

INTERVIEW: CHARLES BUKOWSKI

Dialog with a Dirty Old Man



HUSTLER Managing Editor David and boozing Bukowski discuss the turn-on qualities of panties and high-heeled shoes.

Charles Bukowski is an ugly 56-year-old man. He has written poetry and prose for most of his life but never received any recognition until six years ago. "I got lucky when I was 50," he says, "but it may shut down all at once. If it does, I've beat the game." Considering what he went through to get where he is today, he's probably right.

When Bukowski was two years old, his parents immigrated to this country from Andernacht, Germany. They ended up in Los Angeles. "I haven't been able to get away from L.A. since then. I've bummed around, but that's my town," he says. His

parents were poor, and L.A. is a tough town. His childhood was less than happy. "My father beat the hell out of me every day. I disliked my mother. I don't like uninteresting people," he told us. "I used to want to run away from home. But I would think, 'How can I find a job? I'm four feet tall, and I don't have a Social Security number.'"

At 16, he finally did get away and began wandering from job to job, flophouse to flophouse and bar to bar. "I've had probably 60, 70, 80 jobs. I used to work two or three days, that kind of thing.... slaughterhouses, dog biscuit factories, unloading boxcars—

you name it, I've done it." Usually he would just long enough to buy a bottle, or catch a bus going someplace else. It's this kind of hard trip that fills his stories.

In 1959, his drinking almost killed him. Vomiting blood, he was admitted to the L.A. County Hospital for treatment and a drink out. It didn't stop him from drinking, but it did slow him down a little bit. Bukowski got a job at the post office and stayed there for the next 11 years, writing occasionally, with little success and less remuneration.

"I was going nuts sorting mail. This guy from Black Sparrow Press (Bukowski's

present publisher) came by and said, "Listen, I'll give you \$100 a month whether you ever write anything or not; just get out of the post office." So I quit my job, and there's the typewriter looking at me. Now I'm a writer. That's when it gets tough. You've got all that time, and it's not like an eight-hour job, so what do you do? You get drunk, you meet women, you fight with women, you get drunk. And then you write in between times. That's what I've been doing ever since."

Bukowski writes his life in stark black and white, with no frills. There's nothing for the reader to hide behind. His story, *The Fiend* (November 1976 issue of *HUSTLER*), is the brutally realistic account of the senseless rape of an eight-year-old child. The story was told so convincingly that many of our staff members were quite interested in meeting the man capable of creating such a striking horror. In the last year, Bukowski has suddenly begun to receive the popular attention he deserves.

HUSTLER flew Bukowski to Columbus, where he was interviewed—over a bottle of vodka and a pack of cigarettes—by Managing Editor Bruce David. He told us that he reacts with his gut, not his brain, and there is no doubt among those of us who met him that he does exactly that—most of the time. But we also got the impression that Bukowski likes to amuse himself by playing around with the people he meets now that he's suddenly famous. What could be more fun than putting on a bunch of *HUSTLER* staffers?

For the most part, we enjoyed what he had to say, but it's necessary that we let you know at the beginning that even we can't stomach his stand on fucking eight-year-olds. We're not sure that Bukowski can either. Like he told us, "You don't always speak the truth every time you talk."

HUSTLER: Some people say that stories like yours influence people to commit similar crimes. Do you think your story, *The Fiend*, will make someone commit rape?

BUKOWSKI: I think so, yeah.

HUSTLER: If that's the case, and we don't agree with you, can you justify writing it?

BUKOWSKI: No. I had to write the story. What happens in the wake of the story—there you go.

HUSTLER: Pedophilia is probably the strongest taboo in our society.

BUKOWSKI: What's that word?

HUSTLER: Pedophilia.

BUKOWSKI: That means?

HUSTLER: Sex with children.

BUKOWSKI: They're very nice, you know. They wear those little short skirts, and when

they put on their roller skates, you see their panties.

HUSTLER: *The Fiend* is a very shocking story, but apparently you wrote it as an erotic turn-on.

BUKOWSKI: I wrote it. I don't know why I wrote it, but people tell me that it arouses them when they read it. So there must be some truth in it beyond just myself and my feeling, or the character's feeling toward the child.

HUSTLER: Certain people were turned on by your story, others were repulsed by it, and some were just shocked into numbness. I don't think that the universal response is a turn-on.

BUKOWSKI: The response to my stuff is never 100 percent. When I give readings, it's 50 percent haters. But I pack the joint, and so I pay the rent.

HUSTLER: Is it the subject matter that's a turn-on, or just the craft you employ to write it?

BUKOWSKI: I think the turn-on is that I write very simply. There's no literary floss covering what I write. That makes it very bare, and the very bareness affects people. You can write a very literary thing, and it doesn't offend too much. But when you write very simply, it affects people. They say "God, he's really doing it." It just comes right at them head on.

HUSTLER: The very strong impression is that your stories are largely autobiographical. Is that true?

BUKOWSKI: Yeah, I'd say most of my stuff is 93 percent true and 7 percent improved upon. Fiction is improvement on life to spice it up just a touch. So maybe a woman I'm writing about has a 34-inch waist, I might make it 32. Most of it's true, even when I'm writing about other people. When I write about rape and murder, I'm not trying to justify rape and murder. I'm trying to get inside the rapist's or the murderer's mind. It's fascinating to me that a murderer or a rapist likes a hot dog with relish. Maybe he'll even work a crossword puzzle. I mean, I'm not much different—you know, they wipe their behinds. These people, too, are pretty damned human.

HUSTLER: How autobiographical is *The Fiend*?

BUKOWSKI: Well, I was living in this upstairs apartment, and a little girl was downstairs crawling around in the grass. I saw her panties. They were pink and had little ruffles on them. I said, if I really let myself go and forget society's rules and the price of this thing, I would probably go ahead and do what the guy in my story did.

HUSTLER: Did you rape that little girl?

