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## Fiorito: Every man does have a story

June 09, 2010

Joe Fiorito

The point is to make sense — if there is such a thing, and it can be made — of life: as in, how did we end up Here instead of There.

And so to the Good Neighbours Club on Jarvis St., just south of Dundas, a place where a fellow who ended up There could rest his dogs, get a bite to eat, use a phone, see a social worker, find a little help with housing, leave a message for a pal, check the computer, read a book, and generally feel as if he had a place to go.

The club began in 1933 and was intended for former servicemen; there are not so many vets now. And because the club is not lavishly funded, it could not operate without volunteers.

One of these is Carol Ann Cole. I spoke of making sense; she runs a weekly writing group for the men. There is no better way to make sense of a thing than to consider it, describe it, and write it down.

Carol's first project was to get the men to write letters to the soldiers in Afghanistan. Nice letters; no replies; nothing ventured . . .

Now she is helping the men to write their life stories, in the hope that these stories might one day be published as a book, to raise a little money for the club.

She is working with seven men so far. One of these is a rangy guy named Ed. He came here from out west and if he is on his uppers now, it is because his benefits haven't followed him here, not yet.

We talked the other day. He was wearing sweatpants, a shirt, and a camo cap; he had a hoodie wrapped around his waist and there were black rubber clogs on his feet; trouble with his feet; bad trouble, which explains his cane.

Ed said, "I joined the army when I was 17; the signal corps. I served in Cyprus, Golan, Egypt. I ended up in a desk job. I got bored. Then I was tapped for Intelligence.

"I'm Lithuanian, I have languages. I was in Bosnia, Somalia, Germany. I didn't want a desk job, so when my contract was up, I left. I went into construction out west." And when his feet gave out, he moved here to find a specialist.

He's living in a shelter at the moment; he bunks in shelters when he needs to come in from the street for a shower. He is soft-spoken and intelligent and observant. Why is he writing?

"Everybody's got a story."

Everybody does.

Carol Ann edits his work; when she gave his work back to him, he read it and he said, "I gotta meet this guy — oh, wait — that's me." And then he said, "I went from being a decorated soldier to living on the street."

Ernest dropped by next. He dislocated his shoulder a while back, while working construction, and there was an operation, and it didn't work, and you should see the scar.

His story?

"I see it every day in my mind, the house I built." He built that house for the love of his life when he lived in New Brunswick. And then he went west to make some money to pay his debts, and then he got hurt, and she didn't want him back.

Ernest said, "I had three acres. The house was two storeys; two baths, and a well." Of his lost love he said, "I want people to see — maybe

they know someone like me — they can say oh, it happened to him, too — it brings memories, it would lift them up.”

What other point is there?

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