



Sylvin Pineau searches through his tattered music sheets at Saint Mathews Church.

# The Pianist

Photos and story by Joel Watson

When you walk into Sylvin Pineau's apartment, it's not quite something that you would expect to see. All over the walls you can see Pineau's history from when he worked at the Canadian National Railway, and the numerous volunteer and arts awards he has received in his life.

On Oct. 15, 1986 Pineau was in a car accident that would change his life. "I was driving to Toronto when I hit a cement barrier going over 100 km/h. I wasn't wearing my seatbelt and I flew through the windshield." Pineau was in a coma for two months recovering from his severe brain trauma at the Kingston General Hospital.

After the accident, Pineau's memory was never what it once was. "I can't trust my memory anymore, it's a bit of long term and short term, but I have to use pen and paper all the time or else I will forget what it was I needed to do." Pineau also has other techniques he uses such as hang medical slips as well as posting notes just before his door.

Due to his injury, he was no longer able to work at Via Rail and he had to file for disability services such as Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). "I am on ODSP but I get most of my money from CPP because I was working. I was working and I got into a car accident so I'm on disability, ODSP only gives me a couple hundred dollars a month and a health card and a dentist card, that's it."

In 1995, the Ontario government cut rates by 21.6 per cent, creating the monthly rate to \$520 per month. In the past 20 years, social assistance plans have decreased so low that it would have to take a 55 per cent increase to revive it back to the rate it was currently at in 1993.

Pineau faced even more health problems when

he was diagnosed with a tumor in 1998, that was located on the front of his brain. This then began to lead into more problems with his ODSP. "One time after my operation I received my statement, no pills, no dentist, nothing and they cut my ODSP check, and I was furious."

The ODSP budget has been increased by one per cent in this past year, however, this only adds another 20 dollars to Pineau's monthly payment as well as most other citizens of Ontario. "They do so much to screw you over then all of a sudden they say, 'oh we love you,' said Pineau sarcastically and with a couple fake kisses. "It doesn't come even close to what they stole from us in '95 by cutting it by 22 percent."

Pineau had been playing the piano since the age of six, but stopped at the age of 18 and didn't play for 12 years until after his accident. "It's funny how my brain couldn't remember how to play but my fingers remembered the music," said Pineau as he smiled and wiggled his fingers.

Currently Pineau volunteers around the community playing piano at Belleville and Trenton hospital, and the Eastminster United Church's Open Door Cafe. "One of the things that I like about volunteering is the people that I get to meet and then people get to know me too,"

Pineau has even received a few awards through the Quinte Arts Council recognizing his contribution to the art community and his volunteer efforts that he does throughout the Quinte region.

With his motorcycle put away for the winter, Pineau can only play piano in certain locations in Belleville until the snow clears, but it won't keep him from playing the music that he loves.



Pineau enters his apartment located in downtown Belleville.



Pineau playing piano at the Trenton Hospital.



Pineau practicing on his keyboard in his apartment.



Pineau has a cigarette after moving his motorcycle into storage his only form of independent travel for the winter.