

It was really a strange experience. We went out there and parked at the end of the strand and Gene and I -- that's where we were told to meet. Glenda came running out and said the creek was running high today so we're going to go back around by Harold's property. She stopped and picked up two little old ladies that were cute as bugs. One was Harriet Zizzicas, a probation officer, The other one I didn't meet. We went around to Harold's property -- the most fantastic property -- he planted these pines in 1958 so their 16 years old now. It's a beautiful area right at the edge of the dunes.

Mr. Crites waited for the forest rangers. Bert worked for three generations of the Crites family and worked for Angus for only a couple of years before he sold out and moved. Bert was a caretaker-gardener for their family. I talked to him; He said they had at least 20 years of pictures of the gardens Bert did and that he would be more than happy to share them with me. He said that Bert tended plants as carefully as he did so many other things. One of the interesting people that was there was Kathy Jones. I pictured her as a vivacious young girl. She's an old lady. Amazing lady.

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She brought a huge bouquet of wildflowers. It was a good thing she was there because she was impersonal enough and remote enough from Bert that -- how can I say it -- she wasn't really emotionally involved at all with his loss. (What was her function?) She and her husband, Gaylord, Bert died on their third wedding anniversary. They ecology conscious. He picked up broken glass along the way as we made our little journey. They are a lovely old couple. She was telling how she brought the wildflowers because Bert loved wildflowers.

She told how they came upon Bert's shack one evening and he said, You must be cold. Won't you come in and warm yourselves at my fire? and was very gracious and kind.

One of the neatest things of all was that there were two forest rangers (I had just seen Sharon Thurs. night and she said April Brasura's husband had been named in Bert's will, too, and he was one of the two forest rangers.) They came with their badges on and strips of black tape across their badges . . . a very touching tribute. And not Brasura, but

the other fellow, (Jones deferred leaving on vacation for two days so they could be at the ceremony.)

This forest ranger told how all through these years, everytime

parks & beaches
a new ~~forest~~ ranger came into the unit that covered the area

where Bert lived the present forest ranger would take him ou

there, introduce him to Bert, Bert would take him in and have

him sign his name on the inside of his door -- which they

left closed because of the vandalism and everything, it was

a shambles -- and they would swear themselves to secrecy,

never to tell where Bert was, or anything, and that NONE

of the supervisors of the Co division of the forest service

every knew Bert was there. At one time one of these rangers

did tell his immediate supervisor and he said, "Don't ever

mention this man to me again and don't ever take me there.

In other words, he closed the book. I said to them when

they finished their little talk about what and interesting

and fine man they thought Bert was, they were very solemn

throughout the whole thing, and I said to them, My faith in

institutions has been badly battered and bruised the last

couple of years, but this helps renew my faith. I asked them

why they had to go to all that trouble because Bert was there

before the state had the property. They said, no, he wasn't.

I thought he had been. (Where did they do the actual scattering? Who officiated at that?) Harold and Angus had the ashes in a little gold foil box; it measured about 7"x7"x12". To think the remains of a man's body can be contained in that. . . . We took Bert's old coffee mug and used it to scatter the ashes. Kathy Jones told a little bit about her experiences with Bert. The people that knew him the least were able to talk. All we did was introduce ourselves. I couldn't have talked at all. There was a diverse and interesting group: a young man with long red hair, kind of hippy looking. He had a very gentle face and a sweet ~~XXXXXX~~ wife who seemed really stricken. They'd only known Bert about a year and a half. There were a couple of young females; they were very remote, didn't want to talk to anybody. Some of the people had never been there before. One lady was the one who ordered the special cracked wheat Bread Bert liked...at the grocery store. And she had never been there before. A young girl and her mother that I talked to had never been there before. They lived somewhere in Oceano. That brought home to me how very few people he was really close to. He really was isolated: a lot more than I realized.

Angus Crites told me that at the last the only people Bert
could talk about was Harold and me. He said he had relied
on Harold primarily because he had known him so long and
because he lived right there. And I think probably also
because he ^{probably} had apprehension that I was some kind of exploitive
female, which I think was totally dispelled by the time we
finished the afternoon. He was really very, very nice and
he indicated that he would be cooperative with me in any
way to help with the book. The pictures of the garden. . .
It was one of those fantastic blue and gold and green days
in the dunes and there wasn't a lot of wind. It was a placid
gorgeous day. Angus and Harold first scattered ashes right
around the perimeter of the shack and the perimeter of the
clearing. Then 11 of the people went back. The only ones
left were Angus, Harold, Gene and I, Steve and Liz Wright,
and Kaahhy Jones and her husband, Gaylord. There were eight
of us. It was his wish to be scattered in the dunes, so we
walked up HIGH ON THE DUNES. It was one of the neatest things
in the whole world. When you think of death -- death has been
plaguing me anyway -- with Bert's death and all.

and so right

There i something so natural/about scattering the ashes of a person where they're not confined to a coffin that can be invaded by maggots and worms and insects; it's a returning of you to the elements from whichyou/ came. It's a profound experience; what-~~(test-typing-here-)~~- I really believe that's what I want for myself and Gene said the same thing. Each of us took turn scattering the ashes and I took pictures of Harold scattering them and Gene. Gene took a picture of me scattering them. When we were finished we came back down to the foot of the dunes and Angus said -- what his ashes were contained in was just this little box -- a cardboard box covered with gold foil. (A human body can be contained in that?) Yes, it was about this by this (hand motions). Angus said at first he had thought about keeping the box because, just keeping it, but that one of Bert's wishes was that it be as economical as possible, as simple as possible, and that there be as little left as possible. When we got to the foot of the dunes, he said, "I think it's appropriate to burn it." "It's against the law here, but I think it's a special occasion." And Kathy Jones/^{who}was all involved in the

Sierra Club, said, "Yes, I think it is a special occasion."

I was by this time immobilized. You know me. My heart gets in the way of my head. So I just stood there, while this industrious little chickadee of a gal nearly seventy, and Harold and Angus gathered twigs and goldenrod and lupine.

It was K. Jones that had added all the special -- and we built a little fire and when we got it started -- you know me -- I provided the match -- then placed the box on it and let it burn to nothing and we all kneeled in a circle around it and covered the box with sand; that was all. That was good-bye to Bert. It was really simple and basically primitive and I really liked it. (After going through that barbaric ritual with my father, I can really appreciate that, let me tell you.) Then to make me feel the range of -- the comparison -- I had taken flowers to Bert in that primitive little pot I had made for Kathy. I had called the hospital five times and they didn't know where it was, Harold didn't, and they said sometimes when there isn't a family to pick up the affects we send what's left to the mortuary, so I asked Gene if he would take me to Sunset Chapel. Well, he really didn't want to do it but he was gracious and said he would. We went in

and talked to this guy and he couldn't remember anything like that and it had been such a long time -- a month -- all of a sudden, he said, "Wait, let me doublecheck. He went back there and found a plastic bag with Bert's glasses, some lifesavers we had bought him, the book I had given him the night before he died (to keep a long ago promise) I had promised it for ages and had ordered it, but it hadn't come in. I had ordered it at two bookstores. . . And there was the pot, so I got it, ~~xxx~~ and the rest of the things. I'll take them to the reading of the will and they can do with them what they see fit. By that time I didn't feel like going back to see Harold and Glenda. I was drained. The atmosphere in there was so artificial -- organ music playing and so pseudoelegant -- I thought after the experience I've just been through. . . (the last thing you needed was to go into a place like that)

Well, maybe the BEST thing in order to make me realize what's important. Here our families are sentenced to paying thousands of dollars for a barbaric, ridiculous, empty ceremony. KThis farewell to Bert was really something. I wish you could have been there. Most of the people there didn't know Bert well

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except for a couple of old ladies, the Guitons, us, and Angus.

Kathy Jones had just met him by chance and appreciated him as

an historical object. She's a neat, interesting far out old

lady.... She knew him only superficially. In the midst of

that gathering I realized how important to him so few people

were. Oh, God, how I felt I wish I could have taken back that

first year and done it over.