

# Saint Christopher Phone Booth Blues

*by John Olson*

I've got to stop it. This can't go on. I've got stop yelling at people. Dog people. What's up with dogs of a sudden? Why does everyone suddenly seem to have a dog? I like dogs. Don't get me wrong. It's unleashed dogs that make me go ballistic. One reason is because I'm a runner and I've already been bitten at least once. I was running through a small business district I would normally try to miss because I don't relish the time I spend dodging zombie pedestrians, but I've incorporated this little bit into a three mile run I've had to do because I've got insertional Achilles tendonitis in my left heel so I've had to limit my run to these three measly miles. I do enjoy one little spot that I run by, a Mexican restaurant serving mostly burritos and tacos, a very casual little hole in the wall place with a table and three or four chairs outside on the sidewalk. I enjoy the rich smells of food emanating from within and just the general vibe of this place. And recently they've taken what used to be one of Seattle's last public telephones, not an entire booth but a boxy encasement where a big black public phone once offered itself with a fat phone book hanging from the ledge of a cheerless aluminum shelf by a metallic cord, and which has been an empty shell for the last several years after the phone company pulled it out but left the shell, so then someone in the restaurant thought to put a doll inside and surround it with flowers, irises and roses and tulips and sunflowers. The doll is androgynous, I can't tell if it's a male or female, but the figure is very angelic and curiously blonde and dressed in a robe and wearing a big gold crown. I think the doll is intended to represent a saint, Saint Christopher, maybe. It reminds me of the doll the gypsies in Saint-Marie-la-Mer in the south of France near Arles installed in the subterranean chamber of a fortress cathedral, a brown doll representing Saint Sarah, the gypsy saint. I still

remember the heat of that chamber with all the candles burning and the deep sense of reverence that hung thick as candle smoke in the chamber. So it gives me a happy feeling and what a delightful use to make of an empty metal box formerly occupied by a cheerless black public telephone. This particular afternoon there is a dog tied up outside, a short hair mutt of some indeterminate breed with spots of gray and black. He looked friendly enough and he was, after all, tied up, so I thought what the hell and went running past and the dog leaped and took a bit in my ass. He didn't get to my skin but he did grab hold of the bottom of my jacket and scare the shit out of me. I continued but then stopped and it occurred to me wait a minute, wait a minute, what if some woman goes by with a toddler and the dog takes another leap and this time grabs hold of some baby flesh. It worried me, so I went back and popped my head into the restaurant and said hey, the dog outside here just tried to bite me. I had to repeat myself because nobody seemed to register what I was saying, they just looked at me like I was a crazy person. A middle-aged Asian guy sitting on a stool by the window going to town on a burrito suddenly looks anxious and says it's my dog and gets up to go outside and do what he needed to do with the dog. I didn't stick around, but since he didn't ask, I thought I should tell him the dog didn't hurt me, or tear my jacket, and I held my jacket out to show where the tear would have been if the dog had torn my jacket. But he didn't look. He was busy with the dog, who was prancing this way and that, happy as a lark, with an angel in his mouth.

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