



The Penny Poet of Portsmouth: A Memoir Of Place, Solitude, and Friendship

Katherine Towler

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Around town, it was said that he lived on air, though he really lived on coffee and cigarettes. He was a union of unlikely opposites – one of the strangest and loveliest of people, one of the poorest and richest, one of the most sardonic and serious. He could be brilliant and intentionally obtuse, or quietly contained and defiant, all in the same moment.

The Penny Poet of Portsmouth is a memoir of the author's friendship with Robert Dunn, a brilliant poet who spent most of his life off the grid in downtown Portsmouth, New Hampshire, renting a room in a house without owning a phone, car, computer, or television. The book is as well an elegy for a time and place – the New England seaport city of the early 1990s that has been lost to development and gentrification, capturing the life Robert was able to make in a place rougher around the edges than it is today. It is a meditation on what writing asks of those who practice it and on the nature of solitude in a culture filled with noise and clutter. And it is, finally, the story of a rare individual who charted an entirely unorthodox life that challenged the status quo in every way.

The Penny Poet of Portsmouth, bracing in its intimacy and elegance, is so much more than a memoir, or a biography, or even an elegy. It is the fable of a shared journey and a portrait of an abiding friendship— a fitting tribute to the Penny Poet of Portsmouth.

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