



*Land of*  
**broken**  
*dreams*

Liverpool's biggest **attraction** —  
*the Birdman of Exit 38's*  
*crumbling* backyard *junk palace* —  
risks becoming **just a memory**.

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**B**ob Smith spends all day chasing the sun around. He sits in a lawn chair next to his house in the morning, counting semi-trucks go by. In the afternoon, he moves to the sunny side of the shed. He always has an empty chair next to him, in case someone stops by. He wears a sweatshirt tucked into his gray sweatpants even though it's hot outside. His legs are crossed, with thick, blue socks poking out of slippers that his feet are only half inside. "You know when you go beyond 80, it's sort of like skiing," he says. "You don't stop in the middle of the hill. You've got to keep going."

He's the Birdman of Exit 38. For fifty years, he built the Land of Broken Dreams, his backyard palace made of junk. "Everything here is supposed to be broke," he says. "Or else it wouldn't be here. Everybody has stuff to throw away."

A trail leads from his house at the end of Duerr Road just next to Interstate 90 in Liverpool, out into the woods to the Land of Broken Dreams, a little shanty village with some structures two stories tall. He built a tiny church and an artist's studio and plenty of brightly colored houses where birds and rabbits used to live. Paintings, clocks, and long-forgotten toys fill each one. Something hangs from every tree and wall — mannequins, signs, broken statues, and suitcases. Each piece has its place.

He's 84 now and can't remember exactly when or why he started building. "When you get to be as old as

me, you don't count the time," he says. "You just name it in relation to something else."

He grew up on a farm a couple of miles away. On Valentine's Day 1946, he completed his service in the Pacific with the Army Airwaves Communication and cleaned septic tanks for 40 years. He bought his land when the Thruway was built, with his \$250 military bonus plus an extra \$50. He planted trees, built his house, and painted it yellow because his wife wanted to live in a place the color of a canary. He liked woodworking, and the birds and rabbits he raised needed a home. So he started building and collecting. He liked it so much that he kept going.

"It wasn't work to him, it was his fun," his wife, Elma says. When anyone would come by, he showed them around. Sometimes, he'd be gone for two hours and come home hoarse because he'd done all the talking.

And then the winters got worse and Bob got older. He couldn't keep it up anymore. He says Mother Nature can do with it what she will. His wife says it breaks his heart to see it crumble.

He checks on it once a year just to see what the wind has taken, he says. He's got a bad hip, so he shuffles around with a walker. "This here's the handiest invention since the wheelbarrow. It's even got reverse," he says, giggling and creeping backwards.

He doesn't mind if people take things from the Land of Broken Dreams. He's even trying to give his kitten away.

"Everything has its day in the sun," he says. "But everything in the universe ends up junk." 🍌

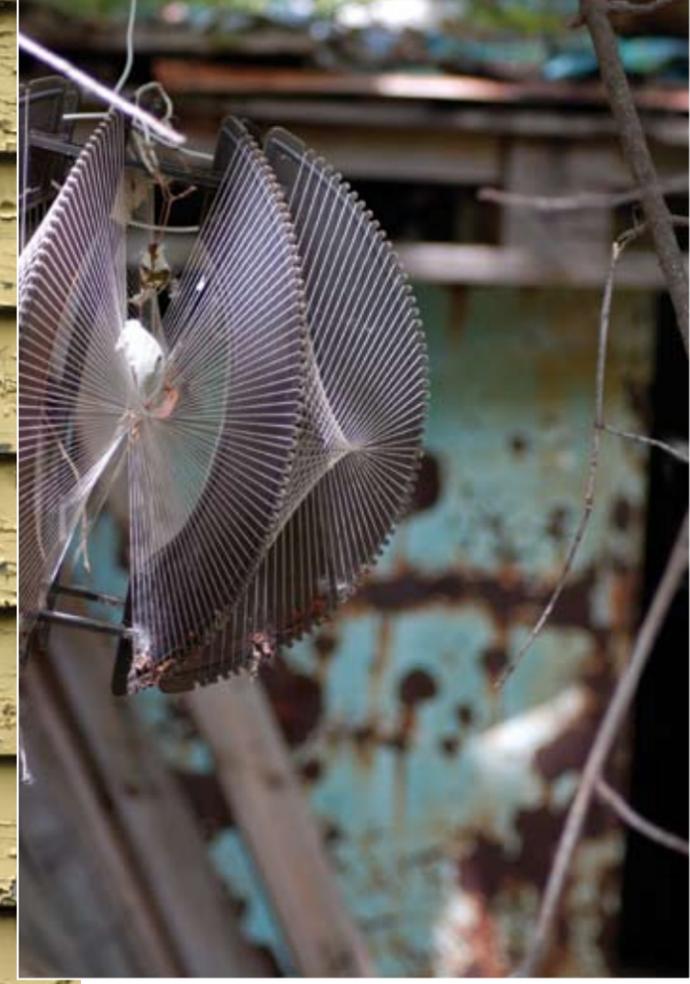
SARA ROBERTSON



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: WANDA LAU (2); SARA ROBERTSON



"If there's anything back *HERE* that's worth stealing, GO for it. I won't *even* miss it."



"I don't pay *much* heed to that *junk anymore*. It's been A LOT OF YEARS. You know, when you live in the Land of Broken Dreams, it's *not* always *easy* to remember."

