

Piker

By Jay Thiemeyer

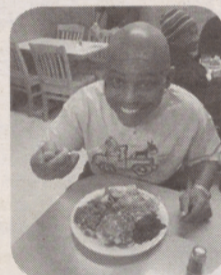
old sod, old tovarich, with braided beard,
bone white and curdled with spit,
sitting at the exit off I-90,
Rapid City flattened out congested around him
going nowhere at five in the day, and him flying
a sign: "will sing for money"
like he was a familiar
I withdrew my eyes;
failing to free myself from the urgent traffic's insistent loudness
and indifference to all but itself and preservation from same:
don't bang me,
I won't bang you! what place is there in a place like that
for an odd old man flying his sign,
an arthritic caved-in harlequin at the exit?
borderless flooding traffic flux
going nowhere fast as Buddha in rags sat smiling,
no one paying him no mind in the rush.
The sun through the haze
intensified the traffic's sweating confusion
at seeing this ancient free spirit
sitting at the exit
like a skull on the Lewis & Clark Trail
which this was, this interstate concoction
for the war machine
for the automobile machine
for the gas and oil and fast food and trucking
and RV and SUVs on trailers behind the RVs
machine
I couldn't see his face beneath the sombrero,
not clearly. It was imaginary to a great degree
the face I remember.
He looked up precisely as I passed, headed out
"on the road" myself, I saw the barest crack of a smile,
a wink
I imagined: maybe I had known him in Charlottesville
I was after all busy
retracing my route of retreat from Charlottesville's
court system to the West twenty years before, leaving Dave Kirby, my
alcoholic executive officer of the hellbound squad
of two we made up
in the invisible stairwell at the high school
where he'd been a hero on the gridiron
till the bottle
got him took him from his earlier self,
him and me both, got by the same damned forever Vodka bottle.
The stairwell where we hid each day
to start it anew with Vodka again,
managed by spare-changing the students
(who gave willingly; they didn't believe in change
at that academic village)

Going back over the foot steps through Huntington, Chicago, Elgar, Murdo,
Missoula — heading West, always westward in a drunken tilt.
I was looking for nothing, I discovered.
Acceptance of nothing that followed,
of never being there again, the twenty years or more,
nor having to be.

David had the strangest
sombrero he wore in Virginia, hiding
in stairwells and other exits availing themselves
when night drew down toward dawn.
And each hotheaded tightheaded morning we resumed our stealth
attack on our lost lives to make sure
they hadn't gone anywhere



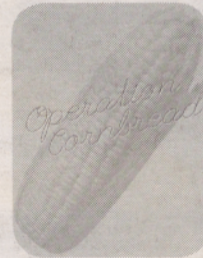
Josh MacPhee



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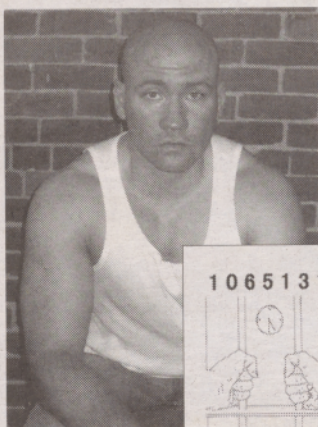
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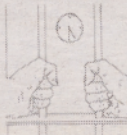
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Jason Breedlove

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alcohol.

I've spent half of the last 17 years
clean/sober and most of it was spent
inside a correctional facility in Iowa.
I've written a book about my
experiences. "1065131" by
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