

G. Murray Thomas



About the book:

Due Spring 2012

A collection of helpful articles from Next...Magazine, which gave birth to the Southern California, and national poetry scene in the mid-90's. It covers the growth of spoken word, page poetry and slam, with interviews and profiles of many poets who are now important figures in American poetry.



Interview:

WB: Murray, why will poets enjoy this book and why will they need it?

Poets will enjoy this book because it presents a portrait of a time when everything they take for granted was just being formed - performance poetry, slams, poetry tours, the

internet. They will also enjoy reading interviews with some of their favorite poets when those poets were just starting out.

They will need this book because the lessons learned by poets then are still important, especially the idea of connecting with your audience.

WB: What was special about that time in the world of poetry?

It was a revolutionary time in poetry. After decades of poetry becoming more and more esoteric and academic, poets were again writing poems the average person could understand and enjoy. This movement came from many directions, whether the writings of Bukowski and Locklin, the explosion of coffeehouse readings, the poetry slams, or the rise of rap music. All of this combined to create a mood of excitement and possibility

among poets (and their growing audiences).

WB: What are your three favorite interviews you can think of off the top of your head?

Wow, so many great ones to choose from. I'd say The Watts Prophets, because they represented part of the history of the changes I mentioned, and Mindy Nettifee, because she spoke for the future. Also, John Sinclair because he brought an interesting perspective to the whole world of non-commercial art. And, looking back, it's great to have a record of what Miranda July was thinking and doing at that stage of her career.

WB: How does a poet become successful?

First, of course, is write good poetry. Second is to find your audience; they aren't going to find you unless you put yourself out there. This means doing readings, and submitting your work for publication, both in print and on the web. And it can mean shameless selfpromotion, whether that is Facebook, your own webpage, letting everyone know when and where you are reading/have been published. It also means having some understanding who might like your poetry, and making a conscious effort to find venues (whether performance or publication) where they can hear/read your work. Of course, you can do all this and still not succeed, but you don't stand a chance of success if you don't do any of it.

Specifications

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SAMPLE

From G. Murray Thomas introduction:

...I don't want to exaggerate our impact, but we did help to unite the SoCal poetry scene. Localized groups of poets began to see themselves as part of a larger community. Poets started traveling long distances across town to attend readings they had read about in our pages. They met other poets, until it seemed that everybody knew everybody. We actually manage to create (or help create) a poetry community.

Yet, despite this deep love of the community, the magazine continued to lose money. As I said, a steady stream of ad salespeople failed to produce the ad revenue we needed. Many people suggested we should go non-profit. I resisted this idea for two reasons, one practical, one philosophical. From what I had seen of nonprofits, it really wasn't any easier to raise money, especially on a long term basis. Secondly, I wanted to prove that a poetry magazine could succeed as a commercial venture. Of course, it didn't, but I still think it should be possible.

We tried various strategies to keep the magazine afloat. Our most drastic move came in March, 1997 (our third anniversary), when we started charging for the magazine. To do this, we dropped our press run from 10,000 to 500. We primarily sold it through subscriptions, although I carted a handful around with me, and sold them for \$1.50 each at readings.

In a way, this was a success. For the first and only time in the history of the magazine, we broke even that year. But the impact of the magazine just wasn't the same. It wasn't reaching the same number of people. Most important, it wasn't reaching new readers. The only people buying it were people who already knew about it. One of our greatest impacts occurred when someone, who might have no idea what *Next...* even was, picked up a copy. Closet scribblers suddenly discovered they were part of a huge community of poets. We wanted, we needed, to get that back.

So in the spring of 1998 we attempted to return to the big time. We resumed our free status, and again printed 10,000 copies every month. For the first time we got a designer (Phish Blackler) to do the layout. Our new ad manager, Lob, gave a full press to getting more ads. We started featuring more high profile artists, like Henry Rollins and Patricia Smith. And we poured more money, money we didn't have, into the magazine, adding color, and upping the page count, all in an attempt to make the magazine more appealing to advertisers.

But it was too late. Our finances were too thin to maintain the new look and coverage. With ad revenue still weak, we had no choice, and folded the magazine in the fall of 1998.

(I should note that I continued to produce the calendar and post it online. It eventually became part of *Poetix* (www.poetix.net), a webzine started by Larry Jaffe (and currently maintained by Richard Modiano and Larry Colker), a webzine which attempted to continue what *Next...* had started. *Poetix* does do a great job of getting information out to poets, yet somehow an online resource just doesn't have the same impact a flimsy piece of newsprint did.)

The demise of *Next...* left a huge hole in the SoCal poetry community. But in those 4 1/2 years, we had managed to accomplish much. We helped unite the SoCal poetry community.

We also created a record of a transitional time in American poetry. (For more on this, see Victor Infante's Foreword.) You hold part of that record in your hand right now. We hope you enjoy it, and appreciate the effort it took to create it.