

Honorable Mention, Poetry

He Just Wasn't Normal

by Jonathan Kana

Copyright © 2012 Jonathan Kana. All rights reserved.

No mistaking it.

I could tell from twenty-five feet away: he just wasn't normal.

He stuck out.

Maybe it was his goofy smile.

Maybe it was his poor social boundaries.

Maybe it was the way he communicated with incomprehensible
exclamations,
not words and phrases.

Uh oh, he's coming my way...

Now he's patting me on the shoulder, as though he's known me all my life. Now he's
walking on past, like he's got ten dozen other friends to greet tonight. Now he's standing
at a safe distance, and I'm quietly making jokes at his expense.

Uncomfortable contact.
Violation of etiquette. An
awkward moment.

Uh oh, he's coming my way again...

Now he's handing me a button he made to earn a living on the streets.

Now he's accepting my hasty offer of five dollars.

Now he's hugging me, more closely than I would hug my own father.

Brotherly affection.

Intimate connection.

A grace-filled moment.

Maybe it was his infectious smile.

Maybe it was his uninhibited kinship with complete strangers.

Maybe it was his effervescent joy and uncontainable
gratitude,
expressed in joyful noise.

He stuck out.

I could see it as clear as day: he just wasn't normal.

And I envy him.

--

This poem is an improvisation about my encounter with a deaf man on the Congress Avenue bridge in Austin, TX, where my wife and I were waiting to catch a glimpse of the famous bats for the first time. This eccentric man was obviously in the habit of greeting and entertaining spectators who would crowd the rail, livening up the scene with his "antics" and obvious excitement over the spectacle about to take place under the bridge. The bats were awesome to see, but my wife and I both agreed that meeting this man was the best part of the night.