

# Tribute to stepfathers pays homage to overlooked dads

**Dear Abby:** On Father's Day many stepdads are often underappreciated or excluded, so I wrote this poem to honor these unsung heroes. I hope you'll put it in your column, so my husband — and other stepdads everywhere — will know it was written for them. — **Lesley Stitt, Ontario, Canada**

**Dear Lesley:** In these times when blended families are common, your tribute is clever, appropriate, and certainly worth space in my column. Read on:

## NOT HER FATHER

Hey, it's really not "your day."  
I just don't know what else to say  
Because, you see, you're just a "step,"  
You're not her dad — you're just a "rep,"  
— A stand-in really, rest assured  
You're only there to be endured.



DEAR  
ABBY

to do;

And you get all the "good jobs," too;  
You get to worry when she's late,  
Pick her up from her late date,

Oh! Unless she needs a ride,  
Or someone there to take her side,  
And please have money you can lend;  
'Cause that's when you will have a friend.  
She's NOT your daughter, though, be clear;  
You're not her dad, just someone here.

There's really lots for you

Comfort her when she's in tears,  
And try to calm her teenage fears.

And you will get to love her, too,  
Even though she won't love you.  
You'll get to care for her each day,  
And see my daughter doesn't stray  
From rules that you will get to make —  
She won't admit they're for her sake!

She thinks stepdads just aren't "fun,"  
You're just as boring as her mom.  
You're only there (you must concede)  
To see that she's got all she needs!  
Father's Day? Nah, she won't bother  
Thanking you — you're not her father!

So let me do it in her stead,  
As I have done since we were wed.

Thanks for all the things you do,  
And all you are — I love you, too.  
Happy Father's Day.

**To Fathers Everywhere — Birth Fathers, Stepfathers, Foster Fathers, Too:** Happy Father's Day to all of you! In addition, I extend good wishes to those caring men who donate their time mentoring youngsters whose parents are absent or deceased. The most precious gift a person can give is a gift of self, and the difference you make is immeasurable.  
P.S. To Morton B. in Minneapolis: Happy Father's Day, Pop!

Write Dear Abby at [www.DearAbby.com](http://www.DearAbby.com) or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

## KEROUAC

Continued from F1

Armed with that immediacy, and hoping to impress his friends with his new unchained style, Kerouac filled a 120-foot typed scroll with these adventures. This legendary manuscript became, for me, *The Mythical Scroll*.

The manuscript went on rare public display earlier this year at the New York Public Library as part of an exhibit of the author's personal possessions — his railroad signal lamp, notebooks and tattered journals; his playing cards and photographs; his manuscripts and paintings. I made the journey, by train, to see it.

These items tell the story of a complex man, who's often summed up as the "King of the Beats." While he popularized the term "beat," it's no use summing him up as a hep cat free spirit getting endless kicks in coffeehouses and jazz bars. Instead, he was a complicated, and in the end profoundly lost, chronicler of humanity.

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He was born in Lowell, Mass., to a family of French Canadian heritage and spoke French as a child. He played football for Columbia University in New York City, but dropped out to spend time in authentic exchanges with his friends including "Howl" author Ginsberg.

Sometime in the mid-1940s, Neal Cassady arrived in New York with a book satchel full of Shakespeare and Marcel Proust, and accompanied by his teenage wife, LuAnne.

When Ginsberg introduced the two men, their combined mental brilliance took the scene by storm.

On Christmas Eve, 1948, Cassady and LuAnne showed up on the Blake doorstep in Rocky Mount, N.C. — yes, that Rocky Mount, my hometown



New York Public Library, Berg Collection

**JACK KEROUAC'S** "Face of the Buddha," above, and his railroad signal lamp, right. (Reproduced courtesy of John G. Sampas, legal representative of the estates of Jack and Stella Kerouac.)

## AUDIO DIARY

Marion Blackburn, a former news reporter and occasional columnist for *The Daily Reflector*, recorded an audio diary of her experience seeing *The Mythical Scroll* in New York. It is scheduled to air this week on Public Radio East. Airtimes are 6:40 a.m. Monday, 8:40 a.m. Wednesday and noon Friday and Saturday on the Down East Journal. Visit [www.publicradioeast.org](http://www.publicradioeast.org)

## ONLINE

For more information, photos and an account of the exhibit, visit Blackburn's Web site, [www.marionblackburn.net](http://www.marionblackburn.net)

— where the Kerouac family — Jack, his mother and his sister, Caroline, and her husband Paul Blake, were celebrating a quiet holiday at their new home on Tarboro Street.

Soon, Kerouac, Cassady and LuAnne were taking off at breakneck speed to New Jersey, a trip they'd complete twice in three days and

forever captured in "On the Road."

There were no interstates until the mid-1950s; rather they used rudimentary two-lane roads and prowled lonely gas stations where unkempt, wild-eyed young men could easily be arrested for vagrancy.

In the novel, *Rocky Mount* becomes *Testament, Va.*; the people likewise take on other names. The trip, and others Kerouac and Cassady took together, became the fuel for the new kind of writing that reflected the times — of bebop and rootlessness, of longing and loss — and the trips, and the immediacy of happening.

Kerouac understood life's messy chaos and captured the eagerness and ragged edges of people around him, understanding, as he did, our cravings and dissatisfactions and how they lead us on empty searches, one after the other, back to ourselves.

His alter ego, Sal, rides in the broken front seat of Dean Moriarty's new but going-downhill-fast '49 Hudson; other times, he's crammed with too many souls into a touring car packing in miles



from border to border. The novel races through romance and calamity, but we can't help falling in love with Paradise.

Still, it's Dean Moriarty who fuels the novel. It's hard to keep your eyes off him as he swaggers into a gas station with no intention of paying; or lies to his wife to sleep with his girlfriend; or reels off tales of car thefts and joy rides.

By 1951, Kerouac wrapped up his epic, but he continued wandering and often stayed in Rocky Mount with his sister, "Nin," who was by now living in a country cottage at a crossroads called Big Easonburg Woods in Nash County.

Sitting on their screened-in porch, he typed, and when he wasn't writing, walked in the woods, meditating, or took the neighbor's hunting dog into the fields, penning notes, reading Buddhist sacred texts and writing what would become "Some of the Dharma."

In 1957, "On the Road" appeared and brought him instant fame. A milestone reached, his road forever took a different turn.

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*It was drizzling and mysterious at the beginning of our journey. I could see that it was all going to be one big saga of the mist. "Whoeee!" yelled Dean. "Here we go!"*

*We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and*

performing our one and noble function of the time, move. And we moved!

— "On the Road," part two, chapter six

At the New York Public Library, I paused before entering the chilly hall where before me, stretched out like the highway it described, lay *The Mythical Scroll*.

I fell into some kind of trance looking at those neatly typed lines, one running into the other, a few scratched notes in an otherwise unbroken sequence of images, dialogue and action. They radiated the energy and clarity of the moment he wrote them.

"On the Road" has always lingered on the margins of literature, dealing, as it does, with criminal behavior and unsavory motives. Nevertheless, the Beat Generation evokes an era of innocence and awakening, of new freedoms and open-mindedness, of jazz and adventure.

The novel became something of a portal for me, offering hope that, through my own travels, I could shed the eastern North Carolina dirt that clung to my shoes all the way to Chapel Hill, where I discovered Kerouac in college. Reading his novel, my world became limitless and instead of rules and dead ends, I saw the possibility for heroes and madmen.

The exhibit included his notes on Buddhism and a drawing, *Face of the Buddha*, completed in Rocky Mount. There was a notebook kept while on fire lookout at Desolation Peak in Washington state. There, too, the typewritten pages for "Some of the Dharma," published posthumously in 1997, along with his carefully drawn trading cards and rules for an imaginary baseball league and newspaper, "Racing Times," created when he was 13. Among the items were his paintings from the 1960s, and a photo of him shortly before his death.

The objects from the later years reminded me of his personal descent after publication of "On the Road." At first there were interviews, popularity, readings, but the hangers-on got to him and he became tired of being the Father of the Beats.

He often appeared drunk at readings, and later cut off ties with Ginsberg and Cassady and everything associated with the Beats. He died in Florida in 1969 at 47, of causes related to his alcoholism.

But in 1956, he was working at Blake's Television Shop on Raleigh Road in Rocky Mount, hauling new color TVs for his brother-in-law, and at night, writing haiku and dreamy ramblings about stillness and peace, looking at the stars as he walked the fields, his head full of longing, still.

I often pass the house where he lived in an area today known as West Mount when visiting my parents. Sometimes I stop and walk around, gazing at the driveway and wondering whose cars once parked there. Or, I step around back and peer at the porch that once opened onto a forest and think of him there, meditating, reading and typing, lost in the same eastern North Carolina solitude I know so well.

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"On the Road" has been a constant companion for Americans looking for something beyond the familiar, tracking down a dream behind the wheel of a car.

Looking out of our windshields we see endless black ribbon in front and back of us, notched with white dashes ticking away the seconds of our lives. We see beauty, find some hidden part of ourselves, something that raises us from the inside out.

We return home, once more happy with our routines and schedules, until the restlessness finds us, and sends us out searching, again.

## HOUSE

Continued from F1

Kerouac.

Among them was a teenaged Betty Langley Fisher, who now shares ownership of the house with other family members. She clearly remembers the moody young man who lived next door.

"Jack was not a very talkative person," Fisher says. "Thinking back, we probably thought he was a little odd. He'd take off with five dollars in his pocket and go to Mexico. They never knew when he was going to leave and when he was going to come back."

Some have said Rocky Mount was the closest thing the writer had to a home. The Nash County countryside offered him the peaceful surroundings that nourished his writing, even as he chased adventures with other Beat writers.

"He was doing a lot of writing when he was there," Fisher says. "Mother had screened in the back porch and that's where he slept, typed and carried on." The house sits at the intersection of Halifax Road, and the porch has now been enclosed with walls.

Rocky Mount shows up quite often in his works. It's *Testament, Va.* in "On the Road," and Rocky Mount in "Dharma Bums" and "Book of Dreams." Other times, Kerouac simply writes about North Carolina, but it's the same place.

If you read his letters of the time, edited by Ann Charters in two volumes, you come across it often.

"This is the south," he wrote in April 1955 to Carolyn

Cassady. "Piney woods out there where I've laid out my mat of grass for meditation, sometimes in the dark night, sometimes warm afternoon, sometimes dewy pearly morn."

Reading "Some of the Dharma," the influence of those Nash County woods is clear.

*Corn shines in the Moonlight*  
*Makes curtsies to dark Me's*  
*Wave palmetto crab-arms*  
*at dead hero-fathers*  
*Of the past...*

— Book Two, "Some of the Dharma"

"Some of the Dharma" began as a series of notes on Buddhism for Allen Ginsberg. It grew into a sprawling 420-page volume that even mentions television station WNCT.

John J. Dorfner of Raleigh believes Kerouac adopted Rocky Mount because it reminded him of his Lowell, Mass., hometown. "Rocky Mount has a textile mill, with a library nearby. It's a miniature Lowell," Dorfner says. "That was why Jack really loved it."

Dorfner has more than a passing interest in the house. He wrote a book about it, "Kerouac: Visions of Rocky Mount," hoping to preserve its significance. His work earned the respect of Kerouac biographer Ann Charters, and he corresponded with Ginsberg before his death in 1997. Ginsberg wrote the forward to Dorfner's other book, "Kerouac: Visions of Lowell."

These days, Dorfner runs a small publishing house in Raleigh, dedicated to distributing these books.

Dorfner's own story somewhat resembles Kerouac's, and may explain why he took such an interest in preserving details of his life. Dorfner grew up in Woodstock, N.Y., — yes, that Woodstock — and was in the military during the Vietnam War, though he remained stateside.

Afterward, he hitchhiked to Oregon, and while working for a book distributor, he discovered the Charters biography of Kerouac. The year was 1973.

"I read about him, and thought, This guy did what I did," Dorfner remembers. "I used to sit in San Francisco, near the railroad and write poetry, but that was before I ever heard of Kerouac."

In the 1980s, he moved to Raleigh with his wife. He wanted to see "Testament, Va." for himself and find the house in Big Easonburg Woods. He estimated the house's location by re-reading Kerouac's works.

"Once I went to Rocky Mount, it became an obsession," he says. "I started knocking on doors. I was there every weekend."

At last, he found the right door. "It was really cool meeting all these people who knew him as 'Nin's brother,' rather than as the 'King of the Beats,'" he says.

Dorfner hopes one day the house is identified as a landmark. "I'd like to see it become a writers residence, a museum," he says.

Fisher also has a strong interest in preserving the home. Her family has many fond memories of it.

"My mother loved that house," she says, "We want to keep it."

## A LOOK BACK

### The Daily Reflector

Will Jenkins was born around Rountree Crossroads in Pitt County and attended military school until his mid-to-late teen years. On Feb. 17, 1898, he married Catherine (Kate) Eliza Smith. She had been raised near Cannon Crossroads, just east of Ayden.

Kate and Will bought farmland in

Ayden and built a two-story home at the corner of West Second and Pitt streets. They had three children.

In 1940, Kate, then 64, and Will, 74, retired from farming and moved to Durham. Kate died in 1942 and is buried in Ayden Cemetery. Will died in 1945 and is buried beside his wife.

Source: "The Chronicles of Pitt County, Volume 2," by the Pitt County Historical Society.



KATE SMITH JENKINS



SAVE IN JUNE AT THESE LOCATIONS:

Overton's  
Pirate's Den  
Icon Boutique  
Moxie Clothing  
Tan N Bed

Fusion Surf & Skate  
Boli's 5th St. Pizzeria  
Che Bella Boutique  
The Sunshine Factory

Chico's Mexican Restaurant  
Tie Breakers Sports Bar & Grill  
Wimpie's Steam Bar & Cajun Cafe  
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