

A Letter Inspired by a Poet Stephen Spyrit of Portland, Passes Away

11/22/10

The physical world saw the passing of writer, poet, organic farmer, and yoga teacher Stephen Spyrit on November 11th, 2010. Stephen was integral in the formation and many expressions of Portland's Punk Music and Artistic scene in the 80's and 90's, and continued to be so until his untimely death less than two weeks ago. He was a friend and inspiration to countless people, and he will be missed dearly.



My wife and partner, Jen Burk Reynolds, met him in the music scene mentioned above; she inhabited much of the same inner community of friends that both her and Stephen still call family. I first met Stephen on a trip to India with Jen in 2006, in which we randomly bumped into him in a small alleyway in Varanasi, India - perhaps his favorite place to call home in Asia.
(Stephen pictured walking along the ghats in Varanasi, the Ganges and he in contemplation)

During 2009 when our family lived in Portland, I had the chance to have a few long conversations with Stephen, and it further became obvious that he moved through life in a truly compassionate and insightful way. I am grateful for those now all too brief encounters. Stephen was a thirty-year member of a fellowship of close friends that mourns his loss; many of whom continue to live in shared homes and in neighborhoods of several of these 'urban communes'. It was wonderful to live so close to him for a bit.

In doing a bit of research of Stephen online I am struck primarily by two things: 1) the amount of creative projects and expressions that he left behind, including all of the people that he touched so very deeply, and 2) the pervasive lack of personal self-promotion; his work truly embodied the phrase 'look at God' rather than the all too often 'look at me'.

Perhaps his humility is one of the things that has touched me most via his death. His impact on this world has been great, but it has also been soft in the skillful way that Taoism encourages - he melded in a congruent way with whatever presented itself, even when that thing was resistance in some war-like guise. He truly was a modern-day mystic - the many stories that I had heard prior to our first meeting were clearly confirmed.

Personally, I have seldom met another person that loved Varanasi as much as I do - a love directed specifically towards all of the dramatic, contradictory, and challenging reasons this great city presents; I suspect that Stephen loved this city in a way that I could stand to learn a lot from. I feel that our shared love of Varanasi was much of the bridge that connected our brief brotherhood and love of freedom. The boy in me hopes to continue to learn from the man that he was; there are surely many of us who consider ourselves mentored by Stephen in this or that element of life's great canvas.

The reach of his life was and is both deep and wide; his presence always spoke volumes in the silence, because you just knew that it could erupt into expression in any unforeseen instant - as did his last breath. In the spontaneous way he lived each moment, so did he live the last; of this earth, of this earth.

Be well, Stephen.

Love,

Your Family