

## Withdrawal Symptoms

Neil Puryear stared out at the pews of Kingsbury United Church. The pews were sparsely occupied indeed as funerals were of course among events heavily regulated by COVID-19 restrictions.

He acknowledged his Aunt Betty, who was his deceased mother's sister. He grudgingly acknowledged his brother Scott's former dealers... Eric Taylor and Dennis Townshend. And he had reluctantly admitted two of Scott's neighbours....Dan Stratton and Laura Sinclair. The minister and his organist had requested that a few spectators had to be in attendance. Neil considered the priest to be a frustrated actor. He had hemmed and hawed about his brother's funeral arrangements and compromised with his dead parents and Aunt Betty.

Neil Puryear was a post-Marxist atheist. He had no use for organized religion and also very little time for the art world. But he did install one of Scott's abstract paintings in proximity to the organ, out of respect to his brother. Neil disliked Scott's art practice. He considered both abstract paintings and beautiful landscapes to be mere wallpaper.

Scott had been supportive of the idea of art as wallpaper. His former dealers certainly valued wallpaper art. His brother's biggest patrons had been banks and hotel lobbies. Plus there had been a rich woman named Caroline Burton who had recently died. Mrs. Burton's death put a serious damper on Scott's income and motivated his slimy dealers to stop representing his brother. And there were the pair of them in a central pew, still together after all these years.

The organist played the mandatory Bach variations in preparation for the minister's entrance. Scott and Neil both disliked Bach but if one entered traditional religious territory then Bach was expected. Scott actually liked some religious music....John Coltrane, Pharaoh Sanders and other spiritual jazz musicians. Neil enjoyed some of that music while conveniently ignoring the religious titles.

And now the organist changed his Bach as the priest took his place at his podium.

The priest looked at his notes and then began speaking.

"We are here today to mark the passing of Scott Alan Puryear...."

Neil zoned out as soon as the priest commenced. . This damn pandemic is going to last forever Neil registered Aunt Betty glaring at him. He realized that he must have cursed out loud, although Aunt Betty was the only other spectator admonishing him. Neil thought he detected Eric Taylor and Dennis Townshend laughing although covering their masked mouths.

The priest was now calling up Mr. Neil Puryear. He collected his thoughts and his notes.

Thank you for attending this service in memoriam of my brother Scott Puryear. Thank you to all of those who wish they could attend but cannot due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Scot was born to Anne and Edward Puryear, almost three years before my own birth. We were typical brothers, initially fighting all the time but then becoming friends..even allies. In our respective teenage years we began to move in very different directions. I moved toward education and Scott moved toward the fine arts. After high school he studied at the Montclair Academy of Art, which may have seemed an odd choice for his time as Montclair tended toward realist painting. Scott, being Scott, moved against that current, becoming a highly-respected

abstract painter. He exhibited locally, nationally and internationally. Scott's abstract paintings are in the collections of The Toronto and Royal Canadian Banks as well as the collection of the late Mrs. Caroline Burton.

A few years ago, Scott's practice took a one hundred and eighty degree turn. He began painting landscapes. Some thought they were straightforward landscapes but I thought they were too subjective to be so dismissed. He did part company with Taylor and Townshend and at the time of his death he was not represented.

Scott Puryear...my brother.....made a difficult choice in life. Many people choose the arts while also keeping themselves secure with something more practical. So many artists teach but Scott didn't...I would say he had a strong love and hate relationship with academia and academics. Scott wasn't one to talk very much about his art...he believed that they works spoke for themselves. What people saw is what people got. But Scott didn't make wallpaper.....his work was layered very deeply.

Scott was also something of a recluse. In his younger years he partied hard but in his early thirties he settled down. My brother was a gay man but he never met a partner he could settle down with so he stopped trying. I think my brother Scott was quite mystical by nature. He may not have been one for orthodox religion but he was attracted to spirituality....he listened to spiritual jazz musicians. Scott was an immensely private person who retreated more and more into himself until, alas, he had nowhere else to go. But Scott Puryear should also be remembered for all that he did while vibrant and healthy.....his art and his absolute joy in working.....making his idiosyncratic art.

Now I'd like to play a piece of music that was one of Scott's favourites.....Teardrop, by Massive Attack.

A stripped down sample from some soul-jazz recording was soon meshed with a repetitive harpsichord. Now a piano established a chord pattern and then the world's most ethereal female voice soared on top of it all. Neil understood why this would be one of Scott's favourite pieces of music.....it was cerebral and the lyric sounded close to gibberish. At first he thought the lyric was 'feel like summer pray' until he recognized it was 'fearless on my breath'.

Music had been one of the few topics that Neil and Scott had been able to converse about. But their tastes were so different....Scott liked 'art' music while Neil was something of an old punker. He liked The Clash, The Undertones, Buzzcocks and other bands of that period.

He observed the other people at the small ceremony, after returning to their pews. Taylor and Townshend end seemed familiar with this musical piece, as did the woman who was one of Scott's apartment neighbours. The group Massive Attack he had heard of in the nineteen nineties but never followed. They had both cerebral and trendy but now they were probably nostalgic.

Neil was relieved that his eulogy had been delivered without a hitch. There would be more Bach and then final words from the priest and then the ceremony would be over. Due to COVID restrictions, there would be minimal socializing outside in the parking lot.

And it had begun to rain during the brief service, so the mourners were disinclined to spend too much time talking in the parking lot. Eric Taylor and Dennis Townshend gave Neil their rather formal hugs and condolences and then walked toward their shiny new car. Neil was about to

walk over to where Aunt Betty was standing by herself when Scott's two neighbours approached him.

"Thanks for your support, Laura and....".

"Dan".

"Thanks, Dan."

"I have to spend some time with my aunt now", Neil let the pair of them know.

Laura composed herself.

"I'll just be a minute, if you don't mind. There is something you need to know".

"Oh?"

"Neil, after the two policemen left Scott's apartment, Dan and I stayed for a minute.

"We were careful not to touch anything", Dan chimed in as Neil's face registered alarm.

"We noticed that the handwriting on the suicide note did not match the handwriting on the various notes on Scott's computer table".

Neil stood silently for a moment.

"Are you sure about this? "Laura....Dan"?"

"Yes, it was obvious. I'm not sure of the two cops registered this disparity or not?".

Neil scanned the parking lot. Aunt Betty was still standing by herself in a corner.

"I think we need to talk further, Laura and Dan. I'll gibe to my email....I have to spend time with my aunt now".

They nodded as Neil gave Laura his card. They would be in touch.