

Change

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Bukowski Lives

TACOMA POET DAVID FEWSTER

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ABOVE: DAVID FEWSTER PHOTO, BY ADAM HOLDORF; BELOW: THE COVER OF FEWSTER'S PUBLISHED COLLECTION OF POEMS.

By Anitra Freeman and Kathleen Mitchell

On Nov. 14, David Fewster was in Seattle to read from *Diary of a Homeless Alcoholic Suicidal Maniac and Other Picture Postcards*. The book was released in October as a result of a \$3,000 grant from the Tacoma Arts Commission to publish a book of poems on homelessness. He joined *Real Change* writers Anitra Freeman and Kathleen Mitchell for coffee and an interview before the reading.

David says that his highest ambition these days is to leave his daughter, Hannah, with good memories of him, and he writes, basically, so that his Hannah will have something to remember him by.

Humor is a survival tool, and creativity is a survival tool. Some of us may use these tools to "make life better," or "make the world better." But such judgments are relative. For those of us prone to depression or anxiety, saying that things should be "better" morphs instantaneously into "things aren't good enough." Then we end up under the bed, drinking the cleaning fluid.

But sometimes — some few precious, precious times — we are gifted with the vision of a David Fewster, someone who can sardonically describe all our quirks and foibles and make us laugh affectionately about what schmucks we humans are, and make us glad to be alive, in all our fallibility.

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Look for the Mockingbird Times Inside!



PHOTO OF TACOMA-BASED POET DAVID FEWSTER, BY ADAM HOLDORF.

My Aspiration

When I got out of the hospital and became homeless,
I made a vow that
The only thing I wanted out of the rest of life
Was to become the Francois Villon of Tacoma.
I had no idea what I meant by this,
Except that it sounded very French,
Would somehow involve a lot of loose women,
And ensure that I never do an honest day's work
Until the day I died.

After many months, my only similarity
To the medieval poet-lover-thief
Is that Catholics have had to
Bail me out of my own shit.

Is it too late to make a change
And try to take a shot at being
Tacoma's Answer to Rod McKuen?

— DAVID FEWSTER
AUGUST 30, 2002

PUBLISHED IN *DIARY OF A HOMELESS ALCOHOLIC SUICIDAL MANIAC*

FEWSTER Continued from Page 1

It is a skill to put such clear-eyed compassion on a page so that both the humor and the sadness come through as well as they would in a personal reading on stage. David has been working on that skill for many years, starting out as a comedy/folk/punk guitarist.

David Fewster considers himself primarily a comic journalist. In the '80s and '90s he wrote columns for *Pacific Northwest*, the Sunday magazine published in *The Seattle Times*, and performed at such venues as Red Sky Poetry Theater and Victory Music Review.

Fewster says he spent his high school days devouring the humor in the *New Yorker* magazine. He also consumed large doses of James Thurber. His idol: Don Marquis, the creator of comic characters like Archy the cockroach and Mehitabel the cat and humor columnist for the *New York Sun* and the *Herald Tribune*.

Humor grounded in maturity can be more palatable than humor coming from "a 20-year-old snot-nosed kid" with little life experience. Which, he admits, he once was, a comedy writer in Southern California trying to break into some niche all his own. He's no lover of Jack Kerouac or Allen Ginsberg, evidenced in a long poem (perhaps the centerpiece of his book) set at Seattle's Crocodile Cafe, where Ginsberg once appeared. Rather than using the strident rhythms and rhymes of slam poetry, or the stream-of-consciousness form that made Ginsberg and Kerouac famous, Fewster prefers a conversational style. He wants the reader to understand without having to hear the poetry aloud.

Fewster currently calls Tacoma's Guadalupe House, run by the Catholic Workers, his home. They allow him to get behind in the rent without fear of eviction, a big drawing point for a man whose health is admittedly shot and who has learned to live day to day. He can project his housing stability through next year without anxiety now, he says with quiet gratitude.

One of his poems puts it a bit more crudely, capturing the self-dubbed "resident agnostic" at Guadalupe House: "the Catholics have had to bail me out of my own shit."

When writing poetry, the Tacoma resident admits he has most in mind the later free-verse prose poems of Charles Bukowski, a poet known for his down-to-earth crudeness. But does he believe in a Higher Power, a source of all creativity? Sure.

"Synchronicity is when God wants you to get the joke," he says.

Diary of a Homeless Alcoholic Suicidal Maniac got its start while Fewster sat writing a poem in the public library in Tacoma. Afterward, he went out for coffee, to discover a Poetry Slam in progress. It must have been a slow day, he says, because only four people signed up to compete, a lucky fact that allowed Fewster to come home with first prize (of four prizes) that day. He recalls feeling in awe that he could once again profit from writing — poetry, even.

Now, many months later, things are


looking up: Fewster has had his guitar out of hock since April. And he is keeping pen and scrap paper in pocket. Maybe there's another collection of funny poems waiting to hit him on the head during some otherwise unevent-

ful afternoon in Tacoma. In the meantime, he is giving us all something to remember him by. More than that, he is giving us encouragement, in all our most human failings, to do something worth remembering. ■

Left Bank Books, in Pike Place Market, carries *Diary of a Homeless Alcoholic Suicidal Maniac*. Or send \$7 plus \$1.50 shipping/handling to:

David Fewster
c/o Guadalupe House
1417 S. "G" Street
Tacoma, WA 98405

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