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Autobiography & Memoir

**Keep This Quiet! My Relationship with Hunter S. Thompson, Milton Klonsky, and Jan Mensaert**

Margaret A. Harrell
Jan Mensaert, illustrator
Hunter Thompson, illustrator
Gaelyn Larrick, designer
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Trying to restore standards to the glut of memoirs devouring the book market, Neil Genzlinger, copy editor and frequent contributor to the *New York Times* recently wrote: "[I]t's not a regurgitation of ordinariness or ordeal, not a dart thrown desperately at a trendy topic, but a shared discovery." By that measurement, Margaret A. Harrell has penned a story well worth sharing.

It was the 1960s. Harrell was newly graduated from Duke and had acquired a Master's degree in Literature from Columbia. She was making her way in New York City, living in Greenwich Village, and at the epicenter of the US cultural and literary world. In a very few years, she had filled her life with an array of life-changing exploits, including a tour of Europe and relationships with poets Milton Klonsky and Jan Mensaert and journalist Hunter Thompson, whose personality, writing, and adventures dominate this memoir.

Harrell paints many scenes broadly, giving just enough personal details to keep her on the edge of the story without cluttering the more important aspects of the recollections as they unfold. Music was important, especially the Jefferson Airplane and Bob Dylan. Recalling an early meeting with Thompson, Harrell relates visiting a record store: "A salesperson hustled the crowd into a little room, then again into the cold. I was wearing low-heeled pumps, the back open." Hunter was listening to "Surrealistic Pillow," fourth track ("To be any more than all I am would be a lie…With you standing near I can tell the world what it means to be in love"). Hunter "broke into his big grin and said, 'Today *is* my time.' Indeed. And he knew it."

Harrell's writing style is mostly clean and easy to follow. Much of the book is akin to

listening to the author reminisce about her life in those emotionally charged times. Describing her first sexual encounter with Thompson, she says, “I didn’t feel like a manic spur of the moment thing or one-night stand.” Occasionally, however, she delves into stories or makes references to people and events that are familiar or matter primarily only to devoted Hunter Thompson fans. Does anyone remember or really care whether Hunter Thompson walked off the set of NBC’s *Today* show? It would have been more entertaining to read more about Thompson’s *Rum Diary* novel.

The 1960s were an intense and complicated time. Harrell should be commended for her courage in writing about it forthrightly yet with sensitivity. Margaret Harrell is the author of eight other books and is an accomplished photographer. *Keep This Quiet* is volume one of Harrell’s memoir. She says, “Ours was not a cautious generation.” Indeed.

*John Michael Senger*