

The year is 1963. A young Bob Dylan stands before the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee. He is there to receive the Tom Paine Award, given in recognition of his so-called fight for civil liberty. Standing at the microphone, expected to give a speech, Dylan stumbles over his words, fumbles with the phrasing, tries to articulate the horrifying vision of a room full of white beards, bald heads. He says he doesn't know what to do with the award, doesn't know how to react. Says he's scared playing the role of anything for the older generation. Says – and here's the kicker, the line that just knocks me flat – that he's trying to get young.

Getting young, that seemingly impossible pursuit, is either terribly complex or deceptively simple. I like to think that it means shifting gears, an act of re-imagining, shedding negativity and depression like unwanted pounds. It means sweating out the first drives and the first inspirations, grasping those early impressions that made you fall in love with the world in the first place. Getting back to the quick-eyed wonder of being little and being devastated by all the sights and sounds, confusions and contradictions of life.

For me, I found that wondrous, early life in books, words, the magic tumble and roll of sentences. It was that one summer spent reading Robert Frost, knowing New Hampshire and Vermont and New England and every willow and buttercup and bumblebee, old roads, snowflakes, witches, brooks trickling over rocky woodland, great wheels sitting out alone and lonely in hard brown fields before winter comes for real, summer dust and cicada screams and fallen apples, the thump into buckets, a calf standing wobbly while its mother gives it a go-ahead lick. The lonely stranded feeling of ascending a staircase, bald-spot on imaginary head, while the streets are yellow with a fog that coils and follows like a cat, a record playing something wobbly and worn out, forgotten, reading and re-reading and in love with T.S. Eliot, his voice thundering dryly down about gods and wonder and magic in deserts, feeble, feeling religious and certain and desperately sad. Roaming out late intoxicated with Kerouac, words pounding nonsensical from the one beatific typed page of dharma and saints, the great god of pooh-bear and greybeard, the roads and the highways stretched tight like veins over continents, wheels against asphalt, cigarettes and wine and burn-out sunsets. It was howling one night with Ginsberg as the sun went down over the houses and the grass started hopping with jumpers and a summer breeze moved through the dying dandelions making them fall around us like snowflakes.

Putting together The Puritan was about following the gut feeling of first impressions. Believing that supporting the arts, getting people published, letting writers share the product of their careful and consuming passion, was not a waste of time, but just the opposite. Four years go by fast: so fast that your first jogs across campus in the fall of your first year seem just as close and real in your belly as the poutine you had for lunch, years later. The big problem is falling asleep: letting the disappointments with the faculty or the student body ruin the wide-eyed optimism and enthusiasm of your first tentative brushes, your first delicate strokes; letting the meaningless jobs and the brutal weather and the failures of friendship and love crush that budding desire to follow whatever it is that once made you swell or weep inside.

Over the past four months, we've pretty much heard it all:

- There isn't enough interest on campus – or the city itself – to warrant another literary

magazine.

- Without institutional support, prior connections, or clout in the scene, the project will sink.
- Prose isn't diverse/viable/easy/(insert adjective) enough to have a prose-only journal: excluding poetry and plays and the visual arts is a mistake.
- Taking on an entirely new enterprise is too much work, and counterproductive to the arts scene in Ottawa. Work for another magazine.
- There's no money.

We almost believed it. We almost quit before we made the first steps. That last point literally gave us chills. But for some reason, we chose not to listen.

Some of our more vocal objectors saw our determination as naïveté. If they were feeling especially generous, they might have called it a 'youthful optimism' (see: blindness).

And yet, I like that summation. I really do. In fact, maybe we should have called the magazine *The Idealist*; or even better – *The Optimist*.

Those are good qualities, remember?

We decided to get young, to get back to what made us happy. And so we found that, yes, there was interest in the city: enthusiastic support from established writers and budding students alike, the kind of support you want and need in a creative community. To our delight, we received a host of submissions, and not just from Ottawa natives or students, but from writers all across the country. The writers, as always, confirmed our belief that a prose-only journal could work and thrive in 'poetry city'. It has been a lot of work: editing prose takes time and commitment. But what labour of love does not require diligence, or patience, or the will to see something through to the end? It was never too much; and if we've been able to publish more or new writers in Ottawa, we're proud to call *The Puritan* a success. While money will always be an issue – *The Puritan* is the quintessential grassroots magazine – the hard part is over. The first volume is always the most difficult, the most trying. Number Two is already on its way.

We didn't need to work for another magazine, or funnel our ambitions into a different project. There is enough passion for writing in the city to fund and maintain *The Puritan* as a separate, autonomous entity. It's what we've always believed, always hoped was true – that writers will step up to the challenge, accept the call.

In mid December, we found ourselves at the Governor General's Literary Awards, surrounded by some of the best and brightest in Canadian writing. Sitting down to dinner with the recipients of the awards, and the Governor General herself, I felt out of place, unworthy. A small part of me recalled Dylan, young and impressionable, feeling awkward, receiving an award from an institution that extended into the past, run by the elders of the tribe. But this was one of the highlights of our journey, our attempt to get young. The real writers at the table would not exhaust the subject of writing, of what was happening here and now. I certainly felt no division by age, the colour of a fellow diner's hair. They were all united, all captivated, by the idea that writing is about engaging and encountering the world with the same sense of wonder and discovery, the same sense of magic and adventure, as in childhood, when the first stories are told, the first maps drawn, the first steps taken. Art is discovery, they said; it maps the darkest and brightest parts of the heart. We hope that your discovery

of *The Puritan* rekindles the need and desire to strike out on the journey you've been putting off.

To all those who have assisted, encouraged, or advised us in this project, we would like to extend our warmest and most sincere thanks. To all the writers who have submitted, who have had the courage to share their work with a fledgling magazine, your contributions have meant the world.

Happy reading.

SPENCER GORDON