

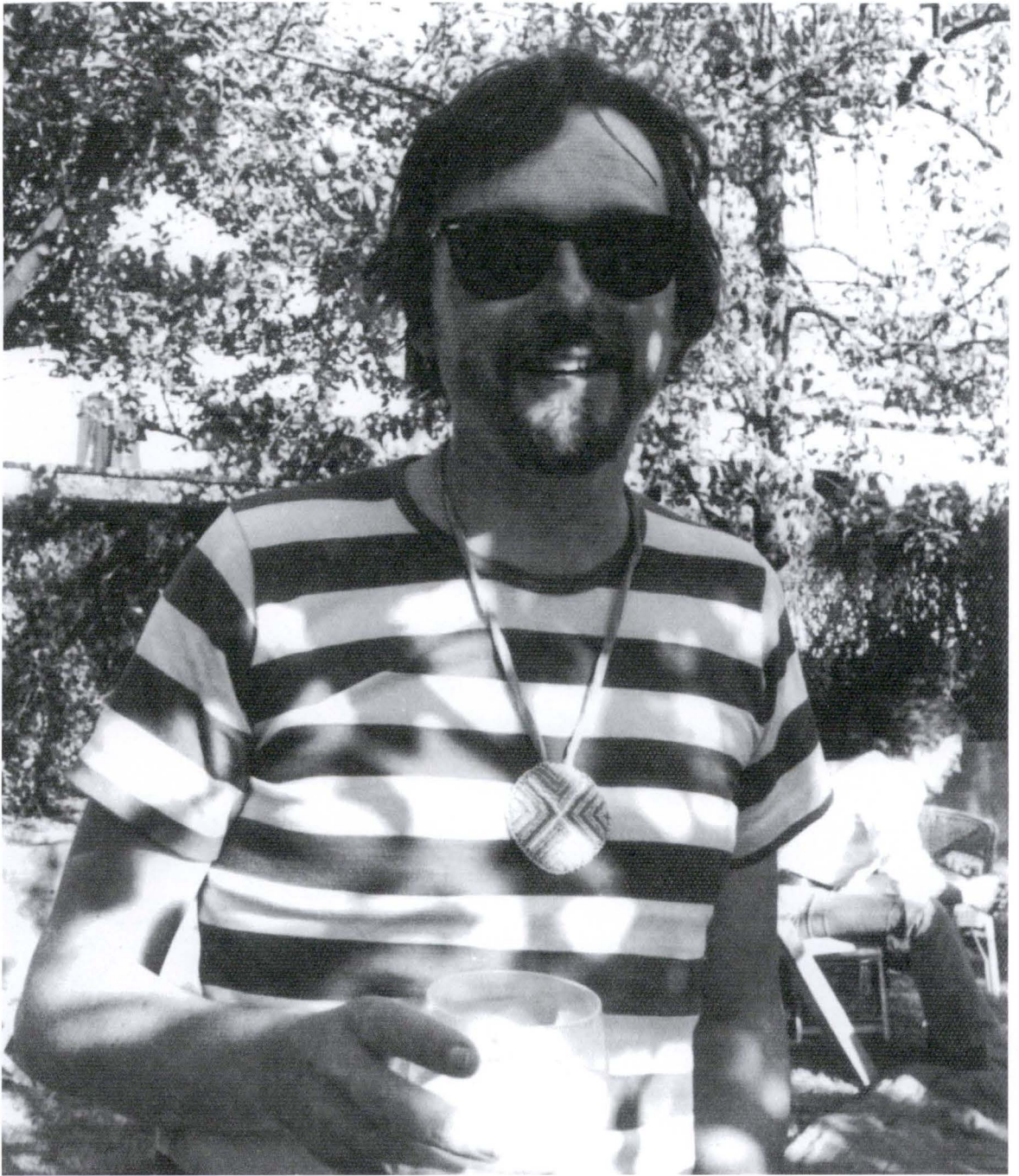
The nature of memory comes into play when contemplating a friendship of 54 years. I tend to see memory in terms of snapshots. Not memories that shape themselves around actual snapshots but recollections that have no apparent antecedent or follow up. This is especially true when it comes to the San Francisco of the late '50s. For instance, there's an image of George and I having a long walk all around San Francisco. I don't recall where we started or whether there was any purpose other than clearing our heads from the previous evening's indulgences and bracing ourselves for our next foray to the bars. The memory is not so much of the walk but of the topic under discussion: the nature of thought. George expounded on his popcorn theory: thoughts arising in the mind sometimes fly from the brain the way corn puffs escape the pot while popping. George and I typically manage to hold differing views, resulting in discussions that go on for quite some time. This time George must surely have won—I can't remember what my stand was! I think his point was that the morsels that escape are discarded and the stuff remaining in the pot is put to use. It may be time to reopen this discussion: perhaps it is the escaped popcorn that is of value. Can you imagine? This sort of stuff has been going on between us for over half a century.

Our group, loosely identified as the people who showed up at Joe Dunn's Sunday afternoon poetry meetings, had been reluctant to self-identify as Beatniks. There were valid philosophical arguments differentiating the various factions of the day. However, in rough brush strokes, we shared clothing styles, black tights for girls, turtle necks (although Spicer never gave up his grubby white shirt and tie), and were also united in favouring alcohol-based refreshments. Here's another snapshot of the mind. It is late. We are heading to Mike's Pool Hall, not to play pool but for the soup, which is just the thing after a long hard night at the bars. Being the late '50s, existentialism is endlessly debated. George, who, among others of our group, is still struggling with the effects of a Catholic childhood, comments on the latest bit of dogma out of the Vatican: the bodily Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Is this an attempt to counter the nihilism of the French intellectuals of the day? Where would this lead?

Not only did the “scene” move from North Beach to the Haight-Ashbury, but along came flowers, beads, and colourful costumes. Alcohol was shunned in favour of weed and the various hallucinogenic chemicals being developed which were embraced by Ginsberg and eschewed by Spicer. Beatniks were history and Hippies could care less about existentialism. With the Doomsday clock screaming nuclear annihilation only minutes away, anti-war demonstrations prevailed. World Peace was what we needed. A real photograph of George comes to mind, wearing a beaded medallion in the fashion of the day.

George and I both happened to be living in Vancouver in the early ‘70s (from “April in Vancouver”: “It’s pretty shitty / Living in a Protestant city”) and then Terrace. The next snapshot sees the medallion replaced by a moustache and a proper tweed jacket, attire appropriate to the role of English instructor. Before long, I too joined the ranks of the faculty at the college. While sharing his house in Terrace, George and I refused to behave like the middle-aged instructors we were, but persisted in our long-standing habit of drinking and talking into the wee hours. George did a lot of outreach while in the North, cajoling all kinds of people into noticing a certain kind of magic that is poetry, as in organizing a community poetry reading in Hazelton.

That, too, was a long time ago now and I stopped taking pictures. Back in Vancouver, the Cold War was over and we began to worry about global warming. In his poems, George captures the angst of the threat of the changes coming to our planet or is it to his body? We now talk about climate change as we observe the bizarre decadence accompanying the unravelling of capitalism. We see each other regularly and never fail to have a celebratory birthday dinner together during the year. George never stops writing. That will only happen with his last breath. As he states at the opening of *Vancouver: A Poem*, “There is more here than memory.”



George Stanley, Vancouver, early 1970s



Robert Duncan, Scott Watson, and George Stanley, San Francisco, 1970
Stanley Archive, Contemporary Literature Collection, Simon Fraser University