

I first learned of the beats, while at the University of Illinois, Champaign. This came right before Christmas December 1959, when several of us juniors in the Garner Hall dormitory were preparing to leave for the holidays. The sophomores and freshmen had cleared out, and as long as we kept our wine party relatively quiet, our dorm counselor agreed not to prevent us from doing so. During those days, cheap red wine, Gallo half-gallon jugs, was our staple drink.

In the middle of our subdued revelry--which had spread to adjoining rooms along the hall, forcing the dorm counselor occasionally to remind us to hold down our voices and go back into the rooms—two big guys showed up wearing jeans, leather jackets, and canvass army surplus-looking backpacks. Both were beat-types, short-haired twenty-somethings with scraggly facial hair. They were on their way up from New Orleans to Chicago and had stopped in to see one of the guys at the party.

Right away they caught my interest because I had never seen people quite like them. We started talking. They seemed to like me, and as the party went on, we continued our conversation. They told me about Jack Kerouac, who I had not had heard of yet. They told me that I had to read *On the Road*. Having lived in a predominately white straight-laced community, I had never heard of Charlie Parker or Kerouac. So when I met these two it was quite an awakening.

After I returned from the holiday break, I met up with a childhood friend who was attending U. of I. and living with his girlfriend in small basement apartment. It was

decked out in beatnik-style with bead curtains and a floor rug or two, second-hand furniture, bookshelves constructed of wood boards placed on bricks, and the obligatory bohemian décor of candles. They often invited me to their place, and we drank cheap Portuguese wine and ate homemade spaghetti dinners. My friend and his girlfriend were conversant with *On the Road*, which I had just read, so we had interesting conversations.