

In memoriam: An old friend

BY JOHN MICHAEL

Jake always had me laughing. He was a teller of tall tales; fighting with cops and fucking up drug dealers. He took life as it came, and honestly seemed to enjoy the adventure. I forget his age, but mid-20s, I imagine. He had a way with the ladies, even lived with a pretty girl for a while. She had a real job and worked at a local college. He was a romantic and fell deeply in love with her, for a while at least. But the streets always seemed to call him back, or maybe it was the drugs.

Jake grew up in Arkansas and served with the army in Iraq for a while. I believe this was true but the Army may have been part of the myth he was living in his head. Jake would go balls to the wall several weeks at a time, staying up for days on meth and mellowing out with heroin. Then he would sleep for four or five days straight, right there on the sidewalk sometimes. Everybody loved him, hobos and sophisticates alike. I used to worry on his down stretches, checking on him, bringing him food and warm clothes which he always appreciated.

Jake overdosed sometime around the first of the year. Breaks my goddamn heart. Word had it he was doing very well; he was off the drugs, living inside and working at McDonalds. Well, he got news that his sister had died and had left her son in Jake's custody. Evidently, this was too much stress. He did a bunch of meth and then followed it up with a big shot of black tar heroin and never woke up.

I am getting better at grieving. Later that night, after I heard the news, I attended a Pink Floyd laser show at OMSI. Those lights and their gentle dancing relaxed me enough to allow me to sob out some tears. Jake was right there with me in my mind, dancing down the street, bullshitting me about this and that, smiling and laughing. I am mature enough to know I am not responsible for anyone's overdose, but part of me thinks, of course, well, maybe if I had been there, he would still be around. This is narcissistic for sure, but I miss my buddy Jake.

John Michael is a former vendor with Street Roots

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by George Burdine

I speak for no one, I speak for everyone.
No resolutions for me at my age.
I surely once did.
I understand those who do,
For the hope of life and numbers (years)
could change.
It is uplifting, short-term or long.
However the next year, it is coming
And we get to do it all over again.
Perhaps with family or friends,
By yourself or with the dog or the plant.
Reflect or look ahead, it is up to you
If it really changes or stays the same.
Happy or hopeful is what we really want,
Even if it does last for two days.
Welcome to the human response to a global
time of year.



PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

Michelle Sapp, a vendor with Street Roots, holds up the keys to her new apartment. She's happy to get inside after experiencing homelessness on and off over recent years.

Street Roots and the International Network of Street Papers

All around the world, street papers are helping to lift their vendors out of homelessness, not just with the paper itself but with dedicated social workers and programmes that fit the individual needs of the vendors. From its base in Glasgow, Scotland, The International Network of Street Papers (INSP) connects 122 of the world's street papers with start-up and editorial support, staff and vendor training, funding and networking, and helps to raise awareness of the ever-growing problem of homelessness. Founded in 1994, this year INSP will celebrate its 20th year working with the street paper movement. Street Roots is proud to be a member of the global network and honored to serve the readers of Portland and Multnomah County.

