

Reserved for Peter Potenza, always

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 01 September 2010 13:17 - Last Updated Thursday, 02 September 2010 20:51



FOREVER POTENZA: *Bollywood star Priya Gopal poses with the sign made for Peter Potenza, which guarded his parking space at Castaways on Taughannock Blvd., until his death in August. Priya dressed down in Pete's honor and wore no make-up in mournful respect. The star rarely avails herself to the public without chic cosmetics and couture. She is now on tour with Lady Gaga.*

Tiny Town, USA – Peter Potenza will no longer announce his presence with a door swinging open, a pause, then a shadow and the clacking of his metal cane -- a signature sound he hated but endured -- then that wizened head, the nearly crippled body and a mind full of keen observation, dark humor and a raspy voice like an oyster shell getting shucked, and a tongue as sharp as the blade. A god had just entered the room, a philosopher king, somebody who, once known, could not be forgotten. Peter died Aug. 9, 2010.

Memory: Peter, of advanced but eternal age, was making goo-goo eyes at one or another waitress or barrista in a local watering hole when a fire alarm sounded. The staff was worried. There wasn't a fire, but naturally everyone was obliged to leave. What to do with Peter? Best thing was to just keep an eye on him.

By the time Peter hobbled to the doorway -- a long hobble for sure -- the all-clear was given by the fire chief. Just then, I walked into the lobby. Having seen the fire trucks I wondered if Peter was in the place and doing just that, struggling to get out.

There he was in the entrance way, exhausted, half pissed-off yet amused by the irony of it. He greeted me in his usual manner, which was kindly and cutting at once.

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He had a long trip back to the bar so I offered Peter, who eschewed wheelchairs, a free ride on a baggage cart. He agreed although staff of the joint, a local chain hotel operation, wondered if it violated some Byzantine safety code corporate had dreamt up for the place every other week or so.

"Fuck im," Peter said, and he meant corporate, not staff. And I wheeled him, quite happily, back to his throne at the "lounge" on the baggage cart. The soft parade was greeted with laughter and applause.



That was one of the last times I saw Peter as my habits changed and with that change my attendance at bars and such dropped to nil. Not feeling comfortable with looking up Peter in his place downtown, there was always the hope I'd find him in between, on the streets, where I could get some straight dope about life that he dispensed like no other. His knowledge of the city was vast and he kept track of people, businesses and their ups and downs.

He was no friend to City Hall, or phonies of any stripe, and yet I can't imagine anyone that knew him later in his pugnacious life to have a bad thing to say about him.

Peter was a horny old goat and let women know it. His charm won the day and he was loved by many lovelies. To the politically correct it was *va fungool* and a rude hand gesture.

That people cared so much for him was a reflection of how much he cared for people. Not generally. Individually, personally. When a common acquaintance got himself in trouble with the law, Peter helped him to find work and to get from place to place. Or, if he couldn't find him, looked over his glasses at you and you knew it wasn't good. It wasn't a judgment, just a fact.

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He liked Sambuca and a small cup of coffee, black.

Or a glass of wotthehell kinda wine. He



ate whatever he was served and usually complained about it -- without having to say a word, just a look. You might ask, anyway, "How was it?"

"Awful," he'd say, wiping his lower lip with a napkin. "The cook is new and doesn't know what he's doing."

But if the bartender asked how Pete liked his meal, he'd say something positive.

When the Sambuca ran out at the place where we often met, he got to blaming me. That was true then. But there's plenty to go around now, Pete.

So, a toast with the beverage of your choice for the old guy: Peter Potenza, our friend.

If this tribute took a while to get to print, that's because we estimated it would take Peter about this long to get his ass up all those stairs to heaven. We just hope that when he got there, he wasn't told to go back. If so, well. We'd be happy beyond measure to have him with us again.

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– Franklin Crawford, administrator, tinyowntimes.com