

BEACHCOMBER BLUES

MATTHEW HINTON

IN THE SUMMER OF 2010 I HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE of being accepted to the Norman Mailer Writers Colony. I had never been to Provincetown before this, but Chris Busa insisted on hosting me for a few days of R&R before my workshop began. When I called from the road, he described the hamlet of P-town like “a fist thrust into the cape”, then quickly corrected himself: “No no, not like a fist . . . like a finger beckoning; welcoming all who come here!” I just wanted to let Busa know I was running late, but he was holding court on top-down cartographic aesthetics and the poetry of landmass. That is only a sugar-touch of the seemingly-non-sequitor moments that I have shared with Chris Busa.

I stayed with Chris for a few days and nights, and he was indeed a generous host. We waded up the bayside of P-town together, Chris occasionally yelling compliments to his topless neighbors sunbathing on the shore. He took me to the coveted meeting place of the Beachcombers Club and introduced me to Sebastian Junger. He gave me directions to Norman Mailer’s grave. He spent hours showing me the stacks of paintings in his saltbox home at the mouth of Commercial Street, a house filled with natural light. I took a “golden hour” picture of Busa using my father’s Nikon 35mm, and was pleased at how the photo captured his essence. In it, he is shirtless and deeply suntanned, mid-explanation of some point on Motherwell or Frankenthaler, with his hands in a sort of prayer-posture—the sun pouring in through the window behind him forms a halo and catches the edges of his glasses. I have turned my house upside down to shake out that photo, but nothing doing. Like Chris Busa, it exists now only in my memory.

There are many stolen moments with Chris Busa that I could recount in great detail, but here are a few more of the ten-cent versions. The weekend that Donald Trump was elected to office, we smoked and drank with John

Buffalo Mailer on a sunbathed rooftop in the Bronx. Another time, at a poetry reading, Busa gave his seat to a homeless man, then spent twenty minutes after the reading talking with him about art. At more than one conference or residency, we have shared theories and wishes and dreams and jokes at the hotel bar. What strikes me about these moments is not how many of them I can recount, but how important each of them now seems—how time has magnified the lessons of my friend Chris. Despite not seeing or speaking to each other for months on end, Chris Busa and I always fell right back into an engaging discussion, and it took me until this year to realize just how much of an impact he will have had in my life. We should all be so lucky to meet the days to come with his energy, and to use it to fill the void he has left behind.