



MANSPEAK

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MANSPEAK

Life
From
A Male Perspective

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Most towns are named after people or places left behind by some foundin' ancestor that landed on these shores with a steamer trunk and a lot of strong memories. Ain't so with our town. Some fool named us after a track of mud and Maine shale worn down by locals traversin' tree stumps and gullies, short cutting' to the lobster boats down at the harbor. Our town was named after a road that went around a road. Yep. This here is Bypass, Maine, population 307. And this is our town square by declaration of the Bypass council. (Beat) But don't try to be findin' Bypass on a map. The map makin' folks couldn't muster up a distinguishin' dot that small. But if you're one of those people inclined to look up places, we're nestled between Rockport and Thomaston in a fair quiet stretch of land and sea, a place where everybody wants to be mindin' everybody else's business 'cause they ain't got enough business of their own. (Beat)

Yep. Bypass is small, but as our combination mayor and duly deputized county sheriff Ethan Barnes tells it, "We're small, but we've got it all". That's straight up moose dung. Bypass is a place where you got one or none. We got the Bett's market. Ain't no Walmart, but it has got character. Old penny-pinchin' Bernie Betts runs the place. He's a smooth operator and you gotta check the expiration date on the canned goods. I called him on it once a few years back. That yellow-toothed twerp tried to pass off a two-year old expired can of pork and beans. "Betts," I says, "These beans are expired." "Sure, Matthew," he says. "Happens as soon as ya pick 'em." "I'm talkin' shelf life," I says, pushing those beans right under his nose. He lifts his glasses up, squints at the date stamp and says, "I'll give you five cents off." (Beat) Well, ain't no way I'm digestin' beans that have outlived their own edible mortality! No sense in aggravatin' a man's poor digestion with a sure gastrointestinal misfirin'! (Beat)

We've got the Lively Bait, Tackle, Boat Repair and Gas Station, run by the Lively brothers, who hardly live up to their name. We got Betty's Café - eat in or take away. Betty puts together a wicked cobbler and serves a damn fine bowl of chowder. Her spaghetti is another story. You wouldn't want to be getting that. I've been under the long-held suspicion that the sauce is made by Chef Ragu. But the real bother about Betty's Café is the old girl shuts down at quarter past six to get herself revved up and set for *Jeopardy*. (Beat)

Now most town squares have a historical statue signifying somebody's important ancestor. Not so in By-Pass. We've got Hennessey's Bar and Grill, standing tall right over there (He indicates) on the harbor since 1910. Old Hennessey died in '64, but nobody had the heart, ambition or money to change the sign. One of Petie Frasier's sons runs the place now. Lots of stories loop around Bypass 'bout Hennessey's. Some say it stayed open all through the Prohibition, on account of the mayor at the time, a hard drinking man and a diehard believer in his Constitutional right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, which in his

case, included a dose of joy dwellin' inside a fine bottle of twelve year old single malt Scotch whiskey, which, if you think about it, raises a point as to the interpretation of the whole business of intent set forth by our founding fathers. (Beat) Yep. Lots of stories loopin' 'round Bypass 'bout the goin's on at Hennessey's and they get bigger and better in the retellin' of the tales. Now me, I'm of the mindset that seein' is believin'. Well then, it just so happened that I got myself a front row seat to the best Bypass bar fight of the last century. (Beat) It was in '69 and I was fresh out of the jungles of Vietnam, back home to settle into a familiar life in Bypass, a place where only an angry sea or a bad woman can claim a man's soul, and every other force of nature is as predictable as the smell of sea salt that clings to ya like the scent of a woman's perfume after they've hugged ya tight. (Beat)

It was three months after my homecomin' when it happened - on a Wednesday ... half price draft beer night at Hennessey's. It was June as I remember, and hotter than napalm. The bar was packed with the regulars who couldn't wait to get to the business of guzzlin' 50 cent beers. I walked in about seven and bellied up to the bar next to Red McGregor, a once well-muscled man goin' to fat, thirty maybe at the time, with flame red hair, a face full scorched by the sun and a temper like the short fuse of a firecracker. Red greets me with a grunt and calls to Petie Frasier behind the bar. "Give the soldier a beer on me," he says. Petie pours, slams the mug on the bar in front of me and moves off. "Thanks," I says to McGregor. His lifts his beer in a toast. "To God and country," he says. Well, McGregor's noble state of thinkin' is cut short by the entry of his ex-wife Grace, a frail-lookin' wisp of a woman, not known to exemplify any state of spiritual stature that lived up to her name. Last I heard, she had moved up to Portland. Her arrival at Hennessey's was plenty enough to warrant an unholy reaction from Red McGregor, but seein' her on the arm of a long-haired hippie type wearin' Jesus sandals and a tie-dyed shirt sportin' a peace sign was like tossin' a lit match into a puddle of gasoline. (Beat) McGregor pushes back his barstool. His face has gone wicked ugly. Petie Frasier says, "Red, leave things be. Don't start trouble." He was talkin' to a man born deaf to common sense and sound judgment, amplified by being two hours into downin' beers. So McGregor puts on his swagger, goes over to Grace and her hippie and growls at 'em like a North Country bear. "What the hell are you doin' in my bar!" Grace steps in front of her hippie. "Red, this is a free country and I can go anywhere I please. I ain't your wife no more. You can't boss me around," says Grace.

Petie Frasier moves fast from behind the bar. "Red, you got problems, you take 'em outside to the Square," he says. As if Red McGregor was goin' to take a listen. (Beat) No. He picks up Grace and sets her aside and faces off with the hippie guy. "Who the hell are you?" He bellows. "James," says the hippie, just as calm as you please. "Peace, brother." Well that meet and greet made McGregor a most un-peaceful man. He throws a right hook, but he gets a helluva surprise. What James lacked in brawn, he made up for in a set of skills nobody in Bypass was expectin'. He counters with a Bruce Lee, Chuck Norris martial arts maneuver and