

## Bio

At the age of 21, certain that I wanted to become a poet, I went to Europe on a solitary journey—not self-consciously in search of myself or of experience, but as a way to put myself in the moment and remove myself from the cultural context in which I had been raised, and against which I had been fighting for three years. With a little money, inherited from my paternal grandfather, I flew to London and bought a motorcycle and crossed the channel by boat arriving in Oostende, Belgium (since France was closed because of the May 1968 upheaval by students protesting in Paris, who were joined by the entire French labour movement—effectively shutting the country down for a few days).

I had no agenda for my journey, no plans, no proscribed destination but there was a family friend in Vence, near Nice, and it was on my mind to stop there and say hello. The idea of going to Vence then influenced the route I took, heading south through Europe. From Geneva I followed what was called The Route Napoleon through the mountains to the south of France. I should mention that while I was in Geneva, there because the French borders were closed because of the student revolution, Robert Kennedy was killed in Los Angeles and with his death the last politician I had any respect for was gone. Martin Luther King had been killed earlier in the spring and then Robert Kennedy. I was devastated by his death and sat in chair for a day hardly able to move. It was unusual for me to invest hope for the future in the words of a politician but Kennedy had elicited my

trust, more so than his brother John, and when he was shot it seemed like there was no possibility of change or a social upheaval in America, no shift in values, no respect for differences inherent in people. The bigots and the racists and the defenders of the status quo continued to assert themselves on the culture and continued to win. It was a suffocating intellectual environment for someone like myself, and where went America at that time, Canada would surely follow. In terms of narrow-mindedness, and repression of arts and ideas, though, Canada was well ahead of America at that time. I managed to get focused and get up and get out of Geneva after making a few dumb jokes about various conventions and striking out with a gorgeous American woman who was working there for the summer. The ride south was spectacular, one of the most dramatic and physically beautiful routes I have ever travelled and in my ignorance I didn't quite comprehend the distance I had set out to cover in a day. It was over five hundred miles of climbing mountains and descending the switch back turns and racing through valleys only to come to more mountains. The mountains never ended until I reached the sea. I didn't know that going in and each time another rose before me after thinking I was in the clear my heart sank as was the light of day sinking and I was in the middle of no where between towns like Gap and Sisteron. Around 7:00 p.m. I reached Vence and riding down the road to the central square I saw the daughter of my family doctor who had asked me to visit her and say hello. She had left Toronto to live with her mother in France and was about 17 at the time finishing her high school education. It was pure coincidence to see her like that on the road and we talked and she told me her mother was away and she was staying with friends and why didn't I return and stay with them when her mother was back in town. That sounded like a good idea and we said goodbye and I continued on my way to Nice.

During the next few weeks I was in Rome, Florence, Pisa, Genoa. In Rome and Florence I saw art and architecture I did not really understand but appreciated some of it. I was more interested in being out on the streets and looking at people than being in churches and museums. One piece I had to see, though, was Michelangelo's Moses. There had been a framed photograph of the Moses in our cottage as long as I had been going there. It was a gift to my uncle from a friend of his when my uncle graduated from high school. My uncle, who left Toronto and ended up in Paris where he studied medicine and then psychoanalysis, landing eventually in New York to practice as a psychoanalyst, along with his wife, my aunt who he married in France, were the only people in my family with whom I felt comfortable and who seemed to understand and be sympathetic to the vague path I had laid out for myself in life. I spent a great deal of time with them through my teenage years talking and absorbing their cultured way of life. They were intellectuals and they were sensitive and caring people. For that reason I had to track down the Moses and see it and it was a revelation. Carved flawlessly from one piece of stone. How could someone do that? How could someone even conceive of that? I didn't know anything about art but I knew what I liked. In time I rode back to Venice and Gloria had returned to the villa she shared with her boyfriend Eddy and Nonni, the daughter I had seen on the road.

Gloria was a dynamic, beautiful, red headed woman. She was the first of my parent's friends to just get up and walk out of the comfortable bourgeoisie life she was living with her husband, the doctor, and her three kids, in Forest Hill Village, an affluent, tree lined neighbourhood in the middle of Toronto. She had been acting in theatre and on TV and wanted to train and pursue a career as an opera singer. Where better to study than Rome.

One day she just left her family and her possessions and the city where she was born and headed to Rome. It had been five years since I saw her and when I arrived at the villa she welcomed me warmly and invited me to stay. Eddie was an artist, of Irish Brazilian decent. The villa was not large but it had a beautiful garden and Eddy had created a studio in the garage by removing some of the clay roof tiles and replacing them with glass. I felt at home with them and was reminded of how I felt with my aunt and uncle in New York. Gloria knew everyone and everyone knew her and through her I got to know some of the artists who were working in the region at that time. It was my first exposure to artists as people and I had dinner and drinks and talks with many of them during the ten days I was there. Everyone had a working schedule, a regime, as they called it that was roughly like this: wake early have breakfast and work until around 11:30 then head to the café Regence for a before lunch aperitif and talk with friends then lunch at home and a siesta and then work until 5:00 and return to the café for drinks and talk with friends before having dinner with some friends and most likely after dinner returning to the café to socialize further. It seemed like a perfect way of life and I got into a routine of writing for part of the day when I wasn't out exploring the region on my motorcycle. Gloria and Eddie introduced me as a poet from Canada and that's what I was and there were times during the stay when I read new work aloud to people at the café. It was the first time in my life when I felt at home and alive and I wanted that to be my life forever. The people I met were from France, Canada, Poland, Australia, Belgium, Britain, Ireland, Sweden, Hungary and in this galaxy they were all forces, individual planets, spinning around the arts. The arts were the centre of the world there in southern France and there were some beautiful galleries and museums and artists like Man Ray, Chagall, Picasso,

living in the region. I was very happy working as poet. It had been a few years since I started writing and had edited a literary magazine at U of T and had published some pieces so felt legitimate and in my milieu. There was nothing else I wanted but there was the question of money and it was running out and I had to live and poetry at that time was not going to suddenly support me so I headed back to London to sell the motorcycle and wait for my girlfriend from Toronto with whom I had planned to meet up in early August.

In London I lived in a small room in Hampstead. The room was about seven feet wide by ten feet long and was on the top floor of an old residential hotel. The bathroom was down the hall and the wall separating me and my neighbour was paper thin and she had a boyfriend, an older man, who visited frequently to watch TV and have sex and there was not a sound that emanated from that room that I didn't hear. I had a friend with a typewriter who lived a few blocks away and during the day I would go to her place and write, using the typewriter while she was at work. We became good friends. London was not the south of France.

When my girlfriend I arrived we did return to Vence and she loved the region as much as I and we stayed with a sculptor I had befriended through Gloria. The region was physically beautiful and the nuances of that beauty, the arid soil, the shape of the trees and the plants, the rolling hills, the rocks and the sky as well as the nature of the architecture, the stucco house with tile roofs, and the age of the buildings in the towns, were all appealing and made it seem like the most beautiful place in the world. It was

essential too that if you were going to be an artist you should be in a beautiful place. Not having a great deal of money was inconsequential in a place of such beauty. What was missing from life that money could buy?

In time I finished school and worked as labourer building swimming pools and my girlfriend who I married worked as an editor and we saved some money and moved to France and were able to stretch the time out from one year to two and our son was born in Cagnes-sur-Mère around the corner from the house Renoir once lived in. I worked with a sculptor, Robert Rousil, on a large project for a few months and learned a great from him about process and patience and thinking in the long term, also about creativity and about living life as a full participant. When the project ended we were living in Tourrettes-sur-Loup a small village about six kilometers from Vence in a building that had once been a donkey barn and was renovated into a two story two and a half room house on the rampart of the village over looking the descending hills of the Alpes Maritimes with a clear view all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. I wrote a novel and a collection of poetry and lived the bohemian life I had sought. Then the money ran out and there was no way to make money in France and we had to return to Toronto. After working as a pool builder again for a season I took a part time job teaching art at a private school in the neighbourhood.

Being with artists and writing had given me the ability to articulate processes and techniques that were often complex. While teaching in the studio I began to try things

that I had avoided for years and slowly developed an idea of what it was I wanted to make becoming a visual artist while continuing to write.

Five Toronto Photographers, Idee Gallery, Toronto and  
Spaces, Cleveland, Ohio 1979

Paintings and Polaroids, Idee Gallery, Toronto 1981

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Zeifman Nudes, Lipman Contemporary, Toronto Ontario, May 2006

Newfoundland, Cheymore Gallery, Tuxedo New York, November 2011-January 2012

New Work, Painting and Assemblage, Zen and Now, Living Colour 1 and Living Colour,  
2, 2010,11, 12, 13, 14, Two Whales Coffee Shop, Port Rexton, NL

Inaugural Show Two Rooms Contemporary Art Projects, Duntara Newfoundland, 2012

Love Light and Decay English Harbour, Howard Park Institute, Toronto Ontario, 2013