

Until we meet again, until then...

We had met during bad times. Two guys stuck in unemployment.

He became my best friend.

Seth was at heart a writer but he was also a master of improvisation at making life better. That was his real art form.

Where did this guy get his bottomless well of passion for art and culture?

Rock music, opera, writing, movies, travel, concerts, sports but above all theater. He loved them all.

He probably wrote more words in his blog about art and theater than everything Hemingway wrote in his lifetime: <http://sethsaith.blogspot.com/>. He was one of the most disciplined writers I ever met posting almost daily blog posts for 16 years.

Bruce (as in Bruce Springsteen) I want you to know that Seth attended 50 of your concerts. That's what his Facebook page says but it's 63 concerts by my count.

<https://www.facebook.com/seth.arkin>

There were hundreds of other concerts too.

I've lost track of how many countries he'd been to but his photograph of Machu Picchu adorns my living room wall. He loved Paris. He made a calendar out of photographs he took in Japan. Once he sent me a text from a jazz club in Krakow, Poland advising me to make sure I visit it because the jazz was fantastic. (Seth loved John Coltrane's music too.)

Seth was a friend of Six-Word Memoirs and knew Larry Smith. When the book party for "Six Words: Fresh Off the Boat" was in Chicago Seth covered the story: <http://sethsaith.blogspot.com/2017/09/celebrating-immigrant-pride-in-6-words.html>. He also helped promote Sara Aboud Rashed's moving and poignant "Map of Myself" when she and Larry brought it to Chicago: <http://sethsaith.blogspot.com/2017/09/celebrating-immigrant-pride-in-6-words.html>

He loved beautiful women but his loves remained unrequited. I think bachelorhood suited him. A conventional domestic life would have bored him to tears. He was too restless.

His last text to me read: "I'm a bit sick. Think it's just a cold but will get tested Saturday. My breathing has been fine."

The Covid then struck him like a sniper's bullet.

By the time they got him to intensive care he was already oxygen deprived. Then came the ventilator. Then organ failure.

At night his mother would read him poetry. The nurses would play Bruce Springsteen music for him as he lay in a coma.

He hung on for nine days.

His funeral was live streamed. The funeral director had 3 funerals that day and one cremation. All Covid related. The previous owner of Seth's burial site had lost a husband and son to Covid. When the funeral director went to get Seth's death certificate the clerk told him he'd just lost a 41 year old family member to Covid. An hour previously a death certificate crossed his desk. That Covid victim was 22 years old.

Before he died Seth managed to complete his last improvisation.

Masks.

He started printing customized masks for dozens of friends, acquaintances and former work colleagues. At one point I heard it was 88 people. The masks reflected something unique about that person. Mine was a mask with Hemingway's picture on it with a big white beard. One woman's mask had her baby's picture on it. Another had a series of flags from around the world. His own mask looked like the baseball pitcher Rollie Fingers with the upturned mustache twirled at the ends.

The masks arrived with the following note:

“Somewhat obsessed of late with the ability to custom-make face masks — I use [Collage.com](https://www.collage.com/). I am happy to give you the one-of-a-kind mask enclosed. ... I want nothing in return except that you remain steadfast in wearing a mask in public.”

Those who have known true grief know that it is a mysterious cauldron of emotion. Sometimes dull and achy sometimes vicious. Sometimes numb and sometimes as piercing as a knife through one's heart. It is untamed and refuses to be salved.

You take respite as best as you can until the next wave of emotion comes ashore.

My respite is found in one thing.

In his last moments a beautiful woman held his hand.