



## The Geography of Bukowski: A Prose Poem

Mike Sonksen



A city is a poem, a man is not a machine William Carlos Williams said no ideas but in things. Bukowski's geography is everyday concrete, celebrating humanity in the Los Angeles streets. The daily minutiae like landlords, rooming houses, 2-bit fires, dusty couches, crowded coffee tables, dirty bathtubs, pawn shops, taco stands, three sparrows on a gate, especially in the Westlake District and East Hollywood. He briefly hit Bunker Hill but that was more Fante, Bulosan and Chandler. Bukowski loved MacArthur Park living on Coronado listening to a radio with guts in bed with the shades shut before cracking a midnight beer while pounding out a new poem. His childhood home on Longwood between Adams and Washington a few miles west of Los Angeles High School. It's apropos that LA's best known poet attended the school named after the city. By the time I discovered Bukowski in my late teens I was already driving around town, his poetry told me to keep going. Don't forget anything. Bukowski's worldview came from visiting Hollywood Park, Santa Anita, Los Alamitos or even Del Mar to bet on the horses and evenings at the Olympic Auditorium watching boxing after working all day at the Post Office. Baptized in hot water music watching the window blasting Beethoven before sliding south onto the Harbor Freeway, a city is a poem to lean into. Bukowski spent decades chasing poetry using his library card to find something he could hold on to. Breaking bottles in a barroom brawl on Alvarado, Buk drove down Vermont, Normandie and Western living for years off Delongpre and later on off Carlton. When I got my own bachelor pad along Franklin and then in Koreatown off St. Andrews I channeled Buk hitting dives like Frank n Hanks and HMS Bounty. Before marrying Linda Lee and moving to San Pedro he had girlfriends like Jane that he broke up with over and over again. You get so lonely sometimes it just makes sense. Love is a dog from hell. Bukowski weaved beauty going out to get the mail, watching a flower in the rain, honoring the pleasures of the damned. Small talk with a fisherman. In the schoolyards of forever taking side streets to the airport with Mozart in a single room occupancy, Bukowski went to LA city college earning a degree at sidewalk university. His journeys inspired me to map my own geography. Bukowski's lifelong home was Los Angeles but for a few years he hit Philadelphia, New York, New Orleans, Atlanta, St. Louis, Miami, riding Greyhound hopping trains across America, working odd jobs for life experience to write about later. A

poetry junkie making magic in a dark room drinking to Tchaikovsky. An ambassador of noir publishing in the *Outsider*, *Open City* and *Wormwood Review* before Black Sparrow and City Lights. More relentless than a tarantula with inner balance like a gold pocket watch, Bukowski wrote about what he could see with a bluebird in his heart while screaming from the balcony.