



Commemorating One's Own Death, Sort Of



Bart Everson next to the plaque commemorating his death. Photo by Mike Leonard

On a lazy summer afternoon in July, Bart Everson and a few friends ventured into a narrow alleyway between two downtown Bloomington buildings and watched as Everson attached a plaque to a weathered brick wall. It read:

“At this location
Bart Everson
Fell to his death
7 May 1990.”

Below those words was an image of a skull and, below that, an acknowledgment that Everson had approved and dedicated the plaque on the 25th anniversary of his death.

A few “Huhs?” are in order.

Most of us would say that the longtime Bloomington resident — who currently appears to reside in New Orleans, Louisiana, with his wife and daughter — did not die on that day and his participation in the event would provide tangible testimony to outside observers. To that, Everson offers up several existential and ontological arguments suggesting that perhaps he did die and everything that has happened since then has been a dream, a fantasy, a separate reality.

What is not at issue is that he probably should have died or at least suffered more profound injuries than “a broken collar bone and a few cracked ribs, arm in a sling for a few weeks, and that was about it.”

On the evening in question, Everson was an Indiana University student still a couple of classes away from graduation, living at a subsistence level like many artists, free-thinkers, and impoverished college students. “That

particular evening, we discovered that a bunch of food had been thrown out in a dumpster behind McDonald’s (then located on East Kirkwood), and we were getting together with some friends to extract some of this food,” he recalls.

The Allen Building downtown had been turned into a labyrinth of cold water flats or “artist’s lofts” at the time, and a door that was supposed to be propped open to reach a friend with the Mickey D’s bonanza wasn’t. Everson decided he could climb up on one building and cross over to the other. “I didn’t realize the buildings weren’t actually contiguous — there was a gap of a yard or so between the buildings — and in the dim light of the evening, I just ran over to the guy’s window and went right over the edge.”

Everson is a gangly 6 feet 4 inches. “I do think because it was such a small space, I was kind of bouncing back and forth, hitting things on the way down. It probably slowed my velocity considerably,” he says. Still, a two-story fall onto hard concrete?

“The guy I was trying to reach was Andrew Galpern, who a couple of years later had a bicycle accident, broke his spine, and is now paralyzed from the chest down. I’ve always felt it was extremely ironic that he had that accident doing something absolutely normal and generally safe, and I walked off of a two-story building with very little damage,” Everson says.

Everson earned a master’s degree in telecommunications and new media at IU in 1999 and has been the media artist in the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Faculty Development at Xavier University of Louisiana since moving to New Orleans shortly thereafter.

“Hey, if I don’t deserve a plaque for falling off a building, maybe dying, and being here to talk about it, who does?” he asks.