have an outline of Edie's suggestions for what the book should be like?

TM: I had no outline from Edie. Her outline, if there was one, and idea had proven to not be viable.

NG: What was the general concept of image of Edie that you were trying to convey through your composition of her memoir. I guess I'm asking you to think metaphorically, like a song title, a painting, a photograph something along those lines, to help readers understand your own artful process and your relationship with Edie, both as a friend and as a linguistic subject who you're trying to bring to life.

TM: ... for some reason I found it very difficult to answer this question. I don't think it is my impression that matters. I wrote of her as I knew her and, as is the case with all art, impressions and/or interpretations are the province of the reader. My sole intention is to convey the facts.

NG: Writing a memoir can be a painful process, especially if it involves a good deal of reflection. Was it so for Edie?

TM: I never knew Edie to find writing her memoir painful. On the contrary, I think, for her, it was an invigorating endeavor that rejuvenated her and was something in which she found purpose.

NG: Was she living in the past then? Not finding much worth outside those few hectic and romantic Beat years?

TM: To an extent, Edie was living in the past. However, this did not comprise her sense of self worth. Edie was a caregiver whose gratification came from doing for others. I think she had become internally disenchanted with most people and found purpose and satisfaction in caring for animals. During the time I lived with her, she had two dogs and 28 cats. Her entire life revolved around them.

NG: I hope this question doesn't sound too silly, but I have to ask. What happened to Edie's dogs and cats after her death? Were you able to find good homes for them? I'm a cat and dog lover, so I'm always concerned about their well being.

TM: Both of Edie's dogs, a sheepdog named Samantha and an Afghan, Shaw, died shortly before Edie. Sometime prior, we had convinced Edie that she needed to find homes for a number of the cats. She went to a local card store and procured one of their revolving cards racks to which she attached signs on all four sides reading, "Cats For Adoption - Descendants of Jack Kerouac." She put the rack out in front of the house on the narrow strip of grass between the sidewalk and the curb where it spun in the wind. I found it amusing, but it worked and many of the cats found homes. She kept her favorites: Liza, Cowboy Bob, Harvey, Dorothy and Ruskie II. After Edie died, I gave Edie's house to Muggs Stephenson who was a close friend of Edie and former roommate of mine who originally introduced me to Edie. Muggs lived at the house up until about one year ago caring for the cats. I don't know what has happened since. Muggs and I have not spoken in many years as a result of an estrangement stemming from the probating of Edie's estate. More of an answer than your question sought, but there is so much that went on that it is tough for any question not to result in a chain reaction.

NG: Did the process of her composition of the memoir and your subsequent editing of it lead you to personal reflection and if so what kinds of reflection?

TM: Overall, the process brought me to a better understanding of Edie and realization of the common thread that ran between us: regret. I recognized this to be a consuming part of Edie's thoughts and saw the stagnating effect that it had. I began to recognize this in myself and acknowledge that my fear of making mistakes never served to protect me but only kept me from trying. And it is in not trying that regrets first take seed. Mistakes are evidence of effort - making the attempt - for which there can never be regret. Regret is a ghost that will haunt with visions of what if that will steal forever your night and day dreams. This moral is something I hope is recognized to underlay Edie's story and something I sought to convey in my structure of it.

NG: The memoir does strike me as rather sad, Edie wishing she were 20 again -- and

don't most of us? — but never having moved away from home, even though that Beat period in New York provided her with the illusion of independence. I guess that's why I wish that she had been able to probe her own history more in the memoir so that readers could learn more about the world in general at that time from her unique perspective.

But now for the last to last question: Have you ever considered writing a memoir about your relationship with Edie?

TM: I hope that someday people will find all of Edie's life worth telling, and I hope *You'll Be Okay* will leave its readers wondering and wanting to know more. I don't know that enough people would be interested in learning about my relationship with Edie to warrant writing a book about it. I've encountered many people who are curious, but sadly most seem only interested in satisfying their perverse curiosity. This offends me tremendously. I think that if I were to write about anything it would be of my relationship with not only Edie, but Henri Cru and Herbert Huncke as well. When I first moved back to New York I lived with Henri at his apartment in Greenwich Village. In the early '90s I lived at The Chelsea Hotel for several years and became Huncke's caretaker for the last three years of his life. I had very close, profound and influential relationships with all three, and I believe there is a great deal others could learn from them.

NG: Don't let that book idea slip away. It'll have great value, not only for Beat Studies scholars but also for anyone concerned about the integrity of human connections and the human condition. Thanks again for taking time to converse with me in cyberspace about the memoir and your reflections on Edie.