



THE PILGRIM

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PUBLISH'D
UNDER THE
GENEROUS
AUSPICES OF
THE MONDAY
LUNCH
PROGRAM,
CATHEDRAL
CHURCH OF ST.
PAUL, BOSTON

From the desk of the Editor:

The kingdom of heaven, we are repeatedly told, is not trumpets and gongs and shafts of light but something far stealthier and lower to the ground, something – like yeast in the dough – whose presence may only be detectable in the sharpening, animating effect it has upon the ordinary elements of life. Something, perhaps, like a bunch of pilgrim writers showing up at a bookstore in Brookline and delivering a tight programme of readings to a quaking, sniffing, chuckling, gasping and finally standing-on-its-feet-applauding audience.

The Pilgrim's first birthday party, on December 5th at the Brookline Booksmith in Coolidge Corner, was a great success. Eleven readers, eleven opportunities for the public to experience the unadulterated flavour of our magazine. The store's Reader's Room was packed out. Great and celebrated authors have read in this space, and not always well: the editor himself has seen more than one heavy hitter go bored and adenoidal over his own work. But the pilgrims were *on*, all of them: Steve Sullivan's poem "Solitude" transported us to a place of cold and lucid stillness; Dave Reid shook the crowd; tiny mental popping sounds greeted the work of Tam Archer; and two poems by Flowin' Eddie Atkins were read – and glossed, improvisationally – by his friend Frankie, whose presence at the event that night was a heroic act of loyalty.

Our deep thanks to the Booksmith and its staff, and to Otto Pizza: it tasted excellent. *JWP*

MIXING AND MATCHING

by Steve Sullivan

It's getting around the time where everyone is wrapped up in blankets, wearing mix-and-match boots or gloves to stay warm. Then boom, the weather changes – jumps up ten degrees, and in a line for food you lose maybe a glove or a hat. Then of course the weather dips down again, into the 30s, and you are without. So you look to cover up with anything you got.

And now there you are all multi-colored and odd-looking, and maybe a little grubby. This is how it happens, because you are trying to keep all your possessions.

PIECE BY PIECE

Novel, romantic, even breathtaking at times –
but then for some reason we let it go.
We begin to take it for granted,
and suddenly it disappears,
as if someone put blinders on our heads.
It's old hat. The same tired daily routine.
No surprises around the next corner.

Sometimes a memory filters in,
and makes us think.
Or a smell like burning leaves,
back when we could burn leaves in the street.
Maybe a stranger's smile,
even though it be a quirky one.

Lost the ability to show our emotions,
no more thrills, even love now gone.
Hearts shattered, chipped away
piece by piece. Another loved one taken,
again and again, and with each passing
more and more of our love center disappears.
Not much of it left now.

But that fragment still beats,
holding within it those memories,
such dear memories.
Tears roll down the cheek,
wiped away with a sleeve – it's been so long,
why does it still ache?

Some love is everlasting. It will live in us
forever. Nothing can obliterate it.
The ones we remember, we hold
and cherish – the fabric of our beings,
'til our turn comes to join them.

Frank Brescia

THE WRITER'S INNER DEMON SPEAKS!

by Paul Estes

[In a slithery, insinuating voice.] Have you noticed, little writer, that lately your writings have all gone downhill? The ideas are no longer readily available, the flair just isn't there. You start your day's writing wondering what to write about. You can't tell the difference between what's interesting and what isn't. And when you do manage to get something down, the details elude you, making your work bland. Whatever's going on in your head, you can't put it down on paper without something being lost in translation. You know what? You're robbing the reader. Yes, you are.

[Breathing sounds.] Oh, you can pretend that you need a quieter space, that the voices of the people around you are distracting you. But that's not the real story, is it? The real story is your inability to perform. It's your lifelong curse. Everything you attempt in this world, you're just not quite good enough to pull it off. It's why you'll always fail at everything you strive for. Try and better yourself and this curse will slap you down. Trust me.

Another thing: your medication probably isn't working. Did you think of that, little writer? You're getting depressed again. Might be time for another visit to the doctor. *[Louder now.]* Life still sucks!



BOTTOM RUNG: THE PLACE TO BE

by Tam Archer

The world told me yesterday that I had to surrender my dreams and settle for a commonplace job – just long enough to earn the next step up, see, because *everyone* starts at the bottom. The world told me that I was broken, and that no glue could hold my pieces together, because I just wasn't cut out for college. The world was afraid of the monster I became because of the Life it gave me to experience.

But my heart kept beating, day in and day out. My eyes would open, inexorably, and I'd be given another chance to contemplate my circumstances. Maybe the holes in my memory were the key to discovering the holes in you, world. Maybe my heart just had enough of the hurt, but wouldn't countenance the idea of throwing in the towel. It told me that anything is possible: it SCREAMED like a thousand sirens when I considered ignoring my dreams.

So I've found myself here, alone but not alone, at the bottom of a ladder that reaches out of sight and into Heaven. Yet I'm stronger and confident with you, world, that I've ever been before.

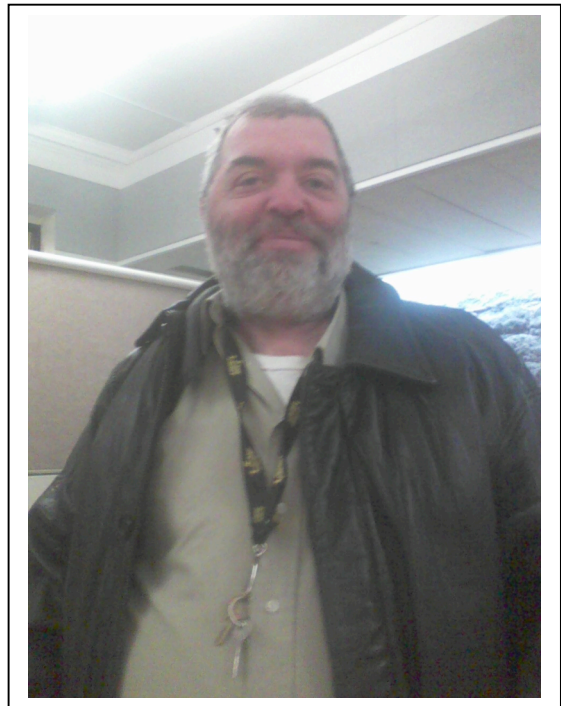
Mother, you are no longer *my* world.

LOST CONNECTION

It's half-and-half at the shelter –
driving me up the wall
but the other guys are alright,
and it's quiet enough to sleep.
No dreams. I like dreaming
but the meds make me sleep too hard.

They caught Nina again,
trying to get into the country.
She was in... what did that guy tell me?
Not London. Berlin?
I need to keep my phone charged
for when she calls me, but something's wrong.
Battery's dead. Charger's shot. No life to it.

Eddie Atkins



DAVE'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE *by Dave Reid*

So here it is: another year coming. For fifty-some years I've been saying "This is going to be my year." Well, brothers and sisters, seems my year never comes. I'm still under a bridge, homeless, nothing's changed from last year or the year before. It's nothing new to me: just another year for us homeless people.

So this is Christmas. The other day me and my friend Steve went to a store to get a much-needed pair of shoes for the winter, with the help of St. Pauls. We walk in, it's what they call Black Friday – thousands of people shopping, pushing, bumping into one another. Then at the cashier the line is like an hour long. My friend gets in line but I'm freaking out. I really had to get out of there – all I saw was greed, with no respect for other people.



Black Friday, huh. Where does the name come from? I believe it comes from darkness, evil, not caring for others. Then on the way home I pass a supermarket: same kind of deal, big crowds. They must be doing last-minute food shopping for their big dinner. I'm wondering if everyone is welcome at that feast.

The radio, all it does is play Christmas shit. The only song that makes sense to me is "Silent Night." Don't get me wrong, it's Christmas and kids should get their toys and gifts. But most people forget what Christmas is, because they're caught up in this shopping greed and being dark to one another. Well brothers and sisters, Christmas to me is God having his son born into this world – a homeless baby born this day so he can hang on a tree for my sins. So remember that. Share it with your kids. And thank Him on this day instead of being greedy and dark. Remember Him and you'll have plenty of sunshine.

As for me and my brother Steve, this Christmas we'll be under that bridge, eating cans of soup and thinking and praying for all of you. Me and Steve will be so close to God because we may not have much but we always remember to be grateful – that soup will be the best soup we've ever had. So to all my readers, have a blessed Christmas. The new year? It's just another year. God bless, we'll be praying for you. HO-HO-HO.



The Pilgrim

BUILDING A MYSTERY

by Garret Jordan

Have you ever reached that point in your life where going back is absolutely out of the question – because you refuse to relive the past – but you can't quite move forward yet because you have no idea where to go or how to get there? In your hands are all the tools to make a good future for yourself, but you don't which ones to start using first. Sara McLachlan sang about this in "Building A Mystery", which is sort of a metaphor for starting a life for yourself from scratch, without knowing what it's going to become. Well, that's *exactly* where I'm at. I'm trapped in what I call "the Limbo of Life" and I'm absolutely hating it.

One thing has changed, though, and for the better at that. After a 4-year hiatus I have re-enrolled in college to continue working on my Associate's degree in Liberal Arts. Now there's the biggest mystery of all. What will happen in the semester to come? What courses will I take this time around? How much of the expense – if anything – will be covered by financial aid? These are all questions that will be answered eventually. I just hope I like the answers. And I also hope you've all enjoyed reading this. Thank you for your time. Cheers!

CHEMISTRY

I am most myself
when I'm around the right people.
Some people rub me the wrong way.
I try to be friendly
but sometimes it's better
just to move along.
Sometimes there's just no chemistry
between people.

Thomas Slattery

SCARY MOMENT

Skid, shake, tremble,
die and dive.
No rest, can't sleep,
peace unknown.
Pray for me
in my small hell.
Cry HELP!
Whispers: I am,
I hear you,
will heal your tears.

Yvette

SPEAKING OUT

by Bryant

There's a type of person who doesn't always say what he thinks, but when he does – watch out! I'm told that when I talk my voice carries. My question is: what does it carry? I think it carries the most when I get upset. Some people tell me I should keep my mouth shut and mind my own business, but then when I DO keep my mouth shut they tell me I'm hiding something and they need to know what it is. I wish they'd make up their minds! Do you want my opinion or not?

Thank God we have this Writers Group or I'd be keeping too much stuff bottled up inside me.



TRANQUILITY by Kevin Walker

Thanks to charity I was able to upgrade from sleeping on cardboard to a rubber mat and a decent warm sleeping bag: an improvement in my conditions which has led to an improvement in the quality of my sleep.

Sleeping as deeply as I ever have, outside in a field of fallen leaves and frosted ground down by the Charles river, I woke suddenly. What was wrong? Why did I wake from such a deep and sound sleep? I looked at my watch. 4.00 am. Not a cloud in the pitch black sky. In fact the stars were out – I could clearly make out Orion on this crisp and crystalline fall morning. So what woke me up? It suddenly occurred to me that it was the total silence that had roused me. The total absence of any background noise. No traffic on Storrow Drive; no lapping of waves; no bird noises; nothing but an unusual hyperborean silence which enveloped me and played with my mind. In my brand new sleeping bag, on my ground pad, I felt as safe as couch potato on his sofa. I lay flat on my back in utter serene comfort.

I had no inclination to move. I didn't want to break this spell of tranquility with the inevitable harsh reality of yet another day of homelessness. I knew I had to vacate my area by 5.00 am or be discovered by a jogger, worker or cop. But I nursed that hour the way a gambler nurses his wagers, savoring each nanosecond before the moment of truth. That one hour of unexpected tranquility was one of those magic moments only gained in the state of homelessness – by being there, not wanting to be there.

NYC, 1980

Shouldn't be on the streets but
there you are:
tryin' hard, dyin' hard.
Not a dime, no time.
Think the room is moving?
The room *is* moving.
So RELAX.

Henry Gunderson

THE WORLD VS MY HEART

by Richard William Lizine

It's like the Lord versus the Devil himself – an unending battle, but the Lord has power over my heart and no devil on Earth can stop that. He helps me with everything that the Devil tries to get me into.

This is why it's the world versus my heart, because the Lord rules my heart and the Devil is of this world, or this Earth, or whatever you want to call this place we're on.

SPREADING MY WINGS by David "Shaggy" Hurley

I remember my first acid trip. I was walking down this long dark hallway until I came to a door. But as I reached for the handle a great hesitation came over me and I started to sweat and shake like a leaf in a Fall wind. After a few seconds I entered and what I saw was myself being confronted by my own past, which wasn't pleasant. So I started walking real fast, *real* fast, like I was watching a movie on fast-forward, back down that hallway. I came to another door, and when I opened it I saw a window...



UNREAL*by Courtney Smith*

Watching the news the other day, I learned that our city of Boston is going to raise awareness of homelessness with a walk of two miles in the cold. You know, if it was just that simple it really would be awesome. My education certainly won't raise any eyebrows, but maybe my words will. To me, this walk is a total absurdity and another way of generating funds that will never touch the inner depth of homelessness – what it really is.

I see a pretty young woman begging for change like a wino, and it makes me angry. I see young adults hanging in packs – a good family member, a job or trade school would probably make all the difference to them. I see individuals who don't need housing, but need to be placed in a facility for mental or physical ailments. I see all this, and try to swallow it – I'm currently housed but that spoonful of sugar does not make the medicine go down.

You don't mend brokenness with clothes donations, shelters or church dining. Not everyone gets housing, and those with CORI or mental issues fall through the cracks. No free clothes or free food can mend this problem of total homelessness. People need to know this and be aware. You can give all the love you want but if our society does not allow them to grow, there will always be homelessness. Boston hands out a lot of free food and apparently it's now more baloney than ever. When a wound needs stitches you don't give someone a Band-aid.

We are not all in the same boat. Some of us get out of homelessness quickly, but then there's the chronic homeless crowd – they might get housing but it's hard, because after all the free services they're like wild foxes that have been fed by hand. They can no longer survive on their own. I've seen some fall back into the same old ways – things unravel. And remember, some people choose homelessness. The best piece of advice I got, when I got housing, was to separate my street life from my new one.

Sometimes homelessness is visible and clear to the eye, sometimes not. A walk in the cold might raise money, but it can never raise true awareness. When the walk ends, and the nice people get back on their trains or into their cars, they will not have felt the burdens or panics of homelessness. They'll go back to a nice place with heat, thinking that they helped out. Which they did, in a way – you can't say they don't care. But one night at even 25 degrees, with gusting wind, would really make them see things differently. I've got no cures for these problems, but I know a little bit about what people need. You can't know what it feels like to be chronically homeless until you've truly, silently screamed.

THE ROUGHEST SWEETEST PLACE*by Brian*

The roughest place I know may also be the sweetest place, and that is my meditation cushion. That's where I've spent the most time with myself and all of the deep emotions in life, sitting with aching legs, again and again coming back to one point.

Learning to see every moment as sacred is rough work, but eventually a tender heart makes up for it all.



BLESS YOUR COTTON SOCKS*(for Raymond Hamilton, Aggressive Street Outreach)*

Is what we say in Britain to a child,
 or laced with sarcasm when we want
 to be patronising. I wouldn't dare patronise you,
 dear friend, or suffer a glare that could
 wither my organs to dust, but last night at the shelter
 I folded laundry with the humble joy of a priest preparing
 communion. Every article had been given from your hand.

You gave me a raincoat which saved my skin, but some gifts
 were ill-fitting like your nicknames for me: 'Little Mary Sunshine'
 or 'Mary Poppins' when I felt neither perky nor 'practically perfect'.
 You share my grandfather's name and hairstyle, but calling you
 'Grandpa' is a mistake I won't make twice. At a time when I
 wanted to blend into the earth in every sense you insisted
 I take a reversible winter jacket - hot pink on one side, electric
 blue on the other - so I could not escape your opinion that I
 was precious and should be safer in traffic.

And the nickname I could bear... 'Sister Mary Magdalen', initials
 the same as mine, she was the original Eminem. Friar, Brother,
 God bless your steadfastness on the path, your ability to laugh
 with abandon, God bless your sternness, God bless your kindness,
 and God bless the meanderings of your beautiful mind. God bless
 these shoes I wear today, and God bless your....hang on, where
 is your twin hiding? I know I put two in the dryer...clinging to my
 hoodie? Voila!...God bless your cotton socks.

*Margaret Miranda***NEW BEGINNING***by Rose*

I've been welcomed back to my
 old church in New Hampshire,
 and I feel great. I can go there
 on Sunday and pray for my
 family and friends. I've been
 changing, and I've given my life
 over to God. I believe in Him
 more and more now because
 he's helped me throw a lot of
 stuff out of my life.

My dad and my best friend both
 passed away this year. On the
 phone my dad told me to be
 strong and to make up my own
 mind. Now I have my kids back
 in my life: I have a new
 granddaughter in New
 Hampshire and a new grandson
 in Utah somewhere.

It feels like my life is changing
 for the better now, because I've
 found my place and I can help
 people out. I don't ask for
 anything back – it just feels
 great to help people out.

CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOME. SEEK OUT JAMES PARKER AT MONDAY LUNCH.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AVAILABLE:

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