

The Passing of Stumpy Shore

By Merv Webster

The Constable had found the man 'round five on Friday morn;
Apparently while on his shift from midnight through 'till dawn.
Two youths, with blood stains on their clothes, detained drunk in the park,
Disclosed they'd rolled some homeless bloke, sometime just after dark.
Now Sergeant in this country town I'd lived round here for years;
Observed some pretty callous things, but this left me in tears.
The aged and fragile frame lay slumped there in a pool of mud
And through his snow white hair and beard was clotted, crimson blood.

The Constable looked up and said, "There fam'ly we can call?
For surely someone knows him Sarge. You know the bloke at all?"
"He's know 'round here as Stumpy lad; been here a year or two.
Came out way back in sixty-three to work on Beetaloo.
Then worked his way to overseer and often came to town;
Was captain of the football team; a sportsman of renown.
He married pretty Sheila Clark and when his son was four,
They called conscripts for Vietnam, which saw him go to war."

"A war of conflicts that would scar and traumatized the mind;
Confusing, cruel, and futile acts some failed to leave behind.
Inherent post-traumatic stress was that war's legacy,
Together with the stump you see attached below his knee.
The old man lying there my lad, is testimony too,
A life spent fighting guilt and fear his mind could not subdue.
Poor Sheila shared his sleepless nights, the flashbacks and his pain,
But in the end she lost the fight as Stumpy left again."

"He camped in squats around the town and drowned his pain with wine,
Withdrew into his own quiet world, content now to resign,
From all of life's inequities, the company of folk,
But all the town saw Stumpy Shore, a harmless poor old bloke.
His Sheila raised their only son, who still lives here today;
Who cared for her through all those years, until she passed away.
She'd told him of the man she'd known, before he went to war;

"In fact one day down by the creek while Stumpy washed his socks,
He saved a lad from drowning, as he'd dived onto some rocks.
The boy he saved that very day was his own grandson Kim;
Ironical, I guess eh lad, that Stumpy should save him."
"You know Sarge when I found the man, I thought him just a bum.
I'd judged the man on what I saw, but now I feel quite numb.
The facts are mighty sob'ring Sarge and now I feel real bad.

You reckon we can find his son?"

"You're talking to him lad."

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