

# One Man's Post

by Crystal R. R. Edwards

We stepped off the curb and crossed the street. "We're better-connected now than we've ever been before," he told me. "How many people do you interact with online every day?" We stepped up onto the opposite curb and continued our walk against a flow of students carrying backpacks. Only a few were obviously walking with someone. Most of them had their heads down, walking as if barreling through invisible walls. Some of them were reading as they walked. I moved my recorder closer to him, my right arm stretched out at an awkward angle. *My readers are going to love this*, I thought. *He's about to get preachy.*

There was a bottleneck ahead. We slowed down single-file, me behind, to wait our turn to pass the doorway of a vacant storefront church. In it, a lone black man sat atop an empty plastic milk crate. Nobody looked at him; they were all slowing down and crowding together to avoid walking onto the large sheet of cardboard he'd laid out like a carpet. His wrinkled, light-splotched fingers cupped around a scratched old harmonica. He blew a riff and rocked back and forth to keep time. His chin raised with a jerk, and his battered voice sang out a plea to his hip-height solitude one last time. "Can you see the tears roll down my nose?" A few more riffs, a little more rocking. He reached down to check the cup partially filled with coins and a few singles.

"Regularly?" I asked. I had to think for a moment. Somehow I had ended up in front of him. I adjusted the direction of my recorder's mic and moved sideways to avoid the cardboard. "A few hundred." I turned to see his reaction. He was several paces behind me, putting his wallet back into his pocket. He approached with a grin. "See?" he asked. "Isn't it amazing? Hundreds. Think of all the lives you could change with a single post. Our ability to reach out has grown exponentially."

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Behind us, a harmonica played. The rumble of the 51C bus closed in as I heard an old man's voice singing, "Other arms reach out to me, other eyes smile tenderly, still in peaceful dreams I see the road leads back to you."

