



Bob Bellows

"Yes, You Can in
Spokane"

*Stranger at the Fair / Yes,
You Can in Spokane*

1974

Art Records

Homecoming

Michael Carter

Nearly twenty years after my escape, I returned to my hometown.

There's one long street that divides the place. It is speckled with fast-food restaurants of every kind. They're all there, each and every one. How else are people supposed to eat?

They have a "real" mall now, so they say. But there's still more strip malls than Reno. No gambling though, at least not the casino kind. You gamble with your life just by walking around town.

Every other yard is burned up, it seems. Sure, many are meth houses. On meth, it's probably difficult to keep up with watering the lawn, or mowing it.

The "knife-and-gun report" is on every day at six o'clock. Like any city, there has always been crime. But beating a World War II veteran to death in a grocery store parking lot, just for a few bucks? Surviving a world war was not enough for the poor soul—he had to die in this town by the fists of a thug.

The bicycle street gangs are still there. They ride with those ear-to-ear grins. Looking for trouble, or kids just having fun? I don't want to know.

The library is packed, but people are not there for the reading. It's nearly one hundred degrees out. The folks who live in their trailers are simply there to soak in the library air conditioning.

Speaking of trailers, in some parts of town, one is in nearly every side yard. The trailers aren't for vacation, though. That's where your kids will live when they're finally ready to leave home.

People wander the dollar store in the middle of the day, but they don't appear to be shopping for anything in particular. They have leathered red faces and turkey-gizzard necks. The dollar store smells like a county health building, so I leave.

The crown jewel of the city is the celebration of something that happened in 1974. The Expo was there, and they will never let you forget it. If you wander the remnants of the park grounds and listen closely, you might even hear someone whistling the bygone optimism of the Expo's "Yes, You Can" tribute to the town. *It takes a little while, but every stranger learns how to smile...*

The hamburger joint we hung out at is still nestled near the freeway. My classmate was stabbed to death there just for announcing where he attended high school—*years* after we graduated.

It's not all bad. There are good people, as with any town. There are some new restaurants that are nice. How else are people supposed to eat?

There are a few old restaurants, too, that are worth visiting. Perhaps refuge can be found within the greasy confines of that railroad-car-turned-breakfast-joint. Perhaps that's where you can take a trip away from reality, if even for just for the time it takes to enjoy a meal. When I show up for a bite to eat, I hope the line is long.

There's a sanctuary on the southern hill where you can pretend the rest of the city does not exist. There's also the mansion addition of yesteryear, when this place was a resort town. Mr. Brownstone has undoubtedly paid a visit, but the mansions are still beautiful. At least the lawns are manicured, not torched.

Residents and visitors can also hide in the historic hotel built during high times. They can even strut their feathers in a lounge, like peacocks, or go on a safari. They can pretend, and they can hide, but they know it's out there. The rest of the city is out there, waiting.

I'm not sure if things are worse, or if they were always bad and I just didn't know the difference. Perhaps they taught me that this is the way things are everywhere, so why leave? One can get accustomed to things. That's just the way it is, they might tell you.

It's no better in those far-away places, they might tell you.

Hello Spokane, my old friend. Everyone has roots; some have wings.