

MAGAZINE
SECONDS

SECONDS #27, 1994 • interview by George Petros

ED SANDERS



Out of Pindar's cock and Sappho's cunt he comes a-knockin' — out of William Blake's mind and Charles Manson's memory he pulls flower-like poems and fatalistic fantasies. He roams the formerly fruited plains, pen in hand, mouth locked open, brain beaming. Every once in a while he looks over his shoulder just in case the past catches up with him.

Hello ED SANDERS — founding Fug, author of The Family and poet laureate of lurid modern folklore. In song lyrics and investigative essays he tells of the eternal struggle between sewer and sky. Initially he adapted his degree in ancient Greek to the emerging counterculture, becoming a poet trapped inside a Rock Star. Then, extrapolating his narrative talents, he became a reporter trapped inside a carnival barker. Today he's a typical American, yo — award-winning, best-selling, and stimulating.

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SECONDS: *Why was William Blake important to you?*

SANDERS: Two directions. When I was very young I purchased the Modern Library edition of all the poems of William Blake and started reading it, and I learned that Allen Ginsburg had a vision in a room in Harlem, around 1948, of William Blake chanting “Ah, sunflower, weary of time.” I picked up on Blake through Ginsburg and through just having bought this book and realizing how easy it was to write tunes. I also read what Blake sang. That, in a nutshell, is it. I realized he wrote “How Sweet I Roamed” when he was thirteen. I was still a teen, and it was important to realize you could start writing interesting poetry when you were very young. It gave a beacon of hope to me.

SECONDS: *How was he important to the history of poetry?*

SANDERS: He was an example of what I really didn't want to happen to me personally, although America isn't the same sort of police state that existed around the time of the French Revolution. Blake was a victim of the English police state. The power structure in England was so freaked out by the excesses of the French Revolution that they overreacted, so that any discussion of some of its better aspects was forbidden. Blake got caught up in that reaction against the French Revolution to the point where he internalized himself and began to focus inwardly. Some people say for the better, but I think it would have been more healthy for him to be able to have been more public with his radicalism and more vociferous in his public posture, as Allen Ginsburg was. So Blake was important. He was the loner-genius-self-involved-kook poet. I often think about going what I call “the Blake route,”

where you make your stuff full-color, you just print your own poetry and don't worry really about selling it. Some of these little books that William Blake made, that now sell for a million dollars, he couldn't give away in his own time. He was a great genius caught in the mire of poverty and political pressure.

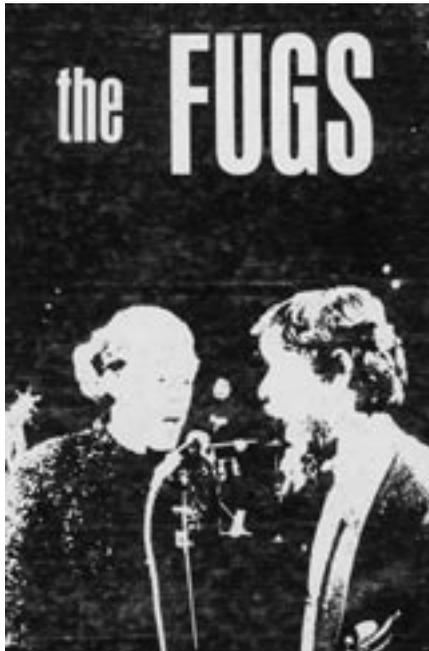
SECONDS: *Since Blake's time, could you give a brief history of the path poetry took and what influence Blake had on it?*

SANDERS: Blake was fascinated with rhyme in his lyrics. He had remarkable lyrics. When you really examine them they break up into interesting metrical patters. Blake's choice of meters was brilliant and his way with unusual combinations of words made him a world-class bard. He's probably not a great influence now. He's just one of these guys that just exists. You couldn't really make a career on modeling

your life or your metrics or your art on Blake, but he is a pylon in the evolution of poetry that everybody can look up to. He's an empowering person and he showed that you can do it yourself. You don't need a lot of other people to create a great corpus of printed work. He was a printer, engraver and belonged to various out-there discussion groups. He's an example. I can't, in a nutshell, take his poetry forward to the modern poetry that's being written now. It's a much different ballgame now. It's a hundred-and-fifty years later. We have other influences. Our poetry is washed in the blood of this century.

SECONDS: *Was there one movement or style in poetry which, between Blake's time and the time you started working, brought things into the modern focus?*

SANDERS: No. In America, I think most young poets are first turned on by Edgar



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Allen Poe. Poe, of course, had an influence on Baudelaire and the French Symbolists, but also has lurked in the textbooks. They initially tried to dismiss him. Marrying his cousin, being a junkie and a waste who died in the gutter. But the poetry remains, and the short stories. The poetry has always had an energizing effect on young poets. It was on me personally. I know it was on Allen Ginsburg and way long ago on Charles Baudelaire and generation after generation. I think a more direct impact on American poetry has been Poe and then more recently the Beats and the Black Mountain Poets and the Nature Poets. For women there's people like Marge Piercy, Adrienne Rich, Anne Waldman and Dianne DiPrima. Now everything is allowed. You can write rhymes, you can write closed-field, open-field, you can write epics, you can write haiku, you can write epigrams, satires, short-story poems, long-story poems, poems without punctuation, poems in all caps, poetry without any capitalization whatsoever and still wind up in the fancy anthologies. It's a very free time for poetry. The liberation of poetry began in Russia with Pushkin and in England with Blake, with Byron, with Shelley and in America with Poe, Whitman, Emerson, John Greenleaf Whittier, the poets that were against the American slavery movement, then the Russian Symbolists, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, picking up with Hart Crane and Vachel Lindsey and Edna St. Vincent Millay, moving on through William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, T.S. Elliot, Wallace Stevens, and Emily Dickinson. So we have a real varied tradition that we can grow on and groove on and sing on in America. It's an amazing time for poetry. It may not have many readers but there's a gigantic network of poetry out there.

SECONDS: *This diversity of styles — will it consolidate into one thing where different elements are fused into a formal whole?*

SANDERS: Maybe. Academia tends to stultify. Right now the academic situation is pretty fluid. There's many different schools. There's not so much uniformity and it's not as tepid as it has been in the past so that diversity is recognized. This whole thing about multi-culturalism and diversity is vital and I don't think it will go away. I think the freedom allowed poetry will continue at least through this generation. Who knows? Maybe

there won't be any poetry — maybe it'll all be mental telepathy. You'll download something into your brain.

SECONDS: *Is Rock music the repository of the poetic impulse? If you look at song lyrics and at poetry, you have a very similar thing.*

SANDERS: The problem with lyrics is the writing can be conservative in the sense that many musicians try to rhyme. The English language is not a rhyme language. It's very difficult to rhyme well in American. I'm talking about the American language as its evolved. When you start doing "moon," "June," "spoon," and "croon," you limit your ability to describe reality. That's one of the problems with Rock lyrics but there are many exceptions like Dylan and the Beatles. I'd guess the impulse to freedom and the poetic impulse is preserved in Rock and Pop.

SECONDS: *The poets of yesterday had equivalent social positions to Rock Stars. Is it the music or is it that troubadour tradition?*

SANDERS: Well, there's a couple of traditions. Occasionally, a poet does assume an important role in civilization. I mentioned Pushkin, who was so controversial that the Czar himself would read his poetry and ban certain sections. Byron was enormously famous in his time and extremely controversial. It is true that some poets become very well-known. Then there's that declassé aspect of being a poet, in that you gotta have one foot in the gutter and one foot in the grail. A poet tends to be inquisitive, a little more intelligent, a little more grasping and investigating. On the other hand, poets can be alcoholics, drug abusers. They tend to be a little out there. Their deportment does not always satisfy the middle class. An example is Robert Burns. At one point he was the darling of the Edinburgh Society, but later on after he'd done a couple of weird things at parties, he was snubbed. A great poet dissed by the Scottish mercantile types.

SECONDS: *Could I ask you to elaborate on the relationship between music and poetry?*

SANDERS: Poetry in its most ancient form probably, at least in part, grew out of music. It grows out of joy and remorse and lamentation. It grows out of the urge to tell stories. In its oldest form, music is stored in some different parts of the brain besides pure language. It's a very mnemonic way of storing information. People that are brain-damaged can also sing songs while they can't

“My magic is that I don’t give a fuck.”

talk. People tend, for some reason I can’t really understand, to like to hear vowels sung rather than spoken. Poetry has a strong affinity for music but it does not have to be done in musical form. Some of the world’s greatest poetry has nothing to do with music. In fact, it would probably sound inappropriate set to music.

SECONDS: *The discussion of putting poetry to music brings us up to The Fugs. The Fugs brought Blake’s poetry to music.*

SANDERS: Yeah, but it was a joke. Those Blake things were just one-takes. We rehearsed a couple times in my book store and then we went up to a couple of these recording studios. We just spewed it down.

SECONDS: *Did you feel you were turning people on?*

SANDERS: I didn’t even mean to do “How Sweet I Roamed.” It was simple to play and we just started performing it. Blake had this weird haunting harmony to it that had kind of a modal haunted castle quality to it. People liked it. It was just something I had in my brain.

SECONDS: *You also brought to life the poetry of Charles Olson.*

SANDERS: Yeah, we did a section from *Maximus From Dogtown*. We should have done more. We did some of his poetry. He was a friend.

SECONDS: *You worked with Ginsburg on Tenderness Junction.*

SANDERS: We did “Hare Krishna,” and Corso played on that session. We used to perform a lot with Ginsburg in the 60s. Ginsburg and the Fugs conducted an exorcism over the grave of Senator Joseph McCarthy in Appleton, Wisconsin, on February 20, 1968. We also did a satire called “I Saw The Best Minds of My Generation Rot,” which I stuck on this release of the first album that Fantasy Records is putting out.

SECONDS: *Because of working with poetry as well as with Rock idioms, it seems to me that you guys were the bridge between the Beats and the Hippies. Why didn’t we see other bands like The Fugs?*

SANDERS: I don’t know. Usually people

are very good in one art form. We happened to be poets and we learned things from the Happening Movement and we studied the Dadaists and the Surrealists and we went to avant-garde plays. We knew that you could

have an act, you could go on stage as poets and make a lot a noise and jump around and scream and it was not quite being done at that point in time. Now it would be real old hat but there was no one doing it at the time. We were part of the ferment of the time. We were instantly accepted for what we were, which was avant garde. We were out there. We were looking to have parties and meet beautiful girls and smoke a little pot and drink too much. Partying was very important at the time.

SECONDS: *At the time The Fugs came together,*

could you describe the music scene?

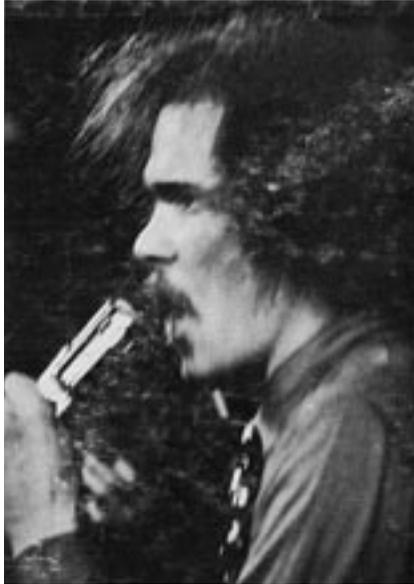
SANDERS: ‘64 was “Leader Of The Pack” by The Shangra-Las, “I Wanna Hold Your Hand” by The Beatles. “Mustang Sally” — that was in all the jukeboxes that summer. The Beatles were happening and the Jazz Poetry was over. We used to go to happenings. Claus Oldenburg had his storefront over on the Lower East Side early in the 60s. I became friends with Phil Ochs. I knew a bit of what was going on. I knew Steve Weber and Peter Stampfel, who had this band the Holy Modal Rounders. I got them to play at the opening of my bookstore in February 1965. Andy Warhol made banners. It was quite a big opening. James Michener was there, William Burroughs was there. It was a groovy party.

SECONDS: *What was the drug scene like in those days?*

SANDERS: The usual. There was a lot of speed — amphetamines, dexadrine. There was a lot of pot and peyote. There wasn’t any acid yet — well, there was a little bit.

SECONDS: *A lot of people think of pre-Hippie as pre-drugs.*

SANDERS: No, I don’t think so. There was a lot of drugs around. Kids were experimenting, but not at the same level as now. It was just as illegal then as it is now and you really went to jail for a long time.



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There was secrecy. Nobody would brag about it. Later on, everybody bragged about it and smoked in the open and stuff. It was similar to now, where everybody's afraid of getting arrested.

SECONDS: *What about the political climate of the time? Vietnam was just starting to happen.*

SANDERS: Yeah, but there was no homelessness. Rents, at least in New York City, were affordable. It seemed to easier to survive. It wasn't such a rat race. There was the tide of expectations created by the Kennedy era still in place. Johnson, although a bit of a warmonger, did try to alleviate some of the suffering with his Great Society programs and War On Poverty. Basically, the civil rights movement, the Ban The Bomb movement — they didn't have that many people in them but they were morally in the vanguard. People believed that there might be some permanent change, that the country might become a social democracy. There'd be no homeless, and there was an expectation the economy would be adjusted so everybody could partake in the largess of America. There was a lot of freedom out there guaranteed by the US Constitution that was not being used and people were determined to use it. That's the good side of it. There were bad things too.

SECONDS: *What sort of hassles did you get from the cops as Fugs?*

SANDERS: It was always a climate of difficulty. In New York City, particularly, there was a thing called a cabaret license. You weren't allowed to do poetry in a coffee shop because it was a violation of the law at the time. Representatives from the district attorney's office would come to our shows and we had to make a choice to just do the regular show and if we got arrested let it happen. That's what we decided to do — not change anything. Lenny Bruce had just been prosecuted the previous year. We had gone to Lenny's trial and realized they could really stack the deck against somebody if they really wanted to get you. We played Tompkins Square Park and there was a phony bomb scare. They insisted on coming backstage and looking in everybody's pouch for bombs but they were probably looking for pot. That was a typical problem, having bomb scares, and I personally had threats. We were always almost getting arrested.

SECONDS: *Did the cops plant drugs on you?*

SANDERS: No, we had real strict rules about pot. I was one of the organizers of the Committee To Legalize Marijuana at the time. They tried to set up Allen Ginsburg in '65, and Neil Cassady had done time. There was a lot of people we knew that were set up so we made sure to run a real tight ship on the road. The Fugs were always in trouble. We'd play auditoriums and they would tell us to never come back. We had to have a civil liberties lawyer on retainer. They had raided my bookstore. We were under siege.

SECONDS: *Do cops have unlimited power?*

SANDERS: No, they don't. We used the American Civil Liberties Union. We had friends who were big-time lawyers. We reached out to get help. We would have fought them. There was an investigation of The Fugs by the Post Office and the FBI early in 1966. I got the documents under the Freedom Of Information Act and the FBI said we were anarchist Beatnik types and what we were doing was protected under the Constitution. If I'd know that at the time I would have put that on the records: "Ruled not obscene by the FBI."

SECONDS: *So it was an unending case of looking over your shoulder.*

SANDERS: We felt prepared for it. We were young, we had a lot of energy. We were a fairly famous group for an underground band. I was on the cover of *Life* magazine. We did a bunch of television specials. We were on *The David Susskind Show* a couple of times, on the cover of *Look* magazine. We got gigantic amounts of ink so we thought we could protect ourselves through our fame. The Constitution is a wild document and it does offer protection for unusual behavior. Plato's thing, "Who will guard the guardians?" is still very appropriate. It's a big question that's been going on for over three thousand years.

SECONDS: *What about hassles within the music industry? You were on a couple of big labels.*

SANDERS: We were on Atlantic. They didn't like the album we cut so they threw us off the label. They listened to it and they threw us off the label soon after we produced the record. We worked very hard on it and used some of Otis Redding's musicians. We recorded at Atlantic's studio and they told us to do whatever we wanted, and the

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wilder the better. We did a bunch of wild tunes, a couple of which I stuck on the new re-issues on Fantasy Records. It turned out the reason Atlantic tossed us off was because they were negotiating to sell their label to Warner Bros. and they were afraid we would reduce the sale price. We started negotiating with Reprise and that was the very label that was buying the label that had just tossed us off. We were happy to be on Reprise and I must say that in the four records we did for Reprise, Mo Ostin, the head of Reprise, never censored

us. He let us do whatever we wanted and I will always be grateful to Mo for being that liberal. They had to play our first record for Frank Sinatra to get his approval. According to Mo he said, “I hope you know what you’re doing.” We were approved by the FBI and Frank Sinatra. That’s big-time approval.

SECONDS: Tell us about those four Reprise records.

SANDERS: The first was *Tenderness Junction*, which came out in either late ‘67 or early ‘68. Then in the fall of ‘68, we came out with this big production job, our twenty-five-thousand-dollar record.

SECONDS: Was that *It Crawled Into My Hand, Honest?*

SANDERS: Yeah. We recorded three or four times the amount we used. I wish I had those outtakes. I hired whole orchestras. Those tapes have all disappeared. In early ‘69 we recorded our final studio album, *The Bell Of Avenue A*. A few months later we released *Golden Filth: Live At The Fillmore East*, which we recorded on June 1st of 1968, just before Robert Kennedy got assassinated. Those were our four records for Reprise, ‘67 to ‘69. Then we broke up in the summer of ‘69. We were a little scorched. I felt like I was living inside of a Samuel Beckett novel by that time. I was running a bookstore, I was running a Rock & Roll band, I was involved

with the Yippies and anti-war protests. We did the exorcism of the Pentagon, then we did an exorcism at Senator Joseph McCarthy’s grave. We were always out there. I turned over my bookstore to the community to open up a community center. There was



a lot of things I was trying to do at the same time. I was crawling around. I was on this permanent crawl across America. So I decided I just wanted to be a Beatnik and I gave it up. If I had kept it together another year we would have made a

lot of money but I was just burned out. So I rested three or four months and began investigating the Manson family. I shifted linguals from Rocker to reporter.

SECONDS: What do you think was *The Fugs’ biggest achievement?*

SANDERS: At the time, I didn’t think we had any achievements. I thought it’d go away. I thought no one’d ever have any interest in it.

SECONDS: Do you find people do have an interest?

SANDERS: I knew something was weird when I went out to cover the Manson case and everybody treated me like a Rock Star instead of a reporter. I could go out to lunch with Sal Mineo. I was treated like a Rock & Roll legend. I have to sign autographs for the rest of my life based on that little four-year period.

SECONDS: How do you feel about that?

SANDERS: I accept it. I’m glad we had an effect on people that seemed to be positive. By the time *The Fugs* had broken up, I was not a *Fugs* fan. At that time, I thought it was a waste of time and I wished I’d never done it and maybe I should have worked on my poetry. When these things break up, you’re glad to be free of it. I negotiated my own contract with Reprise and I did a couple of solo records with them. I was thinking I was hot stuff and I was probably a little too

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arrogant, a little too smitten with myself.

SECONDS: *Did you like your album*

Sanders Truckstop?

SANDERS: No. I haven't listened to it since it came out.

SECONDS: *Will it ever see the light of day on CD?*

SANDERS: I hope not.

SECONDS: *After those records you wrote*



The Family —

SANDERS: *The Family* came out in '72 and I was totally scorched because I'd been going non-stop around the clock since 1962. I did ten straight years of wildness so I decided to go back to poetry. I was never going to sing again. I hated my voice. I didn't want anything to do with music. It was boring. It was ghastly. I was just going to write some short stories. I began *Tales Of Beatnik Glory* in the despair of hating what I'd done. So I wrote *20,000 A.D* and then wrote a little book called *Egyptian Hieroglyphics*. Then I began writing poetry again seriously.

SECONDS: *How did you get involved with writing The Family?*

SANDERS: I had a bookstore, the Peace Eye Bookstore, for four years and I realized that I was probably going to run a bookstore the rest of my life. I probably should have sold the store but instead one day I just gave away all the books and closed it. I got an assignment from *Esquire* magazine and a book contract with E.P. Dutton. My wife and I and my young daughter flew out to LA and basically stayed there six, seven months while I worked day and night on this thing. I thought maybe the Manson Family might be innocent, but people were dying still so I realized quickly that they were a group of murderers.

SECONDS: *Did you ever meet Manson?*

SANDERS: Once. I've corresponded with him.

SECONDS: *When you met him was that prior to his being arrested?*

SANDERS: No, it was a very brief encounter. I guess he was on acid. The way I got information from him during the trial was by sending him notes through his attorney, and I would get answers to questions I asked. He was in Los Angeles County Jail.

SECONDS: *There were some rumors that Bugliosi had leaked information to reporters. Did that affect you?*

SANDERS: He never leaked any to me. I had my ways of getting information. Los Angeles is a data sponge. It's easy to get information.

SECONDS: *Why is that?*

SANDERS: People who work for the government like to help you, so I was able to get a lot of information by developing sources within the government. But not the police and certainly not the prosecutor. Bugliosi was a pretty straight arrow.

SECONDS: *What did you think of him?*

SANDERS: I think he ran a really good prosecution. He and I have been friendly. He just called a couple weeks ago. He's doing a gigantic update of his book *Helter Skelter*. He's gone on to write very successful television movies and he's doing a book on Oswald, I think, where he's attempting to show that Oswald is the lone and sole assassin of JFK — a view I really don't subscribe to. He and I are friends. He's a decent guy and a very good writer.

SECONDS: *You don't feel like he cashed in on the whole tragedy?*

SANDERS: He used my format and for his update he's using my update format. He tells you about it. He's saying, "Look, I'm taking your format, you can't copyright a format." We get along nicely. He's like a Liberal Democrat, you understand? I think he's for the death penalty but he's like a California Democrat. He's not a right-wing nut. Maybe he's a little more conservative than I am but he views himself as a Robert Kennedy-type Liberal Democrat. I did develop friends in the police department over the years. There are policeman that I've met during those investigations that I wouldn't call close friends but there are people I respect, and I realize that you can be a policeman and it's a tough gig. There are some cops who

**“We were approved by the FBI and Frank Sinatra.
That’s big-time approval.”**

are liberals, even radicals in their own way. They’re just stuck in everybody’s abuse and bad news. I’ve met cops that stay in touch with me and once in a while I talk to them on the phone. Recently one of the cops had his little granddaughter write me a letter asking me to sign a copy of *The Family*.

SECONDS: *Speaking of the amalgamation of individuals who were known as the Manson Family, what was your association with them?*

SANDERS: At one point it was fairly close. I wrote for the *Los Angeles Free Times*, which was an underground newspaper at the time and I was, as I said before, a Rock & Roll Star. At first they tried to suck me into this scam and then they realized I was going to be more standoffish, that I was really trying to find out what went on. They were friendly for a while.

SECONDS: *When did the friendliness cease?*

SANDERS: I wrote the truth. I wrote in the newspaper that Manson was a racist and they really got bent out of shape by that. When the book came out of course they weren’t too pleased by my analysis of him.

SECONDS: *So they invited you up to the ranch or something?*

SANDERS: I went and camped out in Death Valley with them. We rode around Hollywood, which I liked. I hung out with them at the trial. I went out to the Spahn Ranch twenty, thirty times before it burned.

SECONDS: *That group of people purport they have their own magic that gets them through life. It seems like a lot of people who have come into opposition with them — well, I know one of their lawyers was killed —*

SANDERS: You mean Ron Hughes? Ron Hughes, quite clearly drowned in a flash flood. There were Manson family members near Hughes at the time of the flood. I went up there the next day because I was supposed to go camping with him that weekend.

SECONDS: *So you would have been there too, huh?*

SANDERS: Yeah, but I was out with Phil Ochs and I missed Ron’s invitation. Anyway, I tracked his activities carefully. I think it was clear that there was some Manson family people there. They might have pushed him into the creek but who knows?

SECONDS: *Did you ever feel fearful for your*

own life?

SANDERS: Yes, at one point. Did you ever get a rotting cow tongue in the mail, man? Did you ever get a picture of yourself all cut up with X’s on the forehead? I used to get a lot of weird mail and I’ve gotten very hostile letters from Manson. He thinks I’m a CIA agent.

SECONDS: *You have your own magic.*

SANDERS: My magic is that I don’t give a fuck. I have a lot of friends in the police. I can have a police officer at my house in a minute. I am one of the Town Fathers here.

SECONDS: *Did you have any other problems with associates of Manson?*

SANDERS: I had a lot of problems. Some of which I don’t want to go into but they’re still going on. I am going to be vindicated on this book because there’s some stuff that’s going to come out very soon. I may ultimately have to do a third version of my book that really tells it like it was, and they can all go to hell. There’s a lot of weird things about that case that are still going on. It’s not over yet. I just got a call yesterday from investigators about this — there are serious people who look into this stuff.

SECONDS: *Would you have been better off not to do that book?*

SANDERS: No, sometimes I regret doing it, sometimes I don’t regret doing it. I did it, I’ll stand by it, it has a lot of information about the counterculture and I guess I wrote it in a way that stunned people. I probably wouldn’t write about the murders quite so vividly now.

SECONDS: *There are claims from the Manson Family that you sensationalized and fabricated a lot of stuff in the book*

SANDERS: I didn’t fabricate anything. I wrote what they did in a vivid way. I described their lifestyle totally based on interviews and eyewitnesses. They still don’t like to admit their connections with certain cults. It will be shown totally without a doubt that I was accurate on those connections.

SECONDS: *What do you think of the Manson mythology?*

SANDERS: I saw somebody at the Mobile station in Woodstock the other day wearing a Manson shirt. “Charlie Don’t Surf” or something.

SECONDS: *What do you think of his rise to a cultural icon?*

SANDERS: You’ve heard of performance poetry? He’s like a performance killer. The

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Geraldos show up or Barbara Walters or Diane Sawyer shows up and he knows he's got his fifteen minutes to show his swastika on his forehead and dance around. He's a performance artist for Satan. It's very American. Only in America. Otherwise, he'd be dead. They would have cast that sucker a long time ago. They overturned the death penalty, otherwise he would have sucked the peach vapors a long time ago.

SECONDS: *What impact did The Family have on your career?*

SANDERS: I probably shouldn't have done it. I shouldn't have done The Fugs, I should have stuck with poetry and become a professor. I'd have my own office and I'd turn on my computer

and read the New York Times for a couple of hours, check my E-mail, then go out to lunch with some cute grad students and then play raquetball with the head of the college to butter up my career and then go home. I'd have a nice cushy pension and I could go to ABA conventions and write poetry papers on Beatnik poets. It's quite a difference from what I do. I'm a totally self-employed loner, William Blake-oriented guy here. I don't really work. I haven't had a job since 1965. I'm a self-employed American. I could wind up in a homeless shelter. I should've saved all the money. Instead I drank it up. The first version of *The Family* sold a million copies.

SECONDS: *You must be doing well off that.*

SANDERS: I'm not doing that well. I make a modest enough living. I'm like a Democratic Socialist. I view myself as a worker and I just want to make enough to travel a little bit, buy books, get high every once in a while, have a good time and work for a better world.

SECONDS: *You also worked on a book about The Eagles which never came to be. Yet I understand you put a lot of work and time into it.*

SANDERS: I put a couple years into it. I got paid very, very well. They broke up and there was this stuff on there about some various

—well —

SECONDS: *Sex-and-drugs type stuff?*

SANDERS: Yeah. Right around the time I finished the book, Don Henley got arrested for being with a fifteen-year-old. Glenn Frey got zapped for coke abuse. Belushi died somewhere in there and I had "John Belushi's soldering iron opium-smoking techniques" in the book.

SECONDS: *Do you still have the manuscript?*

SANDERS: I can see it from here on the shelf. It's four volumes.

SECONDS: *Will we ever see it?*

SANDERS: I haven't really paid attention to it in a long time. It's a good book. It's an exhaustive account. It's called *This American Band*

— *The Story Of The Eagles.*

SECONDS: *Next you wrote Tales Of Beatnik Glory. After coming out with a book like The Family that's so mass-market, why didn't anybody say, "This guy wrote The Family — why can't we put this out in the supermarkets saying, 'by the author of The Family'?"*

SANDERS: It's a different take. It's not everybody's cup of tea. Most people don't know who Beatniks are. Beatniks are Maynard G. Krebs. A Beatnik is some sleazebag. It's a limited audience. It talks about life widely — about behavior that's not acceptable to people who live in the suburbs. Every time there was a mass murder people would call me up to try and get me to write a book about it. I was invited to go down to Jonestown to write a book. I was invited to write books on any number of murders. I didn't want to go down and smell those rotting bodies in the jungle. I did my spell in mass murders.

SECONDS: *Tell us about Thirsting For Peace In A Raging Century.*

SANDERS: That came out in '88. That won an American Book Award. That has a mix of my long poems and my wild erotic poems — my whole career up till '86. Black Sparrow Press published *Hymn To The Rebel Cafe,*



**“I’m going to focus on poetry
and go out in a blaze of leaflets.”**

which is all the poems since *Thirsting For Peace In A Raging Century*. They’ll print my verse biography of Anton Chekov.

SECONDS: *What have you been doing lately?*

SANDERS: I’m a fairly well-known American poet. I won a Guggenheim Fellowship in poetry in ‘83. I won a National Endowment For The Arts fellowship in ‘87, an American Book Award in ‘88, and I keep winning little scholarships. I wrote a book on investigative poetry so I do a lot of lectures out there on the college circuit on investigative techniques, on journalism, on music, on poetry — so I travel a lot.

SECONDS: *Are you the successor to Allen Ginsburg’s throne?*

SANDERS: I doubt that. I don’t think anyone’s ever going to succeed Allen. He’s

a great Whitman-level, Poe-level American genius. I don’t ever pretend to try and fill his shoes. I’m a self-employed American bard but I’m very cynical and I realize that I might

end up reading poetry in the homeless shelter. I intend to go out in a blaze. I’m still unhappy with the economic system the country has evolved into. It’s still too cruel and still too harsh on people that are weak. God forbid if I got really sick I’d be up a creek. If I couldn’t go out there and do my lectures and my poetry readings I’d be worse than up the creek. I’d be swimming in

a slew with nothing. I do okay. I’m going to focus on poetry and go out in a blaze of leaflets. ●●●

