

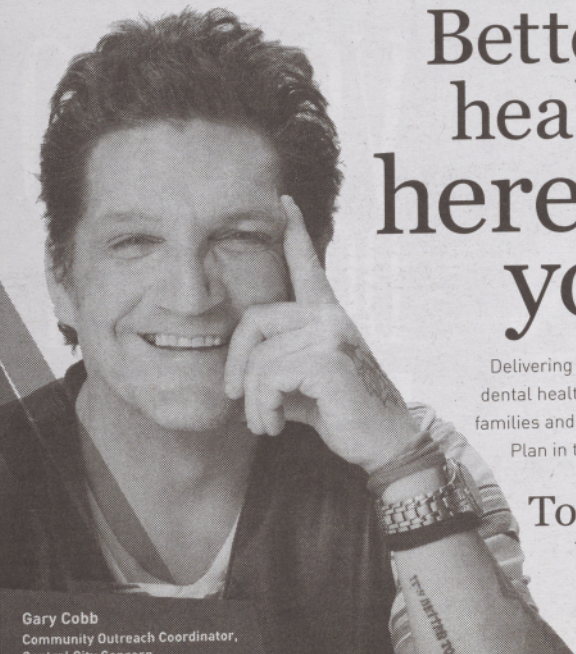
Long Live Mr. King

by John R. Brown

Let's call him Mr. King
 We'll change his name to protect the privacy of this prince
 among the homeless.
 He told me he entered the service right after Korea and got
 out just before Vietnam
 Timing is everything.
 Frugal with his V.A. benefits, generous with his food stamps,
 It was a joy to share with him baseball on the radio.
 "Your reliever should walk in a run," Mr. King told me,
 Just before the grand slam knocked my Tigers out of the
 playoffs.
 A baseball scholar, a student of the game.
 Yes, he drank too much,
 No, he did not always eat right,
 And true, he slept in a loading dock,
 Sometimes without even a blanket
 As he approached his 70th birthday.
 When I saw him late last winter at the hospitality center,
 Clearly there were problems.
 Shivering, unfocused, skinny as a smoke,
 His face as pale as his square, white beard.
 And then, no sightings of Mr. King.
 None at all.
 How sad it was to hear the details of his passing!
 They said he collapsed at the Jack In the Box,
 Was rushed to the Veterans' Hospital,
 Was saved by the medical staff.
 I heard he was housed in Vancouver,
 And that social workers had gotten him his checks,
 And when the first money came in,
 They told me Mr. King went out and drank himself to death.
 How sad to hear the excruciating details!
 And how wrong to believe them!
 How great to see Mr. King on the number twelve bus
 Frail, bald, a little unsteady but still breathing.
 "My God!" I exclaimed, "I heard you were —"
 "I know, I know," Mr. King smiled,
 "It was touch and go there for a while.
 Hey, your Tigers lost their Cy Young winner."
 Touch and go! but not gone,
 Still a baseball scholar, still a student of the game.
 Timing is everything.



by Alfred Lippincott



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