



Image by the author

Jonah Raskin

## Naming Names

Each and everyone,  
two-hundred &  
fifty folk,  
arrived singly  
in dribs & drabs,  
& *conjuntos*,  
*con besos y abrazos*.  
I wish I could name  
every single person  
the way that  
Nick Carraway  
names the names  
of the guests at  
Gatsby's parties,  
a way to honor  
the mourners and the  
celebrants who  
devoured  
forty pizzas,  
drank white and  
red wine,  
everybody  
talking all at once in  
Spanish and English  
and listening, too,  
to the *musica*  
performed by  
the two Johns,  
Santos on drums and  
Shea on a wicked guitar,  
Lluis & Sue harmonizing  
Yele from the  
Troublemakers Union,  
David from Madrid  
along with Stephanie,  
Henri y Stephan,

Maria Nadine &  
Cheryl Schwartz  
on a sacred soprano sax.

My cousins arrived  
from New York,  
*primas & primos*  
from SoCal,  
and from Napa  
came Angela, my  
wife of 17 years,  
who I didn't  
recognize at first.  
I had to fight back  
tears when  
Gloria read from  
her diary  
a passage about  
motherhood  
and fatherhood.  
Later, I  
caroused with  
members of the  
extended family,  
the Lizarragas, Alonzos  
Quitkins, Raskins,  
Aramburos,  
one Aronson (David),  
plus Adelina's  
sisters and nieces,  
everybody  
inhaling and exhaling  
*con juntos*,  
swaying and nodding  
knowingly when  
lawyer Hanlon  
delivered,  
as though speaking  
before a jury,  
a verdict on

Dylan Thomas,  
and opined that  
the Welsh poet  
was wrong when  
he urged us all to  
rage against the  
dying of the light.  
Hanlon recommended  
instead going  
gently  
like my brother  
Adam, the trickster,  
who died  
peacefully at home  
in bed in December  
with Adelina  
at his side  
& who was  
there at his  
own memorial  
up to no good  
no doubt  
raining love  
down on each  
and everyone,  
Sam & Jesse,  
Ngan & Andrea  
Kamel &  
John Hoffman  
JP, Ray & Bridgit  
from Brooklyn  
Joan & Larry  
from Frisco,  
storyteller extraordinaire  
Olive O. & her  
La Playa family  
Brother Adam  
raining love  
down on them  
& on all of us,

on brother Daniel,  
on G., the youngest in  
the crowd, except for the  
babies in strollers and  
in their parents' arms.

R., the ex-smuggler,  
and M., the retired cop  
(can't name  
their names)  
Julio the most  
elegantly attired &  
me in a blue linen shirt,  
green trousers,  
red converse

& a fedora on the  
top of my head  
which I removed  
to greet –  
yes,  
here come more  
names,  
I can't omit them  
—Stacey, Maisie, Karin,  
Mark M., Morris O.,  
Katie Q.,  
Marilyn & Felipe  
& many many more  
the boat  
house on the  
edge of Lake Merced  
reeling & rocking  
& then levitating  
above The City that  
my brother Adam  
knew as  
no one else did.

## The Beats Are an Irreplaceable Tribe

Jack Kerouac's books  
brought me  
to California and  
then took me  
south of the border  
where I searched and  
couldn't find  
the Fellaheen,  
tried and failed to  
learn the rhumba  
read *Mexico City Blues*,  
met the Mexico City Beats,  
a gritty and  
irreplaceable tribe,  
wrote my own  
bluesy novel,  
reread *On the Road*,  
saw something new  
and different  
every time I did,  
heard Jack's jazz live,  
smoked weed,  
crossed the border,  
saw the Mississippi  
behind a chain link fence  
as though the river could  
be fenced in,  
saw Jack became a prisoner  
of himself, unfree in  
Florida with his  
mother, Memère,  
and his third wife Stella,  
his undoing  
a cautionary tale to me  
to beware alcohol and the  
the fame game that  
devoured him at 47,  
older than

his avatar Thomas Wolfe,  
older than Keats  
and Byron, too.  
Like them  
a romantic poet  
in a pantheon all his own.

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