



Barry, 2019. Credit: Kodo Conover.

An Ode to Barry Sutton: Smart, Intransigent, “Absolutely Unique”

By Daniel Forbes

“Who gathers knowledge, gathers pain.” —Ecclesiastes

Did he gaze down in grudging approval on the disparate throng in a lovely gray chapel
Or was it all a bit much, a printed program even, two-hundred mourners usurping his story?
For one of many things Barry Sutton insisted on was writing his tale with his own pen
And just why did so many busy, accomplished, *housed* Portlanders gather thus
To mark the passing of a seeming no-account with no roof – it begs explanation
Therefore, permit a tale wondrous and strange from Melissa Nickerson.

She accompanied Barry and his unhealing leg to the Good Sam ER on NW 22nd
The day the poor hospital guard was killed
Gunshots rent the air up above, and then some were screaming hysterical
Security herding ER patients to the hospital's depths
Having lived on the streets for fifty years, Barry remained calm, "He just went with it."
After a time, they all washed ashore again on the ER's hard plastic chairs
Barry soon announcing he was hungry, as he did when he was
Melissa returned with a sandwich – a loaf, we'll call it
And soup, *chowder* maybe, she can't recall – a stretch, why not?

Barry a couple of bites, a few slurps, and then a halt to laser Melissa
With "deep brown, very intense, very expressive eyes" and say
Everyone here must be hungry, I'll see if anyone wants some food.
Worried over his feelings hurt: Oh, Barry, she thought, food already eaten by a homeless man?
He read her hesitation, acknowledged it with a nod, stuffed it in his pocket, and stood up
Forestalling Melissa with "the irrefutable goodness of his intent."
And cruel Death near that day, God bless every person in that ER, she says
For they all took a bite of that sandwich and some soup. "They all said yes."
One of the most moving things this chaplain has ever witnessed
Folks taking the offering from a homeless man still hungry
His alms complete, this "deeply compassionate" man sat back down at her side.

One reason among many to make music and reminisce, hundreds gathered to usher Barry forward
Five years slinging sandwiches to the hungry, Colin Wonnacott grew to know "Barry's Superpower"
He knew people saw him as homeless, but no stigma stuck
Knew people looked at him askance, but never put 2 + 2 together
It wasn't just his intellect that set him apart, but that houselessness didn't rule his sense of self.

What's more, many homeless are disconcerting, Colin says. But Barry's gentleness allayed fear
Still, there was nothing child-like there. "He wasn't a child."
Rather, "his mask painted what was on his face."
Those who got that, found a friend, Colin figures
A joyous friend with a touch of the prophet Elijah's fly in the ointment.

YOUTH

Height of the Depression, his mom, young Phyllis Scharffenberg,
Left the Oregon family farm to board a freighter and on down the Pacific Coast and through
The Panama Canal
Young Phyllis a looker not deemed safe on-board with the captain off ashore reprobating
She accompanied him on his prowls, port after port until – skipping here a bit – she ended up in Germany
Part of the crowd surrounding famous pacifist sculptor Ernst Barlach, denounced by the Nazis
For his antiwar “degenerate art” after Phyllis fled Hitler’s Deutschland (an ocean liner, the return trip).

Barry arrived in 1950, his father a big-wig’s son, Barry born into the house grandpa handed down
2229 NE Brazee, top-shelf Irvington, PDX, four bedrooms with a fireplace each
And a live-in cook gifted with a car, not that the grandeur lasted
The family – troubled Dad, loving Mom, older brother Tim, Barry – good Episcopalians all
Eventually decamping to the Washington County stix.

Barry a cuddly, bright boy, his cousins’ pet, says one of those cousins, Linda Stief,
Sole family at his memorial
Having lost touch with Barry for many a year
(The funeral home tracked down family to sign for cremation)
Linda told me, “This all brought back memories of sad family stuff, the sadness still there.”



Barry with older brother Tim and cousin Linda, circa 1955. Credit: Courtesy of Linda Stief.

Epilepsy came for him in grade school and despite, he told Linda, docs treating him
Like a “guinea pig” with so many pills, the meds did little but “make him dopey”
Epilepsy intractable, his concussions were “many.”
You can outgrow epilepsy, as apparently Barry did, say those who knew him in his thirties
Grand Mal hitting your head outgrow maybe less so
Grand Mal – just like it sounds: *Big Bad*, the EMTs backing off so not to get their nose broke.

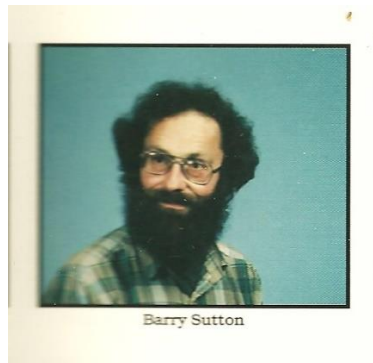
Dad’s drinking came long before the seizures. It got so bad, Dad once found himself
Living alone in a log cabin in Beaverton, back when such was still possible, Linda says
But he “took the cure” out in Pendleton – and it stuck, Mom and Barry joining him there
Things OK, long as *Big Bad* stayed away
Barry tootling the clarinet in the marching band at the Pendleton Round-Up.

But then his loving Mom’s cancer returned a-house-afire, Barry in high school
Mom gone, the bottle reclaimed Dad bad:
Home from work each night a straight shot to passed out in a chair
His Pendleton drinking buddies smoking in the kitchen
A kid subject to seizures largely on his own, eventually come to the attention of the State
Relatives raised their hands to take the poor, sweet head-banger, but their consanguinity lacking
Rules be rules, and off to the (paid) fosterers followed by the boot (or he left), age 18,
A tale Dickens might tell
Foster care and even epilepsy you can outgrow, Grand-Mal hitting your head maybe less so
His dice early cast askew, one under the couch.

LAUNCHED TO THE STREETS

Never a room over a store, no job pumping gas, never a girl to smile back – so it seems
Never cooking dogs on a hot plate, bathroom down the hall
Evanescence baked in with that state-chosen ‘family,’ he wouldn’t’ve aged out his relatives’ house
So life yawned agape, Barry just sprouting chin fuzz (not the fine wooly beard we all knew)
Launched to the streets, a kid fearing seizures out on his own
Think of the courage to carry on, knowing your mind soon haywire
Armed solely with dogged outdoor survival skills, enough for fifty years
Could you survive on the street till your 70s, attending City Council and Baroque recitals all the while?

Barry just in his twenties, did he flirt? Maybe, who knows, though a woman at his memorial
Spoke of deep looks and a ready laugh, the two of them watching TV
Eventually he showed at the downtown Unitarian outpost in 1970-something (they're not quite sure)
Church on Sunday and making phone calls from the office otherwise – many calls, his bike at the door
Morning prayers at the Peace House, plastic-fork lunches, Friday nights at Havurah Shalom
The young girls from the temple now grown to middle age recall him from their salad days.



Barry, 1997. Credit: First Unitarian Membership Directory.

Four decades and more, Pat Schwiebert has devoted herself to her fellow woman and man
The porch at Peace House where she's a mainstay offered Barry refuge
Knowing him down the years, ah-ha! tell us, Pat, of his twenties and thirties
Turns out – none of this surprising – aside from a bit sleeker, he was just the same
Intense and driven to seek Justice, if not driven to be a round peg in a round hole
To help folks help him
Never any talk of family or someone he might be close to on down the years
He outgrew his youthful epilepsy – if not necessarily *Big Bad's* effects knocking him about
Pat says he had no seizures as an adult, not till his last days.

Agitated or distraught, he *rarely* lost his touch of Grace
Counting himself a follower of most religions known to man, bridled his enthusiasms weren't
Making his rounds, he'd denude the landscape of litter, his way of giving back
“An avid trash-picker-upper,” folks would freak when he went in their yard
Maybe even to address the weeds
Remarkable, really, such care, given the hurdles he leapt daily by bicycle
Carrying most everything he owned, everywhere he'd go
A tent no help since he had three events planned that day, his life's stuff in a tent left exposed
Seeking storage, he took a pen to pending federal houseless policy and, yup, changed it.

“He curated us” as he saw fit on his daily rounds and circling his weekly track
His needs spiritual, intellectual, nutritional – and socks
Where’s Barry? Have you seen Barry? I’m worried about him
He came to hear my mother play the piano last month and seemed fine
Or out to Beaverton for the funeral of another friend’s mother
Notice to no one, a bona fide Barry sighting and then gone!

Back when, Cousin Linda’s mom would make him dinner
Needs must, he was adroit with a knife and fork
Sometimes musing politely about seconds, firsts still on-deck
But his plate finally clean, “Zip, he was out the door! He couldn’t stay put.”

He knew many and we knew him, but did anyone truly garner the man within?
Not bloody likely, not if he could help it
How old am I? I’m whatever age you want to make me.
Offered a ride in the rain, *No thanks, I have my bicycle.*
Your questions too direct, he’d stare over your shoulder
And never said where he slept, though morning might find him on your porch.

INSATIABLE FOR ALL LIFE OFFERS – EXCEPT DRINK, DRUGS & ROMANCE

“Barry was just another long-hair with a scraggily beard”
When Rhys Scholes came upon him in “anti-militarism circles back in the early ‘80s.”
Rhys worked for the county chair back when Barry “with his long memory and lots of notes” –
Old-school, paper-and-pen activism –
Would instruct the county board on the whys, wheres, and whatfores
Including, pray tell, what earthly reason the old Washington High School field
Couldn’t be used for the homeless, or at least to store their stuff – storage his White Whale
Cogent and correct, he spoke a “profound truth”
To people who didn’t want to spill “their backroom deal in public”
A deal with the local community association that punted Barry’s “totally reasonable proposal”
Rhys says poor Barry couldn’t understand why “the self-evident right thing wasn’t being done”
And there you have him in a nutshell
His journal found after his death, he wrote:
“That some people can do so much to hurt others is almost inconceivable.”

Barry connected somehow (but of course) with Noam Chomsky, who supplied the phone card
For him to call Ann Oliva, a top-shelf fed running homeless policy
She told me she gets tons of calls, usually “one-and-done complaints”
But, shocko-schock, in pursuit of riding a bike not bedecked with all his worldly goods,
Barry proved different
New federal homeless-bucks on tap, he wanted some slated for storage
So, taking a pen to the regs, he did his homework and offered
“Well-reasoned, specific recommendations that actually altered pending policy.”

After that, Ann told her staff at the Dept. of Housing & Urban Development to put him through
Barry calling her once a month for years to offer
“Unvarnished and unapologetic thoughts, experiences and recommendations from the ground up.”
He ended up impacting her job going forward, Barry helping prove “the value of partnering with clients.”
Ann often visited family in Portland and was chagrined not to match a face
To the informative buzz in her ear
So she and her brother trooped fruitlessly shelter to shelter – though Barry favored porches and alcoves
Her brother later encountered Barry at the Heart of Wisdom Zen Temple – natch.

He’d strategize necessities
You don’t live by your wits fifty years on the street running from your needs
His far-flung wanderings required fuel for his strong, slight, stooped frame
Carrying bags of papers and books, off he must be, showing up chipper despite the night’s rain
Despite the moldering rain the day before tomorrow and the sleet a week from Tuesday
Off he must be: the housing mavens need instruction, the mayor a word, City Council correcting.

His a straight shot down a crooked path, he sparkled in various shades of beige
A warm, loving, funny, oddball dude – a pretty good combo, all in all
With his obsessive idealism and signature “Beaver-Tail” (a friend called it)
Tangle of white-boy, Rasta hair that in Barry’s case sometimes hung down his *front*, not his back
Fascinating, begging to be touched and comprehended.



Talking to fellow Buddhist Ed Welsh, Barry's characteristic clasped hands indicate he's listening with every fiber of his being, 2011. Credit: Kodo Conover.

Impacting strata beyond counting in Portland and beyond

A man “beyond our regular lives” says Linda

In the newspaper, Tom Hallman Jr. declared him perhaps “the most unusual man in the city”

Which is saying something

Portland's very own gadfly at your service in a checked flannel shirt, the real skinny at hand

What hole did Barry fill, what need we didn't know we had?

ESCHEWING A ROOF

Ed Blackburn, former Central City Concern honcho (CCC focused on housing, health care, jobs)

Says Barry'd drop by his office to tell of “someone sick who really needed to get out of the weather,

And then he'd bring up Kierkegaard.”

So they'd chew over old Soren awhile, Barry “insatiable” for all that life offered

“And then up he'd pop and was gone. I often wondered where he went.”

Barry so alone, not hanging on the corner, not camping with anyone, no tent to find him

A straight-edge intellectual sometimes aloof, he could just turn away – believe me, I know

But his info to Ed about the sick guy proved he cared about his Fellows.

Ed worried about him alone out in the wet and the cold, the wet and the dark,
The freezings night after night
Alone amidst the vagaries of the night, no one to check
So Ed held the housing hoops an easy height for Barry to leap, but it never took
Barry's disinclination far deeper than waiting lists and paperwork
"He had angst about housing – he didn't seem interested."

He might've surrendered to the machinations of friends who got things done
The folks who sought his very own roof, fridge and door
That achieved, some rough edges perhaps hypothetically smoothed
Fewer knocks to the head as a kid and less roiling in his soul (easy, those two, hunh?)
Grounded on such claims to a different life, where might Barry have stood?
Maybe a desk and a phone, the dispossessed and bereft calling him for the stuff he knew
(But permit this: if not homeless, was he just another grab-your-elbow old coot
Pushing that Equity boulder uphill?
Do the (specious?) Thought Experiment: Is Barry housed nearly as endearing, nearly so special?)

Barry more comfortable parsing the Balfour Declaration than life's exigencies
That roof friends sought proved too ... *enclosing*. Sounds exculpatory to say, but ain't
One spoke of patience learned, that what he thought best for Barry maybe wasn't
A friend's porch, he came and left as he wished, not even a tent to sweep
Same for the Augustana Lutheran Church alcove, his inimitable bike announcing him there
The ground hopefully not quite frozen.

The weather fierce, there'd be a hen's-tooth sojourn at a motel, Sam Muller's wallet opening on occasion
He'd go from one minister's house to another's, perhaps some raking to do
A buck or two needed for some tool for living (batteries? a tooth brush?) a receipt duly provided
Swept the rug store's sidewalk only to say: *No, no – 75 cents is too much for that. I'll take fifty.*
Offered two pair of socks, he'd demure, one a sufficiency.

He actually tarried with a roof, Pat says, when the eminent hospital's institutional heft
Propelled him into assisted living for all of a week before back to Peace House's
Relatively unfettered porch
The joint's curfew would impact the evening concerts and lectures he'd sleep on the street
Rather than miss
Even up at the college on the far north bluff – no way pedaling back from there in time

“A lot of people yearn to get off the street; he wasn’t one of them,” Pat says
“He never wanted a tent, a doorway did him fine
There were barriers that kept him from a home, barriers of his own making. He made his choices.”

VERILY, A HANDFUL

Justice and Truth Barry’s two Lodestones
I honor what he stood for, standing tall
Try to honor his friends’ testimony by tossing rose-colored glasses aside
And offering a full portrait of this questing, flawed human
That is, a man like any among us, the quote from Ecclesiastes ruling him more than most.

Asked to clean up the porch bestrewn with his stuff, people due to arrive
He told Pat *Democracy Now* was on and clean-up would have to wait
Asked not to run roughshod over the Peace House morning prayer, Barry told her,
I have too much in my head I have to get out.
When that didn’t fly, he left, absented himself, didn’t come back
With more moral standing in this town than you can shake a stick at, Pat says,
“I don’t think there’s a church in Portland that didn’t struggle with him regarding boundaries
It’s painful because you want to be loving and open. Just know you gave as much as you could.”
She adds, he was “absolutely unique.”

His spirit undimmed, but the years passing, Barry sometimes fell under his Demons’ sway
The lies to war (which war? – pick one) and then Bush the Younger’s 2004 recrudescence
Set him quite aflame
The World calls our bluff, but Barry wasn’t bluffing,
The war criminal’s “known unknowns” known to him
His signal to noise ratio strong, “A prophetic voice in our midst,” says peace advocate Mary Priem.

Barry might “engage with folks who did not wish to be engaged.”
Bending their ear over some geopolitical outrage, bureaucratic failing or local disgrace
Come on, man, the way you talk – resurrecting World Trade Center 7 – the hens won’t lay
A Unitarian said, “Barry was like a stray cat you couldn’t pet, but wouldn’t go away.
At public lectures, he’d hijack the evening’s agenda,
So we had a sexton poised at every door to bar him.”
Big-time authors or small-beer politicians, folks maybe buying tickets

(Not that anyone had the sheer dumb gall to try to charge our boy Barry –
Getting comped was part of his deal with life)
He'd try to slip in, saying, *You see what these folks are doing to me?*
Previously at First Unitarian, he'd abuse the lecturer's patience, the guest author who'd traveled far
Only to offer answers that somehow shirked Barry's cul-de-sac questions
They'd waffle annoyed, the crowd restive
And so sextons preemptive.

Not everyone's cup of tea – who is?
“Multiple times” I'm told by someone who knows, the good folks of my church, First Unitarian,
Said, Barry, time for a time-out, we'll see you in a month
Saw it myself more than once, and it twisted him up inside
Encountering him at the library, he was at a loss
But it's a church, he'd say, some upcoming lecture crucial to his further understanding of the world
Sad, Barry not showing with his many plastic bags in the First U balcony on Sunday, something missing
A relief for all, his suspension served.

At Havurah Shalom, “He was more of a regular than the regulars,” says member Sam Sirkin
An inveterate raiser of his hand, hard questions at the wrong time, the Rabbi admonishing – no big deal
Barry well intentioned, *legit*, a member of the community for many, many years
“Then he got caught up in that out-of-bounds conspiracy crap” blaming elements within Israel for 9/11
Have you read this book on 9/11? You need to read it, you need to get it today!
Sam says the Rabbi told Barry, “We love having you here, but you've worn out that particular topic.”
(He sure wore it out with me, hectoring me twice a week if I'd gotten the book yet)
“We never asked him to leave, he was welcome here – just not that book.”
So Barry declared the temple had violated his First Amendment rights
And consigned it for a time to his boycott list
His absence, Sam says, a loss to the life of Havurah Shalom
More than just being different, Barry made a real contribution
Thankfully, the folks there had his back and proved a salve, his last days.

As complex as anyone and probably more than most
He'd get positively indignant if the hard-boiled eggs lacked salt
Human, indeed, not off in some weird, separate, *homeless-guy* taxonomy
Says Pat, “You'd like him an awful lot – most of the time.”
Folks would store his stuff, become his phone, offer a bus pass though two-wheels his thing.

He got knocked down plenty, the theft of his bag-draped bike always a blow
Worse the (truly) reluctant banning from library or church
When intemperance overtook him too long a spell, his go-along-to-get-along gone
I urged calm a couple of times at the Albina Library when he'd pitch a fit
They didn't understand, he *needed* to hear that report's end, though his computer time done
Knocked down, cowed not, he'd spring up a far corner of the ring, bobbing and weaving his Truth
Seeking righteousness and maybe something to eat.

AMONG HIS FELLOWS WITH WET FEET

At the long table with paper plates, some folks maybe unsettled
He kept to himself or chatted with the volunteers
That won't win friends among his peers? his fellows? – the other folks with wet feet
Sure, he was homeless, he'd be the first to say, but he didn't let it define him
A big fan, Melissa admits, "Not everyone was crazy about him."

Barry wanted everyone, no matter who, to embrace his life-long quest for Justice
Environmentalism, human rights, world peace – all them trifles
Buttonholing any who'd listen, lest the day's inequity burn him deep within
Do you know what's going on up there? They're cutting down the trees!

Rising above his (perceived) station, he wasn't popular with those who disdained
The Hither-and-Yon Reading, Lecture, Concert Series, have-bike, will-travel
A persnickety, self-righteous champion of the way things shoulda oughta be
And self-appointed judge and jury of the sandwich line
"Defuse-Don't-Accuse," sixty growling stomachs crowding forward, someone cuts the line
Expressing his displeasure, Barry wants the injustice acknowledged to assuage his distress
A black eye and taped-up glasses the result, getting some charity to fix them
Stoically added to his list of houseless logistics.

On a good day, you'd talk to him like a regular Joe, contending as Joes do
Him citing sources you never knew – Kierkegaard my left foot!
Beyond the boggy existentialists, clarity, humor and heartburn trailing in his wake, he was *fun*
The thickets he landed made sense nonetheless
Ask the Portland State physicist, the history of science their schmoozing

City Commish Nick Fish called him “one of the smartest people I ever met.”

Fumbling the notes playing the recorder, Linda says he invented his own musical notation – natch
He’d drop gems, disabusing you of the Empire’s myths. But nothing he said was truly surprising
Amazing, yes, but grounded – not surprising at all, come to think of it.

His Demons dormant, music or a lecture the night before, much that was marvelous to share
Did you hear the music last night at First Congregational? Oh, you should’ve been there to hear.

The ‘good’ Barry with shining eyes

Though who are we to say, we that Fortune graced with a door and fridge

Us blessed with a sober father, healthy mother and no *Big Bad* bespoiling.

Sparring like regular Joes, the discussion a diversion in your day – to Barry, much more

Till off you went to your couch, fridge and locked door

And Barry went off to wherever he’d go, the porch of the evening or that week’s snug, the stars up above

Peering up at you through that one cracked lens that diminished him so

Just so damn sad on top of everything else, life tough enough, his glasses broke

Why can’t you dial it back, Barry? Why not be smart round folks not welcoming disputation?

His journal offers an answer. He wrote:

*“Don’t want others to try to disparage/condescend my values, aspirations; hard enough as it is without
[UNCLEAR] working against me.”*

And oh for penmanship sufficient to fill the gap of – just what, exactly? – was working against him.

Me? I feel the shame of it still, one snowy night, buffaloing Barry from my porch

He’d slept there the week before and had a meal, such that his teeth would allow

And came inside to the john more than once, morning and night

Problem was, this during initial peak Covid, no vax and people dying in droves

I had family in that house two bouts with cancer behind her

Her risk, not to mention mine, averred high by those said to know

A selfish, risk-adverse time, life in a bubble, family sealed off, kids home at pretend-school

Trying not to breathe buying beer at a bodega, the clerk wanting you gone. Remember all that?

The porch was one thing, that first time spontaneous

Finding him huddled by the shuttered library, his former haunt

But not just showing up like that, says the man with a roof

Not to pierce my home’s Covid-bubble three, four times per night

And if welcomed then, what of the next night and then again more?

Too scared to welcome someone with Barry's wide dealings with a Covid-ridden world
Could a hospital bed, a respirator be found were they needed?
So I huffed and I puffed and sent this poor guy – my friend – shivering off into the night
And feel awful about it still, Plague's grim necessity the excuse I clutch
Recalling what Pat said, "Just know you gave as much as you could."
Maybe, maybe so.

LAST DAYS

Cold, wet, hungry, chronically sleep-deprived – think of your frazzle, a couple of nights scant sleep
Now multiply that by years and decades, all those concussions the cherry on top
But still wicked smart, more than apparent
His steps always tricky – his bike, his lifeline, stolen again? – they grew more slippery,
The years unfolding
Hungry, wet, cold, moldering, his feet wet for days, his boots not the best
And then the Plague roared up, rearing-up from nowhere
Plague-times hard, Barry slipping off the radar like so much and so many.



Barry in Providence Hospital recovering from his stroke (note copy of The New York Times), 2023. Credit: Zoe Sirkin.

Till, midwinter, his marvelous brain was felled by a stroke,
Things come full circle since his youthful undoing
Collapsing at Fred Meyer forestalled freezing to death alone, a John Doe we might never have known
An emergency thrombectomy removing a clot from his brain, he remained comatose
Learning his identity, they called Sam from the temple, whose name surfaced from helping Barry before
Inert on Providence Hospital's surgical ward, his yowls of protest as silent as the Demons
That pricked him yet.

But then "Barry's mind awoke," and he shed his torpor, says young nurse Zoe Sirkin, Sam's daughter
The hero of his End Times, Zoe volunteering hours a day for a man she'd known from temple
Her entire life
Including – and this the least of it – pureeing his beloved hard-boiled eggs once the feeding tube removed
Sam, and Melissa also, to the fore, *Sam!* one of the first words he spoke, when granted voice once more
All his life off to the races to wherever he wasn't, Barry intent on escape
The hospital roof pressing heavy, a "flight risk" his last days, fighting with staff and piloting his walker
Down the linoleum and almost out the elevator, a gowned man in the snow
Uncharacteristically seeking 911's aid:
Help! I'm being held hostage here. I can't get out. This is a drug house – they're drugging me!
Straight-edge to the last, trying to break free
Out of Providence, his last months in an adult home not happy
Calling to strangers on the street for release
And – absent for decades – *Big Bad* back to kick him down the stairs, Fate's final cruelty
Meds still a bust swapped with electrodes that did nothing.

To go, get out, keep moving, the whim his, not another's
Needing to keep the Demons behind him, himself beyond reach
"Up he'd pop and was gone" and "Zip, he was out the door!"
This boy grown old despite what he'd faced
Despite fifty winters outdoors after Mom died, Dad blotto, the State obtuse and his noodle haywire
Fifty *Portland* winters, a feat beyond you and me
Look at him, hale and hearty at 70 there on the bus, product of a sober life and everywhere by bike
His life his own Domain five decades and more, the world his, all that he could grab
Bound solely by the chains within, chains that he fought and loosed
Loosed and fought till they gripped again
It took a stroke to hobble him finally, and many friends rallied round, the Sirkins stalwart
Ministrations tendered, as Portlanders had for years, such as he'd permit

Some of us figuring – everyone deserving – but here was a Man among us, Barry somehow different
Even when gripped by that which bound him, someone who sought the Light and kept his Code
Not alone in Life, Barry Sutton did not die alone, his last vision not a streetlight in the sleet.



Barry looking fit, age 70, 2020. Photo Credit: Kodo Conover.

Our common fate claimed this good Man, and so in a lovely gray chapel
Strangers gathered – you, you, and all those folks too!
Happy that this “deeply compassionate” Man called us friend
Glad he bridged Life’s Chasms with such wide embrace
Says Cousin Linda, “Despite all he lost, Barry made something of himself,
He mattered. And I’m proud of him for that.”

This poem is based on the dozens of remembrances voiced at Barry's memorial service at First Unitarian, November 2023; on numerous interviews I conducted; and on my years of friendship with Barry, encountering him often three times a week. Barry's own words in italics, the other quotes also legit, the speaker identified in that stanza.

Daniel Forbes's journalism exposed heavy metals up the stack at Portland's Bullseye Glass, changing state law; helped promulgate Portland's regulations on lead dust from housing demolitions (the nation's first); and led to his testimony before the U.S. House and Senate at hearings he caused, exposing the Clinton White House's sub rosa paid propaganda demonizing marijuana. His novel, *Derail this Train Wreck*, from [Fomite Press](#), was sparked by an NYPD attack on his wife and himself at an Arlo Guthrie concert, of all things, at Lincoln Center, of all places. They paid, and free-speech case law was made. Contact: ddanforbes@aol.com.

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