

Transcript of edited excerpt.

AMRAM, DAVID

"My name is David Amram. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Well, I would just think of the time I walked down MacDougal Street—I wrote about this in *Offbeat: Collaborating with Kerouac*—One side of the street was dark, and they have those steel trap doors in the sidewalk, and they open those up at night so they can take stock down into the place. They also take garbage out. So they would open up this, like a steel gate that was in the sidewalk.

If you were walking down the dark side of the sidewalk, you could fall down in one of those things. So most people walked in the street, if they were on a side that wasn't lit.

This was a dark street, and you could see the piles of old newspapers and half-eaten souvlakis and popsicle sticks and beer cans and bottles and cigarette and cigar butts, because that was before anybody had a conception of anything remotely relating to the idea of ecology. Certainly in the '50s, it was still everybody throwing everything around.

So Jack started walking right close to the buildings in the darkest part. I said, "Jack, think of that Fats Waller song." I said, "'Sunny Side of the Street.'" Fats used to sing that. I said, "We're going to fall down in one of those basements. Let's go on the other side of the street. Let's walk on the sunny side of the street." And he said, "Nah." He said, "An artist always has to be in the shadow."

Finally, I got him to come on the other side of the street. As we walked, he looked, and he said, "Look at that." So I looked, stared at the sidewalk, thinking maybe he saw something interesting that had been dumped there. He said, "See those diamonds in the sidewalk?" I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, look at that." And I looked down, and sure enough, if you looked hard enough there was this little glistening stuff like asphalt.

He said, "Those are all the reflections of all the beauty that's here, not just in this sidewalk, but everything in life that we take for granted and ignore that's right here for all of us to have, those precious diamonds."