

JOHNNIE B. BAKER, BUDGET PRESS

Angela: Why and how did you start Budget Press?

johnnie: The idea of budget press had been in my head for five or so years before I did it. I had moved back to rivercide from San Francisco and I was living in the life arts building. In rivercide I've found one has to keep oneself angry and busy. The angry thing is easy, but the busy thing can be hard. But if you don't keep busy, you can get real comfortable, and bored, and apathetic, and then no longer angry. So I was back in the 'cide and I was surrounded with talented people, and budget press was how I kept from getting sucked into the black hole. I started by publishing myself, then some friends, and then people I didn't know.

Angela: What was your original vision for BP? Did it change at all?

johnnie: Budget press was always pretty much what it was when it started. The whole budget press idea got a little crazy at first, with the store and all, but the press itself was always the same. I would just go around and drop them off at places, for free. If one was to order by mail, two stamps was all it took. The idea was to just publish people with as little frill as possible. Budget press was always about minimalism, not the as far as the poetry itself, but just the press. I published a good 80% of the people who submitted, and some of it wasn't that good. But as long as there was something in there I could relate to, I'd put it out. Basically, it was about me doing whatever the hell I wanted, so I did. When I was in Russia things changed a bit, as the focus went from publishing chaps (which I still did on a more limited basis) to my Budget Files e-zine.

Angela: What about Budget Press, the store?

johnnie: That was just a big mistake. Going a little too far with an idea with absolutely no planning or money. Jeez, do you realize how long ago that was? How old I was, how old you were? Age. I just wanted to have a place where anybody could do anything and just be themselves. There was never any place for me to go and hang out growing up in Rivercide, and I wanted to create a place where freaks could be freaks. But it was a complete failure.

Angela: Describe the local art scene back when you started BP.

johnnie: I didn't know much about it, since I had been living in SF. What there was seemed to be in the life arts. Even Mark Schooley and the RCAA were in the building then. Spanky's was gone, though there was still the barn. And there was no café, which changed everything. I had never really been part of anything in rivercide prior to this period in my life. The only people I knew downtown were pat and nick, from previous lives. But the life arts was jumping.

Angela: List some of your favorite contributors and why you decided to publish them.

johnnie: This is the most difficult question. I answered the others and then it took me a week to answer this one. I have connections with each writer in different ways. Kelly McClure was the first person I published that I didn't know, who actually picked up some Budget Press

and then submitted by mail. ST Brophy and Richard Tater I published the most, since they're the best writers I know personally. Hunter Manasco was from Alabama, and I couldn't tell if he/she was a he or a she. Ended up being a guy writing as a gal. This has made me look back over everything, and a lot of stuff is coming back. I miss making connections with talented people from all over. Steve Conway was in prison in Wisconsin, and his collection was all poems about disasters. Tom Hamilton was an Irish guy traveling across America. Matthew Carr sent stuff to me in Russia after finding Budget Press in Prague. Robert James Brant, from Latrobe PA. But I must say my favorite of all, both as a writer and how it made me feel to publish her, was from Riverside, Jennifer Stoeber. Her chapbook was called *Dry Heat*. She's at USC now, doing cultural studies. Just some really good stuff. Deep, but not pretentious. Hip, but accessible. Spoke in a language I understood about stuff I understood. Her poem *riverside* I reprinted in Budget Press International, which I took with me to Europe and Russia so people could get a glimpse at the 'cide. I even taught it to my language students. The largest printing of anything I published. I sent it out as an example of Budget Press for years. Oh, and David Miller. As I said earlier, what was the most important criteria for me to publish someone was if I could relate to what they wrote. Jennifer and David I related to the most.

Angela: Describe your favorite BP art show.

johnnie: Well the best one of course was the bbq in the store in the basement of the life arts. That was a real party. The place was covered with paintings; we even painted the floor. Then the giant budget press logo on the wall. The show started with readings from pat, bob, Tricia G. O. Etz and me, and then the bbq kings played. I sold burgers, hot dogs, and mushrooms. Raffled away some stuff. Then the building security shut us down. A good time had by all. There was one time me and pat went down to o.c. and hooked up with some non-rivercide budget press authors and did a night at the Club Mesa. That was cool as well, but nothing tops the bbq [*I agree: one of the best art shows I've been to*-Angela].

Angela: How do you connect Do-It-Yourself to BP? What about community?

johnnie: Budget press was all about DIY. I did everything except write the stuff. From rounding up the writers to layout to printing to stapling to mailing, I was budget press, and budget press was me. I mostly even stole all my printing costs, so by the end it was almost free to make my chapbooks, which was good since I gave them away for free. And I got the idea from the record labels I listened to when I was younger, SST and the like. They did things themselves. Community? That is a term that could be defined in many different ways. I miss being part of the larger zine community. I guess without the Life Arts community I never would have got started. I've never thought community played a role in what I did, but maybe I've been wrong.