

# voices

## Memories of Noel

BY GRETEL EHRLICH, a  
Santa Barbara author.

Noel Young was on his way to Big Sur to meet Henry Miller when his La Salle touring car broke down in Santa Barbara, and in Santa Barbara he stayed. San Francisco-born and Stanford-educated, Noel wanted to write stories and live in the free-wheeling bohemian community that came together around Miller, but he also had a family to support. In his goat-like, practical way, he settled down where his car had left him and opened a printing shop on East Canon Perdido. It was there that I met Noel.

Was I six or seven or eight? I can't remember. Elfish, wiry, mischievous, Noel was in his late 20s. He gave me crayons and paper while printing up some party invitations for my mother. I remember the smell of ink and the sound of thundering presses as I sat on the floor and began what my mother said was my "first novel."

Noel finally did spend the summer of 1951 with Henry Miller in his low, rambling house on Partington Ridge. In exchange for room and board, Noel built a rock wall and put in a garden. Evenings, the house filled with visitors—painters, poets, philosophers, and photographers. Later, Noel's house in Mission Canyon became the southern annex of Big Sur: poetry, harpsichord music, and hot tub parties.

Noel bought a huge Heidelberg Letterpress and began printing books, first for Black Sparrow Press, and later, he began his own publishing company. Before Capra Press, there was Capricorn Press (in tribute to Miller), and Noel's first letterpress volumes were poetry. In the early 1970s I was one of many who came to him with a sheaf of poems to read (others included Mort Marcus and Joe Stroud from Santa Cruz).

"If you write a few more, maybe I'll publish them," Noel said, and that was all I needed to hear. I signed my first book contract a few months later while sitting in his hot tub.

From that day on, Noel was the carrot dangling in front of my nose, during the "donkey days" of tedium and difficulty that befall all serious writers.

Capricorn eventually became Capra Press, and Noel launched his infamous "Lifestyle" books, as well as the well-known Chapbook series, his back-to-back books. He published Henry Miller, Anais Nin,

Ray Carver, Ross MacDonald, Thomas Sanchez, Ursula LeGuin, Edward Hoagland, James Houston, Robert Easton, John McKinney, and myself—among many others.

"None of it was thought out," Noel contended, with the usual twinkle in his eye. "I only published what I loved, what I, myself, would like to read, with no regard to commercial success. This is the only way to be happy."

Success came anyway. In 1977, his hot tub book sold out, print run after print run, and was eventually bought by Random House. Noel's list expanded: He published more than 300 books. On weekends his house was open, his hot tub hot, the food and booze potluck. "Partington Ridge South" was in full swing on the edge of Mission Creek. Publishing had never been so much fun.

Noel gave many of us a wonderful start, nudged us along the way, and gave our various outpourings of prose and poetry a loving home. Now, it is our turn to give something back. Noel is suffering from Alzheimer's disease and needs full-time care.

In the name of literature, art, and life, about which Noel gave us so much, please send your donations to the Noel Young Fund.

## A Friend in Need

BY HILLARY HAUSER, a  
Santa Barbara activist.

As humans we are a form of energy—we flow through the physical life, and then we leave," said Felicity Green, a master teacher of Iyengar Yoga. "During our earth life, our mind and body are together. What we don't want is for the mind to leave first, or the body to leave first. We want them to exit together..."

Alzheimer's is a really crummy disease that like a thief in the night creeps in to steal mind from body. That it should visit any human being is cruel. That a man of letters and literature should be bombarded with it is extreme irony, like a pianist getting arthritis in his hands.

I first heard about Noel Young in the early 1970s, in a Los Angeles masterclass of pianist Jakob Gimpel. Henry Miller, a good friend of Gimpel's, used to attend those classes, and I always stayed late



after the class, sometimes past midnight, to talk with these gifted artists.

"You're moving to Santa Barbara?" Henry asked me one night. "Crazy. But you must do yourself a favor and get to know Noel Young."

And so I did. I met him in his office in the Fithian Building on State Street, a wild whirlwind of stacked and strewn books, manuscripts, papers, ashtrays, pencils, scraps of memos and memorabilia. We talked about Henry, of course, and after that I began to gather some pieces of Noel's life montage. There was the chaotic printing press business he owned with Graham MacIntosh, where I paid to have a book of my poems printed in genuine hot type—and watched in awe the workings of these same presses that spun out the Capra chapbooks. So called after the "chapmen" or street

hawkers of old England, these chapbooks were two books bound back-to-back, one upside down, so that you could read one book, then reverse it and read another one.

This series began with Henry Miller's *On Turning 80*, and in the last 12 years of his life, Miller gave most of his books to Noel Young to publish. The colorful author had grown disgusted with Manhattan big-business publishing, as do many writers with bohemian veins in their bodies.

Mainly what I observed about Noel was his celebration of wine, food, and friends. Harry's was a ritual. So was Joe's. So was every other restaurant where Noel regularly established his West Coast version of the historic Algonquin Round Table. The talk was always brilliant, interesting, and, I imagined, in the vein of the Robert Benchley-Dorothy Parker lunches

at the famed New York hotel.

The conversations have now stopped. Several years ago, Noel's family—son Aaron, daughters Hilary and Caity—and Noel's mate, Lisa Cabryl, began to notice the mental slippings, the forgetfulness we all joke about but which becomes not-so-funny. With Alzheimer's, one soon realizes the tragedy: Faulty memory sinks into a deregulation of body functions, muscle tone, the ability to walk. It is a terrible descent.

Before long, Noel's family realized he could not be left alone and that every moment of his waking life needed to be watched and guarded. They began to consult with the excellent loving and humane services in Santa Barbara that have been established to help people in Noel's predicament, as well as the family that must learn to cope—including the Friendship Center in Montecito, the local chapter of the Alzheimer's Foundation, and Coast Caregivers.

Unfortunately, Noel's disease has progressed to where he now needs constant supervision and care. There is no medical insurance, retirement plan, or nest egg that might have accompanied a publisher of one of those big book houses in New York.

This is why Gretel Ehrlich and I have established the Noel Young Foundation—to help Noel in the last days of his life, to pay for the supervisory care he needs. We are appealing to the Santa Barbara community to help one of its most colorful characters, the publisher who was for so many years at the center of this town's wonderfully diverse literati. In our minds, to help someone who has taken such a terrible fall in life's journey is an integral part of our own essential connection between mind and body—and humanity.

Please help. ■

## Be a Friend, Indeed

To help Noel Young, please send contributions to:

Noel Young Fund  
P.O. Box 611  
Santa Barbara, CA 93102

The following groups have given support to Noel Young's family, and are wonderful community resources for those who may be confronted with the difficulties of caring for Alzheimer's patients:

**Alzheimer's Association, Inc.: Santa Barbara chapter, 2024 #B De la Vina St., Santa Barbara, CA 93101, (800) 660-1993 or 563-0020. Private, nonprofit group providing information and help for caregivers. Library of reference books.**

**Coast Caregiver Resource Center: 427 Camino Del Remedio, Santa Barbara, CA 93110, (800) 443-1236 or 967-0220. Provides counseling, in-home care assessment, legal and financial help.**

**Friendship Adult Day Care Center: 83 Eucalyptus Lane, Montecito, CA 93108, 969-0859. Funded by United Way, Santa Barbara Foundation, Wood-Claeysens Foundation, All Saints By-the-Sea Episcopal church, and others, provides day care for adults who cannot be left alone.**