



Allen Ginsberg and Catherine Ingram, British Columbia, 1984

IN THE DEEP WITH CATHERINE INGRAM

## Jack Kerouac's Secret Tome

The Beat Generation of the 1950s, arguably the original American hipsters, erupted into a post-war era primed for freedom of every kind—explorations in Zen, psychedelics, sexuality, jazz, wanderlust and new forms of literature.

The Beat writers, in bravely recording their newfound freedom, had to fight for the right to cut loose, winning several obscenity trials, such as the censures of Allen Ginsberg's epic poem "Howl" and William Burroughs's novel *Naked Lunch*. These works and many others like them would subsequently be found on the bookshelves of nearly every hippie commune and literary bookstore in the English-speaking world. The most famous and influential work of the Beat literature was *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, a novel that inspired young seekers then and ever since to use any journey as an inner journey and let the road itself dictate the travel plan. *On the Road* would go on to influence the work of Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, David Bowie, Hunter S. Thompson, Jim Morrison and many others in the decades before and after Kerouac's death in 1969. (In 2007, Russell Brand

made a documentary journey for the BBC entitled *On the Road*, in which Brand traversed the American back roads coast to coast in his homage to Kerouac).

I had a peripheral connection to the Beats and knew several of them, including Allen Ginsberg. In 1984, I invited Ginsberg to give a writing retreat at a small island centre in British Columbia at which I was the program director. Although by then Ginsberg had won the National Book Award and was considered one of America's poet laureates, only five people enrolled for the week-long retreat. Consequently, each of us had many hours of personal tutorials with Ginsberg, and this is how I came to know of a then-obscure work of Jack Kerouac's called "List of Essentials: Belief and Technique for Modern Prose." The List was ostensibly an offering by Kerouac to help budding writers, and, as a young writer keen to hone my skill, I felt that I had stumbled upon a secret tome. On reading the List I recognised that these were dictates not only for literary prowess but for what it might mean to "be in love with your life." Maybe those two talents are one and the same.

## Jack Kerouac's List of Essentials Belief and Technique for Modern Prose

Note to reader: the list below is presented in Kerouac's original grammatical format.

1. Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy
2. Submissive to everything, open, listening
3. Try never get drunk outside yr own house
4. Be in love with yr life
5. Something that you feel will find its own form
6. Be crazy dumb saint of the mind
7. Blow as deep as you want to blow
8. Write what you want bottomless from bottom of the mind
9. The unspeakable visions of the individual
10. No time for poetry but exactly what is
11. Visionary tics shivering in the chest
12. In tranced fixation dreaming upon object before you
13. Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition
14. Like Proust be an old teahead of time
15. Telling the true story of the world in interior monolog
16. The jewel center of interest is the eye within the eye
17. Write in recollection and amazement for yourself
18. Work from pithy middle eye out, swimming in language sea
19. Accept loss forever
20. Believe in the holy contour of life
21. Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists intact in mind
22. Don't think of words when you stop but to see picture better
23. Keep track of every day the date emblazoned in yr morning
24. No fear or shame in the dignity of yr experience, language & knowledge
25. Write for the world to read and see yr exact pictures of it
26. Bookmovie is the movie in words, the visual American form
27. In praise of Character in the Bleak inhuman Loneliness
28. Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better
29. You're a Genius all the time
30. Writer-Director of Earthly movies Sponsored & Angeled in Heaven

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