

Spring 2020

Special Edition 9

Le Trésor des Kérouac

Bulletin of the descendants of Alexandre de K/voach

Witness to Kérouac Activities since 1983



Jan Kerouac, Los Angeles, 1978.
(Photo: © Marie- Andrée Cossette; courtesy of Gerald Nicosia)



Kérouac
Kérouack



Kérouac
Kérouack



Keroac
Keroack



Kéroack
Kyrouac



Breton
Burton



Curwack
Curwick



PRESENTATION

François Kirouac

This is the ninth *Special Edition* of *Le Trésor des Kirouac* and it is devoted to Janet Michele Kerouac (1952-1996). Jan, as most people liked to call her, a writer in her own right, was the daughter of the famous Franco-American author who penned the Beat's cult book *On The Road*.

Although she died very young, at only forty-four, the one thing that really marked her life was the absence of her father, whom she met only twice in her life. A great deal of what we know about her, we owe to her friend Gerald Nicosia, the American author who was also her father's biographer. Hence you will find in these pages, some texts written by Gerry Nicosia, a decades-long regular contributor to *Le Trésor des Kirouac*, whom we thank very much for his precious contribution.

Jacques Kirouac writes how he was greatly impressed by Jan the very first time he met her. He was not the only one to consider Jan an outstanding woman. Everyone who met her said she was an outstanding woman. Among them, there is Deborah Lash Bower, sister of John Lash who was Jan's first husband and with whom she fled to Mexico at the age of fifteen. Her text shows how much Jan meant to her and she also tells us about Jan's last days, in Albuquerque, New-Mexico. Last but not least, a text written by Bill Bower, Deborah Lash's husband, also adds to better knowing Jan by telling what he remembers of time spent with her.

Enjoy reading,

Le Trésor des Kirouac Special Issue number 9 ISSN 0833-1685

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Gerald Nicosia
(Photo: J. A. Michel Bornais)

Biography of Jan Kerouac

by Gerald Nicosia

published in *Le Trésor des Kerouac*, number 83, March 2006, pp 10-11

Jan Kerouac was born February 16, 1952, in Albany, New York. Her mother was a young seamstress, Joan Haverty, who had run away to New York City a couple of years earlier, to get away from a harsh and demanding mother. In New York, Joan had met the 28-year-old writer Jack Kerouac, whose first novel, *The Town and the City*, was a commercial failure earlier that year, 1950. Kerouac's friends were all getting married, and he felt lost and at loose ends, still living with his mother. Three weeks after meeting Joan, he married her on November 17, 1950. Six months later, he got Joan pregnant and—in the space of three weeks—wrote what would become his most famous and influential novel, *On the Road*. But *On the Road* was revolutionary in every sense. Typed nonstop on a 120-foot strip of drawing-paper segments taped together, it did not even look like a conventional novel. It was rejected everywhere. With no financial prospects whatsoever, Jack asked Joan to abort the baby. When she refused, he left her and returned to his mother, denying that the baby was his. Joan returned to her own mother in Albany, and thus began the tragic saga of Janet Michele Kerouac.

Jan grew up in many different places—upstate New York, rural Missouri, after her mother briefly remarried, and, most notably, the tenements of the Lower East Side of New York. For the most part, she grew up in dire poverty, with her mother on welfare. Her mother lived what was known then as a “bohemian” life—lots of art and poetry, lots of lovers, lots of adventures, and little or no time for her children. Jan was a waif of the streets. By the time she was 13, she had tried heroin and briefly worked as a prostitute. Jan was growing up in the tumultuous 1960's, when promiscuous sex and lots of drugs, such as marijuana and LSD, were everywhere in her neighborhood. She was in and out of youth homes and juvenile detention facilities. Pregnant at 15, she ran off to Mexico with a neighbor named John Lash, an occultist and would-be writer who was almost ten years her senior and had already traveled the world.

Jan had already met her father when she was 10, in 1962, when her mother forced him to submit to a blood test to prove his paternity of Jan, and thus



Jan Kerouac in Boulder, Colorado, 28 July 1982. (Photo C. L. Gurwell)

force him to pay child support for her. Jan loved him madly and prayed that he would come back, but he never did. Once she managed to get his phone number and they talked for an hour on the phone, while he was very drunk. He told her, “You’re not a Canuck, you’re a Bretonne,” and advised her to be proud of her French heritage. Before she left for Mexico, she went with Lash to see him one last time in Lowell, Massachusetts. He sat beside her shyly on the couch and showed her the portrait of his brother Gerard on the wall, telling her of the child saint that he believed guided all his writing. But Jack’s third wife, Stella Sampas, insisted that she leave their house. Before Jan left, Jack said, “Sure, go to Mexico, write a book.”

In Mexico, her baby girl Natasha was born dead, stillborn. She did write a book there with Lash, a novel called *The Influence*. Then they returned to the United States and began living amid the hippies in San Francisco. Eventually they migrated to a hippie commune in Little River, in northern California, where she heard on the radio of her father’s death on October 21, 1969. Lash was not faithful to her so she left him, going “on the road” like her father, through Mexico and South America, to gain the adventures she felt she needed to become a writer. She eventually returned to the U.S. and took up residence in Santa Fe, where Lash occasionally rejoined her; and there she began her first serious autobiographical novel, which she called *Everthreads*.

By June, 1978, when I met Jan in San Francisco, she had nearly finished *Everthreads*. She had also been living much of the time near her mother in Kittitas, Washington, where she worked as a dish washer and in a corn cannery. She had a poor, hard life, and was unknown in the literary world. I helped her to sell that first novel by connecting her with a literary agent named Joyce Cole, and *Everthreads*—with the title changed to *Baby Driver*—was published in 1981 to much acclaim.

Jan became something of a literary celebrity herself. She was invited to literary conferences around the world, and always she spoke of her love for her father, and how sorry she was that he was not capable of being a devoted father to her—that he had been a slave, essentially, to his writing and to his mother. His absence left a gaping hole in her life, that she filled with too much alcohol and too many drugs. Nevertheless, she was able to complete a second, major novel, a part of the trilogy of her life, called *Train Song*, which was published in 1988, again to excellent reviews.

Jan’s books did not earn much money, however, and all this while she lived in poverty. It turned out the U.S. copyright law said she should have been entitled to half of her father’s royalties—which were considerable—but the Sampas family never told her this fact. When Jan found out by herself, from John Steinbeck’s son in Boulder, the Sampases still refused to pay her the half of Jack’s royalties she deserved to receive. Jan had to hire lawyers for three years to force the Sampases to begin paying the money in 1986. But even then, they were



Janet Michele Kerouac
(Photo: collection Jacques Kirouac, courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)

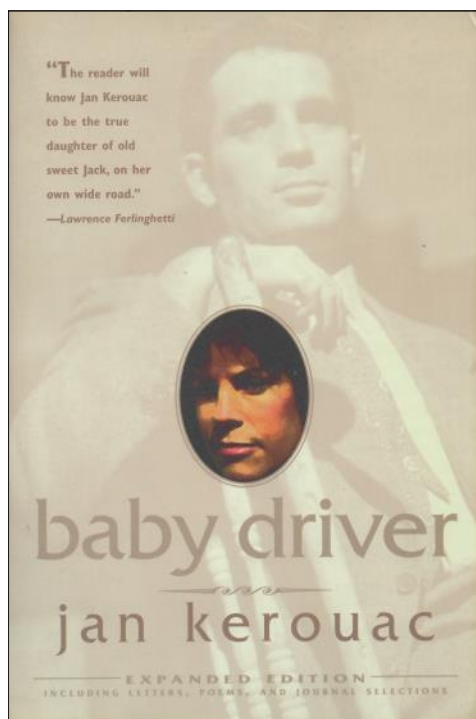
slow to send the checks, and did not send her all she was legally entitled to.

Jan’s health was not good. She had inherited her father’s bloodclotting disease, and of course because of her unhappiness she did not take good care of her health either. In 1991 she suffered complete kidney failure in Puerto Rico and nearly died. She was only kept alive by doing peritoneal dialysis, by herself, four times a day for the rest of her life. She tried earnestly to finish a third novel, *Parrot Fever*, the completion of the trilogy, before she died. But her life was disturbed again in 1994 by discovery of evidence that the Sampases had forged her grandmother’s will, and left Jack Kerouac’s estate (now valued at many millions of dollars) entirely to themselves. Without that forged will, it would have gone to her and her cousin Paul Blake, Jr., son of Jack’s sister Caroline, Ti Nin, who had died in 1964.

In 1994, Jan filed a lawsuit against the Sampases, trying to have the fake will thrown out. That lawsuit, and the completion of *Parrot Fever*, consumed the remainder of her short life. Unfortunately, she died on June 5, 1996, three months before her case was set to go to trial in St. Petersburg, Florida. She very nearly completed *Parrot Fever*.

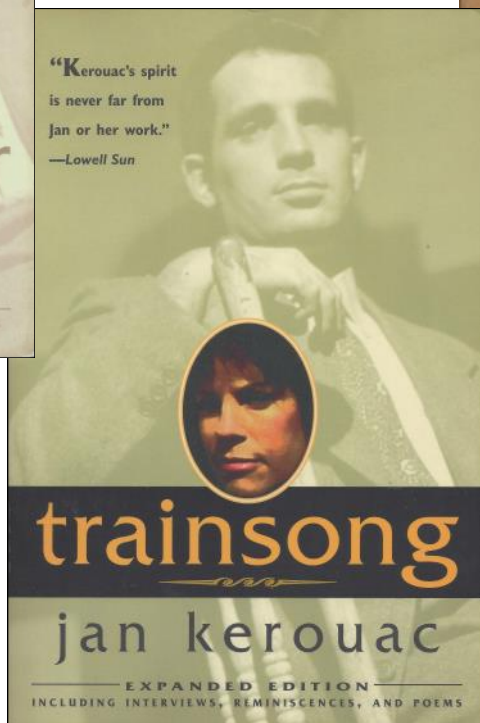
As her literary executor, I sold *Parrot Fever* to Thunder's Mouth Press. Then Jan's heir John Lash conspired with John Sampas, executor of the Kerouac Estate, to have me removed as her literary executor in 1999, before I could bring her case to trial. But the sale of *Parrot Fever* to Thunder's Mouth Press remained legal, and I found an excellent editor, Phil Cousineau,

to put the manuscript into final shape for publication. However, in a sad denouement to this tragedy, in 2004, Thunder's Mouth Press, after receiving several valuable Jack Kerouac manuscripts from John Sampas, made a decision to cancel the publication of *Parrot Fever*, which Jan so dearly hoped would someday be published.



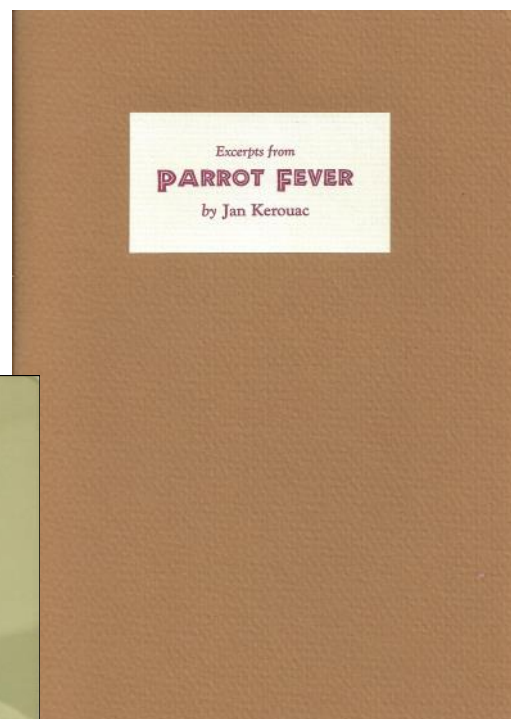
Book cover of the second edition of *Baby Driver* published by Thunder's Mouth Press in 1998. The first edition was published by St. Martin's Press in 1981.

(ISBN 1-56025-184-0)



Book cover of the second edition of Jan Kerouac's second novel, *Train Song*, published by Thunder's Mouth Press in 1998. The first edition was published in 1988 by Henry Holt and Company, Inc.

(ISBN 1-56025-165-4)



Cover of a booklet of excerpts from Jan Kerouac's third novel, *Parrot Fever*, put together, free-of-charge, by a friend to help Jan raise money to pay for her medical and legal expenses. *Parrot Fever* has yet to be published. This is a photo of the copy that Jan had given to Jacques Kirouac.

My Memories of Jan Kerouac

by Gerald Nicosia

published in *Le Trésor des Kirouac*,
number 83, March 2006, p.12

I knew Jan Kerouac for almost twenty years, and I have thousands of memories of her. When I first met her, she was 26 years old, a black-haired, blue-eyed, scintillating beauty. She was bright, very articulate, and very funny. She loved to camp, to mug, to make faces, to joke, to put people on with extravagant fake stories. She was absolute fun to be around. But I also found that she had a very dark and unhappy side. One day, having lunch in a New York City restaurant, I asked her what her destiny would be. I was wondering if she thought she would become a famous writer, as she was then completing her first novel, *Everthreads* (later published as *Baby Driver*).

Jan said, "My destiny is to be pulverized." I almost fell out of my

chair. She was not joking that time. She was dead serious. She did not believe she would live long, and she felt she would be forgotten, dying unloved and unknown. She did die young, but she was wrong about the other two things. When she died, she was loved by many people who knew the pure-hearted little girl inside the wild young woman; and she was not unknown. She had written three excellent novels—the last one, *Parrot Fever*, still unfortunately not published – and she would be remembered, as she wished, as "the daughter who tried to save her father's archive" from the people who were selling it off piecemeal to collectors and dealers around



Jan Kerouac and Gerald Nicosia in Boulder, Colorado, August 1982, during the conference held at Naropa University, marking the 25th anniversary of the publishing of *On The Road*. (Unknown photographer)

the world. She wanted her father's papers preserved in a library, not sold off to the highest bidder for hard cash. That battle still goes on.

I remember her poetry, her stories, her exuberant love of life and how much she loved language, loved learning new words and new languages, loved exploring new places she had never been. I also remember her passion for justice, for the poor and outsiders. She was always railing against the American Congress and the Republican Party for cutting off monetary subsidies and welfare for the poor. She also loved all animals and was outraged at the destruction of our earthly environment. Most of all, she cared about everyone she met. She did not play the "famous daughter," but was accessible to all, talked to everyone who came up to her, answered every letter that anyone sent her. She felt she had received a great gift in being Jack Kerouac's daughter, and she wanted to share this with the world. And, in fact, she has done so, and is still doing that through her writings and all the efforts she made to preserve the Kerouac Archive.



(Photo by Duarte Moniz)

Gerald Nicosia, Jacques Kirouac and Janet Michele Kerouac, at Washington Square Park a few minutes after being thrown out of NYU's *Jack Kerouac Conference* on June 5, 1995. Jan had changed into a custom T-shirt reproducing part of Jack Kerouac's final letter to his nephew Paul Blake, Jr., dated October 20, 1969, in which Kerouac wrote that he did not want the Sampas family to get "a dingblasted thing" from his literary estate.

As her literary executor, by her instructions, I placed all of her own papers at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, where they can be studied by all future generations.

*Meeting Jan Kerouac,
the beginning of a unique experience*
by Jacques Kirouac

published in *Le Trésor des Kirouac*,
number 84, June 2006, pp 14 -17 and
number 85, September 2006, pp 25 - 28

Early in the autumn of 1988, I heard that Jan Kerouac, the only child of the Franco-American writer Jack Kerouac, would be coming to Quebec City and that I would be able to meet her. At the time, she was completely unknown to me. So I started reading *Baby Driver*, her first novel.

I must admit that after finishing the book, I was left with a rather negative opinion about her and asked myself: what kind of girl am I going to meet at the cocktail party given in her honour by the *Secrétariat permanent des Peuples francophones*¹ located in the lower part of Old Quebec? I was then the president of the Kirouac Family Association and, though I was very interested in Jack Kerouac as a writer, I was not interested in his daughter or her books. At the cocktail party, I first noticed her from a fair distance; I could see her moving around people. She had a nice smile, was well dressed and wore a skirt.

After a few minutes, I met her and was immediately struck by her very bright crystal-like blue eyes. She was quiet and looked serene, as we shook hands she said a few words in English, easily understandable for me because she was speaking slowly enunciating very well. My negative apprehension had vanished and the best was still to come.

Indeed, I invited her to have dinner with the Board of Directors of our Family Association. So the next day I sat beside her for at least two hours. During that time, she was like an open book, telling me about her life but mainly about her only

two meetings with her father. She was sorry not to have any souvenir from him except the cork from a bottle of wine, she saved when she met him for the first time. She ate very little and drank no wine, telling me she had given up drinking.

She told me she was living like a monk in her flat, in Kingston, New York. During that meal, she made some sketches and drew a car on the white place mat that was on the tablecloth. She did it with great simplicity, smiling all the time but usually not laughing. She never spoke loudly, being rather reserved all the time.

So, at the end of the meal, I had a completely different opinion about her and her life. From that very moment we became firm friends until the end of her life. After talking for two hours, she told me she felt tired but, before leaving the group, she made a short speech. She told us she was happy to have found a new family with our Family Association; then she then became a regular member.

By the end of our first meeting, I was impressed by her great simplicity. She had no pretension and I felt a great affection for her. To me she was not responsible for the poor childhood she had had on account of her father's absence.

A few months later, she sent a short article to be published in our family bulletin about her trip to Quebec City². Here is an excerpt:



Jacques Kirouac (1927-2019)
Founding president of
Association des familles Kirouac, KFA.

“When we got out of the car, the very first thing I saw was the apparition of Chateau Frontenac. I didn't even know about it yet, but the eerie under the lit spires seemed to broadcast its name into my head. Then we trudged up the street, where I was amazed to find a brass placard riveted to the side of a stone building with Association des Familles Kirouac³ engraved in it, right at eye level. Suddenly I remembered how I used to look through the monstrous Manhattan phone book as a child in New York City, searching in vain for my name, and finally came to the reluctant conclusion that I was some kind of a freak.”

¹French-Speaking Peoples Permanent Secretariat.

²The whole story in Jan's own words, on pages 25-26 in this document.

³In fact, it was: *Club Jack Kerouac*.

“Well, not here, I’m not. Hey! This is my kind of town. Upstairs in an enormous room I met a great collection of people, all very warm and *simpatique*⁴ (sic). And in the midst of them all, were two sky blue eyes beaming at me like a beacon of recognition... My cousin Jacques Kirouac, the President of the Association. When I met him and held his hand, I instantly felt a bond much closer than I feel to my grandmother or my uncle! Looking into Jacques’ eyes, I felt as if I were staring into a mirror.”

As you can see, right from that moment we felt at ease with each other, hence our friendship grew from there. Although we were not closely related within the K/ genealogical tree, I became the closest Kirouac to her and, some years later, she told me that I was like an uncle to her. Some months later, in March of 1989, I stopped at her flat in Kingston, New York, while on my way to Florida with my wife. She was living in the historical part of the city. Big trees almost covered the impressive stone houses. But her flat was located in a rather old house which badly needed repairs. She was waiting for us under the veranda to be sure we

would find her. Once inside, I was surprised not to find much furniture. She had almost nothing, and she told me that the things I saw did not belong to her. She was really poor, having only a mattress on the floor in the middle of an empty room.

As I looked at the borrowed typewriter I saw she was working on a book; she would later call it *Parrot Fever*, but at that moment, it was still entitled *Fired from Paradise*. With much simplicity, she then told me that her books were her children. Looking sad, she glanced at a stack of books on the floor. She told me those books had been written by her father, but that she had not read them all. That surprised me a little but I did not ask why.

In another room, I was surprised to see a Quebec flag hanging on the wall. Some years later, she told me she was in favour of Quebec’s sovereignty. I did not think that she was interested in that question, but eventually, I found out she was very concerned about her own roots.

Almost at the end of our meeting, we went to a small room where there was nothing but papers and

boxes on the floor. Amongst that mess, she was looking for pictures,⁵ and she gave me a wonderful one⁵ taken in a boat on the west coast of the United States. Though she had almost nothing, she offered me a full loaf of bread that she had baked herself. It was too much for me, especially knowing she had so little food. So I took only half of it, but I was really impressed by that gift which showed how important it was for Jan to share with others.

I left her with the promise to see her in Florida later on; but when she went to Sarasota, we were suppose to meet at the Greyhound bus station. A young man informed me that she had left that morning but he did not know where to find her. It was only the following day when I was in a motel further north that I was able to speak to her on the phone. This was our first missed rendez-vous! Later on I understood that she was like a bird flying from tree to tree. It was not easy to catch her. The same thing happened again on our way back when passing through Kingston, NY and the following summer when she wanted to come back to Quebec in order to visit Rivière-du-Loup, specifically the village of Saint-Hubert, birthplace of her grandfather. To make plans even on the spur of the moment was difficult for her.

But we kept in touch mainly through postcards. I was amazed by her choice of them: very colourful, funny subjects, very short texts with drawings, stamps overlapping, red ink, etc. So she seemed rather unconventional, not to say eccentric, but I was always glad to read these cards as they conveyed her feelings of the moment.



Jan Kerouac in Baja-California, Mexico, in 1983
(Photo: collection Jacques Kirouac)

⁴ In French with a faulty spelling.

⁵ After Jan’s death, this photo was selected for the cover of a planned edition of *Parrot Fever* but the book has yet to be published. In 2006, it illustrated an issue of *Le Trésor des Kirouac*.



Jan Kerouac, at home in Kingston, New York State, in March 1989, offering a loaf of bread she had just baked. The Quebec flag is hanging behind her, a sign of her attachment to her French-Canadian roots after visiting Quebec City a few months earlier, when she shared a meal with the KFA board members. The story of her Quebec trip is on page 25. (Unknown Photographer, courtesy of Jacques Kirouac)

Then later on, she wrote to me that that she was going back to Eugene, Oregon, to take care of her mother who was dying from cancer. So I lost track of her for quite a while, not even knowing about her trip to Puerto Rico, where she almost died from kidney failure. So I was very glad to hear her on the phone from her new home in Albuquerque. Of course we talked about her sickness, but now we had another subject to talk about: the Sampas family! She was arguing that her grandmother Gabrielle's signature on her last will was a forgery, and she wanted to sue the Sampas. But being very ill, she relied on her friend Gerry Nicosia and wanted our Family Association to give her moral support.

Some time after that, she phoned me again asking to meet her in New York City, in order to help her in her lawsuit against the Sampas family. I was reluctant to go, unsure of what I could do to help her, but after a phone call from Gerry Nicosia, I changed my mind and went to New York at the beginning of June 1995. It would be our third meeting and also the last.

In fact, I met her in the lobby of her hotel near Times Square. Right away I saw a difference in the way she looked, compared to those previous occasions some years ago. Her skin was no longer smooth and youthful, being darker and having

the appearance of parchment. Her blue eyes, although still very bright, had some jaundice in the white part. She was almost skinny. She appeared to be unwell, if not actually gravely ill. After some discussion in her room, I left her with her friend Gerry Nicosia. We had both agreed that she was quite vulnerable, partly on account of her daily four dialyses she had to submit to and the medication she also had to take. I felt sorry to see her that way and Gerry and I agreed to take good care of her. The next

day, walking on the streets, I noticed another problem: she had difficulty keeping her balance; someone had to hold her arm.

It would be too long to make a complete account of the four days while we were together. I will only recall some facts which are related to Jan's main concerns at the time: her lawsuit against the Sampas to save her father's literary heritage. I soon found out that the main reason she was in New York was to take part in the Symposium on Jack Kerouac, seeing it as a unique chance to prevail against the Sampas family and win her rights to her father's estate.

Another day on the sidewalk in front of the Town Hall, with a group of demonstrators backing her cause, she acted as a "cheerleader." I was surprised to see her shouting in a loud voice and almost jumping with a placard that had "KEROUAC GATE" written on it. And she was. To me, she appeared to be at least twenty years younger, and at the same time I was happy to see her taking part in a youth demonstration but also sad because I knew that her burst of energy was only temporary. After that we went to a restaurant where she ate less than half the food she had been served. She was exhausted and left again for a dialysis.

In fact, she was not well at all during her time in New York, as she also had a sore on her foot that was very painful. In spite of all that, she wanted to make a short speech at the opening of the symposium on her father at New York University. I was at her side when she stood to walk towards the stage, intending to speak at the microphone. Her "godfather" Allen Ginsberg was the master of ceremonies.

Unfortunately, nervous and frail as she was, she did not reach the narrow staircase to the stage before her way was already



Jan Kerouac, New York, June 5, 1995. Jan died a year later on June 5, 1996. (Photo: Gerald Nicosia)

blocked by the programme director of NYU, Helen Kelly⁶. Then the police escorted her and I outside the hall to the sidewalk. I saw her giving a press conference in front of the conference hall, near Washington Square. Very quietly and not raising her voice, she put forward her point of view on her quest to save Jack's papers. After answering some questions, she then concluded, saying: "I leave the rest to Gerry Nicosia, because I am too sick to keep talking."

We were very disappointed but she gave a press conference outside. I must say that one of the panellists came to tell me that he approved Jan's stand but that he could not express his point of view publicly! Jan was apparently irritating many



Jan Kerouac and Jacques Kirouac, Washington Square Park, New York, June 5, 1995. (Photo: Gerald Nicosia)

⁶ Gerald Nicosia's full account of this event was published in *Le Trésor des Kerouac*, Special Edition, number 8, summer 2019, pages 16-20, in the section **Key Figures** on the KFA website at:

<http://kirouacfamilies.com/publications/Jacques%20Kirouac.pdf>

of the university's administrators who made it clear that she was not welcome.

In spite of her illness and the stress due to her struggle to save Jack's papers, Jan did not forget the hard years of her childhood when she had lived not far from Washington Square Park, where the two of us went for a walk. While sitting on a bench, her purse fell to the ground and almost all its content was scattered around, including her money. So I got up to pick up the money. Then she told me: "Jacques, leave that there for the poor." As I sat back on the bench, she told me that while living in Manhattan's the Lower East Side, she would walk barefoot on the sidewalks trying to find some food in garbage bins. She also told me of stealing money from the poor box to feed herself, and offered to show me the church where she had done that. She told me all these things without any bitterness.

In spite of her illness and the stress due to her struggle to save Jack's papers, Jan did not forget the hard years of her childhood when she had lived not far from Washington Square Park, where the two of us went for a walk. While sitting on a bench, her purse fell to the ground and almost all its content was scattered around, including her money. So I got up to pick up the money. Then she told me: "Jacques, leave that there for the poor." As I sat back on the bench, she told me that while living in Manhattan's the Lower East Side, she would walk barefoot on the sidewalks trying to find some food in garbage bins. She also told me of stealing money from the poor box to feed herself, and offered to show me the church where she had done that. She told me all these things without any bitterness.

Still, during that period of her life, she sent me a very moving letter that remains unpublished⁷. Like her father in *Visions of Gerard*, she evokes what was then thought to be our family motto when she wrote: "I now understand fully the Kerouac Family motto: *AIMER, TRAVAILLER et SOUFFRIR*⁸. I love my father, work on my book and suffer endlessly from health problems." First she applied the family motto to



Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate

Alan Ginsberg (1926-1997), one of the first members of the Beat Generation, and Jan Kerouac on their way to the **Grammy Awards Ceremony** in New York in 1991.

herself. Her first love she said went to her father whom she had been searching for through her entire life. Her work was writing and, at that moment, she was working on *Parrot Fever*, but due to her severe illness, she could not complete that book which would have concluded the trilogy. It is interesting to note that Jan, like her father, was evoking suffering not only as an intellectual topic but also as a personal matter. She referred to the family motto to point out her ties with the Kerouacs the same way her father had used that same family motto to connect with his Breton origins. A little bit further, she concluded with: "I hope you wonderful people of *Les Familles Kerouac* will take up the fight to preserve our honour because I am now too weak to fight anymore."

That letter was written on August 17, 1995, less than a year before her death. Her health was still deteriorating, but she wanted to keep on with the lawsuit against the Sampas. She appreciated the moral support of our Family Association, which she considered as being her own family, but the actual work on the ground was done by Gerry Nicosia, whom she valued as the only one to help her in the United States. In Jan's mind, the lawsuit was more than strictly personal for she wrote that it concerned "our honour." Jack's only daughter felt very lonely at the end of her life but she relied on the

⁷ This text was written in 2002, six years after Jan's death; the letter was eventually published in *Le Trésor des Kerouac*, number 76, June 2004, on pages 31-33. In the present document, the letter is on page 13.

⁸ In English: LOVE, WORK AND SUFFER

Kirouac Family Association to help her. It is significant that in the United States, the badge with our crest became the rallying symbol for Jan's supporters. Jan on her personal card had a "fleur de lys" symbol of her French roots. I saw that Jan, at the end of her life, was getting closer to her own family, so it was not surprising, but rather meaningful, that she wanted to be buried in the Kerouac family plot in Nashua, New Hampshire, even though she had never lived there.

I received her last postcard in April 1996. She mainly wrote to me that she was tired from the lawsuit and from all the delays caused by the Sampas. But in spite of all that, she was planning a trip to Lowell in the coming fall.

At the end of May, only nine days before her death, I received her last phone call, she was coming out of hospital but going to a nursing home on account of her illness. She told me she was now sure she was Jack's daughter because of her blood disease. But she was confident on getting better, because she intended to go to St Petersburg, Florida, with her ex-sister-in-law and always her friend, Deborah Bower, for the lawsuit against the Sampas to save Jack's papers. She told about no longer being able to travel alone, but there was not a single word about her third book.

At the end of that call, she told me she would send me a photo of her with the flowers I had sent her at the hospital. Instead, I got a phone call from Deborah Bower in early June telling me that "Jan had passed

away the previous night." I was very distressed by the news, and even six years after her death, I am still moved just by writing those lines. In fact, I was saddened by the entire end of her life when she was fighting strongly to save Jack's papers. She really suffered from the opposition of the Sampas family who controlled her father's estate. If her first two books were mostly autobiographic, the third one was different and more difficult to produce; it would prove to be too much for Jan, who told me in New York that she knew she would die within a few years. So she left us with an incomplete work but one that is more analytical of her own life, as I found out while reading some excerpts from *Parrot Fever* she gave me in New York on June 3, 1995, for my birthday.

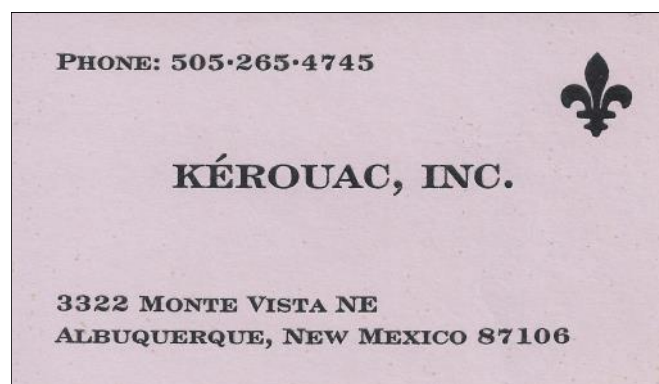
EPILOGUE

When Jan passed away on June 5, 1996, her funeral took place at Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Albuquerque. Deborah Bower, her ex-sister-in-law who looked after Jan through her illness up to her death in hospital, arranged the funeral service.

In 1997, David Bower⁹, Jan's half brother, wanted to bury Jan's ashes in the Nashua Cemetery on February 16, Jan's birthday. He gratefully accepted my suggestion to plan the first anniversary funeral service in the presence of Jan's ashes on June 5, 1997, in Nashua. Reverend Father Roland Côté, Curate of the parish in Nashua, performed the commemorative Mass where three Franco-American sang in French. It was a private service for relatives and friends of Jan. Three couples from Quebec represented our family association. The Curate also said the last prayers at the cemetery.

Jan was finally at the end of her earthly voyage; back with her own in the family plot, with her grandparents, after so many painful years on a rather rough road. Let us remember Jan in our prayers.

⁹ David Bower, now known as David Stuart.



Jan Kerouac's business card given to Jacques Kirouac. Note the acute accent on the "é" in the name Kérouac and the fleur-de-lys, at right. (Collection Jacques Kirouac)

SAN ANSELMO, CALIFORNIA

AUG. 17, 1995

DEAREST JACQUES (Cher cousin)

I must say, I feel so utterly frustrated in my efforts to save my beloved father's ARCHIVE. I feel like David fighting Goliath. Here in the States nobody but Gerry Nicosia is helping me! Even the Detectives who were paid (by me) \$5,000.00 to find out what John Sampas is selling were BRIBED AND BRAINWASHED by the other side. I pray constantly for Divine Intervention but I fear all is lost.

I now understand fully the Kerouac Family Motto: AMAR, TRAVAILLE, et SUFFER. I love my father, work on my Book -

AND Suffer endlessly with health problems. And there is nothing else.

I will most likely go to my grave never having owned a house.

While the Sampases GLOAT over their illegally-gotten millions they stop from Gabrielle Kerouac!

I hope you wonderful People of Les Familles de KÉROUAC will take up the fight to preserve our honor - because I am now too weak to fight any more. Much love, Jan Kerouac

Transcription of Jan's August 17, 1995 letter

San Anselmo, California

August, 17, 1995

Dearest Jacques (Cher cousin)

I must say, I feel so utterly frustrated in my efforts to save my beloved father's archive. I feel like David fighting Goliath. Here in the States nobody but Gerry Nicosia is helping me! Even the Detectives who were paid (by me) \$ 5,000 to find out what John Sampas is selling where bribed and brainwashed by the other side. I pray constantly for divine intervention but I fear all is lost.

I now understand fully the Kerouac family motto, amar, travaille, et souffrir. I love my father, work on my book and suffer endlessly with health problems, and there is nothing else. I will most likely go to my grave never having owned a house, while the Sampases gloat over their illegally gotten millions they stole from Gabrielle Kerouac!

I hope you wonderful people of les familles de Kerouac will take up the fight to preserve our honour because I am now too weak to fight any more.

Much love, Jan Kerouac





5 June 1997, Nashua (N.H.), Mass on the first anniversary of Jan Kerouac's death: from left to right (all rows combined): John Paul Pirolli, a.k.a. Buddah, a friend of Jan, Brad Parker, a friend of Jan, David Bowers, Jan's half-brother, Paul Kirouac, Maxine Bowers, wife of David Bowers, Claire (née Robert) and Jean-Yves Kirouac, Miles Bowers, Jan's nephew, Alberte (née Garon) and Jacques Kirouac, Reverend Steve Edington, Clément Kirouac, then KFA president, and his wife, Éliane Tardif-Kirouac. (Unknown photographer).

This anniversary Mass preceded the interment of Jan's ashes in the Kerouac family lot in the parish burial site, Old Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague Cemetery in Nashua, New Hampshire.



Jan Kerouac at home in Hollywood, California, summer 1978.

(Photo: © Marie-Andrée Cossette, courtesy of Gerald Nicosia)



Jan Kerouac's last resting place at the Old Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague Cemetery in Nashua, New Hampshire.
(Photo: François Kirouac, 11 September 2014)

MEMORIES OF JAN KEROUAC



Albany (N.Y.) around 1957, Jan Kerouac and her mother, Joan Haverty, the day Jan received her first tricycle.

(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)

New York - Jan Kerouac and her mother, Joan Haverty.

(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)



To the left: Jan Kerouac and her half-sisters: Kathy (left) and Sharon, in Albany, New York.

(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)

MEMORIES OF JAN KEROUAC



Jan Kerouac and her half-sisters in Albany (N.Y.) around 1957.
(Photo: Dave Haverty, Jan's uncle, courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)



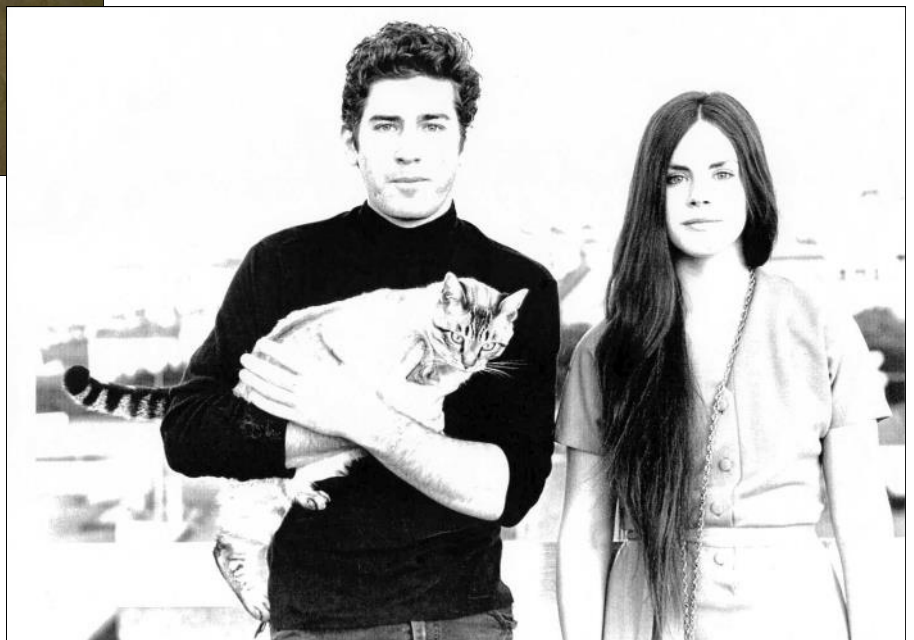
Jan Kerouac in New York City in 1961
(Photo : courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)



New York, 1967 - Jan Kerouac
(Photo : courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)

San Francisco, November 1968.
Jan Kerouac with her first husband, John Lash.

(Photo: Collection Bill Bower)



MEMORIES OF JAN KEROUAC



June 1978, Jan Kerouac with Carolyn Cassady (1923-2013), born Carolyn Robinson on April 28, 1923, in Lansing, Michigan. She was a novelist, married Neal Cassady but also had an adventure with Jan's father, Jack. Carolyn is 'Camille', one of the characters in Jack's novel, *On The Road*. This photo was taken at Carolyn's house in Los Gatos, California. (Photo by Gerald Nicosia)



Huntington, Long Island (New York), September 1978, Gerald Nicosia, Lilian Dodson and Jan Kerouac holding the manuscript of her first novel, *Everthreads*, later published as *Baby Driver*. (Photo: Stanley Twardowicz, courtesy of Gerald Nicosia)

MEMORIES OF JAN KEROUAC



Hollywood, California, summer 1978, Jan Kerouac working on her first novel, *Baby Driver*.
(Photo: ©Marie-André Cossette, courtesy of Gerald Nicosia)



Jan Kerouac in San Francisco's Sunset district, California, in October 1979.
(Photo: Gerald Nicosia)



San Francisco, October 1979, Jan Kerouac with Victor Wong, a good friend of Jack, on Clement Street. In Kerouac's novel *BIG SUR*, Victor is "Arthur Ma". (Photo: Gerald Nicosia)

MEMORIES OF JAN KEROUAC



Eugene, Oregon, 1983, Jan Kerouac and (her half-brother) David's Chevy 1952.



Jan Kerouac in Baja-California, Mexico, in 1983.
(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)



Two photos of Jan Kerouac in Baja-California, Mexico, in 1983.
(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)

REMEMBERING JAN KEROUAC

by Bill Bower

published in Le Trésor des Kérouac, number 121, autumn 2016, p.16

I came to know Jan Kerouac by good fortune. She was briefly married to my wife Deborah's brother, John Lash. Deborah and Jan first met in the late 1960's. There was an immediate connection between the two of them that lasted until Jan's death.

I first met Jan when she visited us in Maine. She spent several months with us during the summer. (I am sorry, I cannot recall the exact year but it would have been between 1981 and 1985)¹. Deborah was a lobster fisherman at the time. Jan regularly accompanied her on her lobster boat where the two of them would laugh and sing together while Deborah hauled her lobster traps. During the

evenings, the three of us would talk, tell stories, and Jan and Deborah would share the adventures of their day. Like Deborah, Jan enjoyed watching the lobster traps come up from the ocean floor. The two of them were excited as every trap came to the surface. They said it was like opening a Christmas package. One never knew what might show up in a trap. Lobsters were, of course, the desired catch but they frequently found all sorts of interesting creatures including the largest sea mouse ever found on the coast of Maine. Squid, scallops, sculpins, small sharks, green crabs, Jonah crabs, and small flounder were among the many things they caught. Jan delighted in this experience.

I believe Jan wrote something about her Maine experiences in "Parrot Fever." (I once saw a draft of this work but do not have a copy. If you know where I can get one, I would love to have it. In the draft, I was the minor character referred to as "Dill.")

We did not see Jan again until the early 90's. She called us from Puerto Rico, where she had been living. Her health was declining and she felt a strong need for love and support. She turned to Deborah, asking if it would be all right if she came to Albuquerque. We were delighted that she had chosen us

as her surrogate family. Jan lived with us for several months before renting a house near the University of New Mexico. She later moved to a home that was nearer to our house in the northeast part of town.

Jan and I spent considerable time together. She could not drive so it fell to me to act as her chauffeur so that she could get to her doctor and do her shopping. She joined us frequently in our home for dinner and for holidays and birthday celebrations. Our children delighted in these occasions, particularly Christmas, when Jan would bring them small gifts. The gifts were, of course, thoughtful and interesting but what really intrigued our children was how Jan wrapped them. Her packages were so beautiful the children were reluctant to open them. They did so carefully, preserving the packages as best they could.

I found Jan to be one of the most intelligent, interesting people I ever met. She had a gift for languages. Her ability to create puns was extraordinary. For example, the title of one of her chapters about herself and Deborah referred to them as the "Harmonica Virgins" a play on

¹ It should read 1981 to 1986.



Jan Kerouac lobster fishing in Maine, summer 1986.

the "Harmonic Convergence" that was part of the popular culture at the time. Jan was surprisingly well informed. I say surprisingly because she rarely read anything in her later years due to vision problems. And yet, she was conversant on a multitude of topics. As I drove her around Albuquerque we would talk about everything from art to politics to music. I think the two of us contributed

much to each other's knowledge of the world.

During her last days Jan was hospitalized. Deborah and I visited her daily. I was able to see her two or three times a day during the last week of her life. My office was across the street from the hospital so I was able to slip away from work frequently to spend time with her. Of those she loved, I was

the last to speak with her. I had seen her in the morning and we talked for about 15 minutes. That afternoon, she had slipped into a coma from which she never recovered.

Deborah and I both were at her side when she died.

My life was greatly enriched by Jan. She was beautiful, bright, funny, curious, and creative. I was blessed to have known her.



December 1988, Jan Kerouac during a photo shoot for the launching of her novel *Train Song*.
(Unknown Photographer, courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)

MEMORIES OF JAN KEROUAC



1985 - Jan Kerouac with her half-brother, David Stuart.
(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)



Eugene, Oregon, 1985 - Jan Kerouac with her half-brother, David.
(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)

Maine, 1986 - Jan Kerouac.
(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)



Jan Kerouac, Hollywood, California, 1986.
(Photo: courtesy of Gerald Nicosia)



MEMORIES OF JAN KEROUAC

1981, Jan Kerouac during a photo shoot
for the launching of her novel *Baby Driver*.

(Unknown Photographer; courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)



Jan Kerouac, New York State, 1988.
(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)

Jan Kerouac, New York State, 1988.
(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)



JAN KEROUAC'S FIRST VISIT TO QUEBEC CITY

Jan Kerouac's text written at Jacques Kirouac's request for the KFA news bulletin following her trip to Quebec City in December 1988. This text was published in its original English version in the KFA news bulletin then called *LeBris de Keroack*, number 15, March 1989, pages 18-21.

On 17 December 1988, the KFA Board members were delighted to spend a few hours in the company of Jan Kerouac and share a meal with her at the restaurant *Chez Camille*, on Chemin Sainte-Foy in Quebec City. Invited by the *Club Jack Kerouac*, Jan attended a cocktail party in her honour at the headquarters of the *French-Speaking Peoples Secretariat*, located in Quebec City's Old Town, near Place Royale. This is when she first met Jacques Kirouac¹, the founding president of the *Association des familles Kirouac (KFA)*, who was also a member of the *Club Jack Kerouac*.

Before that, Jan had been to Montreal and met a student from UQAM (Quebec University at Montreal) François Deschamps, son of Marcel Deschamps, who had met her father in New York City and had translated *Memory Babe*, Jack Kerouac's biography written by Gerald Nicosia.

Another student named Jean Morrisette, put François Deschamps in touch with *Club Jack Kerouac*, hence the decision to organize a reception in honour of Jan Kerouac.

Streaming northward on the Voyageur through vast flat expanses of snow blanketed terrain, I began to forget where I was... Kansas? Nevada ? Drifting in and out of sleep, amnesia played hide and seek with me. I had vague recollections of spending the past few months on the East Coast of The States - - but in the States these wide unbroken stretches are only to be found out West.

My foggy perceptions were instantly cleared up as a dazzling sight greeted me through the window: about thirty billowing blue and white flags with *fleur de lys**, flapping in the frozen air. Yes - - Quebec My homeland... that's where I am now!

Everyone on the stuffy bus woke up and piled out into the station, where I sat with Jean Morrisette and François DesChamps at the grimy counter on stools - - just like bus station *cafés** every - - except that here you could get *un** soup de pois*; a fitting initiation into *Québec**. As I sat there, in between my two pals, a 101² sticker stuck on my sweater, I refused to speak any English... (God forbid I should be mistaken for an Anglophone - *Tabarnuche* !*).

Outside, Marcel picked us up in his car, talking non-stop in that raced romantic style of his ... not unlike an Italian. He drove us straight to the center of town, skidding through narrow ancient roads on ice. When we got out of the car, the very first thing I saw was the apparition of *Château Frontenac**. I didn't even know about it yet, but the eerie underlit spires seemed to broadcast its name right into my head. Then we trudged up the street, where I was amazed to find a brass placard riveted to the side of a stone building with *ASSOCIATION DES FAMILLES KIROUAC**³ engraved in it - right at eye level ! Suddenly I remembered how I used to look through the monstrous Manhattan phone book as a child in New York City, searching in vain for my name - - and finally came to the reluctant conclusion that I was some sort of freak.

Well, not here, I'm not. Hey! This is my kind of town. Upstairs, in an enormous room I met a great collection of people, all very warm and *sympatique**. And in the midst of them all were two sky blue eyes beaming at me like a beacon of recognition... my cousin *Jaques* Kirouac, the President of the Association. When I met him and held his hand, I instantly felt a bond much closer than I feel to my grandmother or my uncle! Looking into *Jaques*' eyes, I felt as if I were staring into a mirror.

A few nights later François, my tireless host and escort, a darling boy whom I had met earlier that year in Lowell Massachusetts, brought me from his

* In French in the text .

² It is important to know that, a few years before, the Parti Québécois was in Power in Quebec. René Lévesque, a distant cousin of Jack's mother, Gabrielle Lévesque, was then Premier. *Law 101* was then adopted making French Quebec's official language.

³ Here, Jan is mistaken: the brass plate was that of *Secrétariat des peuples francophones*.

¹ On page 7, you can read the story of this first encounter.

father's house to the great Kirouac cousins dinner. We talked for hours about a million fascinating things over biftek *au poivre vert** - - and I valiantly resisted the temptation for wine - - taking Perrier instead like a good girl. The spectrum of subjects that night ran from genealogy to food ... from travel stories to language puns ... there was much laughter and merriment as well as flashes from camera. And, as is customary up here, an exceedingly long goodbye at the entrance of the restaurant, complete with every conceivable mathematical combination of hugs and kisses and parting endearments between us all.

I know I shall miss these long *Québécois** farewells back in Les États. I exchange my miniature pistol for a much more appropriate Kirouac emblem to go on my key chain - - cousin Jacques now has the gun.

The following days were spent at Chez DesChamps on *L'Île de Bacchus**, where father and son entertained me endlessly with great stories, W.C. Fields movies, tapes of my father, hefty Norman cuisine, and, last but not least, a romp along

the *Fleuve St Laurent**. Francois and I got all bundled up one *après-midi** and went sliding down a steep snow covered hill to the banks of the river. "This is where we go swimming in the summer." He informed me, as we ventured cautiously onto the magical sheets of ice, all buckled up in mushroom-like formations and refracting the light of the setting sun into myriad hues of turquoise lilac and rose. Slipping, sliding and crunching we frolicked like young children, pulling up whole sheets of ice and tossing them onto the surface - - watching with glee as they shattered in a cascade of twinkling snow stars and even making a melody ... the little diamond fragments swirled round and round the giant *champignons geles** as the sun sank behind *La Ville de Québec**. What a marvelous playground! As much as I adore the tropics, I've always had a special place in my heart for winter fun; skating, sledding, playing in piles of snow ... As a child in upstate New York I used to do all this, but now the climate has changed and there is not enough snow anymore in the wintertime. So I know where to come - - *À Québec**.

*Oui, je reviens sûrement ... en été, et en hiver aussi.**

I hope my French will improve quickly.

And now I have the *Québec** Nationalist flag hanging in my window in Kingston, New York. Marcel gave it to me before I left. It's a bit tattered on one edge, so maybe I'll be a Canuck. Betsy Ross and sew it back together before I return. Whenever Hockey comes on TV now, I always look to see if the Montreal *Canadiens** are playing - - and if they are I root for them. Maybe it's my imagination, but they seem to be more energetic than the other players. This summer I will visit *Rivier du Loup** (Rivière-du-Loup) and the ancestral home. Then perhaps I too will become a Habitant.

JEANNE

* In French in Jan's letter.

⁴ Jan is referring to the meal with the KFA board members at the restaurant *Chez Camille*.

⁵ See photo on page 9.



Photo : Marie Kirouac

On 17 December 1988, meeting at the restaurant *Chez Camille*, on Chemin Sainte-Foy in Quebec City. From left to right: François Kirouac, Yvette Hunter, Sarto Kirouac, Jacques Kirouac, Jan Kerouac, Johanne Kérouac, Jean Morissette and François Deschamps.



17 December 1988, restaurant *Chez Camille* in Quebec City. From left to right: Marie Kirouac, François Kirouac, Sarto Kirouac, Jan Kerouac and Jacques Kirouac.

(Photo: KFA collection)

17 December 1988,
restaurant *Chez Camille* in Quebec City.
Jan Kerouac and Jacques Kirouac,
KFA founding president.
(Photo: KFA collection)



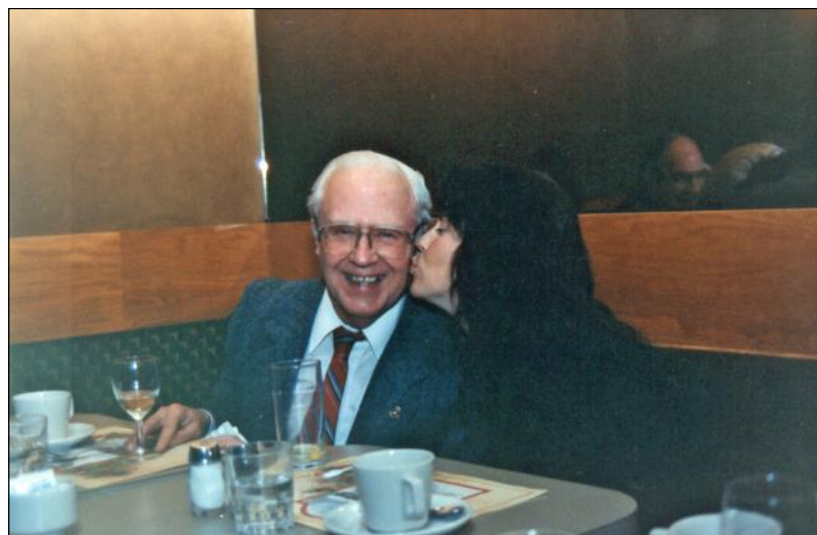
17 December 1988, restaurant *Chez Camille* in Quebec City.
Jan Kerouac and Jacques Kirouac, KFA founding president.

(Photo: KFA collection)



Jacques Kirouac and Jan Kerouac. These photos taken on 17 December 1988, show how much Jan was enjoying meeting Jacques and the KFA board members.

(Photo: KFA collection)



In memory of Jan Michele Kerouac

16 February 1952 – 5 June 1996

by Deborah Lash Bower

published in Le Trésor des Kirouac, number 84, June 2006, pp. 18-20

Having been first a sister-in-law, and then a “sister-out-law” (as she put it)¹ to Jan Kerouac for nearly thirty years, it is a privilege to reflect on her life on the anniversary of her death. I have remained largely silent over the ten years that she has been gone. I have grieved deeply, and have not deigned to join the fray of writers who, captivated by Jan’s lineage as the only child of an American literary icon, have portrayed her as the creative, bad girl Kerouac who veered ‘off the road’ to heroin, prostitution, and hard living. Instead, to my family, and me Jan was more than the stuff of the “autobiographical fiction” she described in her books. She was part of the fabric of our lives, a part that became more tightly woven at the end of her life.

Janet Michele Kerouac was born in Albany, N. Y. on February 16, 1952. She was the daughter of Joan Virginia Haverty Kerouac and Jean-Louis Lebris de Kerouac, better known as Jack Kerouac. Jan was raised by her mother. She met her father only twice. The second time, en route to Mexico with my brother, she stopped to see Jack. Before she left, he told her “Write a book, use my name if you want to.” She finished two books, *Baby Driver* and *Train Song*.

In a jungle hut in Mexico Jan gave birth to a stillborn daughter, Natasha. It was the only child Jan

would have. She and my brother, John, buried Natasha in the “rain forest soil beneath the banana palm.” Jan took this loss, as she did many losses, with acceptance. It seems to have been a pattern in Jan’s life — to accept, to live without preconceptions, without expectations, with child-like hope. Those of us who knew Jan understood how vaguely she planned, how little she expected, how greatly she anticipated, and how tremendously she trusted.

It was later in the summer of 1969 that I met Jan. She and John were living in Vichy Springs, CA. My first impression of Jan was of her stunning beauty. She was sixteen, with hip length hair the color of honey. Black lashes fringed clear blue eyes. Her expression was one of intelligence, eagerness, and goofy amusement. She loved language and languages. She spoke eloquently on subjects ranging from metaphysics to bread recipes. She thanked me for the “lucky bean” I had sent her. “When I hold that bean I feel I can pick up trees with my big toe.” That summer in Vichy Springs Jan made loaf after loaf of bread. She loved to bake, and as she kneaded the bread, she regaled me with stories of her remarkable adventures. She told me a story of her father coming home in the middle of the night, demanding that Jan’s mother make him a spice cake. Joan refused.

¹ *A sister-in-law and then a sister-out-law*, as Jan liked to say as she had divorced John Lash, Deborah’s brother.



Deborah Lash Bower and Jan Kerouac in Maui, Hawaiï in 1987.

Collection Deborah Lash Bower

Years later, in my kitchen, Jan and I would stay up into the wee hours of the morning baking, making bread and pastries, and--in honor of Jack--spice cake. We would sing, and Jan would rap a spice cake ode she wrote to her father. We talked, and sang, and clattered pans. And as Jan would paint a veritable multilingual montage in French, Spanish, German, and Arabic, I would emphasize her words with a smashing of pots. We were like dervishes, engaged in baking frenzy.

Jan cooked like she lived—without reading a recipe. In fact, she hardly read more than two paragraphs of anything -- including her father's books². She had no patience for it. However, despite this impatience, she knew literature and languages, geography and art, science and sociology. She was good company. So good, in fact, that I invited Jan to be my 'sternman' (lobsterman's helper) on my fishing boat³. For one summer we were the "Harmonica Virgins" that she referred to in her unfinished book, Parrot Fever. That summer, according to Jan, was the longest period of sustained fun she had ever had. In the fall, Jan journeyed on.

Over the following years, Jan and I met in New Mexico, Maui, Maine. However, Jan was losing something of herself. She was becoming sick. On New Year's Day, 1992 she wrote from Puerto Rico that she was having hemodialysis, but she was feeling very ill and afraid. We invited Jan to come live with us in Albuquerque. When she arrived a few days later, we took her directly to the hospital. The shunt in her chest was cracked. She was scheduled for immediate surgery. Thus, we began the days and months of medical care that were punctuated by trips on which she pretended to be well.



Jan Kerouac in Maui, Hawaiï in 1987
(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)



Jan Kerouac at sixteen
(Photo : Deborah Lash Bower)

By June of 1996 Jan was gravely ill. Before her last surgery, we sat in her darkened hospital room. "I have become the Bride of Frankenstein," Jan quipped. Over those last hours of her consciousness, we talked about our summer of lobstering, about her brother David and his son Miles, about my brother John, about my husband and three children, about Natasha, about Jan's mother, about Jack. Jan was propped up in bed. She had a tube protruding from her neck.

² It is important to know why Jan read so little. One day, Jan explained to Gerald Nicosia that she could only read a little at a time and that her eye problem started with her use of LSD as a teenager. She explained that the print would start to flicker (flash back and forth) if she concentrated on it for too long. She said it had started with her use of LSD.

In later years, Jan's vision also deteriorated because of the dialysis, and the medicines she had to take for it. Her focus became very bad, and letters had to be printed very large for her. She would print her manuscripts in 20-point type or larger. She also had a special magnifying lens built over her typewriter.

³ See photo on page 21.

Her neck and torso were packed with gauze pads. She told me that a priest had come and prayed with her. She liked that, so summoned another priest. However, she sent the second priest away because “he had an attitude.” She asked me to find a “better” one. She reminded me of my promise to her as “durable power of attorney for health care decisions.”

Jan died on June 5, 1996, in Albuquerque. My husband and I were holding her hands. As she wished, she was cremated. As I promised, I went in search of a “better” priest. Instead, I found the best. I told this priest all about Jan — about how she was from a large French Canadian Roman Catholic family. I told him about her great strengths and her great weaknesses. I told him about her sins and about the depth of her acceptance of others, about how she lived without guile, with an uncommon, selfless generosity. I did not hide her past, her marriages, her cremation. I told him how I had asked for a priest when Jan was in a coma, and no one came. He looked at me curiously. He said (paraphrased) “You are a good friend to Jan. If she was thirsty, would you give her something to drink? If she was hungry, would you feed her? If she was naked, would you give her clothes? If she was sick, would you comfort her?” I answered, “yes” to each of these questions. He continued, “And would she do the same for you? (Yes) And would she do the same for others? (Yes). Then she was generous and loving, which is one of Our Lord’s commandments. You have been a good friend to Jan. She has



Jan decorating her Christmas tree in 1995, at Albuquerque, New-Mexico, six months before her death. (Photo: courtesy of Gerald Nicosia)

been a good friend to you. Good friends to one another are good friends to God. God shows His friendship in many ways.”

Father Mondragon performed a funeral mass with communion for Jan. It was held at the Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Jan’s ashes are buried with her grandparents, Leo and Gabrielle Kerouac, in Nashua, New Hampshire. My family has not visited her grave. We have no need. She is woven into the fabric of our lives. She is knitted in our hearts.

In loving memory of Jan Michele Kerouac ...

Deborah Lash Bower*

* Deborah Lash Bower, born 17 September 1950, died of cancer at Albuquerque, New-Mexico, on 13 December 2014. She had a PhD in psychology, was also a capable businesswoman and captain of her lobster fishing boat.

MEMORIES OF JAN KEROUAC

A lovely picture of Jan Kerouac
(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)



Jan Kerouac in Puerto Rico in 1991. The small stuffed tiger now belongs to her nephew, Miles. (Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)

Jan Kerouac with Allen Ginsberg in New York for the
Grammy Awards in 1991.
(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)



MEMORIES OF JAN KEROUAC

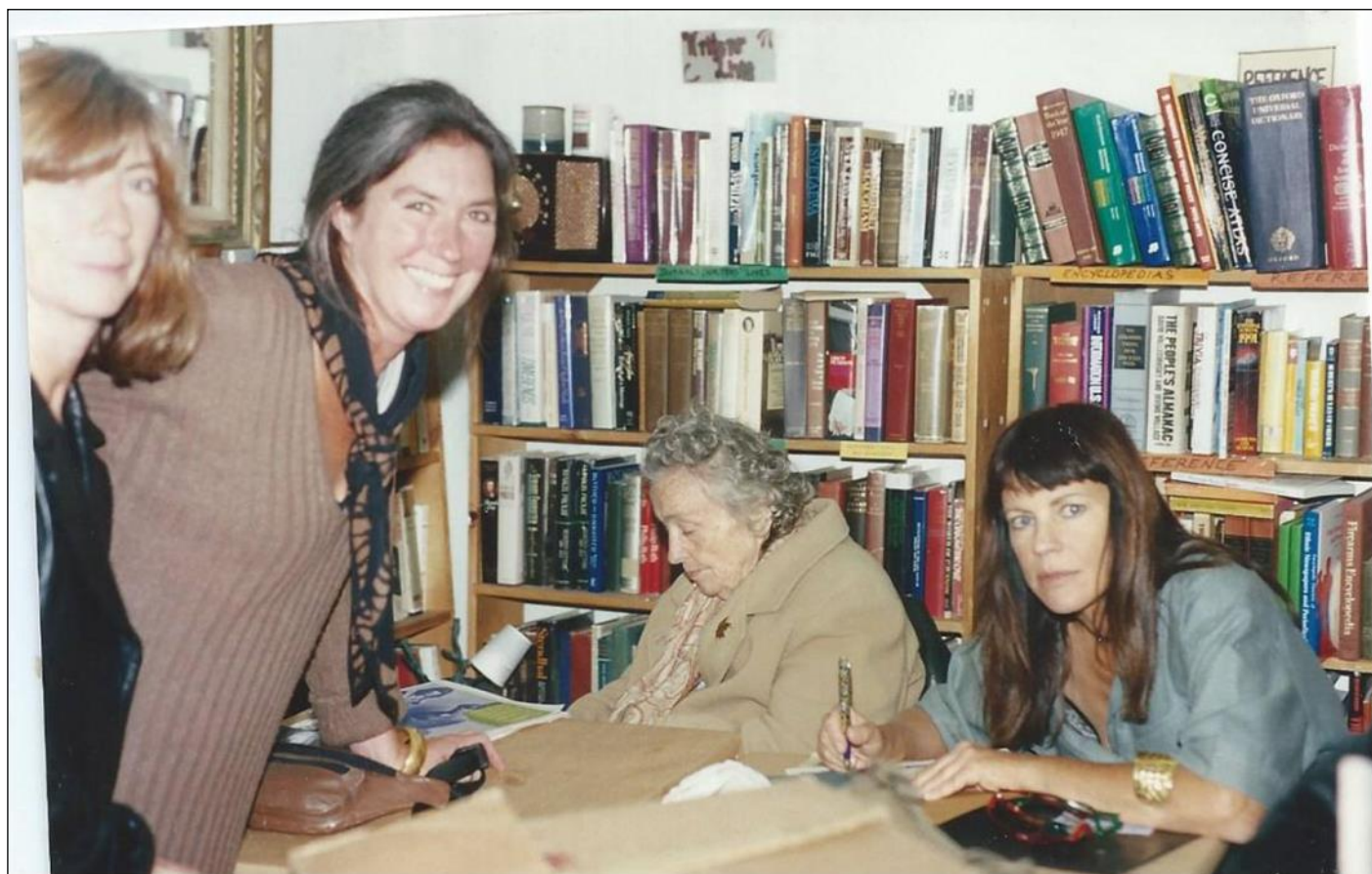


Jan loved to cook. Here she is cooking a meal at Gerald Nicosia's home in January 1994, in Corte Madera, California. (Photo: Gerald Nicosia)



Jan Kerouac sitting at her father's desk, at Jack's former home in St. Petersburg, Florida, in March 1994.

(Photo: courtesy of Gerald Nicosia)



September 1994, **Bookcellar Café**, Harvard Square, Cambridge, Mass. Jan Kerouac signing one of her books for the famous Montreal-born McGarrigle sisters, authors, singers and song-writers. From left to right: Anna McGarrigle, Kate McGarrigle, Mrs. Sylvia Nicosia, Gerald Nicosia's mother. (Photo: Gerald Nicosia)

Photo : Gerald Nicosia

MEMORIES OF JAN KEROUAC



July 1994, Jan with her friend and secretary, Lynn Kushel. (Photo: Gerald Nicosia)



Jan Kerouac and her half-brother, David Stuard, photo taken in March 1995, at the Cowell Theater in San Francisco, during a benefit event for Jan staged by Gerald Nicosia.

(Photo: courtesy of Jan's estate)



1995 - Jan Kerouac with her half-brother, David Stuart.

(Photo: courtesy of Jan Kerouac's estate)

JAN KEROUAC'S INTENTIONS

A Recollection of Jan Kerouac's Years of Work on *Parrot Fever*

By Gerald Nicosia

published in *Le Trésor des Kirouac*,
number 84, June 2006, pp. 6-13



Photo : Ken Miller

Gerald Nicosia on the cover
of his biography of Jack Kerouac,
Memory Babe.

In rereading the manuscript of *Parrot Fever*, I was struck more than ever by what an accomplished book this is - though clearly still only a work-in-progress. In the story of these two half-sisters, Maxine and Claire, there is no mistaking the harrowing but glorious life that was Jan Kerouac's; the ability to put such a stamp of originality on one's own life - to create a vision of it that no one else could steal or plagiarize if they wanted to, because it is so uniquely one's own - is the mark of a true writer.

I first heard of the rudimentary plan for *Parrot Fever* when Jan phoned me from her home in Ellensburg, Washington, in August 1981. Like all of Jan's books, this one changed titles a number of times, and she was calling the book something else then, though I don't remember what. Her first novel, *Baby Driver*, was just about to be published, and Jan claimed that she had already started the second one. She made it very clear that she wanted to create some distance from the raw autobiography of *Baby Driver*, and she was thinking of including some of her past incarnations - which she truly believed in - as a means of doing so. "The book will end in India in 1990," she told me. "Are you predicting your own future?" I asked, somewhat irritated with her. It sounded like the book was an excuse for further excessive globetrotting or amorous adventures, and I was dismayed by what seemed her insatiable appetite for both. No doubt my own brief, unhappy romantic fling with Jan ("You're not my type - you're too kind," she said at one point) played some part in my disenchantment with this idea for a second novel. But the truth is, by this point I had willingly switched from the role of suitor to father figure for Jan, and I was trying very hard to get her to settle down into a stable lifestyle and a productive work-routine. I knew that she could do great things with her life, but not if she kept chasing abusive, empty-headed hunks and will-o'-the-wisp crackpot invitations all over the planet.

"Oh no!" she assured me. She said she would not need to go to India, because she had already read many books about it and talked to many Indian people. She simply wanted to force her imagination to work harder as a means of getting free of slavishly recording her own life.

When I met her in San Francisco in July 1985, she was already well along on writing her next novel, but it was not the one she had spoken of from Ellensburg in 1981. This was the book that would become *Trainsong*, which at that point she was calling *Loverbs*. I regretted to hear that she was back to autobiography. As per her editor's request, *Loverbs* (*Trainsong*) was going to be "a diary of all her relationships with men" over the past ten years, and

was going to rely heavily for material on her new celebrity life - of money, world travels, and men, men, men - after the publication of *Baby Driver*. The most promising thing Jan told me during that visit was that she hadn't given up on the novel about her incarnations. She had sketched out the plot, she said, and would get back to it after she finished the sequel to *Baby Driver*.

When I heard from Jan in the spring of 1992, after having lost contact with her for almost two years, she had crossed several major watersheds in her life. The biggest one, of course, was the complete kidney failure she had suffered in Puerto Rico in January 1992. She was now forced to do peritoneal dialysis four times a day - which she performed with her own IV equipment, bags of a special fluid that she had to order by the case, and a permanent catheter that had been implanted in her abdomen - to stay alive. She was living by herself in Albuquerque, and told me she had come to several major realizations about her life. The first was about men. She had reconciled herself to the fact that she was never going to have a life-partner, she said. She had always dreamed that she and her first husband John Lash would get back together, but he was now living in

Europe with a French woman that he claimed was the love of his life. Jan said she did not want any more of her famous one-night stands or disastrous affairs with brutal criminals or compulsive womanizers. To avoid her weakness for the wrong kind of man, she was going to attempt to remain celibate for the rest of her life. The other main thing she talked about was her coming death.

First, though, she told me about her mother's death on May 15, 1990. It had occurred two days after Mother's Day, though soon she would be telling people that it had occurred *on* Mother's Day, and eventually she even seemed to believe that herself, getting the dates confused in various drafts of *Parrot Fever*. There is no question, however, that this was the most momentous event in her life outside of the death of her father, Jack Kerouac. Her mother had been her one true friend, her confidante, and the one person who would always offer her a home, food, and loving care whenever she needed it. When Joan died, Jan was orphaned in the most profound sense. She talked of how her mother had always been too proud and independent to accept other people's help, and had even refused to go to the hospital, until she was so sick that she had had to be taken there a few days before she died. Jan foresaw that she was going to need help in the future too. Though it went against her grain, Jan said she would accept it more cheerfully and gratefully than her mother.



July 1994, Jan Kerouac at the Four Seasons Hotel in San Francisco, California.
(Photo: Gerald Nicosia)

Jan told me that the only thing that would save her life would be a kidney transplant, but she doubted that with the blood disease she'd inherited from her father (in her case, the blood didn't clot properly) she would be eligible for one. Also, she'd heard and read about the agonies of preparation and post-operative care that a kidney transplant entailed, and she was "leery," she said, of putting herself through such an ordeal. Instead, she had made peace with her shortened lifespan, and wanted to do the most important work she could in the little time left to her. Primarily, she said, she wanted to finish her third novel.

Already, though, she admitted that the odds were against her. She had money to live now, thanks to the percentage of her father's royalties the Sampas family had been legally compelled to pay her, but the kidney failure was having a negative impact on almost all areas of her life - including other bodily functions. Her eyesight had deteriorated drastically, she could hardly feel with her fingers, her energy level was very low because of the continual interruption of her sleep for dialyses, her memory was getting spotty, and even her equilibrium was affected. "I stagger like a drunk and I'm not even drinking!" she laughed, for she still had her sense of humor about all this misfortune. As a result, she was no longer able to drive, and stayed home most of the time, ordering out for food and channel surfing through the night, till it was time for her morning dialysis. "I live like a monk," she said, sounding sad and lonely. Completing her third novel, she said, was the only thing she really had to look forward to.

She was calling it alternately *Parrot Fever* and *Fired From Paradise* - not yet sure which title she preferred. It was clear that she was somewhat torn about which way to go with it. She wanted to keep it in the third person - except for the interposition of first-person "letters" from the protagonists - to attain the objectivity she had long sought in her fiction, and long been criticized for lacking. But the "incarnations" had been too much of a reach for her. Instead, she had settled for splitting herself into two separate main



April 1995, Jan Kerouac and Alton Kelley, artist, during a signing session at Gerald Nicosia's home, Corte Madera, California. Kelley's posters were sold to benefit Jan.

characters, the two half-sisters Claire and Maxine, and allowing her personality to be explored and analyzed through the interaction of the two. The big problem for her as a writer was to decide between letting the book simply become a sequel to the other two - the third and capping book in a trilogy - or giving free rein to her imagination to take it in an entirely different direction, permitting consequences and conclusions to enter the book that might not actually have happened in her life - at least not yet. For one thing, she wanted the more self-destructive of the two, Maxine, to die or disappear near the end. But it was apparent that she was already having trouble keeping the sisters separate both in her writing and in her head - a result, I think, of the strong autobiographical pull that always gripped Jan when she sat down to write. She would even mix up Claire's last name - at times in the manuscript she is Claire Haggerty, and at others she is Claire Luna, taking the last name of the novel's major male character, Jacob Luna. At several points in the writing of the book, Jan confided to me that her instinct was actually to make Jacob the main character. When she would say that, I always remembered how she'd once told me that most of her previous incarnations were as men - that her soul was male.

Interestingly, Jan said that one of the things that had motivated her to return to the book after her kidney failure was watching a TV documentary about scriptwriter Waldo Salt and, the same day, a TV showing of Salt's film *Midnight Cowboy*, one of her favorites. The scene of Dustin Hoffman's character, Ratso, dying before he ever reaches Florida touched her now more than ever, she said. At one point in her novel, Jan even quotes some of Ratso's dialogue. But what amazed her was to learn that Salt had spent decades trying to make it as a scriptwriter - writing many mediocre films such as *Taras Bulba* - before he authored masterpieces such as *Midnight Cowboy* and *Coming Home*, for which he won an Oscar. Jan felt that if Waldo Salt could make a stunning breakthrough after decades of trying to get a handle on his art, perhaps she could do the same with *Parrot Fever*.

Almost every time we talked on the phone, her progress and problems with *Parrot Fever* were part of our discussions, and we also corresponded extensively about the book. By the summer of 1992, Jan had already circulated sample chapters to several publishers, but had gotten rejections everywhere. She was discouraged, and felt that if she could get a contract for the book, not to mention a monetary advance, it would help inspire her to complete it - a task that grew increasingly hard as time passed and she grew physically weaker and more forgetful. To help her out, in October 1992, I agreed to serve as literary agent for the book. I sent it to dozens of publishers - including Viking Penguin, now her father's main publisher - but again it was universally rejected. I would have been discouraged myself, had I not remembered the two years I'd spent submitting *Baby Driver* to every editor and publisher I could think of and seeing it too rejected over and over, until the combination of real literary agent Joyce Cole and St. Martin's Press editor Barbara Anderson made the book a reality. Of course *Parrot Fever* lacks the sort of titillating sex scenes that helped make *Baby Driver* a commercial success - the kind of scenes that - as Jan mocks in the new novel - people had come to expect her to write, so that they could get their cheap thrills from a safe distance, while pretending to admire her "courageous" life.

In 1994, Jan began the lawsuit against the Sampas family, aimed at recovering and preserving her father's literary archive, which consumed the last two years of her life. Both her medical and legal expenses were increasing rapidly,

and her royalty income, which the Sampases sought to reduce, no longer covered all her needs. To raise needed money, Jan agreed to let printer Norman Davis issue a chapbook of selections from *Parrot Fever* that spring. I agreed to write the introduction, and to prepare myself for that, I had many discussions with Jan about where she was going with the book.

What I learned was that Jan had a very thorough, elaborate structure in mind for *Parrot Fever*, and that she really wanted the two sisters to be definite, separate characters whose interaction would resolve both the plot and the central mystery of the book - which is: why do gifted, intelligent people self-destruct in this world? The reader has to understand that Jan began this book - at least the real page-by-page writing of it, which she started around 1988 - from the premise of a wrecked life. At this point, her health had already begun to fail, although she obviously had no idea how catastrophic that failure would become. I remember when she arrived in Lowell in June 1988, for the dedication of the memorial to her father, her legs were swollen from the bus ride and she had other health problems that she thought at the time might be lupus, a disease her mother supposedly suffered from. She had broken up with her last serious lover, Michael in Boulder, three years earlier, and she no longer believed she would find a lifetime partner - as she told Lowell literary historian Brad Parker quite clearly.

When we talked about the book in 1994, Jan told me that she hoped the third-person point of view and dual heroines would allow her to get far enough outside herself to finally analyze how she had landed in such a mess, and to provide her with a useful perspective on her life and perhaps

some peace of mind, if not actual hope for the future. She saw her life seesawing between two powerful magnetic poles - on the one hand, her desperate desire to preserve the joy, playfulness, and innocence of childhood; and on the other, her inability to meet the serious demands of the adult world, which kept pulling her into complex, usually tragic situations that she was ill-prepared to deal with. To put it as succinctly as possible, the central issue of the book is: where does childishness leave off and self-destruction begin?

Jan believed her lack of a father figure played a huge role in her inability to solve this dilemma, which most people get past with far less pain and suffering as they embark upon the mature portion of their lives. But she wanted *Parrot Fever* to get beyond just the simplistic bitching about daddy's absence that had characterized the two earlier books. She wanted this one - her masterpiece, she hoped - to become an allegory for the fractured psyche of every man and every woman, if not the fractured psyche of the world itself - and an allegory, even more important, of how that fracture can finally be healed. To this end, the two fatherless sisters' love and concern for each other was to play a key role in the plot. One of crucial scenes that never got written was that of Claire, the younger "emotional" one (as Jan called her), going to Hawaii near the end to search for her lost and possibly dead sister Maxine. At the end, the older sister, a successful writer who was supposed to have her life together, would crash even worse than Claire, "the family goof" and "profoundly disturbed dreamer" (again, these



Boulder, Colorado, 1982, Jack Micheline (1929-1998), Beat poet, born Harold Martin Silver, and Jan Kerouac at the 25th anniversary of Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*. Behind her, at right is Carolyn Cassidy. (Photo: Gerald Nicosia)



Jan Kerouac speaking about her father's spirituality at Middlesex College, Lowell, Massachusetts, October 1994.

(photographer, probably Brad Parker.
Photo from Jacques Kirouac's collection)

were terms with which Jan described her to me). The reversal of their usual roles was to comment on the human capacity for growth, in both good and bad directions. But she also wanted to show love as the glue that holds crumbling human life together. One of the central images - which also never found its way into the manuscript, at least the portion of it we have (and a considerable part was lost in Jan's move to Key West in 1993) - was to have been the poster for the movie *Ben Hur*. Jan told me that she used to stare fascinated at this poster when she was a child, and she loved the way BEN HUR was printed in big rocky crumbling letters. But Maxine, by keeping her mind fixed on those crumbling letters, and imagining that she will write a book that will become such an epic masterpiece, manages to put her life back together, at least in words on the page - much as Jan was trying to do with PARROT FEVER. Thus artistic vision would serve as another glue for human life, working side by side with love.

I was awed by the ambitiousness of Jan's vision, and it was a major tragedy - both for her personally, as well as us, her friends and readers - that she never lived to realize it. What we have here - marred by incomplete chapters, missing chapters, gaps where material was either lost or never written - is far smaller in scope, but like the stone skeleton of Jack London's burned-out Wolf House, it is still a remarkable piece of architecture. In even these shards of *Parrot Fever*, you can hear what was to have been Jan's *Moonlight Sonata* - sadness and passion and ominousness all mixed together. The promiscuous sex is still here, to a degree, but now the overtones are much darker than in *Baby Driver* or *Trainsong*. Sex becomes not an exciting adventure and pastime, as in the previous two novels, but rather an additional and deadly source of psychic and social fracture. There are dark references to the letdown and betrayal both sisters feel from their ex-husbands; and in the end, Claire seeks to end her desperate loneliness with a guy, Louie, whom she knows from the start is nothing but a sleaze ball hustler. How ironic that Jan's first biographer - whom she repudiated before his book came out - sought to emphasize her wild sex and "playgirl" life as somehow the essence of her character, when Jan herself had already moved far beyond those things, both in her life and her writing.

Like the greatest English literature, thinking back especially to Shakespeare, *Parrot Fever* begins with something about to go profoundly wrong with the world and the accepted order of things. This, of course, was the basic story of Jan's life: a beautiful little girl is born to a husband and wife, only the husband (and now daddy) is nowhere around, in fact is running as far as he can get from the family he has just created - leaving wife and daughter to deal with the cataclysmic consequences of this rupture themselves. Jan opens her story with Maxine LaCrosse stumbling upon a flood in Maine, where she has gone to help celebrate the work of her famous writer dad. It's noteworthy that Jack Kerouac himself used the imagery of a flood in *Dr. Sax* to suggest a world gone out of control as the young Jackie Dulouoz enters puberty - though Jan, as far as I know, never consciously sought to imitate her father's work. As Jan's book begins, the flood and fog are "deranging" people, driving them "slowly, quietly mad," and there is a hint that human beings might actually start to murder one another.

This apocalyptic atmosphere pervades the novel, and there are numerous references to the possible coming end of human life. In fact, she intended - with typical Jan pun-in-cheek humor - to title the final chapter, in which Claire goes in search of her lost sister Maxine, "Apocalypso." Of course Jan was approaching the very definite end of her own human life as she wrote all this, and a part of what she was doing was trying to see her own life in the greater human continuum - to merge the two. In so doing, she finds a great personal consolation. She has lost the unity of her own family, but, as she says in "Hedda's Garden" (a kind of perverse version of the Garden of Eden), she has managed to make "her old fond dream come true, of being at the Earth's Hearth" -having reconstituted and rejoined the Family of Man.

Fortunately Jan did complete the book's two most important chapters, "Chernobyl Swan" and "Trainsong Park" - both of which I think are some of the finest short pieces of fiction written by any American writer in the last decade of the twentieth century. Throughout the book, Jan has been expounding upon her naïve, youthful idea that she can avoid becoming part of the world's evil by simply remaining a childlike witness to human life - like one of those people on the subway with their heads buried in the newspaper, riding home or to their job as they read of nuclear disaster in faraway Russia. But in "Chernobyl Swan," Claire finds that the witness cannot help becoming part of the evil machinery herself. She cracks open a swan's egg, wanting to see what she expects will be a dead embryo - killed by a fierce, possibly radioactive rainstorm in the wake of the nuclear power plant accident in Chernobyl. But the embryo was still alive; and in seeking to examine it, she kills it herself. "She felt as though she had committed a terrible crime by opening the egg and yet at the same time she knew that it would have died in there anyway," Jan writes, somehow condensing her whole life into that one brilliant image. If she had done nothing with her traumatized life, Jan would have died anyway; but in seeking to lead a full, adventuresome, creative human life, she has ironically hastened her own death.

That chapter, "Chernobyl Swan," incidentally, contains some of the most evocative writing about New York City that I think any American

Photo: Gerald Nicosia



March 1995, Jan Kerouac and Anthony Stillman Bliss (1946-2017) in the famous Bancroft Library at UCLA, University of California at Los Angeles. Jan met Tony Bliss to discuss placement of her father's archive at The Bancroft.

writer has ever done - an accomplishment which alone would make Jan Kerouac a significant writer.

"Trainsong Park" recounts the actual death of Jan's mother Joan Haverty in 1990. It rivals, in power and intensity, the great scene in her second novel *Trainsong*, where she meditates on her father's death at Allen Ginsberg's house in Boulder, Colorado, on October 21, 1982. In "Trainsong Park," Jan attempts to look at death head-on, and to see what it really means. Her mother is supposedly "gone," but "where had she gone?" Jan asks. Memories of her dominate Jan's consciousness, and she is still tremendously alive to Jan. But the big thing that is missing is Joan's distinctive voice. Death, Jan finds, is the Big Silence. Joan's children can now romp through her house, opening forbidden drawers, without fear of Joan yelling at them to stop, and it makes them feel "sheepish," as if "they had done something bad" by usurping what should have been her right to control her own home. Joan had been an immensely strong woman, seemingly able to overcome every form of human adversity, but somehow she has failed to surmount the worst human problem of all: death. "You can't just make a mistake like this and just fail," Jan says plaintively to the mother who is still in her head. In the futility of the children trying to do something useful with what she has left behind - even the Salvation Army rejects her dilapidated furniture - Jan makes a poignant comment on how helpless we all are before this final human destroyer, silencer, and leveler.

In the exceedingly hot summer of 1995, Jan moved to San Anselmo, California, and a few miles from me. That whole summer, she had a blackish purplish sore on the top of her right foot the size of a nickel, which caused her extreme pain, and made it almost impossible for her to walk more than a few yards without stopping for relief. Needless to say, she was not traveling anywhere that summer, and even riding the bus became a virtual impossibility. So I drove to her house several times a week and took her to



April 1995, Jan Kerouac raising her glass to the success of her battle to save her father's papers, with her cousin, Paul Blake Jr., and his partner, Linda. Photo taken at Gerald Nicosia's house

the grocery store, to the drugstore for bandages and salves, to the Laundromat, and usually, at the end of her round of errands, to a coffee shop or restaurant to relax for an hour or so - before she returned home to continue work on the novel in her sweltering house. It was in those dozens of different coffee shops and restaurants that summer - as well as sometimes her famous late-night phone calls - that I heard her final plans for completing *Parrot Fever*.

Some of the most exciting things to me were the scenes Jan projected that would for the first time deeply explore her relationships with men. One such key scene was to be a description of Claire's striptease act in a sleazy Eugene, Oregon, topless club - to be based upon Jan's own striptease act in such a place shortly before she left for Puerto Rico and her near-fatal kidney failure. Jan told me the scene would involve a confession of how she actually enjoyed stripping. "You get a whole stage and music and can do with it anything you want," she said. She had approached it in a creative fashion, devising all sorts of imaginative costumes and dance routines, many of which involved the black star-on-thigh tattoo her first real love, Paul Ortloff, had given her at about age twelve. What would give tension and clarity to the scene would be the contrast between what Claire expected - which was to receive loving adoration and appreciation from the men she danced for - and what she actually got: "a bunch of horny dolts who all wanted her to get down to the nitty-gritty, to see her naked." The scene, Jan said, would be a paradigm of her life: her search for love, repeatedly frustrated by men who only saw the hot, foxy sex symbol - the *Marilyn Monroe* that Claire wants so badly to become in one of the early chapters of *Parrot Fever* - and not the lonely, unloved girl inside. Jan conveyed this cruel insensitivity in an image I liked so much at the time that I wrote it down in my notebook: "men [at the strip club] would look up at her [Jan/Claire] with eyes demonically white and milky in the black light."

Another scene, also based on Jan's own life, would be one of the girls -

probably Maxine, whose character needed beefing up - riding a Manhattan bus with her mother at about age two. The little girl lifts up her skirt to show off her new panties - knowing how cute she is - and embarrasses her mother. All the people smile at her mother to show their appreciation for her cute little girl. "They're really smiling for the mother," Jan said, "but the little girl thinks they're smiling at her." And the little girl quickly develops a craving for this kind of "outpouring of affection" - which, according to Jan, was the only equivalent she could find for the father-love that did not exist for her.

There were also to have been detailed scenes of Claire's life with Louie, the Puerto Rican gigolo. Claire, again based on Jan's own experience with a similar man in Puerto Rico, would continually go out of her way to meet Louie's needs, but when she needed something basic, even something as essential as a ride to the hospital when her body was beginning to collapse, Louie would shrug her off, saying it was too much trouble. At some point Claire would have an illumination of where this excessive need to cater to men had come from. Jan wanted to recount the real-life episode of spending an hour with her father in her tenement apartment when she was about ten. She said a "blue spark of recognition" had passed between their eyes, and she had seen how much hurt it had caused Jack, since he had been forced to turn away from her for the rest of the visit. She had decided at that moment that it was her job to protect men from being hurt. It was that moment, Jan claimed, that began

her years of taking care of men who were “big babies,” letting them abuse her and always blaming herself for their unhappiness.

Jan’s mother was going to come in for some heavy criticism too - for the first time in her writing, though she often criticized her in private to me and other close friends. She wanted to show a scene of one of the girls - probably the same panty-flasher on the bus - wanting a hug and kiss from her mother, and being coldly rebuffed. In reality, Jan said, Joan almost never hugged her at all as a child, and she felt that such absence of physical affection may have done real emotional damage to her.

It seemed to me that what would make *Parrot Fever* so radically different from Jan’s earlier books was this no-holds-barred approach, which would make everyone - her mother, her father, even her own self (or perhaps one should say *selves*) - fair game for critical analysis. In September 1995, just before she returned to Albuquerque for the last time, Jan told me she wanted to recast the whole book from Jacob’s point of view. Obviously she would soon fall far too sick to even begin such a massive revision, but there was a genuine artistic impulse at work in such a plan. She admitted that in seeing herself dissected in the two half-sisters, she disliked a lot of what she saw in her own personality and behavior. She found Jacob a much more sympathetic and likable character - the kind of person she wished she could have been. She had based a lot of the “Jacob” chapter on her interaction with her agent Peter Livingston, who later died of AIDS. In reality, she said, there had been a sordid side to that relationship too, as she had actually been having a secret love affair with Livingston despite the fact that he was married at the time.

I think if Jan could ever have really broken through all her protective facades and cover stories, as she at least suggested to me that she would do in *Parrot Fever*, she could have produced a truly great novel. She told me the novel would essentially have two morals or mantras. One would occur in a scene where one of the half-sisters sees a sexy, dreamy young woman swishing blithely by in her miniskirt in some café, unconscious of all the actual misery around her, and she thinks, “Just you wait, dearie, you’ll find out what *pain* is all about.” That mantra was a vision of the universal suffering that all



April 1995, Jan Kerouac and her cousin, Paul Blake Jr., at Gerald Nicosia’s home, in California. (Photo: Gerald Nicosia)

flesh is heir to, on a par with Dostoyevsky. The other mantra would occur in a scene that I thought was an absolute stroke of genius - a scene between Claire and her mother in Sacred Heart Hospital in Eugene, just before Joan’s death.

In one of her last utterances, Joan said, “Jan, you know I’m going to be all right, don’t you?” Thinking her mother wanted to be comforted, Jan had answered, “Yes.” When her mother died a few hours later, Jan was overcome by immense guilt for having lied to her. But eventually Jan - and this would be the key to the scene - came to see that what was actually transpiring was *Joan’s attempt to comfort Jan*. That someone on the verge of death could think enough of someone else’s needs to put that other person’s comfort first was an astounding revelation to Jan. Although never conventionally religious, Jan was definitely seeking some form of religious or spiritual truth as she approached her own death, and Joan’s final act of selflessness seemed like some ultimate form of salvation to Jan - something she could always look back to whenever she needed comfort in her own life, a gift

that could never be taken away. The importance of caring for others was thus to be the book's other great lesson.

"Why did she want to title it *Parrot Fever*?" some people ask. The fact is Jan loved parrots - all birds, in fact - and, besides her relationship with the real-life Macadamia, had often kept parakeets for pets. But beyond that, I think she could find no better symbol for the essential message of her book than the parrot. It is a benevolent, human-

friendly, fun, childlike creature - but it is also the bearer of a potentially fatal disease. That paradox is at the heart of the book's double vision. The small, lithe, ever-curious and quirky green parrot is a symbol of Jan herself - or at least a significant part of her nature - and the disease she tries to avoid is mortality. She tries to avoid it by becoming an expert observer and chronicler of it, but in the end that isn't enough to save her from the universal, fatal contamination. Yet she manages to make friends with the parrot's disturbing behavior and even its destructiveness - learns to make peace with its troublesome intrusions and even to soothe its mad flurries with her own love songs - as Jacob eventually makes friends with Mackie and plays classical piano compositions such as *Les Oiseaux Tristes* for her.

That is how I think of *Parrot Fever* - as Jan's final love song to her own troublesome life.



Jan loved parrots so she sent this card to Jacques Kirouac on March first 1996, three months before she died in Albuquerque, New-Mexico.

(Collection Jacques Kirouac)

TO JAN - IN LOVING MEMORY



On June 5, 1997, there was a Mass in homage to Jan Kerouac at Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague church in Nashua, N. H., mark the first anniversary of her death. It was followed by the interment of her ashes in the Kerouac family plot at the Old Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague parish cemetery.

Representing the KFA were, from left to right: Alberte Garon and her husband, Jacques Kirouac, KFA founding president, Claire Robert-Kirouac, Clément Kirouac, then KFA president, and Jean-Yves Kirouac (Claire Robert's husband).

Photo : collection AFK

Nashua, N.H., 5 June 1997 at Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague church,
from left to right: Jean-Yves Kirouac, Paul Kerouac,
Jacques Kirouac and Clément Kirouac.
(Photo: KFA Collection)



TO JAN - IN LOVING MEMORY



Sunday, 29 August 1999, the launching of Reverend Stephen Edington's book, *Kerouac, Nashua Connection* in Nashua, N.H., was the occasion to, once more, pay tribute to Jan Kerouac at the Old Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague Cemetery. From left to right, front row: Claire Robert-Kirouac, Alberte Garon-Kirouac, Joy Stephanie Carter, Roger Brunelle, __?__, Jean-Yves Kirouac, Reverend Stephen Edington and Jacques Kirouac. Behind, Luc Pelletier, __?__, __?__.

(Photo: KFA Collection)

Sunday, 4 October 2009, photo taken at the Kerouac family lot in the Old Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague Cemetery in Nashua, N.H., where Jan's ashes rest. The previous day, Saturday, 3 October 2009, in Lowell, Mass., was the launching of Gerald Nicosia's *A Life In Memory*, a collection of texts written by the author and by friends of Jan as a warmhearted homage to Jack's daughter. Were present, left to right: J. Brian Timperley, Jacques Kirouac, Colette Kerouac, Jack's second cousin, and her husband, Robert Deschênes, Marie Lussier-Timperley and Gerald Nicosia.

(Photo: courtesy of Gerald Nicosia)



Photo taken on 9 October 2016. Whenever KFA members go to Lowell, Mass., or Nashua, N.H., visiting Jan's last resting place is a must; it is an occasion to pay homage to Jan and the Kerouacs who hailed from Saint-Hubert-de-Rivière-du-Loup (Quebec, Canada).

From left to right: Mary Emmerick, professor and journalist from Chicago, a close friend of Jan, Jacques Kirouac, KFA founding president, and Gerald Nicosia, a long-time friend of Jan and Jack Kerouac's biographer.

(Photo: François Kirouac)

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JAN KEROUAC

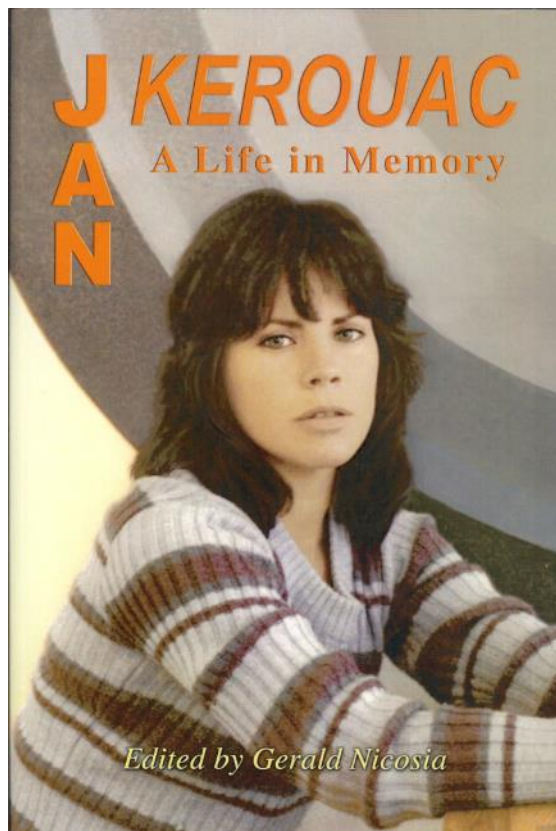
In January 2009, Gerald Nicosia, *Memory Babe's* author, published a book about Jan Kerouac, daughter of the famous Franco-American author, Jack Kerouac. The 189-page book, entitled *Jan Kerouac, A Life in Memory*, includes texts signed by seventeen authors including Nicosia, as well as Jacques Kirouac, the KFA founding president.

Jan Kerouac, A Life in Memory can be ordered directly from the author-editor: Gerald Nicosia, Post Office Box 130, Corte Madera, CA, USA 94976-0130. Please include a cheque (check): Orders from within the US \$30 postpaid. Orders from Canada \$45 postpaid (including a US \$20 Post Office surcharge).

The book can also be ordered from the KFA in Canada at: association@familleskirouac.com

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TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JAN KEROUAC

The Last Days of Jan Kerouac

Comments from the back-cover:

Literature / Biography

The Last Days of Jan Kerouac presents excerpts from a full-length biography of Jan Kerouac currently being written by Gerald Nicosia, the acclaimed biographer of Jack Kerouac.

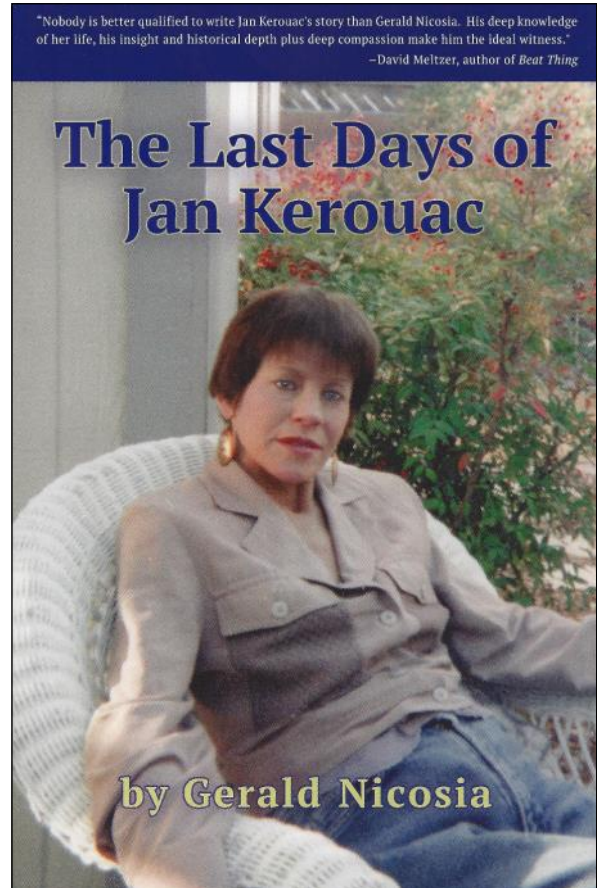
Called a "great book" by **Allen Ginsberg**, and currently in print in several languages, *Memory Babe* was hailed as the best biography of Kerouac in reviews worldwide, from the *Chicago Sun-Times* to the *London Times Literary Supplement*. In *The Last Days of Jan Kerouac*, Nicosia tries to present a sympathetic portrait of Kerouac's only child, never publicly recognized by him in his lifetime, and often shunned and misunderstood for her early lifestyle, when she grew up as a child of the New York streets in the 1960's. Nicosia shows Jan Kerouac to be a thoughtful, sensitive, often troubled, but deeply caring artist who sought to leave a literary legacy that, if not as great as that of her father, would somehow complement his and carry the Beat writer's message into the next generation.

Aram Saroyan, author of *Last Rites and Genesis Angels the Saga of Lew Welch and the Beat Generation*, writes:

The celebrated British psychologist Donald Winnicott divided the human race into two groups, those who had 'good enough' parenting and those who didn't, and said it was the job of the former to look after the latter. In this gripping excerpt from Gerald Nicosia's biography of Jan Kerouac, the harshly neglected daughter of Jack Kerouac, we see the principle in heart-rending action. Nicosia, whose Memory Babe stands as the definitive biography of the senior Kerouac, is saint-like in his generosity and patience with the benighted daughter. In the end, this is a double portrait of the writer and his subject, one in which we may catch ourselves reflected alternately in one or the other protagonist. If it weren't all true, it would make first rate fiction. I found the piece engrossing.

Oliver Harris, President of the *European Beat Studies Network* and editor of William S. Burroughs' *Letters, 1945-1959 and Junk: the definitive text of "Junk"*, writes:

Part-documentary, part-polemic, The Last Days of Jan Kerouac is driven by Gerald Nicosia's trademark passion for the untold story. Illuminating the dark corners in the tragic, and tragically neglected life of Kerouac's disowned daughter, this feisty biography is a highly personal and highly readable bid to do Jan's life and work justice."



David Meltzer, author of *Beat Thing* writes:

Nobody is better qualified to write Jan Kerouac's story than Gerald Nicosia. His deep knowledge of her life, his insight and historical depth plus deep compassion make him the ideal witness.

The 55-page book *The Last Days of Jan Kerouac* can be ordered directly from the author-editor at: Gerald Nicosia, Post Office Box 130, Corte Madera, CA, USA 94976-0130. The price is US \$20 postpaid if ordered within the U.S.; and US \$35 postpaid to Canada.

The book can also be ordered from the KFA in Canada at: association@familleskirouac.com

Our motto

Pride Dignity Integrity



*Founded: 20 November 1978
Incorporated: 26 February 1986
Member of the
Fédération des associations de familles
du Québec since 1983*

Canada Post

Mail agreement Number 40069967 for Mailing Publications

Return to the following address:

Fédération des associations de familles du Québec
650, rue Graham-Bell, bureau 210, Québec (Québec) G1N
4H5

IMPRIMÉ—PRINTED PAPER SURFACE

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of Alexandre de Kervoach
do you know any
who made significant contributions?**

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