

Lazy Grasshopper

by Nick Sullivan

I am the ultimate procrastinator
 Nothing to be proud of I'm told
 The grasshopper, my patron insect.
 The ants are the ones I beg for food.
 When the summer sun wanes and the autumn breeze blows
 I wait in the park for a friend but...they never show.
 There's a scrappy, beat-up whodunit novel
 Someone left sitting on the stoop.
 The Earth travels around the sun
 One and a half times while I sit finishing the crime story.
 A mind distracter.
 Leaves rustle and change color imperceptibly
 Each leaf only falls once
 And the tree misses the leaf
 So it makes it anew.
 At sun up, I stand, leaving my mystery novel
 And walk away to find something to do.

It's a challenge to look like
 you are going somewhere when
 You are where you are going.
 The street filled with others like you,
 Grimy, proud, hopeless, hungry,
 And starved for a glance, a greeting,
 A buck, not a sneer for looks reminding
 you of your invisibility. Blindsided by
 "Get a job!" You scuzz not spoken
 but there on the tongue's tip.

Always hungry, not starving, hungry
 For fresh, a leisurely meal without
 Shouts and slamming of fists and
 Jumbled talking to no one anyone sees.
 Napkins of linen, not paper, linen,
 White if you had any say, and starched,
 Sans any stains as it lies unfolded on your lap.

For the uncounted time the shuffler
 You have your names for the regulars
 Blocks your path, hunting for cigarettes,
 Moving on when you remind him,
 Again, you don't smoke.

You plan no further than that day,
 Tomorrow brings you knots of despair,
 Of uselessness, of more grime,
 Of being a throwaway, of how
 Tired you feel and how much your
 Damn feet hurt. The shoes, they
 Were free but cheap is cheap and you
 Took them anyway without a pause,
 Stuffed under your coat and walked out,
 Ready to sprint away with any
 Hint they were on to you.

Dignity

by Steven Barry

You stink. You don't smell it as it's you.
 You can get accustomed to anything if
 You have to, but you stink, people step away
 From you, frowning, noses scrunched in disgust.
 It's not like you pee on yourself, there are
 Those, but sweat on sweat on more sweat
 Gets rank and a daily shower is a pipe dream,
 What with that interminable wait for tokens,
 Then the line for a washer and dryer,
 And what are you supposed to do
 When you wear the only clothes you have?
 No shirt off your back from you,
 Not when it's your only one.

It's the old ones that really get to you.
 Tiny, barely smelly pit high
 To you, arms weighed down by bags
 Filled, who knows with what.
 Unnaturally wide, she wears her three
 Coats, dressed for a blizzard in August.
 She doesn't speak, but scowls and
 Growls her warning if you come
 Too close. She stares with fear, with
 Distrust, unaware of the curb
 She tumbles off, bags flying every
 Which way, revealing her books, an orange,
 Folded plastic and paper bags, a pair of
 Not-so-clean socks, empty pop cans, tiny pencils
 Held tightly by a green rubber band.
 You stop and offer your hand,
 Her sand-papery paw in yours,
 Boosting her upright as she checks
 Her knees-for blood? You gather her things,
 Holding them before her like an offering as
 She grumbles a thanks and skitters on,
 Where to, only she knows.

Old Hippies

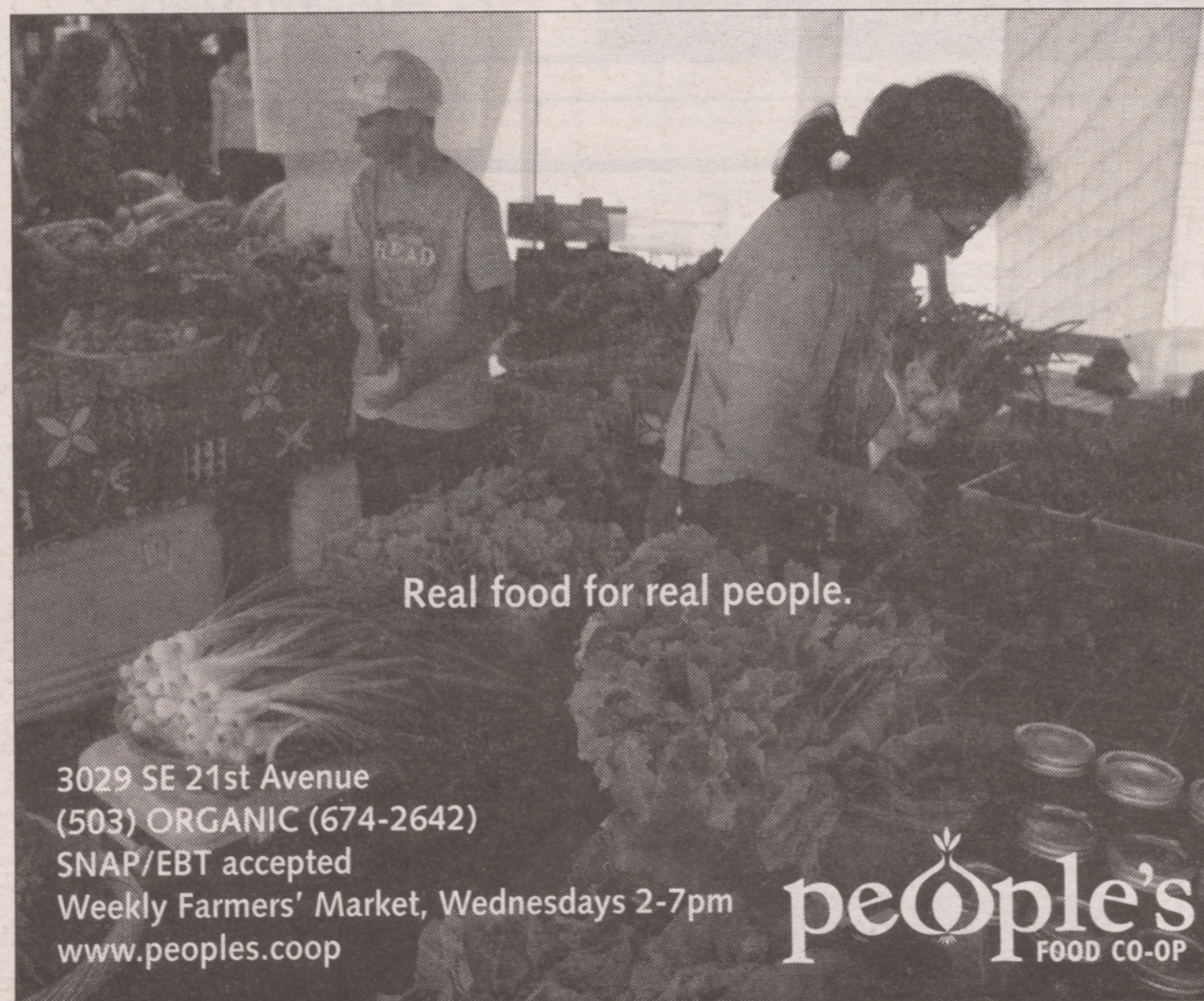
by John R. Brown

For years, these hippies have congregated under the bridge
 In the park, in the long sharp afternoon shadows,
 In their buckskins, their fringe, their granny glasses
 For so many years that the buckskin is cracked
 The fringe has thinned out like their hair
 And actual grannies wear those glasses,
 They know me, and used to invite me to join the circle,
 But I am only a respectful witness to their ceremony.
 Years go by, twenty hippies sat in that circle
 On the ground, chanting and passing the pipe,
 Now half that many, most of whom can't comfortably sit cross-legged
 Still chant and smoke and pray for peace.
 My friend George, who would be their leader
 If these beautiful people believed in leaders,
 Used to resemble heroic Jesus from "King of Kings,"
 Now looks like Gandalf, who is also in the movies.
 Old hippies never die — they just go up in smoke.

Just Geometry, Probably Trig

by James Maddox

But you were just geometry, charted out cartography
 Twisting through the pretzled parabolic curved analogy
 While I straddled the fault line between wisdom and hypocrisy
 Stitching the embroidered songs of everything taught to me



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