

Uncle Ned

by sean m. poole

There was this old guy named Ned. He swept floors. No one knew much about him. He'd been around for years sweeping the concrete floors of the hangar-sized buildings housing the mechanical service departments at an old amusement park.

Some people said he'd been part of the early days of the operation decades ago but no one asked Ned about it. Ned said little to few about not much of anything at all. He swept floors. He was pleasant enough. He seemed well mannered and informed on many subjects of interest when engaged in conversation. But those instances were rare.

Ned, who appeared to be a simple easily satisfied old soul, had been a complex driven young man. He led a tempestuous passionate life which ultimately brought him immense personal satisfaction both creatively and emotionally. The artist accomplished a most difficult and sought-after goal. He found love. His life and art enriched forever after with its golden glow. Now at 79, widowed 5 years, he was at peace. He was happy and quite content. He'd expressed everything he'd needed to say as an artist. Life had served him a heaping plate and he had devoured it. Now he savored the fullness of his belly while lingering over dessert.

He swept floors. Which might not seem like much but it was the fruit of a seed Ned had planted years ago and he relished its sweetness now. His position was indeed one that had been established many years before in the early days of the enormously popular and now corporately controlled amusement park.

Ned was part of the mom and pop team of artists and show folk whose brainchild the park was. Most all of them are dead by now. Ned himself left the operation after twenty years. He'd been gone dozens more before returning anonymously to sweep floors. It was a position chiseled into the bedrock of the company foundation while the current owners were still in diapers. But that's not what this story is about.

It's about Ned and what happened one day as he was sweeping the floor of the tractor barn, a steel and timber hangar housing heavy equipment. As Ned swept the acres of smooth cement floors under and around the 'dozers, earthmovers and graders, he realized someone was in his head. Ned liked to meditate as he swept. He had gotten this psychic high while sweeping since the first time his Grandpap let him brush the duck shit off Granny Watkins' back porch more than 70 years ago. He thought it was the greatest chore in the world.

Throughout his turbulent youth and tumultuous young adulthood, Ned retained his strange affinity for the act of sweeping floors. By this point in the game he'd sent his head tripping to some far-away places. But deep down inside he knew he'd never really left his body, in the terms of, say, being able to pop over to New Delhi for afternoon tea and a dip in the Ganges. He realized that astral projection was just a sublime state of mind. In his case aided and perhaps induced in some way by sweeping floors - A sort of mantra to allow the mind more easy access to alternative levels of awareness. He had never actually encountered anyone else in his mental journeying.

He never sensed any omniscience other than his own.

But now, as he skillfully maneuvered a growing pile of workshop debris around the eight-foot tall wheels of a rotary axe, he became distinctly aware that there was someone else with him, inside of his head. He wasn't scared.

"Perhaps I AM getting too old to smoke that high-grade bud anymore." He laughed moving the now formidable pile of trash away from the tractor toward a large mound in the center of the cavernous room.

"You're not getting too old for the good bud, Ned. I'm real. I'm here. You're not hallucinating. There is someone. Another living soul. With you. Me. I am not harmful to you."

It seemed as if the voice would continue but Ned interrupted.

"Well thank Christ for that" he swore softly.

"You're welcome, Ned" answered the voice.

"Say what?" asked Ned.

"You thanked me. I said you're welcome."

"What? You're Jesus? Jesus Christ? I'm talking to Jesus Christ? A divine visitation? Is that what this is? Or is it the second coming? Oh, I must be hallucinating! You sure you got the right guy JC? I'm an old Pagan. Remember? I dance naked around bonfires by the light of the full moon and fuck women I call goddess. I think you got the wrong number. I'm a sinner, a blasphemer. You want a Christian."

The voice laughed softly, a pleasant melodic chuckle.

"You spit out the words like a machine gun, Ned. Whatever you've been or think you've been you have never been boring. Most Christians bore me to tears. Hell! I'm not a Christian. As for that goddess stuff it certainly endeared you to Mom. And well you know Ned as far as goddesses go she is the Queen. But this is about you and me. I'm not what they teach people that I am. I'm simply another soul."

"Just like me!" thought Ned.

He maneuvered the push broom across the floor with the fluid ease of a master gathering a new collection of dust and dirt.

"No, not just like you Ned. I am much, much older. You're a youngster compared to me. Although you're much older than you think. That's partly why I'm here now telling you all this. See, I'm a very old soul - Old enough to qualify for divinity. And yet I am not as old as some of the others - Pan and Zeus, Great Aunt Hera, Uncle Al, cousin Kali - it's a long list. I'm pretty much considered the baby of the family. I've been the wild one, the prodigal son if you will. The point is you got it all wrong down here, you know? My savior trip wasn't about dying it was about living. I was a young man. I am an old soul, but I was a young man full of fire and burning with purpose. I challenged the order. I nearly brought it down. Yet people continue to use my name and an insipid alteration of my message to enforce and uphold the order. I've been portrayed as austere, somber, a mournful penitent. That is wrong. I loved to sing

and laugh and dance. I, too, knelt before a goddess. O sweet, sweet Mary, how I love you still."

The sound of the push broom, rhythmically brushing the floor reverberated throughout the deserted warehouse. Jesus continued talking to Ned.

"You, Ned, you were there. A much earlier incarnation that you have yet to fully recall, but it was you. A fervent follower. An ardent disciple. Although that's not what this is about either, Ned. No, this is about you and me and what we're doing now."

"Now?" asked Ned, puzzled.

He had been sweeping in this same building for close to an hour. Nearly done. An ordinary night except that he was talking with Jesus. Not the Cuban kid from the scenic arts department but the real Jesus Christ. Still couldn't see him but Ned knew on his most cellular level what was happening was real.

"All we're doing now is sweeping," he said. "I enjoy it. Always have. It's kind of mindless yet very stimulating to the mind. I guess I get kinda Zen about it."

"I guess you do, Ned. That's one of the things I've always liked about you. Your innate understanding of the importance of simplicity. Your love of life as well as your irreverence, creativity, and independence. Your awareness of the constancy and perfection of the nature of things. Yin and Yang. All of the qualities which made us friends once have drawn me to you now.

You have traveled many paths with confidence in the rightness of being in that place at that time and always to your ultimate benefit, though neither greed nor selfishness motivated you. Now it is your time to leave the body. We've come to the purpose of my visit to you. I rather enjoy this sweeping thing myself. So I'll take over here if you don't mind and you may do what you like. Traverse the astral plane. Look in on old friends, loved ones, whatever, whilst I remain here within your body. I will sweep. I will savor the physical sensations of the corporeal frame and I will bear the horrendous pain of the cerebral hemorrhage, which will take place in this body within the hour. Then you will pass in peace with full realization of

your true selfhood into the other side where awaits you the love of those who have crossed before and now make ready your place."

It occurred to Ned that if this was in fact the soul who had been Jesus Christ, now would be an excellent opportunity to get some answers to the big questions. Like the meaning of life: Why? And for what purpose? The afterlife? Heaven? Hell? Purgatory? Is O.J. guilty? Who really shot J.F.K.?

Then Ned realized that's not what this was about at all. And besides he felt satisfied with the answers he'd come up with on his own.

So Ned just said, "Thanks, man", and split. He went and looked in on the lives of his nieces, who were his only living relations. Then he went home. As he floated, disincorporate, in his own studio he realized he had to test this experience. He was still not entirely sure it was real. So with ghostly hands he picked up a pen and in a letter to his nieces he wrote the events of the evening up to that point.

Then he concluded, "Perhaps I should change my name to Thomas but I just had to put this to the test. And so I will return now to my body. If all this is real, I shall be gone and with my dear Greta very soon. Whatever happens, I am now and shall always remain your loving Uncle Ned."

We cremated my Uncle Ned yesterday. He died of a cerebral hemorrhage last Friday night. He was sweeping the tractor barn at the amusement park where he'd worked since before Aunt Greta passed away.

They found him collapsed on the floor with the broom in his hands. He was smiling.

Uncle Ned left his acre of land, his little house and all it's contents to my sister and me. In the studio I found his portfolios and notebooks. The final pages of his journal frighten and intrigue me. I don't know what to think.

