

The Tailoring of a Wordsmith

Sarah Shaheen © 2009

Teddy, I am not poor today.
I have no money, but I am not poor.

I am writing and
I would write
A thousand poems,
A thousand parcels of scintillating stars.

To gain the fortune of seeing
One of them being read
By a man with brass knuckles,
And a belt that reads Conception.

To feel their stigma
Rise up between the pages of
A paper bound ink dance.

To run up and catch the falling
Letters
Off of a once abandoned hitch van.

To put on the lavish dress
Of a good imagination
And public announcer.

To follow the trail of silvery biscuits and
Burnt toast
Beneath a sun umbrella.

To find
The satisfaction of long endured passion
Lingering somewhere between
Blood and ink.

Teddy, I am not poor today.
I have no money, but I am not poor,
Only ravenous.

So, I write a thousand poems,
And dream a pretty sweetheart dream
Of being tailored by a wordsmith.

Always with a song in his heart

Now if he only had a guitar to pound out the rhythm

BY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Kevin Bynum is the first Street Roots vendor I have interviewed who is homeless as a direct result of the economy. He doesn't think that he can get regular work for a while, so he's looking for ways to enjoy his current situation. A guitar would help.

Bynum dreams of owning a steel string acoustic guitar this summer so he can play "All Summer Long" by Kid Rock outside

VENDOR PROFILE Kevin Bynum

VooDoo Doughnut in Old Town Portland.

It was 1989, my thoughts were short, my hair was long / Caught somewhere between boy and man

"Why that song?" I asked Kevin during our interview.

"Because lots of people know it and would start singing with me."

She was seventeen and she was far from in-between / It was summertime in Northern Michigan

The tattoo artist and remodeler came to Portland via Seattle from Atlanta, Ga. He worked as a remodeler for a man who appears to have been buying small apartment buildings, fixing them up, and then either selling them or renting out the units. The financial market froze up, the employer could not get a loan to purchase the next building, and Kevin got laid off.

Ahh, ahh, ahh

Ahh, Aah, ahh

Kevin was evicted from his housing on the second day of the worst snowstorm Portland has seen in a long time. Nearly penniless, he stayed the first night of his "new experience" at the Portland Rescue Mission. Then he moved to various warming

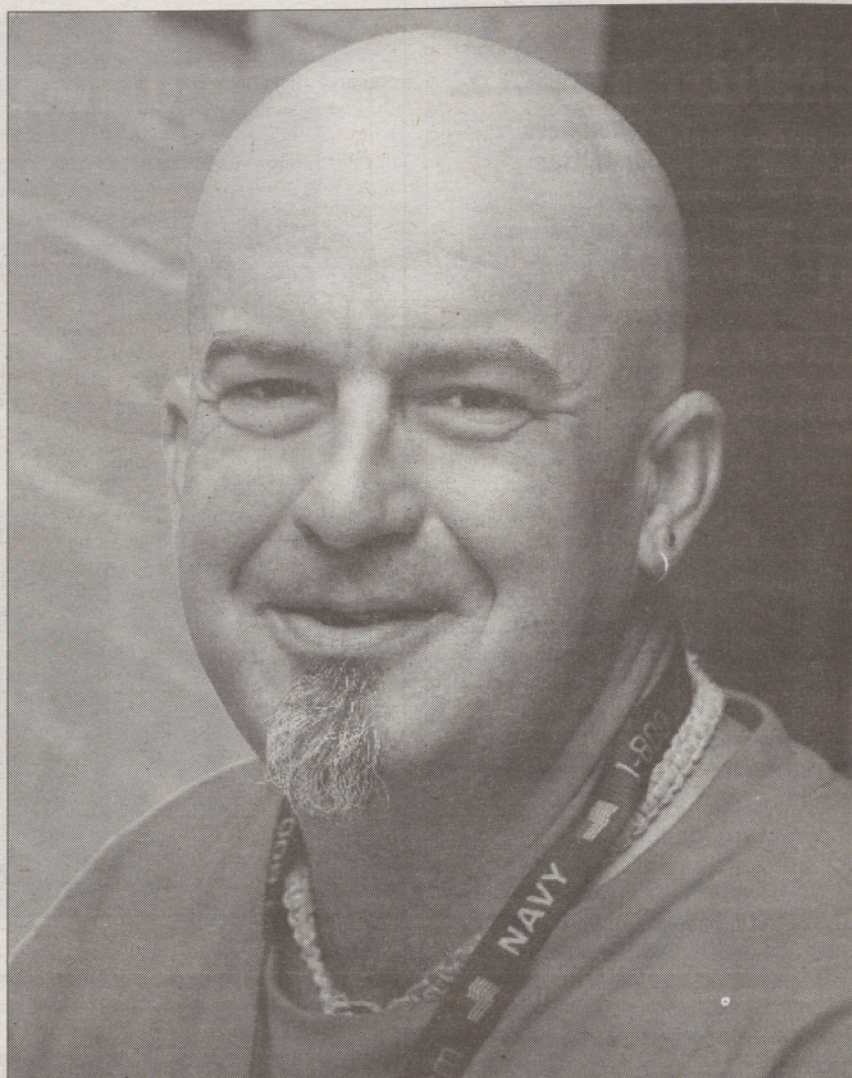


PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ

centers operated by the Red Cross and looked for work. That first month he said he talked to a few individual tattoo artists and inquired about jobs at a handful of shops. "I was told they are laying people off. People were using their money for necessities, not tattoos."

*Splashing through the sandbar,
Talking by the campfire*

It wasn't long before Kevin attended a Street Roots vendor orientation and began selling newspapers. He often used part of his income to chip in for a motel room with other vendors. Other nights he stayed with friends. He has been a vendor for seven months. Kevin is grateful to Street Roots because it keeps a roof over his head. If he had that steel string acoustic guitar, he told me, and sang on a street corner, he would be able to increase his income. "Street musicians and panhandlers make more than vendors do."

It's the simple things in life, like when and where, / We didn't have no Internet

But man I never will forget / The way the moonlight shined upon her hair

The simple life may not have included the Internet in 1989, but it can now. The Street Roots office gives its vendors free access to a computer. Kevin communicates with his daughter via his MySpace page and texting on his cell phone. Kevin showed me a photo of Tori. She was wearing a necklace with a silver guitar charm on it, "because she knows how important the guitar is to me," he said.

Singing Sweet home Alabama all summer long

Kevin told me that being a vendor has had its benefits. He likes "meeting hundreds of new people each day, listening to their stories, telling some of mine." He would like to learn all about Portland culture, which is more "tolerant" than back home. But Bynum misses his daughter, who is still in Georgia with her mother. He would like to find a way to bring Tori to Portland after she graduates from high school next year.

May the summer of 2009 be kind with an economic thaw close behind.

*Ahh, ahh, ahh
Ahh, ahh, ahh*

CORRECTIONS

Street Roots strives for accuracy, but we're human. So we also strive to correct errors in our paper whenever possible. Please report any errors to our managing editor, Joanne Zuhl, at 503-228-5657, or write in to joanne@streetroots.org.

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