

## *Henry Miller in Brooklyn*

### BACKGROUND ON HENRY MILLER, QUOTES

Chronology of Miller's life, highlights excerpted from his autobiography *My Life and Times* (Playboy Press, 1971). Miller died in 1980. (See [www.henrymiller.org](http://www.henrymiller.org) for the complete chronology and more about Miller.)

#### **1891**

Born in the Yorkville section of Manhattan, December 26th, of American parents of German ancestry. Moved to Brooklyn in first year. **1892-1900** Lived in the streets of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, known as the 14th Ward. **1901** Moved to "the street of early sorrows" (Decatur Street) in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn.

#### **1909**

Entered City College of New York and left after two months — rebelled against educational methods. Took job with Atlas Portland Cement Company, financial district, New York. Began period of rigorous athletic discipline that lasted seven years. **1910** Began affair with first mistress, Pauline Chouteau of Phoebus, Virginia, a woman old enough to be my mother.

#### **1913**

Traveled through the West. Worked as a ranch hand in effort to break away from city life. Met Emma Goldman, the celebrated anarchist, in San Diego — a turning point in my life.

#### **1914**

Back in New York, worked with father in his tailor shop; tried to turn business over to the employees. Met Frank Harris, my first contract with a great writer.

#### **1917**

Married Beatrice Sylvas Wickens of Brooklyn, a pianist. **1919** Daughter born, named Barbara Sylvas, now known as Barbara Sandford

#### **1920**

After working several months as a messenger, became employment manager of the messenger department, Western Union in New York. **1922** Wrote first book, *Clipped Wings*, during three weeks' vacation from Western Union duties.

#### **1923**

Fell in love with June Edith Smith while she worked in a Broadway dance palace. **1924** Left Western Union, determined never to take a job again, but to devote entire energy to writing. Divorced first wife and married June Smith.

### **1925**

Began writing career in earnest, accompanied by great poverty. Sold prose-poems, *Mezzotints*, from door to door.

### **1927**

Opened a speak-easy in Greenwich Village with wife June. **1928** Toured Europe for one year with June on money given to her by an admirer.

### **1931-1932**

Met Anais Nin, the writer, in Louveciennes. Began writing *Tropic of Cancer* while walking the streets and sleeping where possible. Worked as proof-reader on the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. Taught English at Lycee Carnot (Dijon) during the winter.

### **1933**

Took apartment with Alfred Perles in Clichy and visited Luxembourg with him. The *Black Spring* period; great fertility, great joy. Began book on Lawrence which was never finished. June returned to Europe, but after a brief stay asked for a divorce and left. **1934** Divorced from June in Mexico City by proxy.

### **1936**

Visited New York again. Practiced psychoanalysis. *Black Spring* published in June. **1937** Momentous meeting with Lawrence Durrell. *Scenario* published with illustration by Abe Rattner. Began publication of *The Booster* with Alfred Perles. Met W. T. Symons, T. S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas.

### **1939**

*Tropic of Capricorn* published in February. End of a very important period of close association with Anais Nin, Alfred Perles, Michael Fraenkel, ... et. al. Toured southern France. Left for Athens on July 14, arriving at Durrell's home in Corfu, Greece, in August. Back and forth to Athens several times, visited some of the islands, toured the Peloponnessus. High water mark in life's adventures thus far. Met George C. Katsimbalis (the Colossus); George Seferiades, the poet, Ghika, the painter, et. al. Source of regular income stopped with death of Paris publisher (Jack Kahane, the Obelisk Press), the day after war was declared.

### **1940**

Returned to New York in February where I met Sherwood Anderson and John Dos Passos. Wrote *The Colossus of Maroussi*, *The World of Sex*, *Quiet Days in Clichy* and began *The Rosy Crucifixion*.

**1941** Made tour of USA accompanied part of the way by Abraham Rattner, the painter, from October 20, 1940 until October 9, 1941. Father died while I was in Mississippi and I returned to New York. Left for California in June 1942. Continued with *The Rosy Crucifixion* (finished half of it) and with *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (finished about two-thirds).

### **1943**

Made two to three hundred water colors. Exhibited at Beverly Glen American Contemporary Gallery, Hollywood, with success. **1944** Exhibited water colors at Santa Barbara Museum of Art and in London. Seventeen or more titles edited for publication in England and America. Year of fulfillment and realization. First "successful" year from material standpoint in whole life. Married Janina M. Lepska in Denver, Colorado, December 18, 1944. Moved to Big Sur, my first real home in America.

### **1945**

Finished *Sexus* at Keith Evans' cabin, Partington Ridge. Daughter Valentine born November 19. **1946** Moved to shack at Anderson Creek in January. Began work on *Into the Night Life* book with Schatz. Also began book about Rimbaud: *The Time of the Assassins*. **1947** Took possession of Wharton's house on Ridge in February. Began writing *Plexus*, *Into the Nightlife* completed.

### **1948**

Wrote *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder*. Son Tony born August 28. **1949** Finished *Plexus*. Began writing *The Books in My Life*.

### **1951**

Separated from wife Janina Lepska; the children went to live with her in Los Angeles. **1952** Eve McClure arrived April 1 to live with me. Began writing *Nexus*. Divorced Janina Lepska. Left for tour of Europe with Eve on December 29. Arrived in Paris for New Year's Eve.

### **1953**

Big year — best since Clichy. Invited to stay at home of Maurice Nadeau, former editor of *Combat* and chief organizer of the Defense of Henry Miller... Returned to Big Sur at the end of August. Married Eve McClure in Carmel Highlands in December.

### **1954**

Alfred Perles arrived in November to write *My Friend Henry Miller*. Traveling exhibition of water colors in Japan. Began writing *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. **1955** Barbara Sandford, daughter by first marriage, came to see me; hadn't seen her since 1925.

### **1956**

Left for Brooklyn in January with Eve to take care of my mother who was dying. While there met Ben Grauer of NBC and made recording *Henry Miller Recalls and Reflects*. Finished *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* book. **1957** Rewrote *Quiet Days in Clichy* upon recovery of ms., which had been lost for 15 years. Elected member of National Institute of Arts and Sciences.

## 1960

Wrote *To Paint is to Love Again*. Left for Europe April 4 to attend Cannes Film Festival as one of the judges. **1961** Toured Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Visited Marino Marini, the famous sculptor, who did my head in bronze. Returned to Pacific Palisades from London in November. In this year Grove Press published *Tropic of Cancer*.

## 1962

Began volume two of *Nexus* while in Pacific Palisades. Received final decree of divorce from Eve in June. **1963** Made 115 water colors from March to end of July. Moved to Ocampo Drive in Pacific Palisades in February. Contracted for film of *Tropic of Cancer* with Joe Levine.

## 1967

The opera *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder* produced in Marseilles, France, in French. *The Henry Miller Odyssey* film begun by Robert Snyder. Began study of Japanese with Michiyo Watanabe. Married Hoki Tokuda on September 10 in Beverly Hills. Honeymoon trip to Paris in September

## 1968

Lawrence Durrell visited me in Pacific Palisades in March. Began *My Life and Times* by Henry Miller, a visual history, with Bradley Smith. **1969** Premiere of *The Henry Miller Odyssey* at Royce Hall, U.C.L.A. took trip to Europe in June to observe progress on *Tropic of Cancer* film.

## 1970

*Tropic of Cancer* film opened in U.S. *Quiet Days in Clichy* film opened in U.S. Received book of Year Award in Naples for *Come il Colibri* (Stand Still Like the Hummingbird). First and only prize I ever received for my literary work. **1971** Publication of *My Life and Times* by Henry Miller by Playboy Press.

Henry's self-written biography stopped here.

## QUOTES BY AND ABOUT MILLER

“Whoever uses the spirit that is in him creatively is an artist. To make living itself an art, that is the goal.”

Henry Miller

“We should not stop to reflect, compare, analyze, possess, but flow on and through, endlessly, like music.”

Henry Miller

“There was never any time when I was living one life, the life of a husband, a lover, a friend. Wherever I was, whatever I was engaged in, I was leading multiple lives. Thus, whatever it is that I choose to regard as my story is lost, drowned, indissolubly fused with the lives, the stories, the dramas of others.

Henry Miller, from *Black Spring*, 1963

“We conjugated the verb ‘to love’ like two maniacs fucking through an iron gate.”

Henry Miller, on his relationship with June

“America is no place for an artist: to be an artist is to be a moral leper, an economic misfit, a social liability.”

Henry Miller, from *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, 1945

"We are all guilty of crime the great crime of not living life to the full. But we are all potentially free. We can stop thinking of what we have failed to do and do whatever lies within our power. What those powers that are in us may be no one has truly dared to imagine. That they are infinite we will realize the day we admit to ourselves that imagination is everything. Imagination is the voice of daring."

*Henry Miller*

“Writing his great autobiographical works could be compensation for what he went through with June and Jean. Might give shape to a love that reality didn’t.”

Kingsley Widmer, from *Henry Miller*, 1990

“[He] always got excited watching June make love to others because the more lovers she had the greater the personal victory for Miller. All that accumulation of love for the loveless Miller.”

Kingsley Widmer, from *Henry Miller*, 1990

“I saw in her [June] a caricature of the theatrical and dramatic personage. Costumes, attitudes, talk. She is a superb actress. No more. I could not grasp her core. Everything Henry had said about her was true.”

“She is glad to be leaving. Henry loves her imperfectly and brutally. He has hurt her pride by desiring her opposite: ugly, common, passive women. He cannot endure her positivism, her strength. . . . Probably Jean loved her strength, her destructive power. For June is destruction.”

Both in *Henry and June*, from *The Diary of Anais Orlando Nin*, 1986

“No there's nothing like Miller when he gets rolling. Men with literary styles as full as Hawthorne's appear by comparison stripped of their rich language, stripped as an AP style book; one has to take the English language back to Marlowe and Shakespeare before encountering a wealth of imagery equal in intensity.”

Norman Mailer, *Genius and Lust*