

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Hey Jack

Adam Leipzig · Wednesday, October 14th, 2020

Hey Jack,

Remember some years back, when I called to say we planned to start a Poetry Prize at Cultural Weekly. Could we name it after you? You said, and I'll never forget this, "Can I donate for the prizes?"

- That's not necessary, I said.
- But I want to, you said.

So it has happened. Every year, you quietly send money our way so we can give prize money to poets from around the world.

Tremendously generous, and really just a morsel of your generosity. I've always relied on you for advice about Cultural Weekly. When we needed a poetry editor, you suggested Alexis Rhone Fancher. When we needed an editor, you suggested Chiwan Choi. They are both integral to what we do. What do we do? What you do – give people their voice.

Those of us who have taken your classes have felt your generosity profoundly, in the loving and sharp way you talk with us about what we have written. You don't get into personal drama. You caretake the text, dramatic or not.

My writing was destroyed by school; I wrote the way school taught me for much of my life, which means I didn't write at all. Not anything anybody would want to read, or even could read. I wasn't able to write until I took your class, and you gave those magic words, Write like you talk.

There it was. The simplest and most generous thing a person could say.

Here we are, nearly a decade into this Cultural Weekly adventure. We're still here, thanks in large part to you. I've already told you that we have plans on the horizon, plans to redesign the site, become mobile-first, start publishing every day, build out a formal board of directors, refresh our name, and be better at asking people to donate to keep the electrons moving. As always, you have encouraged and offered to help, even though you're writing, what is it now, four books, and teaching how many people?

We all take lessons from you, keep taking lessons. We never imagined we would be here, locked down like this, unable to be in person with each other safely, where a hug or a kiss can transport

sickness or death, so opposite of what hugs and kisses mean. We never imagined we would be here, yet here we are, there's a reason, no matter how you parse it, that we're here on this planet now, right now, doing what we do, feeling as we feel, writing as we write. Coronavirus teaches lessons too, and it has altered the ground, shifted vulnerability, made all of us more equal and less equal at the same time.

Poetry is what it is and answers when asked.

Odd way to get round to this, but your spirit of generosity, honed and practiced over your years of teaching, writing and acting, is the spirit to keep guiding us now. The sharp love, unclothed, what's real is what's in the words, only in the words, the words, write like you talk, give.

Thank you, Jack.

With love and admiration,

– Adam



Jack Grapes. Portrait photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher, 2019.

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