

Way Beyond Filthy: Lyn Jones

Many years ago when driving up north, I stopped for a break. I was young then, a surfer & going away in my old wagon with my surfboard equalled happiness & freedom.

Wandering around the ruins of a church, I discovered a centuries old graveyard. The dates on the few worn headstones all from the 1800s.

One was set apart, & I have never forgotten its epitaph. It read - 'Here Lies Filthy Fred, One of The Finest Fellows I Ever Met.'

Who I wondered, had been Filthy Fred? Why that description? Especially as he had obviously been held in high esteem?

Well, the river of life swept me on, in time adding another chapter to that story.

Years later I was a single parent of 2 working in Nursing. The shifts however weren't fitting in with care & time with my children, so I took a job in a local factory, the school hours of 9 to 3 seeming like a God-send.

God-send? It was a living Hell!

Unbearable noise & heat levels from massive nightmarish machines, & angry, bitter employees who hated everyone & everything.

An elderly man, a homeless War Veteran, swept the putrid floors & took out the drums of rubbish. He never spoke to a soul. He was talked about in a derogatory fashion like he wasn't there or unable to hear. It sickened me. He was referred to as - Filthy Fred.

A day came when he was even further insulted. It was enough. I yelled at the perpetrator, then quit.

Wanting to speak to him, I went out & around the far side of the factory. He was making something out of the waste paper.

Then I saw it. Scores of paper birds stapled to the grimy brick wall, sweeping upwards, ascending skywards. It was beautiful - a work of art.

"How lovely" I cried. He looked up, smiled, softly said "Beauty is all around us if we look with the right eyes. Those here are caged birds, but you must fly free like my birds, as must I."

I told him I was leaving, he said so was he. We talked for some time, he was gentle & wise. Was he a reincarnation of that earlier Fred? I like to believe it was so.

Filthy Fred, who made filth into fantasy, garbage into greatness, waste into wonder. One of The Finest Fellows I Ever Met.