

Jack Kerouac

Jack Kerouac (1922–1969), novelist and poet, was a pioneer in the Beat movement, a group of young writers whose post-war sensibilities led them to question authority, tradition, and the cultural norms. Instead, the Beats embraced new forms of expression, including improvisational jazz. Kerouac was born in Massachusetts, and his novel, *On the Road*, is the story of his journey west to find new experience and a new spirituality.

Kerouac wrote essays and produced 10 novels in draft. *On the Road's* experimental autobiographical style influenced many writers in the sixties.

From *On the Road*

I first met Neal not long after my father died . . . I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about except that it really had something to do with my father's death and my awful feeling that everything was dead. With the coming of Neal there really began for me that part of my life that you could call my life on the road. Prior to that I'd always dreamed of going west, seeing the country, always vaguely planning and never specifically taking off and so on. Neal is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles. First reports of Neal came to me through Hal Chase, who'd shown me a few letters from him written in Colorado reform school. I was tremendously interested in these letters because they so naively and sweetly asked for Hal to teach him all about Nietzsche° and all the wonderful intellectual things that Hal was so justly famous for. At one point Allen Ginsberg and I talked about these letters and wondered if we would ever meet the strange Neal Cassady. This is all far back, when Neal was not the way he is today, when he was a young jailkid shrouded in mystery. Then news came that Neal was out of reform school and was coming to New York for the first time; also there was talk that he had just married a 16 year old girl called Louanne. One day I was hanging around the Columbia campus and Hal and Ed White told me Neal had just arrived and was living in a guy called Bob Malkin's cold water pad in East Harlem, the Spanish Harlem. Neal had arrived the night before, the first time in NY, with his beautiful little sharp chick Louanne; they got off the Greyhound bus at 50 St. and cut around the corner looking for a place to eat and went right in Hector's, and since then Hector's cafeteria has always been a big symbol of NY for Neal. They spent money on beautiful big glazed cakes and cream puffs. All this time Neal was telling Louanne things like this, "Now darling here we are in Ny and although I haven't quite told you everything that I was thinking about when we crossed Missouri and especially at the point when we passed the Bonneville reformatory which reminded me of my jail problem it is absolutely necessary now to postpone all those leftover things concerning our personal lovethings and at once begin thinking of specific worklife plans . . ." and so on in the way that he had in his early days. I went to the coldwater flat° with the boys and Neal came to the door in his shorts. Louanne was jumping off quickly from the bed; apparently he was fucking with her. He always was doing so. This other guy who

owned the place Bob Malkin was there but Neal had apparently dispatched him to the kitchen, probably to make coffee while he proceeded with his loveproblems. . . . for to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living, and so on. My first impression of Neal was of a young Gene Autry°—trim, thin-hipped, blue eyes, with a real Oklahoma accent. In fact he'd just been working on a ranch, Ed Uhl's in Sterling Colo. before marrying L. and coming East. Louanne was a pretty, sweet little thing, but awfully dumb and capable of doing horrible things, as she proved a while later. I only mention this first meeting of Neal because of what he did. That night we all drank beer and I got drunk and blah-blahed somewhat, slept on the other couch, and in the morning, while we sat around dumbly smoking butts from ashtrays in the gray light of a gloomy day Neal got up nervously, paced around thinking, and decided the thing to do was have Louanne making breakfast and sweeping the floor. Then I went away. That was all I knew of Neal at the outset. During the following week however he confided in Hal Chase that he absolutely had to learn how to write from him; Hal said I was a writer and he should come to me for advice. Meanwhile Neal had gotten a job in a parking lot, had a fight with Louanne in their Hoboken° apartment God knows why they went there and she was so mad and so vindictive down deep that she reported him to the police, some false trumped up hysterical crazy charge, and Neal had to lam from Hoboken. So he had no place to live. Neal came right out to Ozone Park where I was living with my mother, and one night while I was working on my book or my painting or whatever you want to call it there was a knock on the door and there was Neal, bowing, shuffling obsequiously° in the dark of the hall, and saying "Hello, you remember me, Neal Cassady? I've come to ask you to show me how to write." "And where's Louanne?" I asked, and Neal said she'd apparently whored a few dollars together or something of that nature and gone back to Denver . . . "the whore!" So we went out to have a few beers because we couldn't talk like we wanted to in front of my mother, who sat in the livingroom reading her paper. She took one look at Neal and decided from the very beginning that he was a madman. She never dreamed she too'd be driving across the mad American night with him more than once. In the bar I told Neal, "For krissakes man I know very well you didn't come to me only to want to become a writer and after all what do I really know about it except you've got to stick to it with the energy of a benny° addict," and he said, "Yes of course, I

Gene Autry: (1907–1998), singer and actor, star of many movie Westerns

Hoboken: city in northeastern New Jersey, directly across the Hudson River from lower Manhattan