



children
churches
& daddies

the unregimented, unorthodox, unpretentious
library and not measuring

nothing, surely

volume 129

(Welcome back)

Spring Equinox

March 21, 2003

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poetry, prose, art, news, AIDSwatch, philosophy



the boss lady's editorial

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children & churches & daddies

the unreligious, non-family oriented
literary and art magazine

I'm drained.
I know, I know, that's a bad way to start this off, but consider everything *CC&D* magazine has gone through.

CC&D started off digest-sized & monthly. Then we started this digest-sized magazine biweekly in 1995.

This is when the web site started for *CC&D*. The first site was at Eworld, then it moved to AOL. But our real electronic growth didn't come right away...

Because by the end of 1995 we realized that this magazine was well-respected and enjoyed by many people, but the digest-sized design was not giving the writers the respect they deserved. And the magazine's focus was also limited, covering only fictional writing.

It was time for a change, so we redesigned the logo and started the magazine monthly again, but standard-sized, with the addition of news stories and philosophy. When we had the chance, we also added AIDS stories to keep people informed about scientific news as well.

In 1998 *CC&D* was bimonthly, and because *CC&D* ran collection books, after 1998 we published

CC&D only in book collections (1999 to 2002).

This is when the internet growth started. AOL wouldn't give us enough space, so in 2000 we ran in www.yotko.com/Scars, and we gained urls for different countries for our site. We finally gave in and got our own domain name (scars.tv), and there we post all past writings, past issues, collection books, art galleries, games, sound files and videos of music and readings.

But we got wistful for our issues, so we

came up with a plan: We'll keep our internet publishing, and we'll reduce out book publishing to annually, and we'll start Quarterly issues again, published on the Equinoxes and the Solstices (March 21, June 21, September 21, and December 21). They have the news and philosophy the books lacked, but we still have the poetry, prose and artwork that everyone know and loves in *CC&D*.

CC&D has always been a forum to learn about great writing from America, Canada, India and Europe. Now it is a forum for politics, philosophy, and more. Now it is a greater forum to learn from than ever.



janet kuypers
managing editor

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• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (founded 1993) has been written and researched by political groups and writers from the United States, Canada, England, India, Italy, Malta, Norway and Turkey. Regular features provide coverage of environmental, political and social issues (via news and philosophy) as well as fiction and poetry, and act as an information and education source. **Children, Churches and Daddies** is the leading magazine for this combination of information, education and entertainment.

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THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE SHOULD GO TO THOSE WHO REALLY SUPPORT PEACE

War is caused by statist, who destroy individual rights.

By Andrew Bernstein

The Nobel Peace Prize will be given to Jimmy Carter on December 10 in Oslo. Although Carter's efforts to convince Egypt to recognize Israel's right to exist was a genuine achievement, he has otherwise continuously betrayed the principles on which peace depend. For many years Carter, espousing collectivist ideals, has traipsed the globe treating aggressor and victim with equal respect. For example, he aided the nuclear program of North Korea, the most repressive dictatorship on earth and part of the axis of evil. Carter's trip last May to Cuba, where he sanctioned and supported the dictator Castro, is just more recent evidence that he understands nothing of rights and peace. In choosing Carter the Nobel Committee has shown yet again that it does not understand the cause of war and so of peace.

To understand the cause of war, consider the major wars of the 20th century. World War I was started by the dictatorial monarchies of Germany and Russia. Nazi Germany caused World War II by invading Poland. Totalitarian Soviet Russia repeatedly initiated war by first aligning with Hitler in the conquest of Poland, then by swallowing up Eastern Europe in 1945, and later by supporting the Communist invasion of South Korea.

And consider recent but less global conflicts: Saddam Hussein instigated the Persian Gulf War by

conquering Kuwait. The Taliban, former dictators of Afghanistan, warred against other factions in Afghanistan and then spread its terror overseas by arming and abetting Osama bin Laden's attacks against the United States.

Observe the pattern. It is the less free nations--those in which power is concentrated in the hands of the state at the expense of the individual--that attack their freer neighbors. Such statist regimes, which deny any rights to the individual, are the cause of history's most savage wars. Statist regimes launched the wars that ravaged much of the world in the 20th century. The reason why these regimes did so is not difficult to find.

Dictators are in chronic war against their own people. Hitler murdered the Jews; Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot each murdered millions of businessmen, landowners and bourgeoisie; Milosevic slaughtered the Muslims, Saddam Hussein butchered the Kurds. In her seminal essay, "The Roots of War," Ayn Rand observed: "A country that violates the rights of its own citizens, will not respect the rights of its neighbors. Those who do not recognize individuals rights, will not recognize the rights of nations: a nation is only a number of individuals."

Statism is the cause of war.

Statism rests on the idea that men can legitimately pursue their ends by initiating force against other men. In a

free country such acts are properly regarded as criminal and punished by law; in a free country government uses force only in retaliation against those who initiate it. But statist regimes of all varieties--Nazi, Communist, Islamic Fundamentalist, etc.--initiate force ceaselessly against innocent victims, first within their own borders and then without. In a free country it is recognized that every individual has an inalienable right to his own life. In a statist country the individual exists in bondage to the state, his life to be sacrificed at the whim of the state.

Shamefully, the Nobel Committee has repeatedly awarded its Peace Prize to the bringers of war.

For example, it routinely bestows the prize on statists who condemn the United States--the world's freest, most individualistic country--while praising murderous Third World dictatorships. It awarded the 1994 prize to Yasser Arafat, the brutal dictator of the Palestinian Authority, who imposed a despotic regime on his own people and initiated a murderous war against the free citizens of Israel. Even worse, in 1973 it awarded the prize to Le Duc Tho, the North Vietnamese Communist, who, along with Ho Chi Minh and other Party leaders, imposed a vicious Communist dictatorship in North Vietnam that slaughtered at least 50,000 Vietnamese in the 1950s and then invaded and conquered South Vietnam. All told, the death toll caused by that Communist

Malaysia:

Restriction of freedom of expression hits the Internet

News Release Issued by the International Secretariat of Amnesty International

20 January 2003

The police investigation of the independent internet news site, Malaysiakini, under the Sedition Act calls into question the pledge by Malaysian authorities not to censor the internet, Amnesty International said today.

“This demonstrates, yet again, how restrictive laws are used to curtail freedom of expression in Malaysia,” the organization added.

The police raided the Malaysiakini office on Monday, confiscating all nineteen of their computers, effectively preventing the site’s publication. The raid came following a complaint alleging that a letter published on the site was seditious. The complaint was made by youth wing of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the largest party in the government coalition.

Part of the complaint reportedly refers to the letter’s questioning of affirmative action for Malays. The ‘special position’ of Malays and indigenous peoples is enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution. These provisions include preferential treatment in many aspects of life, includ-

ing education and work.

“The investigation of Malaysiakini makes the government’s pledge not to censor the internet sound hollow. Laws like the Sedition Act, that fail to conform to international human rights standards, threaten the survival of an independent media and freedom of expression in Malaysia,” Amnesty International said.

Malaysia’s restrictive laws are routinely used to curtail internationally recognized human rights, such as freedom of expression. Efforts by independent domestic and international media sources, as well as opposition politicians and Malaysian non-government organizations to comment on sensitive social issues, run the risk of fines, prosecution and imprisonment.

“It is time that the Malaysian government stopped eroding human rights in the name of stability and development. Real stability and development can only be achieved through guaranteeing the free expression of views on emerging social and economic problems, and protecting other fundamental

human rights,” Amnesty International concluded.

Background

In its efforts to promote Malaysia as a centre for Information Technology, the government has until recently restrained itself from using its array of restrictive laws in regard to the Internet. Under Section 3 of the Communications and Multimedia Act, the government prohibited the censorship of the Internet, although there are provisions to act against “defamatory and false information”. However, recent events may signal an end to this restraint.

The Sedition Act (1948) places wide limitations on freedom of expression, particularly regarding sensitive political subjects such as race. Under Section 4(1) c of the Act anyone responsible for a “seditious publication” is liable to a fine not exceeding RM5000 or up to three years imprisonment. Sedition itself is broadly defined in Section 3(1) e as “to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between races or classes of the population of Malaysia.”

Dietary discipleship: Would Jesus be vegetarian?

By Asheville Citizen-Times

POSTED: Dec. 4, 2002 9:20 p.m.

I applaud the thought-provoking letter to the editor, “Jesus wouldn’t be caught dead driving a gas-guzzling SUV,” (AC-T, Nov. 27), and the campaign “What would Jesus drive?” I agree it probably wouldn’t be a gas-guzzling SUV; more likely a pickup truck, like most carpenters.

I also think it’s pretty clear what Jesus wouldn’t eat. If Jesus witnessed modern factory farms, he would no doubt be appalled by the total lack of compassion for the animals. Treated as merely food units, they suffer tremendously from intensive confinement, mutilations, and other endless horrors from birth until the slaughterhouse.

Jesus would recognize the inherent wastefulness and environmental degradation that results from animal agriculture. Converting grains to meat wastes as much as 90 percent of grains’ proteins, 96 percent of their calories, and 100 percent of their carbohydrates and fiber. How can we let

this happen when millions of people die annually of starvation and many more suffer from malnutrition?

Science has shown that a vegetarian diet greatly reduces the risks of many diseases, including cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes. A vegetarian diet is compassionate, results in healthier people, helps feed the hungry, and promotes a cleaner, more sustainable environment. Is there any doubt that Jesus would be a vegetarian? For more information, visit the Web site of the Christian Vegetarian Association, www.Christianveg.com.

Stewart David,
Asheville

dictatorship and its warring totaled two million individuals.

If one admires men who cause war, one will ignore or vilify men who promote peace. Those who respect and support individual rights and political/economic freedom are the only true lovers of peace. Private capitalists and businessmen are outstanding examples. Business requires the barring of the initiation of force. Businessmen deal with one another peacefully, by means of trade, persuasion and voluntary contracts and agreements. Because businessmen respect the rights of all individuals, they have helped liberate the best minds to innovate, invent and advance, and thereby helped produce great general prosperity and peace. By helping to spread free trade across the globe, they have created peaceful relations among the individuals of many nations. Yet perversely, capitalists are denounced as exploiters of man.

If we sincerely seek to attain the inestimable value that is world peace, it is individual rights and therefore capitalism that we must endorse. Capitalism is the only political-economic system that protects individual rights by banning the initiation of force. As Ayn Rand observed, it was capitalism that gave mankind its longest period of peace--an era in which there were no wars involving the entire civilized world--from the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

If we truly want to recognize and promote the cause of peace, let us award a peace prize to Capitalism.

Andrew Bernstein, Ph.D. in philosophy, is a senior writer for the Ayn Rand Institute in Irvine, Calif. The Institute promotes Objectivism, the philosophy of Ayn Rand, author of Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead. Send comments to reaction@aynrand.org.

Settlement Ends Discrimination Case of Nine-Year-Old Forced to Take HIV Test

April 22, 1999

CAROL STREAM, IL -- A nine-year-old black child who was allegedly coerced into taking an HIV test after sharing a snorkel in a public pool with a white youth settled a discrimination case against a suburban day care center, the Chicago Sun-Times reported today.

The mother and son plaintiffs in the case, identified only as "Mary Doe" and "Jimmy Doe," settled for an undisclosed amount of money, said Roger Leishman, AIDS project director for the ACLU of Illinois, which represented the family.

"We're happy, and our client is happy also, and that's all I can say about the cash settlement," Leishman said.

The suit targeted Outreach Community Ministries, which operated a day care center in Carol Stream that Jimmy attended. It also targeted a DuPage County medical clinic. Outreach and the clinic did not admit any wrongdoing under the terms of the settlement.

The suit, filed in federal court last year, alleged that Jimmy, on a visit from a nearby community center, shared a snorkel with a white child at a Wheaton public pool in summer 1996. What happened next, the ACLU said, revealed some of society's worst stereotypes about race and AIDS.

The suit said that the white child's mother, threatening litigation, demanded that the black child be subjected to an HIV test--solely because of the 9-year-old's race. And, the suit alleged, Outreach coerced the black child's mother into making her son take the test. The paper reported that the black mother was told her son might lose his day care.

from the ACLU



ACLU of Iowa Challenges State's Flag Desecration Law

December 2, 2002

DES MOINES-The American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa today filed a lawsuit on behalf of two college students here who were prohibited by city and county officials from displaying a United States flag upside down in protest of U.S. government policies.

Today's lawsuit challenges Iowa's "flag desecration" statute, a law that has already been ruled unenforceable by the state's highest court.

"Bad laws like these should be stricken from the Iowa code," said Ben Stone, Executive Director of the ACLU of Iowa. "Even though courts have consistently ruled that flags may be used in the course of war protests, police and prosecutors continue to use this law for no other purpose than to silence government critics."

According to the lawsuit, two Grinnell College students -- John Bohman and Juan Diaz -- came under scrutiny for displaying an American flag upside down, observing the official method of using the flag to indicate distress as a statement of their "displeasure with the policies of the United

States Government."

ACLU attorneys contend that two Grinnell City police officers, Theresa Petersen and David Klein, saw the flag last September and consulted with Poweshiek County Attorney Michael Mahaffey about the legality of the display.

After receiving assurances from Mahaffey that he was willing to prosecute the students under the state's "flag desecration" statute, the officers went to the students' dorm room and, according to the ACLU complaint, told the students that if the flag was not removed they would be prosecuted.

Thirty years ago, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled in *State v. Kool* that displaying an American flag upside down was protected speech and could not be prosecuted. Later, in 1989, in *Texas v. Johnson*, the United States Supreme Court reversed the conviction of a Texas protestor who was arrested for actually burning a flag in the course of a demonstration, declaring that the right of free speech protected symbolic use of the flag.

"The Iowa law is really more about harassment of protestors than protecting the flag from irreverent treatment," said Randall Wilson, Legal Director of the ACLU of Iowa. "As a device for eliminating freedom of speech, this law runs contrary to everything our national emblem stands for."

Today's lawsuit seeks a court order that holds Iowa's "flag desecration" statute unconstitutional and guarantees the right to display the U.S. flag upside down in the future. ACLU attorneys are also seeking nominal damages and a preliminary injunction against further enforcement of the law.

The students are being represented in the lawsuit by ACLU of Iowa cooperating attorney, Phillip B. Mears of Iowa City. The lawsuit was filed in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Iowa in Des Moines, Iowa.



Protesters Against Sweatshop Merchandise Outside Pirates Baseball Stadium Sue to Reclaim First Amendment Rights

PITTSBURGH--The American Civil Liberties Union today filed a federal civil rights lawsuit on behalf of four political activists who were arrested last month for distributing leaflets criticizing the Pittsburgh Pirates for selling merchandise made by Third World sweatshop labor.

According to the ACLU lawsuit, the protesters were arrested while distributing leaflets on public sidewalks near PNC park, the Pirates' home stadium.

"I don't think Allegheny County residents realized that when they bought the Pirates a stadium, they were also giving away their rights to free speech on the city's sidewalks," said Witold Walczak, Director of the ACLU of Greater Pittsburgh and an attorney in the case. Today's lawsuit was filed, he said, "to re-claim Pittsburgh's streets and sidewalks for the people."

Since the City of Pittsburgh and the Sports and Exhibition Authority have

refused to provide assurance that the protesters will not be arrested again when they plan to resume their political activity before this Saturday's game, the ACLU is asking the court to issue an order before Saturday to protect the activists.

The case was filed on behalf of Kenneth Miller, Joel Waller, Kevin Mayle, Michelle Gaffey and their organization, Industrial Workers of the World.

According to the ACLU lawsuit, on March 2, 2002, the group was engaged in protest when they were told first by stadium security and then by Pittsburgh police officers that the sidewalks surrounding PNC Park were "private," and that they could not distribute leaflets, collect petition signatures, or engage in other political activities on the sidewalks abutting the stadium.

When they refused, Pittsburgh police officers arrested them for "defiant trespass" based, in significant part, on warnings given to them while they

attempted to distribute leaflets on the sidewalks surrounding PNC Park.

But as the ACLU noted in legal papers, at the same time that police were restricting the activities of the sweatshop protesters, they allowed another person in the same location to distribute leaflets promoting an exhibit of baby penguins at the Pittsburgh Aviary.

"The areas in question are owned by the defendants, government entities, and as such are traditional public forums," the ACLU said in legal papers. "The activists have a First Amendment right to use the City's streets and sidewalks, including those around PNC Park, to engage in time-honored political activities."

The case is being heard today in U. S. District Court in Pittsburgh. A decision is expected by this Saturday. The plaintiffs are represented by Walczak of the ACLU and Michael Healey of the law firm Healey, Davidson & Hornack.

ACLU Defends Church's Right to Run "Anti-Santa" Ads in Boston Subways

BOSTON--The American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts and a local attorney today filed a First Amendment lawsuit against the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) for removing subway advertisements promoting the views of a local church and refusing to sell additional advertising space to the church.

One of the controversial ads, paid for by The Church of the Good News, said that early Christians did not celebrate Christmas or "believe in lies about Santa Claus, flying reindeer, elves and drunken parties." A second ad, which was rejected by the transit authority and never posted, said, "There is only one true religion. All the rest are false."

"The transit authority has lost at

least three other cases involving its refusal to display various ads because of their content or viewpoint," said John Reinstein, Legal Director of the ACLU of Massachusetts. "We are confident that the court will preserve the principles of religious liberty and free speech and rule in favor of our client."

The church, represented by the ACLU and Boston civil rights attorney Harvey Schwartz, seeks an injunction ordering the transit authority to sell them advertising space and prohibiting officials from using a vague advertising policy to filter out ad campaigns it finds objectionable.

The transit authority had initially refused to post the church's ad about Christmas, but relented after attorneys representing the church interceded,

saying that the issue was a matter of freedom of religion. But shortly after the Boston Globe ran an article about the ad, officials removed it and told the church that none of its ads would be displayed.

"The MBTA has a history of refusing advertising space to groups it disagrees with," said Harvey Schwartz. "Under the Constitution, government officials simply do not have that power. It is about time that the MBTA learned this lesson."

Today's case was filed in Suffolk Superior Court. A trial in a similar case brought a by drug law reform organization called Change the Climate is scheduled to begin February 1, 2002 in federal court in Boston. The MBTA has refused to sell advertising space to that group as well.

On International Women's Day, the ACLU Calls on the United States To Ratify UN Convention on Ending Discrimination Against Women

*Statement of Lenora M. Lapidus, Director,
ACLU Women's Rights Project March 8, 2002*

NEW YORK - The American Civil Liberties Union today joins other groups around the world to celebrate International Women's Day. Never before has it been more clear that all women must stand together to oppose the obstacles that they share -- violence in their homes and on their streets, discrimination in their jobs, repressive political, cultural, and religious forces, and infringements on their reproductive choices.

In an expression of true celebration of women's lives, the ACLU urges the U.S. government to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The United States played an important role in drafting CEDAW before U.N. ratification in 1979, but more than 20 years later has yet to adopt it as law.

The primary goals of CEDAW are to

eliminate discrimination against women, to promote the rule of law, and to advance a respect for human rights throughout the world. CEDAW recognizes that discrimination against women violates principles of equal rights and human dignity and is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms as men, in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of their countries. It defines discrimination as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The U.S. government's failure to ratify CEDAW is inconsistent with and antithetical to its broader foreign policy. On the one hand, the U.S. government presses the world to stand together for a common goal

-- the end of terrorism. Yet, on the other hand, in failing to ratify CEDAW, the U.S. government stands apart from nearly all other nations -- 168 countries, including all other industrialized democracies, that have adopted CEDAW.

Indeed, when it comes to women's rights, the U.S. government seems to stand with Afghanistan, Iran, and Sudan, three of the other countries that refuse to ratify CEDAW.

The ACLU calls on President Bush and the U.S. Senate to support and ratify CEDAW. Our leaders have rightly condemned as barbaric the treatment of women in Afghanistan. It is time to put that commitment to women's rights into practice here. It is time for the U.S. to fulfill its promise of equality to women. It is time for the United States to join the coalition of 168 countries and ratify CEDAW in 2002.

Pregnancy Discrimination Case Comes Before State Supreme Court

HARTFORD-The Women's Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union and the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union today filed a friend-of-the-court brief in a case that examines the grounds for wrongful dismissal in a private employment setting. The Connecticut Supreme Court today will hear arguments on whether protections against pregnancy discrimination should be extended to employees of small companies with fewer than three employees.

Nicole Ann Thibodeau, plaintiff in the case, *Thibodeau v. Design Group One Architects*, claimed pregnancy discrimination when she was terminated from her position at a small architecture firm. Fearing that she could not seek relief through Connecticut's pregnancy discrimination law because of the size of her former employer's business, attorneys for Thibodeau instead claimed that the state's general "public policy" against gender discrimination and pregnancy discrimina-

tion provided adequate protections.

"The ACLU Women's Rights Project has been a leader in the efforts to eliminate the barriers to women's full equality in American society," said Lenora Lapidus, Director of the Women's Rights Project. "Accordingly, we have long targeted pregnancy discrimination as a part of our efforts to combat the stereotyped decision-making that limits women's opportunities and to ensure women's equal treatment in the workplace."

A lower court ruled that Thibodeau's dismissal was based in whole or in part on her pregnancy and therefore in violation of the state Constitution. The Connecticut courts have previously recognized similar "public policy" grounds to protect Connecticut workers from wrongful dismissal. The defendants subsequently appealed to the Connecticut Supreme Court.

The case has attracted a great deal of interest, with separate friend-of-the-

court briefs from the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union, the Connecticut Chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), the ACLU Women's Rights Project, the Plaintiffs' Employment Lawyers Association, the Connecticut Women's Education & Legal Fund, and the Connecticut Business and Industries Association.

"The ACLU WRP played an important role in fighting discriminatory policies that forced flight attendants off the job as soon as they became pregnant, and we are currently challenging policies that force pregnant police officers out of their jobs. This case seeks to ensure that the prohibitions against pregnancy discrimination apply to all women in the workforce," Lapidus added.

The plaintiff is represented by attorneys Gary Phelan and Elaine Rubinson.

Please click [here](#) to see a copy of the amicus brief filed by the Women's Rights Project and the CCLU.

ACLU Settles AIDS Discrimination Case for Homeless Man, Creating Model Education Program for Shelters Nationwide

NEW YORK, NY -- The American Civil Liberties Union today announced the settlement of an AIDS discrimination case in which Patrick Keegan Biggers, a homeless man, was evicted from a shelter in Maine because he was HIV positive.

Unlike most other settlements, the outcome involved no money and instead prompted a first-of-its-kind AIDS-awareness policy the ACLU hopes will serve as a model for shelters across the country.

"This settlement creates a new AIDS educational curriculum and discrimination policy which can be easily adopted by other shelters to teach staff and residents how HIV is transmitted and what their responsibilities are under the law," said Michael Adams, the ACLU attorney on the case. "Continued public ignorance and hostility against people with HIV only leads to continuing discrimination."

On December 23, 1997, administration at the Emmaus Center in Ellsworth, Maine

evicted Biggers, saying that his HIV status was a "needless risk" to staff and residents. They defined the following actions as "dangerous behavior:" talking about his disease; handling a coffee cup; setting the table; asking to pick up a baby; and having dry sores on the back of his hands.

"It made me feel like a leper, like a castaway," said Biggers about the experience.

The ACLU filed a complaint on Biggers' behalf with the Maine Human Rights Commission and demonstrated that the shelter had violated Biggers' rights under the American with Disabilities Act and the Maine Human Rights Act, both of which prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities or perceived disabilities. The shelter, which changed directors while the ACLU complaint was pending, then agreed to adopt the new AIDS awareness program and issue a letter of apology to Biggers. This was done in return for the ACLU and Biggers' agreement

not to file a lawsuit or seek damages.

As a result of the settlement, the ACLU and the Down East AIDS Network (DEAN) of Ellsworth have developed educational training workshops which will be implemented to address shelter staff and residents' fears regarding the transmission of AIDS. The curriculum teaches people about AIDS and how and when to take precautionary measures, while reinforcing the basic guidelines of respect and equal treatment to which disabled individuals are entitled under the law.

"Although this began as a conflict because of the violation of Patrick Biggers' rights, in the end the ACLU and the Emmaus Center worked together to develop a model AIDS program," said Adams. "What Patrick wanted was to make sure this never happens to anybody else, and this settlement is a big step in that direction."

ACLU Applauds Appeals Court Decision Upholding Minors' Right to Confidential Abortions

CINCINNATI--In a victory for both minors and doctors, a federal appeals court ruled today that a doctor cannot be punished for providing an abortion to a minor without parental consent when the minor had no confidential and expeditious alternative to obtaining that consent.

"With today's decision, the court affirms once again that minors cannot be subjected to a blanket requirement of parental consent for an abortion if there is no real, working alternative for those who are unable to talk to their parents," said Julie Sternberg, a Staff Attorney at the ACLU's Reproductive Freedom Project who argued the appeal as friend of the court.

The case revolved around a couple's attempt to hold a Tennessee doctor and clinic liable for performing an abortion on their 17-year-old daughter without their consent.

At the time the abortion was per-

formed, the ACLU had secured an injunction blocking enforcement of Tennessee's parental consent requirement. That law made it a crime for a minor to obtain an abortion without parental consent, unless the minor had gotten a "judicial bypass" - a court order permitting the abortion without parental consent. Because of the injunction, Tennessee courts were not considering requests for a judicial bypass when the couple's daughter sought her abortion.

The district court had dismissed the couple's case, and today, the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit affirmed that decision. In a joint friend-of-the-court brief, the ACLU's Reproductive Freedom Project and Planned Parenthood Federation of America argued that physicians cannot be required to obtain parental consent for all minors seeking abortions unless there is a confidential and expeditious judicial alternative available.

The appeals court agreed, holding that without a judicial alternative, a young woman's right to obtain an abortion is unduly burdened "If there is no judicial bypass procedure in place, neither the minor nor her physician can legally be required to seek parental consent." Thus, the court added, "to allow this litigation to go forward would be tantamount to fostering an unconstitutional regime."

"The court has sent a clear message that doctors cannot be held liable for respecting their minor patients' constitutional rights," said Sternberg. "Any other result would not only infringe on young women's fundamental rights but also intimidate doctors from providing needed reproductive health care services."

The case is *Blackard v. Memphis Area Medical Center* (No. 00-5326). Attorneys in the case include Julie Sternberg, Louise Melling, and Jennifer Dalven from the national ACLU's Reproductive Freedom Project.

Seeds of Domination

Don't want GMOs in your food? It may already be too late.

By Karen Charman

Americans have been eating genetically engineered foods every day for several years, though many remain unaware of that basic fact. Consequently, the question of whether our food should be manipulated with genes from foreign species may already be moot.

Walter Fehr is an agronomist and director of the Office of Biotechnology at Iowa State University. He says genetically engineered varieties of staple crops like corn and soybeans have contaminated seed stocks all the way to the "breeder seed," the purest version of a crop variety. If breeder seed contains material from genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, all the seeds and plants that descend from that stock will contain GMOs as well. According to Fehr, transgenic contamination of breeder and other seed stocks "happens routinely."

That shocks Theresa Podoll, executive director of the Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society (NPSAS), an organization that represents 350 organic farmers throughout the Upper Midwest and Canada. Podoll is intimately familiar with the problems GMOs are causing organic farmers, but she is astounded to hear somebody within the biotech establishment admit that transgenic contamination goes all the way to breeder seed.

Podoll points out that the nation's agricultural universities, the so-called land-grant institutions, are charged with safeguarding the public seed stocks. "If research with transgenic crops at land-grant facilities makes contamination of the seed stocks a forgone conclusion, why are they doing transgenic research?" she asks. "To gamble all our crops' genetic resources to do research on a ques-

tionable technology that is in its infancy is unconscionable."

Genetically engineered crops were first commercially planted just seven years ago. Ninety-nine percent of the world's estimated 145 million acres of genetically modified crops are planted in four countries: Argentina, Canada, China and the United States. Four crops—canola, corn, cotton and soybeans—that are altered to tolerate herbicides or produce pesticides make up most of these plantings.

From the beginning, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration deemed biotech food "substantially equivalent—that is, no different from food produced by conventional breeding methods, which can only occur between members of the same or closely related species. This classification does not require long-term food-safety testing. Such tests have never been done on GMO crops.

However, in order to breach the natural barriers between species and make foreign genes function in their new homes, bioengineers use genes from viruses and bacteria, as well as genes resistant to antibiotics needed to treat human diseases. The public health implications of this genetic manipulation are unknown. The technology also raises concerns about the creation of toxic substances and allergens that have never been part of the human diet. For these reasons, the British Medical Association and other scientists have called for a worldwide moratorium on GMO crops until safety questions are answered.

Fehr's conclusions are not based on comprehensive research documenting the extent of transgenic contamination in the public seed

stocks held by Iowa State or other public agricultural institutions, though such an effort is now underway at his university. However, the problem of GMO contamination became "obvious," he says, when Europe raised concerns about receiving bioengineered soybeans and corn after the first commercial harvest of transgenic crops in 1996. "From that point on, the whole issue of contamination has been at the forefront of our thinking."

Fehr is not the only one who acknowledges the transgenic contamination of seed stocks. The Grain Quality Task Force at Purdue University also notes that "whenever new genetic material is introduced into the agricultural crop mix, trace contamination of non-target crops is unavoidable."

That's because wind and insects carry genetically engineered pollen far and wide. According to Kendall Lamkey, a corn breeder at Iowa State, the traits of GMO crops are dominant because there is nothing in a non-transgenic receptor plant's genome to counter the introduced foreign genes.

Contamination also occurs when GMO seeds fall into non-transgenic fields from farm equipment previously used on a gene-altered crop. Researchers are not required to use separate equipment for GMO varieties that are already commercialized; and because of the cost and trouble of keeping them separate from everything else, Fehr says, they don't. "If you're growing both GMO and non-GMO and running them through the same equipment and cleaning facilities," he says, "you can be assured that there's going to be contamination."

For years, Podell and her organization have been raising concerns about contamination from transgenic research plots at North Dakota State University, their local land-grant institution. In 2001, NPSAS learned that a research plot of wheat engineered to resist Roundup, Monsanto's best-selling herbicide, had been planted at North Dakota State next to the foundation seed stocks for Coteau wheat, which is popular among organic growers.

Foundation seed stocks, which are grown directly from breeder seed, form the genetic basis for any given crop variety. They are "the seed for the seed" that farmers buy and plant. Genetically modified wheat—like Monsanto's "Roundup Ready"—is not approved for human consumption, yet North Dakota State told the NPSAS via e-mail that "there can be no guarantee that GMO DNA has not been introduced" into any wheat varieties grown at its research stations.

Last March, the NPSAS delivered a petition with more than 1,600 signatures from farmers and consumers to North Dakota State officials, demanding that transgenic crops not be planted or handled where conventional seeds were bred, grown, cleaned or stored. The petition also went to three other land-grant institutions: South Dakota State University, the University of Minnesota and Montana State University.

In May, Fred Cholick, dean of the College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences at South Dakota State, acknowledged the problem and told NPSAS that protocols were in place to prevent transgenic contamination. The protocols include testing to make sure seed stocks and conventional varieties are GMO-free. However, Cholick also said more than 80 percent of his university's soybean varieties were already transgenic. He ended his letter with this disclaimer: "As a biologist, I also realize that

genetic systems are not perfect."

Minnesota and Montana State officials say they understand the need to keep seed varieties pure and are following procedures to do so. But they didn't spell what steps they were taking, nor did they agree to NPSAS's demand to halt work on genetically engineered crops in facilities that also contain foundation seed stocks.

North Dakota State, however, did agree last year to use separate, designated equipment for harvesting transgenic research plots. While this is a positive step, it only applies to crop varieties not yet approved for commercial release. Dale Williams, who's in charge of seed stocks at the university, defends the protocols and says that even if foundation seed stocks are contaminated by GMOs, "it's not that much of a problem."

The university's foundation seed stocks are now routinely tested for GMOs, and so far none have turned up in any of the samples. But relying on tests from seed samples is not foolproof. John Lukach, a research manager at the university, points out that to be absolutely sure GMOs aren't present, every single seed would need to be tested. Further, some commonly used testing methods can only detect GMOs at a contamination level of about 10 percent.

If transgenes are detected, Williams says, North Dakota State could produce new foundation stocks from breeder seed (assuming it isn't already contaminated) or take, say, 100 randomly selected seed samples from the foundation plots, test them, and, if they are free of GMOs, use that seed to produce another foundation crop. Kendall Lamkey, the corn breeder from Iowa State, says either of those strategies could work, but he doubts either would be employed for contamination with GMOs that are already approved—like Roundup Ready soybeans.

In fact, last autumn two lots of

North Dakota State foundation seed stocks for Natto soybeans, a non-GMO variety, were found to be contaminated with Roundup Ready genes. Williams says the contamination occurred in the winter of 2000 when the seeds were sent down to Chile. (In the winter, breeder seed and foundation seed stocks are typically sent to nurseries in warmer climates.) The contamination wasn't discovered until after the seed was brought back and grown out at a North Dakota State seed farm—and then not until after some of the seed had been distributed to growers of registered and certified seed, who sell to organic and other farmers.

Theresa Podoll says that the university had promised that any foundation seed stocks found to be contaminated with GMOs would be destroyed. But in November, Williams told North Dakota's Grand Forks Herald that since Roundup Ready soybeans are "not regulated"—that is, they are approved for human consumption—"small amounts of it, or tolerances of amounts, are allowed in most markets."

But GMOs are not allowed in organic food. The widespread transgenic contamination of organic crops threatens the very existence of organic grain producers throughout the Midwest, a situation that speaks volumes about mainstream agriculture's deep-seated bias against non-industrial farming systems. In *The Last Harvest*, Paul Raeburn writes that for decades, organic farming was "dismissed as the work of zealots," and that USDA scientists—many of whom are stationed at land grant universities—historically looked upon organic production systems as "gardening" and "irrelevant to modern agriculture."

By contrast, industrial agriculture has enjoyed enormous benefits. These included the close working relationships between the land-grant

universities and agribusiness corporations like Monsanto, massive public subsidies for commodity crops, and weak environmental and public health laws that permit widespread pollution of air, water, soil and food with chemicals and fertilizers used in industrial agriculture.

Despite the uneven playing field, the success of organic farming has made it impossible to ignore. With consistent growth in retail sales of 20 percent a year since 1990, organics are the fastest-growing sector in the food industry. When given a choice, increasing numbers of people show with their purchases that they want their food produced in an environmentally friendly manner. Food manufacturers have taken notice, and large conglomerates now own the major organic food companies.

Still, GMO contamination is reaching crisis portions in the organic-farming community. "Organic producers can no longer produce organic corn," says NPSAS president Janet Jacobson, an organic farmer in North Dakota's northeast corner. "I don't know any organic farmers that can grow canola, because there's so much GMO canola around. There are also organic farmers who have had soybeans rejected because they were contaminated with GMOs."

Transgenic contamination is now so rampant that the FDA prohibits organic food manufacturers from labeling their products "GMO-free."

In Canada, a group called the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate (SOD) last year filed a lawsuit on behalf of all certified organic producers in the province, seeking millions of dollars in damages from Monsanto and Aventis, another biotech corporation (which was recently purchased by Bayer), for the loss of the organic canola market due to GMO contamination. Canola is pollinated by insects, and SOD claims the companies knew, or ought to have known, when they intro-

duced bioengineered canola that it would spread and contaminate the environment and neighboring farmers' fields. SOD is also seeking an injunction against the introduction of transgenic wheat.

Unlike conventional agriculture, which relies on chemical pesticides and synthetic fertilizers to be able to produce one or two crops year after year, organic agriculture can only work by growing a diversity of crops in rotation around the farm. Crop rotations enable organic farmers to control pests and weeds and manage diseases, while also building soil fertility. With corn, soybeans and canola already gone from organic crop rotations on the northern plains, SOD President Arnold Taylor says the loss of wheat would be catastrophic. The introduction of GMO wheat would likely spell the end of organic farming on the northern prairie.

Organic farmers aren't the only ones who have suffered from the introduction of biotech crops. Consumers overseas, particularly in Europe, have emphatically rejected GMOs. Dan MacGuire, a policy analyst with the American Corn Growers Association, says economic analysis of USDA data reveals that the introduction of biotech corn is directly responsible for a roughly 30 cent per bushel drop in corn prices. With returns to farmers at their lowest level in decades, and well below the cost of production, he says farmers cannot afford this further cut.

Conventional farmers and the folks who distribute commodity corn already incurred huge losses because StarLink corn, a biotech variety not approved for human consumption, found its way into more than 300 food products—including Taco Bell taco shells—in 2000 and 2001. The StarLink incident prompted expensive recalls and a massive legal quagmire that will take years to resolve. StarLink contamina-

tion is still an issue; in December, Japanese officials detected it in a shipment from the United States.

Rejection of GMOs in foreign markets and the contamination debacle have made transgenic wheat the subject of raging debate and political infighting in North Dakota. Wheat is North Dakota's

No. 1 industry, indirectly generating some \$4 billion a year. Half of the crop is exported, and buyers in eight of its 11 main export markets have said they don't want transgenic wheat. Many have warned that they'll go elsewhere if GMO wheat is planted because of the likelihood of transgenic contamination. As a result, most farming organizations in North Dakota have called for a moratorium on the commercial release of Roundup Ready wheat until there are assurances that export markets won't evaporate. So far, powerful Republicans in the state Senate have blocked such a measure.

Some supporters have indicated that the biotech industry may be deliberately contaminating the food supply with GMOs so that alternatives to bioengineered food no longer exist. In January 2001, food industry consultant Don Westfall told the *Toronto Star*: "The hope of the industry is that over time the market is so flooded that there's nothing you can do about it. You just sort of surrender."

Last April, Dale Adolphe, executive director of the Canadian Seed Growers Association, told Canadian canola growers at their annual meeting that despite growing public opposition and new regulations, the increasing acreage of bioengineered crops may eventually end the debate. Adolphe told *The Western Producer*, a Canadian agricultural paper, "It's a hell of a thing to say that the way we win is don't give the consumer a choice, but that might be it."

Perhaps the biotech industry has already won.

Civil Rights Groups Fight Eviction of Battered Women Under “Zero Tolerance” Housing Policy *from the ACLU*

PORTLAND, OR--In the first legal challenge of its kind, Legal Aid Services of Oregon and the Oregon Law Center, in coalition with national women’s rights advocates, today joined a federal sex discrimination lawsuit challenging a property management company’s policy of evicting victims of domestic violence from their homes.

Today’s legal action was joined by attorneys with the American Civil Liberties Union’s Women’s Rights Project and NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund.

According to the lawsuit, Tiffani Alvera, 24, was served with a 24-hour eviction notice in 1999 by Creekside Village Apartments in Oregon after she informed them that she had taken out a temporary restraining order against her husband, who had attacked her in their apartment.

“What happened to Tiffani is not an aberration,” said Ellen Johnson, staff attorney in the Hillsboro Regional Legal Aid Services of Oregon office and lead counsel in the case. “Victims of domestic violence are losing their homes and being denied housing opportunities solely because

of the behavior of their abusers.”

Similar zero tolerance policies against violence are applied to victims of domestic violence in both private and subsidized housing throughout the United States, including Michigan, California, Louisiana, Colorado and Massachusetts, Johnson said.

The case initially was filed by the U.S. Department of Justice on behalf of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which investigated the matter and determined that Ms. Alvera’s rights had been violated. With today’s legal action, Ms. Alvera joins the case on her own behalf, represented by the rights groups. The case will now be heard in U.S. District Court.

“It is both cruel and illogical to apply a zero tolerance housing policy to a victim of domestic violence,” said Lenora Lapidus, Director of the ACLU Women’s Rights Project and co-counsel in the lawsuit. “We all want to live in a safe environment, but punishing innocent victims and discriminating against women is not the way to achieve that aim.”

Government and academic stud-

ies consistently report that the vast majority of domestic violence victims are female and that their abusers are known to them. Thus, today’s lawsuit claims, the zero tolerance policy discriminates against women on the basis of their gender, in violation of federal law.

On August 2, 1999, Tiffani Alvera was physically assaulted by her husband in their two-bedroom apartment. The police were called and her husband was arrested, lodged in jail and charged with assault.

That same day, Ms. Alvera went to Clatsop County Circuit Court and obtained a restraining order prohibiting her husband from coming on to the apartment complex where they lived.

When she gave the resident manager a copy of the restraining order, she was told the management company had decided to evict her under a zero tolerance policy against violence. Two days later, Ms. Alvera was served with a notice of eviction. Subsequently, Ms. Alvera’s attempts to pay rent for August and September were refused, as was her application for a smaller apartment.

“Victims of domestic violence across the country are vulnerable to this hidden discrimination,” said Martha Davis, Legal Director, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund. “At the moment when they most need housing in order to start a new life, women are being thrown out of their homes because of their partners’ violence.”

The case is *Alvera v. C.B.M. et al.* Ms. Alvera is represented by Johnson of Oregon Legal Aid Services; Michelle Ryan of the Oregon Legal Center; Geoffrey Boehm and Wendy Weiser of NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund based in New York; and Lapidus of the ACLU Women’s Rights Project, also based in New York.



Women & AIDS Clinic and ACLU File Suit Alleging Discrimination Against HIV-Positive Woman

June 28, 2000

from the ACLU

NEWARK, NJ -- The Women and AIDS Clinic at Rutgers Law School and the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey today filed a federal lawsuit against New Jersey state officials for discriminating against an HIV positive woman and her newborn child.

A woman does not lose her right to decide whether or not to undergo an HIV test simply because she is pregnant, added Lenora Lapidus, Legal Director of the ACLU-NJ. And she certainly does not lose the right to raise her child simply because she is HIV-positive.

In their lawsuit, the ACLU and the Women and AIDS Clinic said that actions taken against a woman -- identified in court papers as Jane Doe *ú* by Capital Health System and the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services violate the Americans with Disabilities Act, the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination, and the New Jersey AIDS Assistance Act. The complaint also alleges that the state, in an effort to remove the child from the woman's custody, filed false affidavits stating that the woman was taking illegal drugs at the time of her pregnancy.

In July 1998, the woman went to Capital Health System for a doctor's visit when she began experiencing severe cramping during her pregnancy. The woman was advised that blood work would have to be performed to determine the cause of the cramping. Without written consent or authorization, the woman's blood was tested for HIV. After the birth, the child was removed from the mother's custody based upon her refusal to provide AZT to the newborn.

New Jersey law mandates that pregnant women be counseled regarding HIV testing, said Cynthia M. Dennis, Director of the Woman and AIDS Clinic. The law does not permit unauthorized HIV testing after a pregnant woman has decided not to consent to testing.

The case, *Doe v. Division of Youth and Family Services, et al.*, was filed in the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey. Does' attorneys are Cynthia M. Dennis, Clinical Attorney and Director of the Women and AIDS Clinic at Rutgers Law School- Newark, and Lenora M. Lapidus, Legal Director of the ACLU of New Jersey.

AIDS hysteria blinds us

IN his letter, Edan Milton Hughes bites blindly at the policy pronouncements leveled forth from the AIDS bureaucracy (AIDS still out of control, Examiner letters, Dec. 4). But given the lack of hard data, he misses the apple.

While there are anecdotal claims that unprotected gay sex is up, there is no tracking of HIV sero-conversion. With AIDS incidence and deaths relatively stable (and protease Inhibitors about 50 percent effective at best) and no evidence of the rate of change of HIV sero-conversion, it is premature to conclude that AIDS is out of control.

The state is preparing to make HIV a reportable disease, and this will allow policy to be based on science rather than prejudice. But for all the admonishments, lecturing and specious programs offered by the AIDS prevention bureaucracy, gay men's sexuality and public health is held hostage to policy makers more concerned with politics than science.

S And worse than holding our sexuality hostage to phantom epidemiology is forfeiting our privacy by allowing heterosexuals to determine what is right for us, as this would be as wrong as judging all African American men by the recent unsafe impregnation by Willie Brown and Jesse Jackson.

Marc Salomon
The City

ACLU Settles AIDS Discrimination Case for Homeless Man, Creating Model Education Program for Shelters Nationwide

January 15, 1999

from the ACLU

NEW YORK, NY -- The American Civil Liberties Union today announced the settlement of an AIDS discrimination case in which Patrick Keegan Biggers, a homeless man, was evicted from a shelter in Maine because he was HIV positive.

Unlike most other settlements, the outcome involved no money and instead prompted a first-of-its-kind AIDS-awareness policy the ACLU hopes will serve as a model for shelters across the country.

This settlement creates a new AIDS educational curriculum and discrimination policy which can be easily adopted by other shelters to teach staff and residents how HIV is transmitted and what their responsibilities are under the law, said Michael Adams, the ACLU attorney on the case. Continued public ignorance and hostility against people with HIV only leads to continuing discrimination.

On December 23, 1997, administration at the Emmaus Center in Ellsworth, Maine evicted Biggers, saying that his HIV status was a needless risk to staff and residents. They defined the following actions as dangerous behavior: talking about his disease; handling a coffee cup; setting the table; asking to pick up a baby; and having dry sores on the back of his hands.

It made me feel like a leper, like a castaway, said Biggers about the experience.

The ACLU filed a complaint on Biggers' behalf with the Maine Human Rights Commission and demonstrated that the shelter had violated Biggers' rights under the American with Disabilities Act and the Maine Human Rights Act, both of which prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities or perceived disabilities. The shelter, which changed directors while the ACLU complaint was pending, then agreed to adopt the new AIDS awareness program and issue a letter of apology to Biggers. This was done in return for the ACLU and Biggers' agreement not to file a lawsuit or seek damages.

As a result of the settlement, the ACLU and the Down East AIDS Network (DEAN) of Ellsworth have developed educational training workshops which will be implemented to address shelter staff and residents' fears regarding the transmission of AIDS. The curriculum teaches people about AIDS and how and when to take precautionary measures, while reinforcing the basic guidelines of respect and equal treatment to which disabled individuals are entitled under the law.

Although this began as a conflict because of the violation of Patrick Biggers' rights, in the end the ACLU and the Emmaus Center worked together to develop a model AIDS program, said Adams. What Patrick wanted was to make sure this never happens to anybody else, and this settlement is a big step in that direction.

Black Media Unite for AIDS Prevention Campaign

*Newsday (New
York) (01.17.03)
- Friday,
January 17,
2003
Aileen Jacobson*

A coalition of black print, broadcast and Internet media on Thursday announced a massive campaign to prevent the growing spread of AIDS among African Americans.

Valued at more than \$5.7 million in airtime and other costs, the multi-year campaign includes cover-blurbed articles in the February issues of nine magazines, an eight-part series to run during Black History Month in the 200 newspapers of the National Newspaper Publishing Association, programs on Black Entertainment Television, a Web site at www.blackaids.org and radio public service announcements.

Called the Drumbeat Project, the campaign is "designed for 100 percent penetration of the African-American market," said Jerry Lopes, president of program operations and affiliations at American Urban Radio Network and one of the speakers Thursday at Manhattan's Overseas Press Club. Messages will run on his network's 400 affiliates, he said, and be distributed to "every black station in America."

More than 50 percent of new AIDS cases in the United States are in the black community; 64 percent of new cases among women involve blacks; and AIDS is the leading cause of death for black men ages 25- 44, said Phill Wilson, executive director of the Black AIDS Institute, which organized the Black Media Task Force on AIDS. "We are diagnosed later in the course of the disease... and die faster," said Wilson, who has been affected by HIV/AIDS for 23 years.

Many black women are in denial about the infection, according to Amy DuBois Barnett, editor-in-chief of Honey, and Shani Saxon, executive editor of Vibe. "We're fighting for our lives here," said Barnett.

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Students to learn of HIV, Aids

*Bangkok Post -
Sunday,
February 23,
2003*

An inter-country HIV/Aids prevention school programme will kick off next month to raise awareness about the disease in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region.

Paul Chang, the Asian Development Bank's principal education specialist of the Mekong Department, said the 18-month programme would focus on spreading information through secondary school teachers.

"The target is not only school students, but also youths who have left school and the wider community," he said.

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (Seameo) would oversee formal education outlets while the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation would look into informal means of spreading the message through television, radio and soap operas.

Sornchai Looareesuwan, director of Seameo Thailand, said 36 sites on the border had been chosen for the launch of the programme, which would address the main causes of Aids such as human trafficking and drug abuse.

Male domination of women hinders HIV prevention

Robert Fieldhouse

“It is not flattering that it takes a ruthless epidemic to awaken the world to the needs and conditions of her women” said Dr. Suniti Solomon, speaking at the Tenth Retroviruses Conference in Boston, USA this week.

Dr. Solomon is the director of the YRG Centre for AIDS Research and Education in Chennai, India which provides care for 5,000 patients. She was the clinician who diagnosed the very first case of HIV in India back in 1986.

Women account for an ever-increasing proportion of new HIV cases in India. Current estimates suggest that around one third of infected adults are women and a high proportion (over 80%) acquired their infection through sexual intercourse. Two decades of prevention have failed to make inroads and women remain not only biologically more vulnerable to HIV, but also because of economic, social, legislative and cultural discrimination.

In India, the social construct of gender, which has evolved over many hundreds of years, places women at increased risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. It is difficult for women to follow prevention recommendations. A woman may have little control over who her male partner sleeps with and condom use, more often than not, is male-controlled. Women in India may feel reluctant to access treatment for sexually transmitted infections for fear of stigma and lack of access to education allow male-propogated myths to flourish.

Women with poor social skills will offer sex for social support and stay in marriages that may place them at risk of violence and HIV infection. Women adjust their behaviour to violence to minimise violence; in doing so their ability to insist on monogamy, negotiate safer sex or refuse sex is limited. Women in apparent monogamous relationships often fail to realise they have been at risk of HIV infection. In one survey quoted by Dr. Solomon, only one third of men had been monogamous in the previous month, yet 83% of housewives did not think they had been at risk of HIV infection.

Working with female sex workers in Chennai has led Dr. Solomon to believe that empowering women to respond individually and collectively will be a potent weapon in the fight against AIDS.

“HIV is becoming epidemic, where unequal gender imbalance curtails women’s independence,” Dr. Solomon believes. Female sex workers with whom Dr. Solomon works are encouraged to carry condoms and negotiate with their clients to wear them. Yet this simple, but effective, life-saving act is enough to get the woman arrested and put into a remand home; referring to the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, Dr. Solomon revealed that police officers have a monthly quota of 100 female sex workers to arrest and many of the women she has educated have suffered such a fate.

In order to prevent HIV infection, women need to become agents of change. Yet this is easier said than done. Research into the acceptability of female-controlled prevention methods has shown high rates of acceptability among women. A survey of the acceptability of microbicides to women revealed 95% of sex workers and 72% of housewives would be willing to use one, yet when the men who were their sex partners or husbands were asked, a resounding 60% said they would not allow their wife to apply a vaginal product and just over half 53% said they would allow a sex worker to apply one. “How do you imagine a microbicide being used even after it has been introduced?” Dr. Solomon.

“The world is changing fast; the position of women is also changing”, she concluded. “But men continue to dominate women, whether that be through positive patronisation or through violence and mental coercion - to question the way our society is built is a good beginning.”

Breaking the silence on HIV/AIDS in the Arab World

from AllAfrica.com

In the Middle East and North Africa, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is collaborating with regional governments in an initiative to break the silence surrounding the HIV/AIDS epidemic. All Arab countries have reported increases in HIV/AIDS prevalence rates over the past two years: UNAIDS estimates that 83,000 people became infected in 2002, bringing the total number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the Arab region to 443,000.

At a recent five-day workshop held in Tunisia, UNDP, together with UNAIDS and l'Association Tunisienne de Lutte contre les MST SIDA (ATL MST/SIDA), organized a regional workshop that brought together civil society organizations (CSOs) representatives from 14 Arab countries to develop their leadership capacity and improve networking among them at both the national and regional levels.

"Our goal is to shape our collective resolve into effective leadership in the region. We want CSOs to be equipped and better organized to adopt a more proactive stance as leaders to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS. Our region can, and must, avert the devastating impact on development that the pandemic has had in other parts of the world, and it will take a distinctive form of leadership to ensure that," said Walid Badawi, Regional Programme Adviser, UNDP's Regional Bureau for Arab States, in his opening address at the workshop.

At the workshop, Dr. Naziha Escheïck, Tunisian Secretary of State for Public Health, stressed the importance of cooperation, coordination and expansion of areas of partnership between Arab Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). "It is about promoting prevention activities, reducing the spread of this epidemic, and eradicating all practices that favour its emergence." She confirmed the support of her ministry for this approach, through the establishment of an effective framework conducive for coordination between the different sectors and Tunisian associations.

The workshop succeeded in developing a common vision among the organizations present that will help guide their efforts both at the national and regional levels. "If we can speak with a unifying voice, we will be much stronger and more effective advocates for our cause," said one of the workshop participants.

Through the interactive design of the workshop, NGOs were given the opportunity to share experiences and learn from one another. Participants committed themselves to establish and strengthen CSO networks at the country and regional levels and agreed on a final declaration, which clearly outlined their collective resolve.

After working to mobilize governments, NGOs and CSOs in the Arab region for a more expanded response to HIV/AIDS, UNDP continues its work in disseminating the messages and establishing leadership within the Arab world. Further outreach initiatives and workshops are planned to engage opinion leaders, media and arts personalities as well as leading journalists. A specific event targeting this audience is being planned for early March 2003 in Egypt.

South Asia Aids warning *from BBC News*

South Asia must act now to bring the spread of HIV/Aids under control, United Nations officials have warned.

"Immediate action can prevent at least five million new HIV infections by 2010," Peter Piot, head of the UN anti-Aids programme, told a major conference in the Nepalese capital, Kathmandu, on Tuesday.

He said there was still time to turn back the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the region.

The head of the UN Children's Fund, Unicef, said education was essential to control the spread of HIV, the virus that can lead to Aids.

"South Asia is the second largest HIV/AIDS affected region in the world after South Africa, needing all government leaders, scholars and, in particular, the younger generation to take up strong measures to control it," Carol Bellamy told delegates to the two-day meeting.

"It is not just a matter of health, HIV/AIDS control is a most important task which can be done only through proper educational campaigns."

Intervention needed

India officially has four million HIV-positive people, more than any other country except South Africa, where five million are infected.

A US study last year predicted 20 million to 25 million Indians would be infected by 2010 - unless more is done to prevent it.

Nepal is believed to have more than 60,000 people with Aids or HIV, but only 2,598 cases have been detected, including 250 deaths.

"The HIV/AIDS infection rate is very high [in South Asia]," said Mr Piot.

"A delay in prevention of further spread of HIV/AIDS will only aggravate the epidemic and reverse South Asia's expected economic and social progress."

Two ministers from Afghanistan participated in the conference, along with top health officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Public Protector Orders Halt to Persecution of Anti-Aids Activists

from AllAfrica.com

*By Justin Arenstein and Jabu Mhlabane
Nelspruit, South Africa*

Public Protector Lawrence Mushwana urged Mpumalanga health MEC Sibongile Manana on Tuesday to abandon her costly legal persecution of local anti-Aids activists and volunteer rape counsellors.

Mushwana drove 300km to Nelspruit to personally tell Manana that her attempts to evict the Greater Nelspruit Rape Intervention Project (Grip) from three provincial hospitals were not in the public interest.

Mushwana's intervention follows Manana's repeated but unsuccessful court applications to have the volunteer group evicted from state hospitals, where they provide rape survivors with 24-hour trauma counselling, free anti-retroviral drugs, clean clothing, and legal advice.

Manana insists that the services undermine government's HIV/Aids policies, and has also publicly accused the group of 'poisoning' illiterate rural women by providing them with anti-Aids drugs such as AZT and 3TC.

All previous legal challenges have been dismissed with cost, while Manana's current high court eviction application has been stalled after the court ruled that her legal argument was flawed and that stronger motivations were necessary.

"I have studied this issue carefully, and cannot find any strong justification for incurring any further legal costs at taxpayer expense. It would be in everyone's best interests for this matter to be settled amicably out of court," Mushwana said.

"I know that Grip is prepared to talk, to settle, and I therefore advised that the department begin discussions."

Manana refused, however, to comment after the meeting, insisting that the matter was 'private' and that Mushwana had simply visited to 'pay his respects'.

Mushwana's intervention comes amidst a series of crippling scandals that has paralysed Manana's top management.

Her department head, Rina Charles, is scheduled to be interrogated by independent forensic auditors KPMG on Wednesday in connection with a dodgy R25 million medical equipment tender.

Investigators believe that the contract was manipulated to enrich officials, and that at least some of the equipment was subsequently resold on the blackmarket.

A second audit, by PriceCoopersWaterhouse, is also probing how millions of rands meant for the province's HIV/Aids prevention campaign were instead allegedly paid to companies close to Charles and various Mpumalanga Youth Commission associates.

Police and Scorpions task teams are meanwhile uprooting a sophisticated international medicine theft syndicate that allegedly plundered massive quantities of government medicines from state hospitals for resale on the blackmarket in South Africa, Mozambique and Swaziland.

Police have so far arrested 46 provincial doctors for alleged involvement in the syndicate, including the brother of foreign affairs spokesman Ronnie Mamoepa and close Manana confidant, Dr Nkate Mamoepa.

The string of investigations has rocked Manana's top management, prompting Charles to accuse the hardline MEC of violating financial controls, intimidating staff, and destabilising the department.

Charles wrote to Manana last week accusing her of secretly summoning senior staff to her private home to "subject [them] to questioning and ask them to reveal information concerning [me]".

"They were intimidated, and threatened with being sent to prison. This conduct is highly irregular."

Manana has declined to comment directly, but her spokesman Dumisane Mlangeni stresses the investigations were ordered directly by Premier Ndaweni Mahlangu and that Manana enjoyed full cabinet support. - African Eye News Service

AFRICA: HIV/AIDS vaccine trials results promising, UNAIDS

from IRIN + News

Several African countries are involved in HIV vaccine development

JOHANNESBURG, 24 February (IRIN) - Preliminary results of the first HIV/AIDS vaccine to be tested on humans were “promising” and an indication that it was possible to provide a degree of protection from HIV infection, UNAIDS said on Monday.

But findings from the trials show the vaccine only reduced the rate of HIV infection by 3.8 percent, US vaccine company VaxGen said in a statement.

The trial of the company’s AIDSVAX vaccine appears to show a protective effect among African Americans and Asians, although sample sizes were small. However, for the majority of the participants, the effect of the vaccine was minimal.

“These results are promising. The trial provides clear evidence that a vaccine can work. However, there is an urgent need for more targeted research to find out why the candidate vaccine only seems to work in certain population sub-groups,” Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS said in a statement.

The vaccine used in the VaxGen trial was designed to reduce susceptibility to infection with HIV subtype B, which is prevalent in the Americas, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.

But the major challenge in HIV vaccine development is to develop one or multiple vaccines effective against all major subtypes of HIV, particularly against those in sub-Saharan Africa.

“I don’t think anyone will expect much from the report, the research is extremely limited. With studies done in places where HIV prevalence is low, it is difficult to see the protective mechanism of the vaccine, which is why trials need to be done in developing countries,” Dr Rosemary Musonda, a member of the African AIDS Vaccine Programme steering committee, told PlusNews.

Admitting that the AIDSVAX results were “disappointing”, Dr Pontiano Kaleebu of the Uganda Virus Research Institute remained upbeat.

“This should not discourage people, rather it should encourage more people to come forward with more trials,” he told PlusNews.

Several African countries are currently involved in HIV vaccine development, including Uganda, Kenya and South Africa. But AIDSVAX is the only HIV vaccine to have completed phase three clinical trials - the last step before drug companies can seek approval from drug regulatory bodies.

“We need to step up research in different countries, we need different trials with different types of vaccines. This is the only way we can get tangible results,” Musonda noted.

In Uganda, the first phase of trials for a vaccine which targets the subtype prevalent in East Africa, are now underway.

“This has been a lesson for Africa. Laboratory work is not enough, we have to do more trials and move forward quickly,” Kaleebu added.

Long-Term Strategies: Should Some Patients Wait to Start

Protease Inhibitors? Interview with Keith Henry, M.D.

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Keith Henry, M.D., is Director of the HIV program at Regions Hospital, St. Paul, Minnesota. Regions Hospital has an HIV research program and is affiliated with the AIDS Clinical Trials Group (ACTG) at the University of Minnesota. Many patients are indigent and initially uninsured, and many have already had extensive antiretroviral treatment.

AIDS Treatment News: Explain your concern that the new treatment Guidelines (published for comment by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in July 1997) are leading doctors to rush into protease inhibitor treatment for some patients who might be better off with less aggressive approaches for now.

Dr. Henry: One of the take-home messages from half of the people who have started on a protease-inhibitor based antiretroviral combination have virologically failed that regimen. In my practice I have also seen that treatment combinations which include a protease inhibitor have failed to durably suppress HIV viral load in about 50% our patients. This is a scary figure; nationally, it would likely mean that every day there are more people becoming resistant to protease inhibitors than people being infected with HIV. Can we feel secure that the impressive reduction in AIDS-related death and illness, which we have seen and are still seeing today, can be maintained?

How can one prevent protease inhibitor resistance? And is there really a need to rush and put everybody with a detectable HIV RNA level onto a protease-inhibitor based regimen?

When working with patients I am often uncertain about what to do--except in classic situations. For example, when a person is sick due to HIV, and has a high viral level and low CD4 count, I treat them very aggressively, and usually start with four antiretrovirals. On the other end, if somebody feels great and has a very high CD4 count and very low RNA level, I may choose to just follow them and not prescribe antiretroviral drugs at this time.

But it is hard to know how to treat everybody in the middle. With only 50% success in getting durable viral suppression with a protease-inhibitor regimen, I am reluctant to jump into something that perhaps we do not know as much about as we think we do.

Physicians may be lulled into complacency with the new drugs, because the initial viral load drop looks good. But after the viral load goes below the test limit, they probably see people perhaps once every three months to repeat the test; this is a typical recommendation. If suddenly the virus rockets back, three months is a long time and there could be resistance to several kinds of drugs, and then further treatment choices are limited.

The natural history of HIV suggests that a number of people have an excellent prognosis for years, and that we can identify many of them with clinical evaluation and blood tests. If we are trying to keep a person healthy for 20 to 30 years, and almost certainly we will have better and simpler drugs several years away, does one need to commit now to regimens that have a 50% virological failure rate?

ATN: Is that failure rate only for your patients who are heavily pretreated, who therefore are the hardest to treat?

Dr. Henry: Yes. But in the United States today, an estimated three quarters of a million people already have HIV, and 40,000 a year become newly infected, and an increasing percentage of them are pretreated. For any given clinic population, a relatively small percent are treatment naive. And it will remain that way, if the push is always to start treating almost everybody quickly. If we do not know the best way to start patients and maintain them, even in the ideal patient population where they have never seen drugs before, a high percent may at first achieve viral suppression below the test limit, but then have the virus return.

ATN: Why are we seeing differences between clinical trials and clinical practice?

Dr. Henry: Major clinical trials are reporting that 80% to 90% of treatment-naive volunteers have complete viral suppression that looks like it may last for years. But very few doctors are claiming this high a success rate in their clinics, even with the treatment-naive patients who are easiest to fully suppress.

The reason may be that the resources are not there to provide education and adherence strategies that would equal what happens in a clinical trial. In the trial, you tend to select for adherent patients. And typically there is one study nurse to 20 volunteers; it is the nurse's job to have them come in and take their medicines. In a typical busy practice, the ratio of nurses to patients may run from one nurse per 150, to one per 300 or even 500 patients. What can be accomplished with phone calls, checking up on things, is quite different in this clinic setting.

And the reimbursement for adherence counseling is almost nonexistent. I would be curious if any practitioner in any state is being paid appropriately by coding that task somehow [on insurance forms]. Here in Minnesota we do not get paid anything for it.

It is a big deal for any individual patient to be started on antiretroviral treatment. Bells should ring, cannons should fire; it is a huge step for that person. Yet it has become somewhat trivialized because we do it so often, and with so many different people, and in the clinic we want to spend more time talking about it, but we cannot. I wish I could have a team of pharmacists and clinical educators work with the patient, but that is not available.

Because of the new Guidelines, a doctor who senses that patients could not be adherent to a complex regimen, and does not give protease inhibitors, may feel deficient. I believe this is a problem with the current recommendations. Might it be better, for many patients, to wait several years and use no therapy now, or use a treatment that would basically hold down the fort without lots of resistance--until we can do a better job with adherence, and have simpler drugs? Or should we go with the Guidelines and go for broke? I do not think there has been enough debate about this. The results from ICAAC shook up people who have only been reading the headlines of the publications in the various journal articles, saying that the results with the aggressive treatments are good.

Even experienced physicians sometimes feel bad when they are not in compliance with the recommendations. What do doctors with less experience feel? I have patients who say they want a certain treatment, but it is clearly not the right thing at that time. Because of my experience I can tell them that, and they believe I am looking out for their best interest. But physicians with less experience may just start protease inhibitors because it is the thing to do. That is not ideal for developing a long-term strategy.

ATN: Ever since the Guidelines came out, many people have thought that they were too aggressive for some patients.

Dr. Henry: I also think they are not aggressive enough for many others. The line is too thin if you may have just one key drug in a combination. So I often go straight from two drugs to four, double protease inhibitors and double nucleosides. I feel more comfortable with the margin of error. And often the twice-daily dosing which the four-drug regimen can allow is an important advantage. For many patients the four-drug combination might be a better, more durable therapy than three drugs with only one protease inhibitor.

Non-Protease Regimens

ATN: For those who do not need such intensive therapy, what are some of the treatments you use to "hold down the fort" for those who are not very advanced?

Dr. Henry: The d4T plus ddI regimen is one I am using more and more--with the ddI once a day, at night, and d4T twice a day. Some people also add hydroxyurea. The virologic response seems good. With d4T it has been very difficult to know when or if someone is resistant. People have criticized this approach, saying there is more cross resistance than we know about; but I have not seen any data suggesting that when this treatment approach is used, people have quickly failed the next regimen.

Did we really need to use protease inhibitors in many of these patients, my own included? Or were we in too much of a rush to do it, without thinking of some of the long-term implications?

ATN: How reversible is the immune damage caused by HIV?

Dr. Henry: One of the strong arguments for starting maximum treatment immediately is that the immune damage is irreversible. I am not sure about that. Most of the clinical data on the high-potency regimens suggest that even people with fairly advanced disease have improvements in their immune function to the extent that they are quite protected from most infections--with no major holes which would allow particular infections break through. Even in people with advanced disease--the worst case--it appears that there is considerable protection. And for those with CD4 counts over 150, it seems that immune damage is quite reversible. Some of the work we have done with Ashley Haase and others, in looking at levels of T-cells in tissues vs. the blood, found people whose lymph nodes were shot, with germinal centers you could hardly detect, yet who recovered with therapy. So it is an open debate about reversibility. We have to learn much more about this.

Most people agree there are better, simpler drugs on the horizon. There needs to be more critical discussion of what is the best time to use a complex, highly active regimen.

ATN: Are your more advanced patients still doing well, despite the virologic failure? Are the gains in reduced death, hospitalization, and opportunistic infections still there?

Dr. Henry: Absolutely. I am taking care of about 300 patients, and we have projected for 1997 that we may have about eight patients who will have died this year. But that is down from 40 deaths per year two to three years ago, about an 80% reduction. For people who came into 1997 and did not have a near-terminal condition, and were on anti-retroviral therapy, I have only had one new AIDS opportunistic infection that we have diagnosed in 1997 to date. This

amazing improvement leaves me puzzled about how much of the prophylaxis to continue.

The people I am now seeing in the hospital are mostly new patients. They have not been treated, they come in with pneumocystis just like the old days.

I consider it excellent advice that it is rarely an emergency to get people started on antiretroviral therapy. Some leading physicians almost never start patients on treatment until it is their fourth or fifth visit. That is probably wise; you get to know the person, and hopefully all of their questions have been answered. Things were urgent when we were under the gun of all those deaths and infections. But now that these consequences have slowed down, we should start to be more thoughtful about when to apply different strategies.

Ultimately we will also need to be more cost effective. If a patient is looking at possibly 50 years of treatment, and each year costs \$10,000, that would be half a million dollars. These resources are valuable. Of course we do not want anybody to get sick when it could be prevented, but the clinical community has an obligation to use resources as carefully as possible. Today I am unsure about what is wise and what is not.

Protease Inhibitor Resistance

Dr. Henry: Some people believe that once you are resistant to one protease inhibitor, you will be resistant to all of them, that there is a common pathway for resistance. If that is true, the decision to use a protease inhibitor is a momentous one; and you have to do all you can to use it at the right time, with the right other drugs. I am not sure that we now know how to do that for many people.

On the other hand, some people say you can use one protease inhibitor, and if you get a viral breakthrough, you can switch to a different protease inhibitor. But there is not much data, except that if saquinavir is the initial drug, following that up with indinavir generally does not work very well. Also, there is a lot of cross resistance between ritonavir and indinavir. And for most people it does not look like nelfinavir can rescue people who are highly resistant to other protease inhibitors.

One of the key issues now is whether there is any difference starting with nelfinavir instead of indinavir. There is very little data on that issue. We are very happy to have both drugs available. Both now use three times a day dosing, which is somewhat inconvenient to maintain indefinitely. Both have fairly good data on durable response in ideal situations. Indinavir has impressive clinical data from ACTG 320, and the one and two year data that Roy Gulick presented from their pivotal clinical trial.

But if indinavir fails to keep the virus controlled, how well can you suppress that virus with other treatments? The data from ICAAC overall was worrisome, indicating that this is very difficult to do.

A presentation from St. Vincent's, with a small number of patients, did not show much success in suppressing virus after treatment with nelfinavir had failed. [Abstract LB-5]

In Toronto we presented our data from patients who had been on Agouron-sponsored studies utilizing nelfinavir. We reported, particularly for patients who did not have advanced disease, that even though their virus had broken through to a high level, usually we were able to suppress virus initially with a ritonavir-saquinavir based regimen, and at least some patients look like they are going to have a durable response.

Research Needed

ATN: What are some of the studies needed now?

Dr. Henry: There are appallingly few studies on how to treat people who have developed protease inhibitor resistance. After much hard work the AIDS Clinical Trials Group has a new study, called ACTG 359, for volunteers who have had indinavir failure; this drug is the market leader, and yet this is the first such study looking in an organized manner at people for whom this drug has failed to control the virus.

The data from the Toronto conference (ICAAC) on protease inhibitor failures was largely anecdotal; it is painfully clear that this area has been overlooked for several years now. There has not been enough support from either government or the companies to develop protocols for people whose protease inhibitors have failed, so there is little knowledge on what to recommend for them.

The protease inhibitors are good drugs. But I am not sure that we can tell the average clinician and patient that now is the time to go for broke. We need more studies to look at how to optimize adherence, and we need plans in place for when the recommended therapies fail.

Clinical research in the next several years needs to focus on how we can do better. We need simpler and less expensive medications--once or twice a day dosing, and a much better safety margin for nonadherence, or for cases of resistance to perhaps one of the drugs. Today that margin is often thin; sometimes you really have just one key drug that you are relying on, a single protease inhibitor or perhaps a non-nucleoside. If something goes wrong with adherence, or if the pharmacokinetics are not ideal, the regimen will likely fail due to viral resistance.

Also, it is hard to know what our absolute target should be for HIV RNA. We have been working with a lab run-

ning the Roche Ultrasensitive assay for six months on our patients who are below the limit of the standard Chiron assay. In our clinic population, about 55% of patients at any given time are below the limit of the Chiron test (500 copies). Roughly 25% of our patients are below 50 copies, and maybe 15% are below 20 copies.

Yet our patients are doing very well clinically. So the question is, for all those people who are not at that absolute lower limit, do I need to pour it on? Or should I try basically not to cause damage (with the drugs)? We need studies to address this critical group, people who are doing well clinically, but maybe they are not below a viral cutoff of 20 copies. We would be able to enroll many patients in such studies. Now I do not know the best way to treat them. There are so many unanswered questions. I wish more good studies were available.

Dazzling new drugs are not enough; prevention is still our best weapon

By Michael H. Merson

Early in July I took part in the 11th International Conference on AIDS. In the past, the mood at these meetings has generally been somber. But as the 15,000 participants from more than 125 countries gathered in Vancouver, there was a new spirit of optimism in the air, almost cause for celebration. For the first time, research teams were able to demonstrate real progress in the treatment of HIV infection. They showed that the daily administration of a combination of three antiretroviral drugs, costing about \$15,000 a year, can clear an HIV-infected person's bloodstream of any detectable virus for at least 300 days. This news was so exciting that physicians, researchers and journalists spoke openly of a "cure" for this presumed fatal disease.

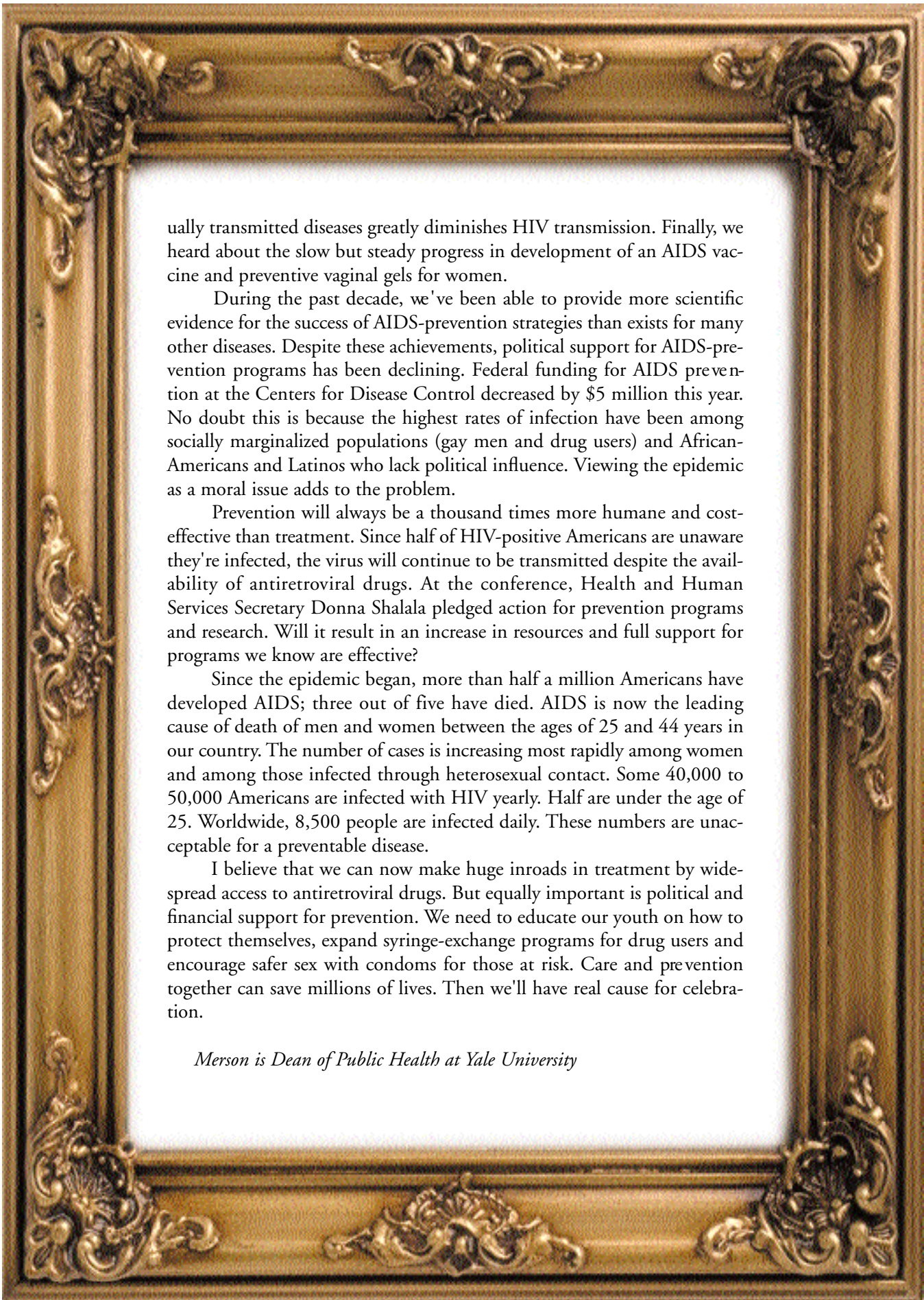
I can only express admiration for the advances made possible through biomedical research. In 15 years we've learned an enormous amount about the AIDS virus and the way it infects our white cells. This basic science has allowed rapid development, testing and licensing of these new drugs that inhibit viral replication. As someone who has seen firsthand, in scores of countries, the suffering brought about by the disease, I feel great joy that some HIV-infected persons can now live a longer life than was dreamed of two years ago.

Despite these achievements, there are still unknowns and potential long-term problems in controlling the disease. One major concern is whether HIV strains resistant to the new drugs will eventually develop, especially if the drugs are not taken in full dosage and on the required schedule. The three-drug regimen--as many as 20 pills a day is daunting and can cause debilitating side effects. We've had antibiotics for treatment of gonorrhea for 50 years, but because of their inappropriate use, we have been forced repeatedly to develop new drugs to treat resistant strains. Tuberculosis has been treated with triple-drug therapy for more than 25 years, yet it is still a leading cause of death among adults worldwide and has only recently been brought under control by having health workers stand over patients at home or in clinics to make sure they take all the prescribed pills.

Another hurdle is making these costly drugs available to those who need them. This will be difficult in the United States and virtually impossible in developing countries, the home of more than 90 percent of the world's HIV-infected population. Beyond that, monitoring the level of virus in a medicated patient's blood to determine the drugs' effectiveness will be expensive.

But the most serious downside to the latest therapeutic breakthrough could be its impact on AIDS prevention. I can hear it now. If we are close to a cure, people may say, why bother with politically sensitive activities such as condom promotion, sex education in schools or disease-prevention programs for illicit drug users. Let's not invest further in trials of protective vaginal products or genetically engineered vaccines. Wouldn't the money be better spent for heart disease and cancer research?

Lost amid the excitement in Vancouver about a potential AIDS "cure" were numerous reports about prevention measures that are working in many places from San Francisco to Bangkok to Abidjan. We heard about the success of syringe-exchange programs and learned that the failure to implement them during the past decade has led to thousands of preventable HIV infections among injecting drug users and their noninjecting (usually female) sex partners. We were told how community-based activities were resulting in safer sexual practices among inner-city women, men who have sex with men, and high-risk adolescents. There was definitive evidence that correct antibiotic treatment of common sex-



ually transmitted diseases greatly diminishes HIV transmission. Finally, we heard about the slow but steady progress in development of an AIDS vaccine and preventive vaginal gels for women.

During the past decade, we've been able to provide more scientific evidence for the success of AIDS-prevention strategies than exists for many other diseases. Despite these achievements, political support for AIDS-prevention programs has been declining. Federal funding for AIDS prevention at the Centers for Disease Control decreased by \$5 million this year. No doubt this is because the highest rates of infection have been among socially marginalized populations (gay men and drug users) and African-Americans and Latinos who lack political influence. Viewing the epidemic as a moral issue adds to the problem.

Prevention will always be a thousand times more humane and cost-effective than treatment. Since half of HIV-positive Americans are unaware they're infected, the virus will continue to be transmitted despite the availability of antiretroviral drugs. At the conference, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala pledged action for prevention programs and research. Will it result in an increase in resources and full support for programs we know are effective?

Since the epidemic began, more than half a million Americans have developed AIDS; three out of five have died. AIDS is now the leading cause of death of men and women between the ages of 25 and 44 years in our country. The number of cases is increasing most rapidly among women and among those infected through heterosexual contact. Some 40,000 to 50,000 Americans are infected with HIV yearly. Half are under the age of 25. Worldwide, 8,500 people are infected daily. These numbers are unacceptable for a preventable disease.

I believe that we can now make huge inroads in treatment by widespread access to antiretroviral drugs. But equally important is political and financial support for prevention. We need to educate our youth on how to protect themselves, expand syringe-exchange programs for drug users and encourage safer sex with condoms for those at risk. Care and prevention together can save millions of lives. Then we'll have real cause for celebration.

Merson is Dean of Public Health at Yale University

prose

the meat and potatoes stuff

Closer to Bone

Spencer Wendleton

Brady Kerns memorized her father's features in the casket. Her life flashed before her eyes and instead of clinging to it, she lingered over the dead. Somehow, his memory would live on no matter what the cost.

Julie, her older sister, never knew of the secret tithing her father sent to her every month. The family didn't embrace Julie; her sexual excursions severed her from family ties. Her promiscuity burdened their mother up to her fatal stroke. In the confines of her apartment, Brady strayed from the light and sewed the day away, the only means to busy her from insanity alongside bargain liquor and cable television. The thought of having no one chilled the aspect of another tomorrow.

She tightened her shawl and bent closer to the coffin. "Don't you realize I need you?"

Her glasses slipped off and landed under his chin. She hunched down to pick them up when Julie snuck behind her. "Why are you touching him?"

"I dropped my glasses."

Brady studied her awkward body. Those huge blonde curls made her beanpole frame shrink to an emaciated stance. Her smooth and slender legs popped out of her black skirt, her cleavage obtrusive in the funeral hall—or any place at that matter. It was ironic that it took a death in the family to see Julie again. They were well into their forties and still hadn't embraced sisterhood.

Julie pursed her lips and batted her eyes. "Is there any rich friends of Daddy's here?" Brady didn't answer. "How much is the 'ol windbag worth? Really, do you know?"

Brady still didn't answer. Julie nagged her even at a visitation.

"You better know," she said, tightening her chin. "That's the reason I came." Brady hid her face into the comforts of her own hands. "Isn't that why you came?"

"He's worth everything to me, Julie." Brady slid her glasses back on. "I miss him already." "No, Brady. I'm speaking of money," she lowered her voice, "stupid whore."

"No money I know of," Brady said, closing her eyes like her father's. "His will gave it to several charities." She bit her lip in the midst of a lie. She'd spent most of his money before he died on unpaid bills and her father's estate taxes. "I'm sorry."

Julie pulled out her lipstick and spread it over her lips. When she blinked, Brady was blinded by neon blue eye shadow. "I think I'll stop by tomorrow after the funeral and figure this mess out with you, hey sis? Money or not."

"But—"

"-I insist." She glanced at him in the casket. Her eyes roamed over their father like a mortician would a corpse with no identity. Before she exited the foyer, she called out to her. "Tomorrow, don't forget."

The visitation ended several hours later. Brady never left her

father's side. Old family members came and went in blurs of suppressed memories. Her father was the only one she needed. She had to move on and find something else to live for. There were no options except to wallow and wait for the next bourbon with a twist. A tall, slender man lurched from the corner of the room. His back was hunched forward; the effect stooped his entire frame. His thin, metallic hair was tied into a ducktail and his face was scathed with acne scars. Those sockets grabbed her attention. The shadows made trenches of his eyes. When he spoke, his throat projected low from lack of use.

"The visitation's over, mah'm."

Brady glued her eyes back to her father's face. The subtlety of his smile had suppressed tears until now. "I'm sorry. I'll leave." "Yes, you're Charlie's daughter." His words worked with a friendly intonation. "I'm sorry for being rude. I'm Ivan."

She shrugged him off. "Brady."

Ivan squeezed her shoulder. Her flesh sprouted with prickly goose bumps. The sympathetic touch made her relax. A stranger's hand was more comforting over the familiar. His mouth creaked open, a line of saliva stretched between his upper and lower lip.

"Your father was a good man."

Brady perked up. "How'd you meet him?"

"Never had the honor." He closed the head of the casket. She

was about to make him open it back up, but he interrupted her. “But I know more than you think. More than you may ever know.”

Ivan dragged the casket into the back parlor and Brady followed. The room was lined with lime green tiles. Through the double doors were two gurneys. The opposite walls were stocked with embalming fluids and chemicals. The odor cleared her sinuses. He rolled the casket to the side of the room and opened it back up. He propped her father’s body up against the wall. He took off his suit and rolled up his shirtsleeve. Ivan smiled at the teeth-shaped bite mark.

“What is this?” Brady asked as though it were her body defiled. “What the hell is this?”

Ivan let his hair fall from the ponytail over his eyes. The silver deflected the orange from the light bulb. Brady marched right up to him. Normally she’d be afraid, but she couldn’t fear the unknown. She was too dense to interpret anything subtle.

“You’re father isn’t really dead,” he said, walking to a metal desk covered in puddles of water that dripped from the pipes above. In one of the drawers, he scavenged out a metal flask. “I know he’s a good man. He gave up everything so he could make a fortune and raise you right. He put you before any of the family.”

Brady wanted to speak, but her throat failed. How could he know such details about her father without meeting him? Maybe he was a con-man or had been around so many dead people he created ludicrous stories to keep the living in his life. His needy eyes became a camera that memorized every feature. His interest never lifted.

Ivan opened the flask. A small flame shot out from the tip. It was a lighter. Ivan placed the neon-blue flame over Charlie’s forearm. His flesh didn’t burn, but turned white. Ivan’s eyebrows curved inward. Brady struggled to contain herself. “Don’t worry, it doesn’t burn the

flesh. It just...softens it.”

“Softens?”

He clicked off the lighter. “The incandescent flame makes the skin tender. A dead man’s flesh contains everything. I tasted him last night. I know so much of him...and you. You’ve never had any friends, you love Dickinson’s poetry, you’re a virgin, Sinatra’s the only music you can stand, you’re an alcoholic—should I go on?” He absorbed her disbelieving stare. “Your father loved all your quirks. He doesn’t want to be forgotten. I’ve found the only way to hold onto the living. At least I’ve used it to hold onto forgotten strangers. Let me help you remember him.”

She thought her own secrets had spilled onto the floor. No one knew so much about her, not even Julie. Since her mother’s death, her father was the only one who could’ve known those details. The thought of eating her father’s flesh drove her to extremes, but what if she didn’t cede to her father’s wishes? How could she pass the chance to honor his memory? Why would Ivan wish to exploit her? She had nothing, money or inheritance. “I know what you’re going through. I learned this secret from my father who used to run this very funeral parlor. He taught me how to see the dead. That’s why he preferred to work alone. I’ve lived so many lives without stepping out of this place. Why live a mediocre life when it can be so much better? The dead don’t need their memories, so why not take a peek?” His eyes shook in their sockets and stemmed the flow of sentiment. “I’m a lonely creature.” He put his hand into hers. She didn’t resist the reassuring touch. “Just like you, Brady. I live through the dead just as you should live through your father. I think you deserve it. I think he’d approve.” Even though she loved her father, she was disconnected from him. He never told her why he loved her. Her reclusive personality divided her from that infor-

mation. She couldn’t identify with him, but dreamed for the chance to be apart of him. If eating his flesh were the only way to be part of him, then so be it.

Ivan led her by the hand to the stool next to the casket. Ivan dragged out a little table, similar to a TV tray, and set it in between them to splay her father’s arm across. “Try it. You won’t regret it.” She watched his pale and hairy arm. A horrible sensation came over her at the thought of desecrating his body. She lifted out of the seat, but Ivan seized her by the neck. He sent her face into his arm.

“Eat!”

His fingers bent deeper into her neck, the pain forced her to bite down. The morsel melted on her tongue and slid down in a liquid stream. The blood on the sides of her mouth tasted sweet. The rush of flavor opened her thoughts back to when her father gave her, her first bike with training wheels. She raced to him and kissed his cheek. Brady felt his eyes go to her smile. Those dimples made his heart spin. Her father hugged her back and whispered how much he loved her. It warmed her heart to know her father cherished this memory. The scene fizzled away. Blood dried out her mouth. She was thrown back to herself and the arm she’d eaten. The bite mark was so deep, the bone poked through. Brady whimpered. Her cheeks soaked up tears. The fulfillment of a loved one’s thoughts compelled her to dig deeper. She bit down so far, her teeth clicked against bone. The next thoughts were of her father’s final days. The brain cancer that ate at his mind took shape. His senses were dulled, his vision grainy and tarnished. The walls of the hospital room were the colors of a black and white photograph. She entered the room with a vase heaped with purple tulips. Her father’s mind became immersed with joy. After she sat the flowers next to his bed, she bent down and kissed his forehead. His senses changed to brilliant colors,

his retinas turned the room into multi-colored pixels. When her lips left his skin, his perception faded back to the grainy reality that locked him back to sickness. He wished to experience those epiphanies she evoked, but the cancer denied that wish.

Her face and hands was slick with blood and saliva. Ivan had joined in, his face dirty as well. His silver hair was matted in crimson. She didn't care. The feast brought jubilation. She'd never felt so ecstatic! The vibrant emotions were set alight. Her father loved her in return. Her dull life abstained from burning out. The truth formed an endless source that emptied into her heart. She continued to ingest the meat. Her last perception brought her sadness to full closure. After he was pronounced dead, she felt responsible for his suffering. His last thoughts surfaced into hers. She didn't know he was watching before he died. She'd fallen asleep next to his bed. He watched and adored the luxury of his creation. His only trepidation in life was his lovely daughter, Brady.

Brady clutched onto her father's arm, but there was nothing left. His arm was empty of meat, colored with red remains and gristle. Ivan splashed water into his face in a sink across the room. When he came back, he offered her a warm towel. She wiped her face clean, the heat replaced her father's cold blood.

"Thank you, Ivan," she said with wet eyes. "I know my father in a new light. How can I ever repay you?"

"You let me share this experience with you," he said, locking arms with hers and leading her out of the room. "You're father is in good hands. I welcome you back anytime. The sooner the better, Brady. His funeral is tomorrow, but you'll never have to let him go." His eyes squinted as he smiled. His pleasure mimicked her own.

"Very soon, Ivan." She smiled so hard it strained the muscles of her face. "Very soon."

The next morning the casket was buried. Her world was hidden under six feet of earth. There was nothing left to piece together her father's life despite last night's events. The suffering that was healed was reopened at the sight of his grave. She wanted to be the one in the ground.

Last night she didn't sleep. His thoughts survived in her mind. The wound was driven deeper. Her need was unfulfilled. There was no moving on. She'd drift in the past and wish for the things she never found from the living. Her family didn't understand. Their lives continued despite the dead.

She left the funeral and drove back to her apartment. She poured herself a glass of Bourbon. The mouthful of spirits burnt her tongue, the aftertaste of her father's flesh backwashed from her throat.

The evening gave way to nothing. The afghan she'd knit kept the unrest at bay for the time being. She couldn't stop thinking about Ivan. He lived by dead memories. Brady wanted to live through anyone's but her own. The pound at the door shook her from thought. It was Julie. Brady kept quiet and hoped she'd leave. She pounded again, the knocks more adamant. When the doorknob twisted, Brady cursed herself for not bolting it. Julie meandered inside. The unwelcome guest didn't care about intrusions. She wore tattered blue jeans and a white shirt cut low to show off her belly button ring. "Why didn't you answer the door?" Her sedated eyes remained insistent. "Huh?"

Brady cleared her throat. The stomach acids that tasted of her father returned. She swallowed it down in the hope it would come back up later. "Don't feel like guests, I suppose."

Julie's olive eyes widened at Brady's lack of interest. "You know what I want." She waltzed to the kitchen and stared dumbly at the blender on the counter. "Well?"

"I have nothing. I haven't seen you

in years, how dare you accuse me of taking money without sharing it with you. Is that all you care about? What about Dad?"

Julie opened the freezer and pulled out the margarita mix. "You and the alcohol. Unhappy little woman, aren't yah?"

"Fuck off."

"Not until I see some money. Even if it's not Daddy's, I still want it."

Julie fumbled with the blender to figure out how it worked. She was so empty-headed she couldn't even work a blender! There wasn't anything funny about this moment. There was no money and she couldn't get rid of her. Both of them were broke and desperate. Julie put her hand in the blender and played with the blades at the bottom. A smirk broke across Julie's face. "Daddy always loved me more," Julie said, trying to cover resentment. She bit her lip and spat out a line of chapped skin. "At least he gave you a check once in awhile." The childish tone demurred to jealousy. "I didn't get a damn thing! I want some of that money. I'll move in if I have to."

"Let me show you how to work that thing," Brady said, noticing it was unplugged. "I need...a drink." Julie shoved her hand deeper in the blender just as Brady plugged it in. The blender wined and churned apart her fingers. Julie screamed, unable to interpret the pain. Her fingers cracked against the spinning blades, her flesh liquefied before her eyes. Julie struggled to lift her hand out, but Brady shoved it back in and let the bones crunch even more. Julie unplugged it and escaped with a mottled and dripping hand. Ridges of broken bone and twisted flesh splashed on the floor as she waved it in horror. The end snapped off at the wrist.

Brady didn't resist the urge. She clamped her mouth over her arm. The cut veins unloaded their contents onto her tongue and flooded down her esophagus. Julie screamed

as Brady ground her teeth around the bones and wrung out the telltale blood.

The contents of her life spilled into Brady's, her body shuddered with an orgasmic awakening. She experienced the men she'd seduced, countless faces without names. The sensations were distinguished by tastes and pleasures: faint rubber, copper, blood, imported liquor, and a sudden soreness in her vagina. Julie's seductions, once effective, were rendered useless with disease and overuse. The meat stuck in the back row of Brady's teeth came down her throat. Images of her sister in a hotel room followed. Julie crouched on the floor and searched for her underwear waded up in the corner. Her lover was gone. Brady felt at ease with herself. Loneliness wasn't as bad as being a free whore.

"You're pathetic, sis." Brady laughed, her vindication dribbled down her chin. "Stupid tramp."

Julie tried to sneak away, but slipped in her own blood and crashed into the wall. Her weakened state kept her on the floor. The shock of blood loss brought convulsions. "Help me, Brady. I'm bleeding!" Her voice shot raspy and knotted. Her eyes beckoned Brady to give back the life she'd taken away. "Don't let me die this way!"

Brady knew her neighbors would hear the screams through the thin walls. She couldn't weigh the consequences in the flood of such powerful imagery. She had to finish her off before someone did show up at the door. She grabbed a skillet and beat it across her head until her screams ended. "Sorry sis. I have nothing for you, but you gave me so much." Julie's eyes fluttered closed. A realization hit her. Ivan had said only dead flesh revealed a person's memories, but Julie wasn't dead. Maybe she'd discovered something he didn't know! The dead weren't the only ones who could give up their memories. She had to let him in on the secret. They could be

together. How could he pass up such a revelation? She'd no longer have to be lonely.

She dragged Julie's body into the closet and rushed out of the apartment. Julie would begin to stink, but maybe she'd never have to come back. Let the whore rot. The misty air, thick with an incoming storm, sprayed her face. She was still drenched in Julie's blood.

The funeral parlor lights were off except for the back room. She followed the lime tiles inside. The light bulb flickered on its last hours of life, which made the double doors throb. Ivan carved up a naked corpse of an old man on a plastic stretcher. He used the bone saw from the ceiling that hung from a cord with a surgeon's precision. He cut across his chest then looked at her like a child caught masturbating.

"I thought you'd be back sooner," he said, looking at her stained clothes. "Busy?"

"I want to share something." The anticipation dropped her into a spell of tears. "A secret."

Ivan let the saw swing in the air and removed his gloves. "That's sweet of you to give so willingly. What is your secret, dear?"

She wet her lips. Julie's blood was lodged in the crevices of her tongue. "A person doesn't have to be dead in order to see their memories. Just eat them period and everything is yours. My sister tasted of the kinds of pleasures you'd appreciate. I'll take her body out of my closet and give her to you."

He brushed his hand across her cheek. His eyes brightened with compassion. She embraced the affection like any recluse in the face of understanding. She was a part of him. They'd shared the one thing that meant the most to her: her father, Charlie. "You showed it all to me, but why?"

Ivan's face tightened. His retina's revealed a passion within those dark, diluted eyes. "When I tasted your

father, I could tell there was so much he wanted you to know. I had to let you in on the secret. Maybe it was irresponsible, but how could I let such a somber child suffer?"

Brady extended her arm. "Taste."

Ivan released his soft hold and punched her square in the nose. The clean snap inspired blood, the stream so thick it drained down her throat. The pain blurred her sight into blotches of color. "What have you done?" His face withered into bitterness. "There's a reason why I don't eat from the living. Those are bodies unaccounted for! The dead don't attract police. The cops will find the body and I'll be connected to you. Your mistake will ruin everything. They'll find my bodies. They'll shut this place down. It'll be the end of me."

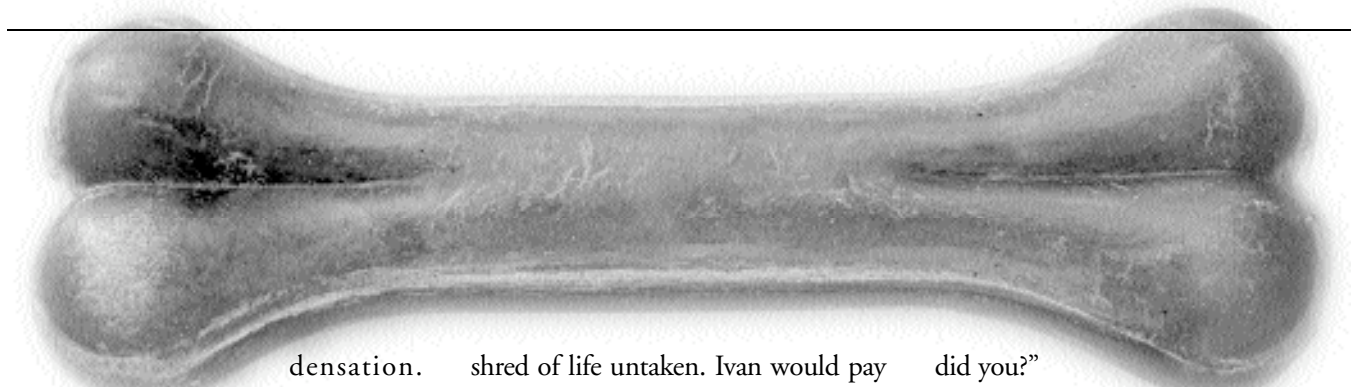
"I'm sorry, Ivan." Brady cried, burning with guilt. "Please let me make it better. I'll never tell them about you. I promise."

"I'd rather you make promises when you're dead!" He reached for her with those massive hands. "I'll kill you, ignorant bitch! You can't repay the damage you've caused." Brady's sense of survival flared with unlimited resolve. Betrayal and shock spun her legs past her attacker to a rusty-orange door. The hinges squeaked open. A chill coiled itself around her after she threw herself inside. She bolted it locked at the same time his body collided into the door. His vocal cords resounded malicious. "Show yourself! You shouldn't have gone in there, Brady—BRADY!"

She absorbed the room, a crawl-space with another door. Spinach-green mildew attacked the walls. Brady wondered what was behind the next door. Ivan quit banging. The sounds of his footsteps disappeared.

She didn't know what he was talking about. He already knew about live flesh? Was he scheming against her the whole time?

The doorknob was slick with con-



densation.

A cold draft threw her hair into her face. The room was larger than she expected, double the size of the funeral parlor. Rows of caskets filled the dark room. Hundreds of them lingered before her like an uprooted cemetery. The crisp and cool fog made it impossible to see. The metal walls made her reflection dance off the surface. A mirror mimicked her every move. Fans spun cool air. The room was refrigerated.

She braved the numerous coffins. The fog uncovered a never-ending mausoleum. The coffins were broken apart to show the brutalized contents that dangled free. The horrid spectacle raced through her mind. She froze at the sight of her father in a coffin across the room. Her stomach dropped to her legs and her mind burned with horror. Ivan had buried an empty casket at the funeral! All the coffins in the cemetery were empty.

“That sonofabitch.”

His eyelids were cut open. Those yellowed eyes watched her in desperation. He was stripped of clothing. The bones across his chest were broken apart, his heart stolen beneath the debris. She wanted to communicate with him without Ivan’s intrusion. She lifted a hunk of meat off his sternum and swallowed it, but her perception was unaltered. There was nothing left. Ivan stole it all.

She wept, the tears icy against the continuous draft. The bodies peered at her and burned responsibility for their demise. She cringed at the thought of giving herself to Ivan. The bastard wanted to make her a future corpse to strip of memories. Maybe some of the bodies still had some

shred of life untaken. Ivan would pay for desecrating her father’s corpse. They watched and egged her on. Their glossy eyes begged her to partake of what they had to offer. Brady shrieked and raced to savor flesh. She broke open coffins with her bare hands and yanked them out. Her teeth stripped the last remnants of their memories. Her fingers, soft meat hooks capable of cutting into the dead, were thick and sodden with passion. The fruits of labor delivered her to a new plateau. The corpses came alive in her mind. Their last moments came to the surface. Contempt arrived into her image-ridden state. There were no happy memories left inside them. The wretched man sucked them all away.

Bitterness ensued digestion. She flung herself back onto the corpses and wrenched away more and more, her thirst never slaked in an unending stomach. The hatred for Ivan was inflamed with every spice and flavor. The taste would never sicken her. They were purer than she could ever be. She was no longer herself, but controlled by the dead. Her new mindset impelled her to carry out their final wishes.

She navigated through the fog back to the entrance. She tossed open the door with a power beyond her own. Ivan waited with the bone saw in his hands, his eyes demented and ready.

“You’re all mine!” He crowed. “Just like the rest of them. You’d be foolish to taste them.” He denied the truth. His face resisted what stood before him. “You’ll never find yourself again. You’ll be lost forever!” He studied Brady’s eyes and the dead stared back. “You didn’t taste them,

did you?”

Brady’s voice hummed with satisfaction. “Yes. Now I’m going to take back the memories you’ve stolen.”

“Never! You’ll never see what is rightfully mine!”

He swung the bone saw, the blades dug across her stomach. Bits of skin showered the air with human dust. The warmth of body fluids empowered her along with their hatred. They fed her their last bit of strength. She seized his arm and squeezed it so tightly his bones cracked apart, his nerves sent in upheaval. He bawled and collapsed. The bone saw slipped from his hand and swung propelled by the cord connected to the ceiling.

Brady grabbed it and studied the rotating blades. She dug it across his throat. Brady moaned and watched his trachea split apart. She couldn’t resist a taste of what streamed out of the wide laceration. Happy memories flooded into the bitterness that lived inside her. Her limbs quivered and evolved into seizures. Her mouth came open and her stomach ejected its contents onto the lime-tiled floor. An unknown energy impelled her to force her teeth upon her own arm. She felt nothing as she ate into herself. Brady didn’t anticipate the obvious. Her only memory was a realization. She was a lonelyretch. With all the flesh she’d eaten, she was still pathetic and depressed. But there was still so much to learn, so much to discover. The bone saw dripped. She was the only one who knew the secrets of the flesh. She picked up the bone saw and cut deeper into Ivan’s throat. The memories were potent closer to bone.

Distraction

David Seals-McClellan

I drove up to the supermarket I guess around 11:30 at night. It was Sunday and there was one of those thick heavy fogs that came suddenly and lay on the city. Sunday nights were especially lonely for me. The entire city was like a graveyard, mourning the loss of the weekend. The streets were especially vacant tonight.

I pulled my car into the lot, having my choice of all the parking spaces. As I parked, a woman paced near the shopping carts, under the fluorescent lights. I looked closer to see what her problem was. She looked intensely grief-stricken. The rhythm of her pacing suggested she was close to the edge. I used to feel more kinship with people like this, before I met my girlfriend. I walked towards her, trying not to stare, but I couldn't help notice her face was red and swollen with tears. I chose a cart.

It felt good to enter a grocery store with a pocketful of money and no one around to get in my way. All this food for me! The doors opened behind me and I walked the sad lady. The light illuminated her face. Her face was beginning to wrinkle around her eyes and mouth. She was somewhere between thirty and forty. She looked Icelandic. She had dry, frizzy, medium-length blonde hair, shaped like a mushroom. Her eyes were small and slanted, almost Asian. She was

pale except for her red cheeks. She looked distraught, but maybe it was just my imagination. I could get carried away sometimes.

I pushed my cart into the produce section and reveled in all the color. Only nature could create this. The sad lady followed, but continued down the aisle, drifting past without expression. She stopped at the nuts and began inspecting jars of almonds. I stood checking the pineapples for soft spots. She began to move down the aisle again, slowly. I tried to make out her ass but it was covered by her windbreaker. She turned the corner and was out of my sight. I placed a pineapple in my cart.

As I moved down the aisle, I noticed how many choices you had in an American grocery store. Everything screamed with color, hoping you would buy it. I rolled along the back row looking at the signs over each aisle. 'Coffee, tea and spices.' 'Envelopes, stationary, greeting cards.' To the right were promotional items. To the left was meat. A 13-inch beef tongue, wrapped tightly in plastic, lay next to a package of entrails. I felt sorry for that poor cow. Who would eat a cow's tongue? Black folks. And Slovaks too. But to me, there was no way you could ever make that taste good. I thought of a headless disemboweled carcass lying on its side in some dark factory, blood and guts wasted, spilling out, the son of some poor mother cow, being rolled end over end by ignorant hands into some mountainous pile of carcasses, burned and creating a brown death-stench that filled the sky.

I felt wonderfully alone. When did you ever get the city to yourself? I traveled up the pasta and canned vegetable aisle, stopping to compare navy beans. Suddenly, the sad lady appeared again, pushing her cart towards me. I didn't look directly at her, but felt her approaching. She stopped a few feet away from me and looked over pasta sauces. I still hadn't looked at her, but felt she was flirting. I glanced at her for a moment but she "studied" a jar of sauce. There was only a can of almonds in her cart. She returned the pasta sauce to the shelf and walked towards me. As she passed, we both looked at each other.

She had an interesting face. Not pretty, not ugly, but interesting. It seemed to conceal sadness. I often wished I could rescue people. Make their pain go away. But it didn't work that way. She was probably a good person. Maybe an enemy to herself, like all of us sometimes, but not evil. Maybe she had done some terrible things in her life, but who hadn't? She was just a child, trying to make it through this mess, like the rest of us.

These were how I got my kicks, watching and imagining. I liked to guess people's life stories. My girlfriend knew I did this and thought it made me more interesting. She never felt threatened, or at least never told me she was.

I moved back down the aisle, towards the rear of the store again. I came upon the dairy section and searched for the cheapest yogurts. I examined the labels, trying to remember if sugar-free was better than fat-free, low-fat

better than no-fat, or if high protein was better than low carbs. Maybe low calories was what I was supposed to be doing?

The sad lady appeared on my left. She leaned forward and took a package of vegetarian cold cuts. She read its label like it was the Quran. I would have picked her up like a six-pack in the old days. But those days were over for me. In her cart now was a loaf of bread to go along with the can of almonds. I pretended not to see her as she moved closer, still looking forward. Oh make your move already! The whole song and dance was bullshit!

Why did it have to be that way with women? Why didn't they just come right out with it? Why all the goddamned intrigue? Fuck "the chase." In my lifetime, I had missed out on many women who claimed they had shown their interest in me by gazing or smiling at me. Who was I, "The Amazing fucking Kreskin"?

There was still a sadness in her face that I wasn't imagining. Maybe she was at the age when one began to realize that the jaws of life held you forever. Maybe in the past she had suffocated lovers out of panic. It was probably all fun in the beginning. Laughter, sex. Then he probably stopped calling, causing her to call more. Her polite veneer would erode and he would charm and lie his way out of danger. Maybe there'd be more sex, until he stopped calling again. Then her anger would boil over spilling onto him, at which point he'd be out of patience and dispose of her in any number of ways.

I selected my yogurt, placed it

in the cart and was off again. The front wheel wobbled as I moved away. I always picked the cart whose fucking wheel wobbled. I walked up the cheese aisle, stopping to pick up a nice smoked Gouda. As I got to the front of the store, no one was waiting, nor were there any checkout people. I moved toward the only register with a lit sign. .

A short fat man named "Glen" appeared with a moustache, loosened tie and rolled up sleeves. He had been proudly serving me for seven years. What a waste of oxygen, I thought. "I was beginning to think the food here was free," I quipped. He smirked. "Actually, if you ever came in and saw no one around, you'd know we were being robbed and should call the police." I thought about cutting his throat, but placed my items on the belt instead. This guy had probably been whipped for thirty years. And all that was left was this fat petty dictator, who probably made misery for seventeen-year old bag boys.

I turned to lift the last yogurt out, when again the sad lady had appeared. She waited behind me, staring vacantly into space. A cheap bottle of red wine now stood in her cart alongside the bread and almonds. Crazy people food, I thought. The register totaled fifty dollars and ten cents.

Glen bagged and I counted money, when we both thought we heard the word "SOLO." We looked at each other, then back at the sad lady, who was examining magazine covers. We looked at each other, then he resumed bagging and I resumed counting. I

double-checked the total and noticed that fifty dollars and ten cents, digitally, spelled "SOLO". I looked back at the sad lady who was immersed in Cosmo.

I paid Glen and pushed my cart through the doors. Walking to my car, I heard the doors open behind me. Out the sad lady came carrying a single bag. What kind of car did she drive? Loading the bags into the trunk of my car, I continued to watch her, but she didn't walk to any car. She walked through the parking lot, past all the yellow lines and dumpsters, out of the lot and across the street.

I keyed the ignition, reversed, pulled out and headed for home. Driving up the street, I passed the sad lady walking on the sidewalk. The fog enshrouded her making her look ominous. I watched her in my rear-view mirror, taking my foot off the gas and coasting toward the curb. What was I doing? I watched her approach. As she neared she didn't veer away from the car, but kept walking, glancing over without much interest.

I surrendered my hands. "Miss...I just saw you in the store...and I really don't mean to scare you...but I wondered if you wanted a ride?" She slowed a bit, staring at me like I had just spoken Arabic. "I really don't mean to scare you," I said. "It's just dark and late and you really shouldn't be out here." She bent down to get a better look at me. "Besides, it's almost midnight and I haven't done my good deed for the day." She looked around inside my car, then at me. She stood up and I watched her belly come closer.

She pulled the handle, opened the door and climbed in.

It scared me how quickly she got in. She sat down and looked at me, still without a word. "My name is Dave." I said, extending my hand. "Lorraine." I thought she said, though it could have been "Laurie Ann". She stared at me with her glassy Mongoloid eyes. She did not acknowledge my hand, so I withdrew it pretending to check it for germs. "How far are you going?" I asked. "LaSalle and Duquesne." she said. "Wow, that's a good six blocks. Did your car breakdown?" "No." she said. I put the car in drive and wheeled away from the curb.

We drove along in silence. I watched her peripherally. She studied the floor, the dashboard, the door, me, the back seat, like she had never been in a car before. It was odd that she accepted the ride, but clearly she was in her own tree. "Don't you feel endangered walking out here by yourself?" I asked, looking at her. She watched the bushes race past. "It's not far," she said in a whispery tone. "Do you drive?" I asked, for the purpose of gauging her normalcy. "No," she replied.

"Has anyone ever told you that you have a sad face?" She looked at me, then straight ahead, and began to tap her foot nervously. "No," she said bluntly. "But also a very pretty face." I added. She continued to tap her foot. We approached her intersection. "Somewhere around here?" I asked. "Right there." She said, pointing to a brown brick building. I pulled the car over.

She was curious to me. Unstable. I was more logical.

Regulated. Merely a different kind of chaos. "Thank you," she said with a fake smile, gathering her things. "You're welcome," I replied dumbly, "Be careful." She climbed out and shut the door. I watched her become smaller as she walked away. How did she survive? I started to drive off, when I noticed she had put her groceries down and was searching her pockets. I waited. She began going through her purse, then turned it upside down, emptying its contents on the walkway. I turned the ignition off and got out the car.

I walked over to her and she was down on her knees, sifting through her junk. As I got closer, I could see her lips moving. When I was close enough, I could hear her scolding the items on the ground for hiding her keys. "You lose your keys?" I asked. She jumped up, startled, with a look of terror on her face. She was trembling. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you." I said. She stared at me as though she didn't recognize me. And who knows, maybe she didn't. "Can I help you look?" I asked. She softened a little, then returned to her knees, sifting and talking to the items on the ground.

Her anger intensified, smacking and throwing things that were not her keys. Her breathing intensified as well. I scanned the ground quietly. "Why can't I find my keys?!" she said beginning to panic. "WHY CANT I FIND MY FUCKING KEYS?!!!" She stood. "WHY CAN'T I FIND MY FUCKING KEYS?!!!" She reared back and kicked her purse like it was for the World Cup. In

full frenzy, she tried to kick everything off the walkway, screaming dryly, pounding her fists into her thighs.

On a string, two dirty brown keys appeared on the edge of the walkway, next to the grass. I picked them up and asked her, "Are these them?" She walked over and took them without saying anything. She walked past all her junk, opened the gate and walked into the courtyard. As she walked, she talked to herself, using her index finger for emphasis.

I stuck my foot in the gate just before it closed. I slid the groceries in the way as a jamb. I quickly gathered all her belongings and put them into her purse. I hurried through the courtyard catching up to her just as she arrived at a door. "You know," I said out of breath, "You really ought to get a key chain." Her face was beet-red.

She opened the door and we entered. How aware of me she was, I didn't know, since she hadn't acknowledged me. Yet I followed. We went up a flight of stairs. I watched her ass as we climbed. Not bad. A little meat. It was all right. Its flatness made it look wider than it was. We stopped at the first door on the left at the top of the stairs. She opened it and walked straight to the bathroom closing the door behind her. I didn't enter, but could hear her running water. I stood in the doorway with her purse and groceries, looking around.

It was simple and clean. Dimly lit. Everything had its place. A throw rug over a hardwood floor. An old couch with

collapsed cushions. The kitchen was connected to the living room. 1960ish. I think it was a studio. No TV just an old boom box on a chest of drawers. It reeked of simplicity. A magnifying glass rested on a stack of magazines near the couch. A small bookshelf stood in the corner. On top of it were some small-framed pictures. Abstract art hung from the walls, adding a dark dimension to the room. The heavy smell of old furniture hung in the air, reminding me of a vintage clothing store or antique shop.

The bathroom door opened and out she came. She had washed her face and calmed down. She walked over to me, sullen, looking down at the floor. She took her groceries and purse. "Thank you." She said. "You're welcome," I said, "You okay?" "Uh huh," she said, nodding. "Can I offer you something? A glass of wine?" "Umm...okay." I replied, stepping inside. She closed the door. "I like your place. It looks very comfortable." She smiled faintly, turned and walked into the kitchen.

I wondered how she perceived what just happened? Had she blacked it out or was she fully aware? Should I ask? How did she perceive me? Did she have anybody who cared about her? There had to be someone, right? It would be very tough going through life without that. I began to feel guilty for being there.

In the darkest corner of her apartment, two large colorful paintings caught my eye. I walked toward them, checking the room for dried blood and pentagrams. One painting was of

a giant pair of hands, connected by one arm. They were multi-colored and struggling to go in different directions. Another was of a worm that had been chopped into a million segments, and families of little people occupied each one. The segments were numbered asequentially.

Moving on, I discovered her bookshelf. A lot of standard feminine bullshit. The Brontes, Sylvia Plath, Margaret Atwood, Anne Sexton, Alice Walker type shit. I wondered if she had ever cut off a man's penis? I checked the segmented worm again to make sure it wasn't a penis. There were photos of her on top of the bookshelf. They seemed hidden or forgotten. She was younger, prettier and happier in all of them. In one, she stood smiling between two large females, hugging them. She had not been stomped on by life's boot yet.

She came into the living room drinking a glass of wine, carrying a wine bottle covered with a plastic cup and the can of almonds from the store. "Did you paint those?" I asked, pointing to the pictures. She looked and nodded yes, setting everything down on the coffee table. "They're pretty good. Is there a story there?" She walked over to the paintings and looked at them very intensely. "I don't know...I did them a long time ago...I guess there could be." She returned to the table. Of course there was a story. Nobody just sat down and painted a conjoined hand or segmented worm for no reason.

She sat down and poured more wine into her glass. I joined her. She poured wine into the

plastic cup and pushed it towards me. I checked to make sure there was nothing fungal or lysergic in it. I drank.

She got up and walked over to the dilapidated boom box on top of the chest of drawers. Many tapes cluttered around it. She inserted one. Some Edith Piaf-Marlene Dietrich-Nico bullshit began to crow. It depressed immediately. She returned to her seat. After a long silence, I asked, "Who're we listening to?" She sat chewing almonds. "I don't know her name," she said staring blankly. "It's very sad," I said. "Yeah," she said, "You could slit your wrists to this." She sipped her wine.

"How long have you lived here?" I asked. "Why?" she asked sharply. "I didn't mean to strike a nerve." I said, tired of acquiescing to her volatility. "You didn't strike anything. Do you really care how long I've lived here?" "I didn't say I cared. I was just trying to be conversational." "Then why ask?!" she spat, leaning forward glaring at me. Her eyes blinked rapidly and her jaws clenched. Her hands trembled as she reached for her wine glass. They shook so badly, I didn't think the glass would make it to her mouth. She continued glaring at me. Finally, she leaned back in her chair, still looking furious and tapped her foot nervously. Her head swiveled around the room while her eyes began fluttering stroboscopically. This must've been what they mistook for demonic possession back in the old days. She looked at me again, still enraged, put her glass down, picked it back up, drained it, then

looked very melancholy. Her eyes became watery. She stood up and the tears came. She walked into the kitchen.

I sipped my wine and looked around the room. It was dark. She was like a young Mrs. Havisham. There seemed to be ten years of dust covering everything. She came out of the kitchen. Her face was red and sunken, but no more tears. She shielded her eyes with her right hand as if there was a bright light shining in her face.

She was worse than I thought. This was probably the longest anybody had ever sat listening to her who wasn't getting paid. Maybe she didn't know if I was real or not. That'd be cool. I made fake binoculars with my hands and followed her in.

She sat down, still shielding her face. She began tapping her foot again. "I don't mean to get so upset," she said with a slight smile under her hand. "I just wonder how you can you tell someone you just met 'that you don't care about them?'" "Bad word choice on my part. I do care. I was just trying to make conversation." She was quiet.

"You read all those magazines?" I asked, pointing to the stack of magazines next to her. "Why is the male nature so vulgar?" she asked, still shielding her eyes. "Excuse me?" I asked, disbelieving my ears. "The male nature...it's vulgar. You're a male. Why do you think your nature is so vulgar?"

I almost said, "Fuck you," but then I remembered she was insane. I thought about it for a moment. "Hmmm," I said,

"Vulgar? The male is a product of nature...and nature doesn't create anything it doesn't need...so what do you suppose the value of the male nature is?" "The tongue is a valuable part of the mouth, is it not?" "True." "Yet it's covered in saliva, is it not?" "True." "Yet there is more bacteria on the tongue than on the anus of a dog." "So men are a vulgarity, infecting nature?" I asked. She sipped her drink, tapped her foot and continued to shield her face.

"Why do you think the male nature is inherently vulgar?" I asked. "The male nature was spiritually violated by its own inception and therefore became intent on violating the spirituality of animals, women, the earth, in order to regain, redeem, reedify its own power. The female threatens the "ego", which again is a male construct, and ideologically exclusionary to the female...we don't really have an ego because according to your god, we have a lack. But once the "ego" was created it took over all male brains, like a plague and brainwashed them into believing they were formed in God's image and therefore entitled to seize spirituality back into their own ridiculous hands." "Are you a vegetarian?" I asked. That seemed to confuse her. "Listen, why don't we change the subject?" I asked, raising my glass. She made no acknowledgment, sipped her wine, tapped her foot and continued to shield her eyes.

"What are all those magazines?" I asked. She began singing with the music. "Gee, but I'm blue...and so lonely... I don't know what to do...but dream of

you...there once was a time...when I called you mine" "You sound like you know what it's like to have had your heart broken." She ignored me and continued to sing. "Dreams don't come true...still I can't help but dream of you...that's all I do" She slurred her speech a little as she acted out the words. She was in her own world. She took the desk lamp next to her and sang into it like it was a microphone. The light from it shined under her face, making her look twenty years older.

She gulped her wine and stood up clumsily. She sang and danced like a drunken clod, bumping into the coffee table, stumbling against the easy chair. Her eyes were very glassy. I watched quietly. I don't think I existed to her at that moment. "There once was a time...when I called you mine...then I lost you...and with you gone...life no longer seemed half so fine" She spun around and swayed back and forth. She was out of her smart mind. But maybe I was too. I stood up and started to dance with her. I put my hands on her hips. She definitely wasn't starving. She did not acknowledge me. She reached down for the wine bottle and took a big hit. It smelled horrible from sitting out too long. I took the bottle from her and took a big swallow as well.

I kissed her cheek and neck and she allowed it. I held her hips more firmly as we danced. "I sit here blue...and so lonely...I don't know what to do" I moved her over to the couch and sat her down. I climbed on top of her. I

No Clue

Max Evans

Woke up this morning butt-naked next to some fat chick. She was wearing an oversized Raiders T-shirt and her left eye was cocked open. She said that would happen before we passed out. How I wound up in her bed was simple: Corona, Heineken, a shot of Patron, back to Corona, two shots of Jager, and finally the kicker, an Adios Motherfucker.

Her walls were covered with old bouquets tacked upside down and magazine pics of Vin Deisel and Ben Affleck. I wanted to slip away but her big-ass arm had me pinned. After I bench pressed that log off me, her other eye popped open. "Hey," she grogged out, "where you going?" "Bathroom," I whispered.

While taking a leak and scratching the flea bites her cat gave me, I remembered it was Sunday. Shit, Shaleen's gonna fuckin' kill me! I thought. I rushed into the front room without shaking. My gear was on the couch all mixed up with her's. I threw mine on and made sure to be quiet with the belt.

Curious to see how big she really was, I picked up her drawls. I gave them a stretch and inside my head, Chris Tucker went, "Daaamn!" Then I chucked them and they floated out wider than a family-sized pizza.

Before I did the creep, I took a peek in her room. All she'd done was turn away from the sun. The back of her legs had so much cellulite, they looked smothered in chunky peanut butter. There was a magnet-picture of her boyfriend on the fridge. He was a straight dweeb in a Navy uniform.

I sealed the front door shut and booked it to my car. I had to keep clicking the clicker to find it. Stuck under the wiper blades were flyers for 420 festivals and raves. I snatched them off and stuffed them in the glove with old parking tickets. Burrito wrappers covered the floorboard but I couldn't recall going to Del Taco after the club.

As I was picking out the morning boogs, I could smell that chic's stuff. I checked my finger and something like dried marinara was on the cuticle. I thought about it more and figured what it had to be. Before the light turned

green, I racked my brain praying I never went down on her.

The whole night flashed through my head as I floored it to Shaleen's: getting to the club late with the fellas, checking out who was there, a big girl buying me a beer, and later, faded as hell, sneaking out the back door with her.

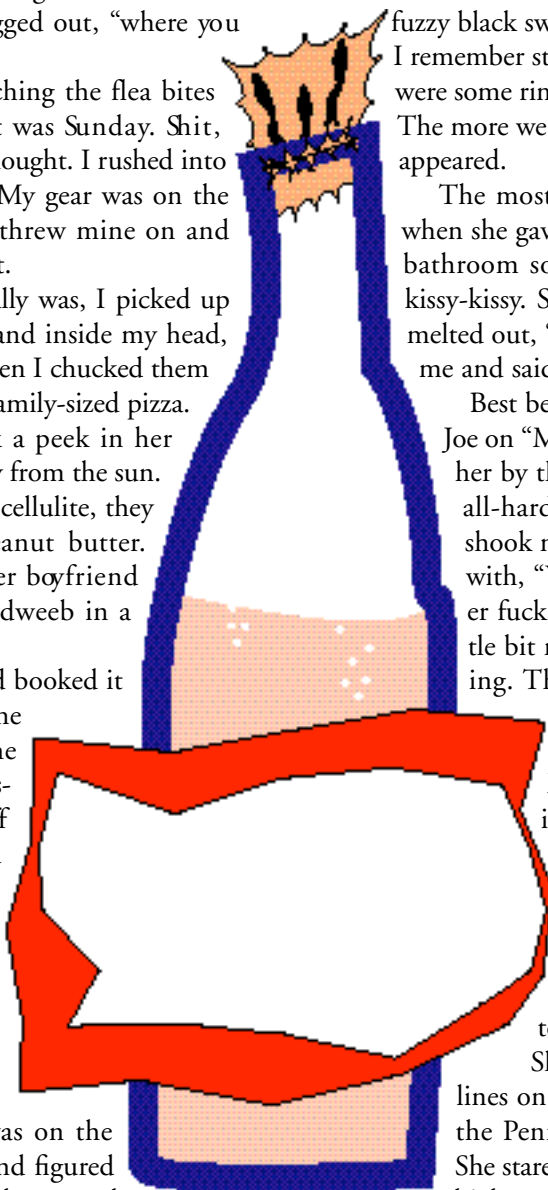
Her name was Margarita, or Maria, or something Mexican like that. Her eyebrows were toothpick-thin and arched high like a Mickey D's sign. Her lips were two-toned, red and brown, and she was wearing this fuzzy black sweater that V'd deep into Cleveland. I remember staring once and thinking, If that bra were some rims, she'd definitely be rolling on D's! The more we drank, the more the rest of her disappeared.

The most messed up part of the night was when she gave me a smack. We ended up in her bathroom somehow and were way past being kissy-kissy. So while she was giving me head, I melted out, "Ahh bitch." She stood up, slapped me and said, "Don't call me no bitch!"

Best believe I was hella-stunned like Glass Joe on "Mike Tyson's Punch Out." I grabbed her by the wrists, gritted my teeth and said all-hard, "Fuck's wrong with you?" She shook me loose and came right back at me with, "Well, don't be calling me no mother fucking beetch then." We argued a little bit more and then went back to macking. The tile was cold at first. The mats smelled like cat piss.

I was only about ten minutes late to Shaleen's. I knew I had to get in there fast so she wouldn't shove the Irresponsible Card in my face. I looked in the rearview and my eyes were red as rug burns. Zits jumping out. Hair jacked. I wanted to try and fix it but wasn't about to lick my fingers for nothing.

Shaleen opened the door with sleep lines on her cheek. It looked like she made the Penny Saver her pillow for the night. She stared at me and said, "What the... Nice hickeys, guy." I was like whatever's and



stepped past her.

On the couch chillin' out was our son Bailey. He was in his diaper and Kobe Bryant T-shirt. I said, "Wassup, Bail'-Bail'," but he was too busy watching "Blues Clues" to even notice me.

I stepped over Lego's, clothes, bills and old juice cups to get to the kitchenette. As messy as Shaleen's studio can get, it's better than the looks I got when Bailey was just born and Shaleen was still living with her parents. I moved dishes around in the sink and washed my hands with orange dish soap. Wet the hair a little. Drank from the faucet.

Then I heard from the doorway behind me, "I don't even wanna know." Shaleen ripped down a gang of paper towels and said, "He re, just take these. I don't know where those hands've been."

While I dried off, Shaleen said Terrell was picking her up at nine so they could go to California Adventure. Terrell's her boyfriend. He's cool-people. Last Saturday night after Bailey knocked out, me and him ran to Vons to split a twelve pack. I'm just glad she found someone to nag on instead of me.

Shaleen went into the bathroom to curl her hair and said, "Eric, change his diaper. He just woke up." I grabbed Bailey's bag and sat next to him on the couch. His plastic cell phone was under my butt so I grabbed it and flung it away. When it hit the ground, it kept going, "Sorry, wrong number. Sorry, wrong number."

Bailey stared at the tube while I took off his heavy diaper. He's probably seen that tape a million times already. He loves it when Blue finds a clue cause she'll spin around fast like an AOL-logo. One time, Bailey spun around too and bonked his head into Shaleen's coffee table, right at the corner. That scar above his right eye will probably never go away.

While I was swiping a wipee around everything, Bailey's little wee-wee flipped up. He looked at me and half-smiled like when he poots. He's got blonde hair like Shaleen and hazel eyes like mine. His head's shaved for the summer and some people say he looks like Eminem. Others say more like Mini-Me. I say his nickname should be Mini-Em.

After I strapped a fresh diaper over it, Bailey asked me in his high-pitched voice, "Pee-pee gone?" I lunged to kiss his soft Buddha-belly and told him, "Yeah Bail', your pee-pee's covered now." But while sliding on his shorts for the day, I couldn't help but think, Little man, you ain't got a clue what that thing's gonna get you into. Not one single clue.



The All-Terrain Bicycle

David Seals-McClellan

I was glad I had decided not to drink the night before. I rode towards the bike path in silence, thinking. The chain circling the cog was the only noise. Early morning was the purest time of day because nobody was out. The sun was bluing the sky. My mind was fresh, my body rested and clean. This had been the first week in about 2 months that I hadn't gotten drunk or high. Because it had been about two months since my girlfriend confessed that she had fucked her ex-boyfriend.

It had come as a complete shock. I felt hollowed and dead. I pressed my lips together and stood as straight as I could when she told me. I even laughed to show that I wasn't hurt and in complete control. When it came to vulnerability, I always showed the opposite of what I felt. But nobody had ever figured that out about me. She hugged me with a face full of tears. But I just stood waiting for her to finish. She waited for me to hug her back -- an old female trick. But I wasn't having it. As remorseful as she seemed now, was as willing as she was to fuck her ex-boyfriend that night.

She was a sociopath, I told myself. The girl I was meant to be with could never do such a thing. I didn't make as much money as her ex. But I also didn't cut her down like he did. Nor did I work late all the time, then go to strip clubs on the weekends with my friends. I was better looking and in better shape than him too. I always thought we had good sex. I always made sure she finished before I did. I couldn't figure it out.

I spun my peddles in a low gear to warm up. Too early for tourists, I thought. Especially on a

Saturday. The path would be free of morons. There'd only be hardcore cyclists out. Not that I was so hardcore. I didn't even own a touring bike, just a rickety hybrid. But I had muscular legs and liked to work hard. And Lance said, 'It's not about the bike'.

I arrived at the low-fence barrier, which led to the bike path and climbed off. I hoisted my bike over it then got back on. I turned on my stopwatch and dove down the descent leading to the bike path. Twenty yards in front of me, was a Greg LeMond/Lance Armstrong looking guy tearing up the road. He was about 6'0, lean and muscular, prominent ball calves, maybe 180 lbs. He wore a bright yellow jersey, open to his navel, with black cycling pants and a compact pump sticking out of his rear jersey pocket. His bike was delicate looking and moved forward effortlessly on a perfectly straight line. I, on the other hand, bobbed and weaved and fought my bike. I had zero technique, yet somehow was gaining on him.

He must've already done 100 miles, I thought to myself. There must be a reason he's going slower. I continued pedaling comfortably, still gaining on him. Soon, I had arrived in his draft, so I relaxed and focused and stayed on his back tire. I traveled undetected for a bit, but then he noticed my shadow and bore down, pedaling more intensely. I pedaled harder to keep up. If I could stay in his draft I might be able to keep up with him. I got lower on my bike, thought of my ex-girlfriend and pedaled more furiously.

I struggled to stay on his back tire as we dove down a hill. But he

pulled away from me going down and coming up. We got back onto the straightaway and I worked to catch up. My legs burned, but I pumped as hard as I could until I caught back up to his draft. We were about 5 miles from the ocean and I didn't feel that badly. My competitive nature drove me. I was always interested in knowing where I ranked on the totem pole of life. I was going to try to stay with him until the ocean.

Another descent approached. And just like before, he pulled away going down and coming up, disappearing onto the straightaway. I shot down then labored up the hill. When I got back on the straightaway, I saw that he had opened up about a 15-yard lead on me. Again I sprinted, ignoring the burning in my legs and lungs, quickly fighting my way back into his draft. He glanced down and saw my shadow.

I imagined him being impressed and gaining respect for me. I felt pretty good knowing that the ocean wasn't too far away. Then a wave of insanity came over me. I veered around him, accelerated, pedaling with him stroke for stroke, then passed him. I chose not to look at him as I took my rightful spot in the lead. I kept sprinting hoping I could maintain it until the ocean. But it was going to be close. I looked down and didn't see his shadow. But I knew he was there.

Another descent approached ahead. I raced towards it, determined not to let him pass me this time. I built up more speed and dove down with more momentum this time. But on my left, Lance sailed by without as much as a glance, returning me to my rightful spot in the rear. We both made it

back up to the straightway with about 2000 yards left to the ocean. My legs were on fire and getting very heavy. I didn't know if I could make it the rest of the way, but I wasn't about to stop now. I stayed on his back tire, pedaling with him stroke for stroke. He wasn't slowing any, but he wasn't pulling away either. My lungs were heaving for air. With about 75 yards left, I veered around him again and accelerated past him. I pushed and pulled my pedals as quickly as I could, looking onto the thousands of screaming French, lifting me with their applause.

I glanced behind me and saw Lance still there. He looked at me pointed south, into the distance. I looked and saw Palos Verdes, 10 miles away. It just so happened that I was already going there, but not at his pace. The race was over. I planned to fall back to my true identity, enjoy the ride and let him go as far and as fast as he wanted. We both turned left at the overpass, with me still leading and headed south. But I slowed my pedaling and "let" him pass. I kept up the façade a little while longer and then fell farther and farther behind.

With Lance getting farther and farther ahead, it felt good to ride at a more comfortable pace. I noticed the sand more, the water, people rollerblading and playing volleyball. I loved the Southern California mentality – people spending entire days doing this. My ex-girlfriend would spend entire weekends hiking and camping. Some of my best memories of us came from hiking and camping together. We worked together on the preparations...driving...setting up the campsite...exploring trails...finding some beautiful place to sit. We even made love in a cave once.

I shook my head to clear the memories. It was time to move forward and get my shit together. I

made an okay living as an architect's assistant, but it was time for a change. I wanted to go to Design Center in Pasadena, but it was expensive and I needed to take a few classes to get my GPA up. I wasn't young anymore. I didn't have all the time in the world left. I did want to eventually get married and have kids. Every time one door closed another opened up, I told myself. It was time for me to get my life together.

Lance was ahead about a quarter of a mile. One of these days I'd have to get a real touring bike to see how fast I could really go. Maybe I wasn't as bad as I thought. But they were so expensive and always got flat tires. I hated changing flats. And I always felt a little superior when I rode past a guy who was changing the flat on his expensive Italian touring bike. I wondered how close I could get to Lance before the end of the path. I accelerated.

I focused on Lance, to see if I was getting closer or if he was getting farther. I passed a Latino couple on their bikes, glancing at them as I went by to see how the faces of mediocrity looked. I rode a straighter line and established a rigorous pedaling rhythm, pushing and pulling with my cleated shoes. Lance was getting closer. Maybe he was just lollygagging, I didn't know. But catching up to him would be a victory for hybrid bicycles all over the world. I got lower and pedaled harder.

I closed in on Lance, now just a few hundred yards away. I imagined the look on his face when he saw me on his back tire. This was the advantage of being in the rear, you always had a target in front of you. I passed another cyclist, a middle-aged woman wearing a sun visor. I blew by, imagining her being stunned by the sudden appearance of my muscular back, powerful legs and exemplary riding technique.

She was in awe of my well-made machine and felt her own inferiority as I got farther and farther away.

I could almost spit on Lance now. But I stayed hidden behind him so he wouldn't see me. I arrived on his back tire and felt instant relief. But the path began to twist and turn and I struggled to stay hidden. As we rounded a big corner, he did a double take and saw me. He smiled, then crouched around his bike and exploded. I pedaled frantically to keep up, but was losing him through all the turns. The path straightened out but he continued extending his lead. He was too strong. He had a whole other gear I didn't. I got low too and pedaled with more ferocity. We weaved past several pedestrians and cyclists. But he pulled farther and farther away.

Then suddenly it was silent. My depth of perception began to fail. Everything around me was slowing down and turning yellow. I was feeling the life leaving my body, but I kept pedaling. My body was chilled. My legs were losing power. I felt as if I was watching myself from some out of body place. Drowsy, I could make out Lance looking back to check on me.

A public restroom approached on the left. I squeezed my brakes and slowed my bike to a halt. I dropped it on the sand, stumbling over it and staggered towards the restroom. My legs threatened to cramp with every step. I limped around the corner and went into the men's bathroom. Everything was spinning wildly. The walls of the restroom surged and receded. I stood awkwardly in front of the urinal and worked my penis out of my shorts. It looked traumatized, all mashed and twisted. I steadied myself and aimed for the urinal. A trickle of dark yellow pee squirted feebly into the receptacle. I was still panting, but my wits were returning. In the doorway, a silhouetted figure

appeared. "Are you okay," he asked. "Yeah..." I said weakly, zipping up and walking gingerly towards the door. It was Lance...

...As he walked towards me I could tell he was totally bonked. The first thing I did was lay him down on the sand in the shade and elevate his feet onto the bench. That way he could keep more blood in his brain. Then I asked him if he had any food. He didn't. I asked him if he had any money. He didn't. I asked him if he had someone who could come pick him up. He didn't. So I gave him a couple of gels and a protein bar and made him drink his water.

I praised him for his strength and asked him if he was always such a tenacious rider? He said that he wasn't, but that he had been wound up lately and was trying to take it out on the bicycle. He was an overachiever with muscular legs. I asked him why he was riding a hybrid? He said he couldn't afford a touring bike. I tried to keep him talking to help him stay lucid. I told him about all the times I had bonked. He asked me how long I had been riding. I hadn't realized it had been nearly twenty years now. He asked what I did to get into cycling shape. I explained to him different things like interval training, sprints, hill climbing. I explained to him the importance of diet, intensity, duration and consistency.

His legs were starting to cramp, so I got down and kneaded out some of his knots. He was grateful. He said he would like to get into real cycling shape and asked if he could come out and ride with me sometime. I told him that would be okay, but that he would need to get a touring bike. I told him he could

buy one cheaply, used, and that he should save his money if he really wanted the cycling experience. I also told him when he felt better we could ride back up together and he could draft off me the whole way. He was most appreciative.

He wanted to know how far I rode. I told him it depended on the day, but that my long rides were anywhere from 50 to 75 miles. He wanted to know what routes I used. I told him I did some routes around Malibu, Encino, Ventura County, some I did inside the city. He asked where I had started from today. I told him West Hollywood, which



felt a little strange, because it was like saying, "Hey, I'm gay." But he didn't seem to flinch. We talked a little longer about how we both came to LA, what we did for a living. He was an architect's assistant and wanted to get back in school. He told me how it was all computerized nowadays.

He seemed like a good soul. He was very calm and easy to talk to. I sat there listening, when suddenly something came over me and I just blurted out, "Would you like to go and have coffee sometime?" His eyes widened a little. There was a long silence and then he said very courteously, "No thank you." I could tell he felt awkward. He quickly changed the subject and went on about structural require-

ments for beach houses or something, but I didn't hear a word he said. I sat there shrinking with embarrassment, nodding my head, smiling. Then a little voice said, 'Hey, you asked a guy out for coffee, he said no, get over it.'

When he finished speaking, I asked him if he felt ready to try riding back up. He lay there, with his feet still elevated and said, "You know, I think I'm going to go over to the water and just veg there for a while, until I feel better. Then I'll try to make it back up." Rejected again, I thought. "Okay." I said with a smile, extending my hand to him. He shook it. "Do you have a card or a way I can reach you?" he asked. "For what?" I said. "So I can repay you for that bar and those gels." "Don't worry about it," I said. "Bring food next time and maybe one day it'll be your turn to rescue someone."

He thanked me again. I climbed on my bike and wished him luck. As I pedaled away, I couldn't help but wonder what came over me? I was usually a little more subtle. Could I have phrased things better? The guy probably wasn't even gay. I smiled and shook my head. About two hundred yards ahead, there was a guy riding north on a green Bianchi. He had good technique. Very low in the saddle. Kept his heels down. His legs were shaved too, the sign of a serious rider. We were riding into a mild headwind. If I worked hard now, I could sneak up to his draft and have an easier ride home. This was the advantage of being in the rear, you always had a target in front of you. Of course, once he saw me we might have to figure out who was the lion and who was the lamb. I put my head down and began to accelerate.

Robinson's Birthday

David Seals-McClellan

Robinson sat on the stairs outside his apartment. It was a cool night. Inside his apartment was much warmer. It was quiet. No one around. Everyone was in bed ready for tomorrow. The cars driving down distant streets was the only sound. Robinson looked at the building across the street. Tomorrow, the sun would rise over it, as it had done for the past four years. It would set behind him, over the same spot on the ocean as it had done for the past four years.

The next day, Robinson sat in his chair looking out the window. It was late afternoon and very hot in his apartment. With his windows closed, the heat inside was unbearable. With them open, the noise from the Pakistani children playing outside was unbearable. He chose the latter. They dribbled a cheap basketball, running back and forth between the buildings screaming. They weren't even playing basketball, Robinson thought to himself. Where were these kid's parents, letting them run amok, making all this noise? Why wouldn't they take them to a park to keep them from disturbing all the hard-working tenants? Then Robinson noticed their parents were right there. Mrs. Raghil and Zuhmed were laying out a sheet of unleavened nan on the driveway. How were the cars going to get in and out, he wondered?

Robinson swiveled away from the window and faced the TV. There was a talk show on that featured the scum of the earth, which would be followed by a "TV Judge" show that adjudicated for the scum of the earth, then a "TV Dating" show where the scum of the earth dated. Robinson watched because he didn't have to think. He thought about all

the American soldiers who died for this.

He finished his beer and got up to get another. As he strode, he noticed the cheap brown carpet covering his floor. He hated it, but never seemed able to get far enough ahead to do anything about it. It had become a symbol of his inadequacy. He returned to his seat with a beer and took a long swallow.

Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Went the noise outside, startling Robinson in his chair. Pop! Pop! Pop! It went again. Robinson leaned forward and looked through the blinds. One of the kids had a sheet of large bubble wrap and was jumping up and down on it. Because the complex was two buildings, divided by a driveway, every sound the children made amplified, echoed, and ricocheted between the structures. Robinson's eyebrows lowered angrily as he considered going out there. But there was no reasoning with them. They were from a third world country.

Robinson relaxed and turned back towards the TV. After four years he hadn't decorated his apartment yet. No art, one easy chair, a bed, an old stereo and a phone that never rang. He only used the phone to listen to personal ads and order pizza. In fact, since his one friend Bill had moved to Oakland, no one in the city had his phone number.

It was 5:23 PM and Robinson still hadn't said a word or left his apartment all day. He drained his beer and got up for another one. As he walked by the fan, it oscillated making the curtains dance a bit. The refrigerator wasn't making the beer cold, just lukewarm. He stuck four in the freezer.

Honk! Honk! Honk! Honk! Honk! Came a noise from outside

that sounded like Canadian geese. Robinson walked to the window and looked out. A Latino man stood on the sidewalk, holding onto an old shopping cart with one hand and squeezing a bicycle horn with the other. The man and his cart were both middle-aged and raggedy. Inside the cart, were all kinds of Tupperware bowls, metal containers, canvass bags, filled with food. Honk! Honk! Honk! Honk! Honk! The man squeezed the horn again. Several children ran up to him and gave him money for corn cobs on a stick, snow cones and pastries. After serving his last, the man was off again moving up the street. Honk! Honk! Honk! Honk! Why didn't he use a bicycle bell, Robinson wondered? Wouldn't that disturb fewer people? But that wasn't the point though, was it? It wasn't about the smallest disturbance possible, it was about the greatest disturbance possible, because that sold more corn on the cob.

Robinson felt sticky and tense. The heat was stifling. He rose and went to the bathroom. He drank his beer while urinating. What a birthday. And it was almost over. He was tired of screwing whores. Getting blown in cars and alleys. That got old quick. There was always that deep remorse that followed. And feeling dirty. He remembered three whores ago when his rubber broke. He knew immediately, but kept fucking her because it was the best feeling he'd had in a long time. After he came inside of her, she screamed at him, pushed him and smacked him. If he hadn't caught anything, it was worth it.

Robinson flushed the toilet and leaned on the vanity. The room was dark. He stared at the floor.

Suddenly everything seemed very real. His aloneness. Feeling trapped. He wasn't supposed to be here. He was supposed to be happy. With a good woman, job and children. This wasn't the life he picked. This wasn't where he was supposed to be at age 33, friendless and alone on his birthday. The floor swelled. He became dizzy and stood straight up, shaking his head.

He leaned over the bathtub and turned on the water. He walked into the kitchen taking deep breaths. He took a beer out of the freezer and rolled it over his chest. It was cold. He rolled it over the back of his neck. Soothing. He opened it and took a big swallow. In the cabinet above the stove, he kept a little pipe filled with weed. A little birthday hit might just be the thing. He pulled it out, lit it and sucked away. He blew out a thin plume of smoke, then returned it to the cabinet. He walked back to the bathroom, stopping at the stereo to bend over and turn it on.

As he stood up, he felt something "pop" in his heart. Suddenly, his heart began to accelerate and the walls seemed to be surging and receding. His airway felt like it was closing and he was certain he was suffocating. He could no longer feel gravity under his feet and believed that the furniture, carpet and doorways were all conspiring against him. This was ridiculous, he thought. He massaged the skin over his heart to calm it down, but it didn't help. What the fuck was going on? Had someone slipped him acid? The heart would certainly explode if it continued to beat like this. He had to slow it down in a hurry. He tried to take a deep breath, but couldn't get much air in. He paced back and forth clutching his chest, terrified he was having a heart attack. It felt like it was pumping oxygen out faster than it was pumping it in. He tried to take several short breaths in succession, but hardly any air got through.

He went to the window and opened it. The fresh air relieved him for the moment...but then his heart began to race...and his breathing became constricted again. Robinson ran to the front door and stepped outside. Luckily, the children were gone now. He held on to the railing and rubbed his chest with the heel of his hand, using a deep circular motion. He tried to breathe deeply, but still, little air was getting in.

Robinson stepped back inside, frantically searching his mind and apartment for answers. He heard the bathtub still running, so he stripped off his clothes, dropped them on the floor and ran to the bathroom. He jumped into the tub and felt instant relief. He turned off the water and lifted his legs onto the wall in front of him. Ahhh! He was able to breathe. He took a deep breath and blew it out towards the ceiling. He noticed the ceiling seemed to be pulsing...and spiraling...and coming down towards him. He sat bolt upright, his heart accelerating and lungs swelling again. He looked down at his chest and saw his heart doing the merengue. "I'm going to die -- I'm going to die," he thought and jumped out of the bathtub.

Robinson ran back into the living room. He struggled to put his clothes on over his soaking wet body. He noticed he'd forgotten to close the front door. It was getting more and more difficult to breathe. Fully clothed, he ran through the front door, out onto the sidewalk, clutching his chest. Once outside, he stopped and tried to compose himself. He began walking down the street trying to look as normal as possible.

It was working. His heart was slowing and his airway seemed to be opening again. But then the street started to tilt and he began to lose his balance. His heartbeat rose and his airway closed again. Robinson stopped and tried to breathe. A young black man was approaching.

As he passed, he smiled at Robinson mockingly. This man was complicit with whatever forces were trying to kill him, Robinson thought. Robinson didn't want to die -- on Venice Boulevard -- like a dog. So he turned around and started back towards his apartment.

He was trying to navigate the swaying street, pretending nothing was wrong, when he noticed a teenage latina walking towards him, carrying a plastic grocery bag. As she passed, she too stared at Robinson, peripherally, smiling secretly, delighted at his misery.

He made it back to his apartment and went inside. He grabbed the phone and dialed 9-1-1. "Emergency" the operator answered. Robinson gasped. "I-I c-can't--b-b-br-breathe." "Are you having a heart attack, sir?" "I...don't...know...p-p-p-please send h-help." "Okay sir, I'm going to send an ambulance...are you at 3755 Cardiff?" Robinson gasped. "Yes." "Is that an apartment or a house?" "Apartment--number one." "Is there a security gate or anything?" "No." Robinson said wheezing. "Okay sir, I need for you to stay calm--." Robinson hung up and went to the freezer. He grabbed a package of frozen chicken breasts, placed it over his heart and returned to the living room. He laid down on the floor, putting his feet up on the chair. He opened his shirt and rubbed the frozen chicken breasts over his heart.

The phone call had made him feel better. The accelerated heart, shortness of breath, and doom were only coming in waves now. He waited for the ambulance, hoping they wouldn't use their siren.

And the next morning at 5:17 AM, the sun did rise over the building across the street. And around 8:02 PM, it set over the same spot on the ocean as it had done for the last million years or so...but no one seemed to notice.

Clark 22

Paul Dunk

It was 2 a.m. and darkness rushed by outside the Clark 22's window like black gold, Texas tea, millionaire. Ray sat there in his seat and wondered about the funk he was in and if it'd ever change. He'd been in and out of relationships and was of a mind they just didn't rate anymore. Like, *why fucking bother?*

They all wound up the same.

He just wanted to be alone. Forever.

A woman sat scross from him and he tried to imagine what was going on in her mind. Maybe the same shit. She looked lonely. Tired. Part of the bus like a plastic chair that people sat on. Thirty million years old of loneliness, the black behind her racing.

"Addison," said a voice over the speaker, and again, "Addison."

Yeah, right. *Addison.*

They pulled to a stop at the corner and Wrigley Field stood in a shroud of night and winter cold. The Cubs'd be losing there in six months, thought Ray, and you can bet your bottom dollar. He was a Sox fan regardless of how little he even cared for them. The Cubs were cocksuckers, though, every year.

The door opened in front and a body got in. Ray looked over to see what it was.

Shit....

A troll. The guy farted around in the pockets of his pants for change. Layered clothing, shitty stuff. Bum-wear, but he didn't look like a bum. The bus lurched forward and the cretin almost fell over, finally rescuing himself by grabbing onto the

pole. He was a *functioning bum*, Ray realized, the kind that actually have jobs and pay their rent on time but are really just bums anyway. Sitting around watching wrestling in their garbage-filled studio apartments. Jagging off to Baywatch, because they couldn't afford cable.

The dude looked about fifty-three or so. He finally got the buck-fifty together and jammed it home in the slot. There was a woman somewhere whom he'd fucked one time or another, and she was even worse.

"Jesus," sighed Ray at the thought of it.

He reached into his bag and pulled out the new issue of Maxim. He'd subscribed in an effort to situate his finger on the pulse of the modern dating world, but thus far'd only gleaned a general idea about how sickening it was. Just the same, though, he endeavored to get lost in it. Gumby-idiot meanwhile wobbled down the aisle and eventually sat his ass next to the lonely woman across the killing floor.

Shit....

Ray looked up from an article about rubbers and Gumby-idiot was making himself at home. The dude was dressed in eight different shades of gray--janitor clothing, he guessed.

Yeah, the putz was probably a janitor. Three points from retardation and homelessness. That's what they did. Swept floors and took the garbage out.

He wore a white button with black lettering on it that said, "I LIKE PICKLES," looked like it was homemade, right there on his breast.

What the fuck is that about?

Ray wondered, picturing the man tossing himself in a Dumpster.

"Grace," said the driver. "Comin' up: Grace."

Yeah, grace was on the horizon....

According to Maxim, when a man went rubber-shopping he should pay special attention to getting the *right size*, and that a good way to measure your Johnson was by putting it inside a spent toilet paper roll. Most normal men should have room to spare when fully erect, and, if your dick didn't fit, well, you might want to consider a career change.

Become a porn actor, they suggested.

Ray imagined himself fucking the *Angel Soft* and yawned. It was two-ten in the morning. He was dead tired.

Gumby-idiot starting clipping his fingernails, the tiddley-bits landing dangerous close. Ray squinted his eyes at the audacity of it. What kind of moron clips his goddamn nails in public? Ray wanted to fucking kill him. Right there on the bus.

"Hey, Pickle-boy," he said, loud so as to get the man's undivided attention, "If on-a those nails so much as *touches* the tip-a my fuckin' boot, I am gonna ram it up your goddamn ass."

They stared at each other awhile.

Ray went, "Do you understand me?"

The guy nodded, putting the chrome bastard away in his gray pocket.

"Irving Park," said the driver. "Irving next."

Painkiller

Jeffrey Gianelli

I don't think of myself as someone who knows everything or who has it all together just because of my age. I could have been that boy once. I am the older one, the one who knows better, the one who can look the situation up and down and take it for what it is. I can see past the pit of my stomach or look over the length of my biceps. I can ignore all of these things completely if I choose.

He sleeps with the covers up over his head and only the lower half of his face is showing. It is almost comical, the nose and the pair of lips still claiming their breath while the rest of him has given up everything. I pull my arms away, wondering how things got to this point.

If I were more subtle about things, it would have been easier. He might have been expecting it. I could have easily been more of a bitch, just ask any of my friends. Why I have held back so much in this relationship, I don't know. Normally I would expect perfection from my lovers; do your dishes immediately, don't even think about leaving your clothes on the floor, get up off your ass and help when it's time to do the cleaning. I let Ethan break all of my rules.

He rolls over and pulls the covers off of his face. He is still asleep and his bare chest rises too abruptly; he's smoked five packs of my cigarettes so far this weekend. Sometimes I wish there were hair to run my fingers through in the place between his nipples where the hard, well-developed muscles rise and fall in a noiseless crescendo. I run my lips over his cheek, then climb out of bed.

The shower is too many feet away. I walk towards it, imagining I am in a marathon and it is the grand prize. If I make it, this is one more day, if not, who knows. The room becomes blurry and I start to get dizzy, but it soon passes and I stumble over toward the toilet. It takes me a very long time to go.

I still have several hours before my flight leaves, so I decide to take a bath

instead of a shower, even though the tub hasn't been cleaned in over a week. Just goes to show how far I have compromised my standards with this entire situation. As the tub fills, I sit on the edge and try to picture what it would be like to slip into the water and cut my wrists open, staring blankly ahead as it slowly turns crimson. The funny thing is, I can't even imagine myself doing something like that. I am simply not capable of it. That is something that he would do.

I slip into the tub slowly, letting the warm water cover my body inch by inch. The dizziness hits again and I fight it as hard as I can. Just think if he found me lying here naked with my head under the water. I picture a white light running down from my head to my toes, penetrating all of my cells, restoring my strength. I let my mind go completely blank and before I know it I have been sitting in the tub so long that the water has started to get cold, then I notice the clock above the sink. It is almost 9 a.m. and I do have a lot to do today. I get out and dry off quickly, feeling almost renewed.

I return to the bedroom to find Ethan in the same position he was in when I left. Oh yes, I could go over there right now and pull his legs up to his cheeks and take it all out on him one last time. He would deserve it. He would almost deserve it even if I didn't use protection.

"Ethan," I say. He doesn't stir. His ruffled black hair makes him look as if he were some young, talented musician who could play beautiful music but has completely lost his mind. And it is entirely possible that he has done just that. If only he had something to keep him occupied, like music or acting or some sort of hobby. But he has nothing, nothing that is, except me.

"Ethan," I say, louder. His eyes open. He appears to be dreaming still. I pull the covers completely off of him. I had forgotten he was naked. His boy-

ish hips lure at me. I turn my eyes away.

"What time is it?" he asks, rubbing his eyes. I notice there is a spot of crusted blood on his left earlobe.

"The sun is up," I say. "Get your ass out of bed." He turns over on his side.

"God damn it!" I shout. He flinches. "How many pills did you take last night?"

"None," he says. I already knew this would be the answer, it is always the answer, yet the supply in my medicine cabinet has to be replaced weekly now. I am unsure at this point of which pain is stronger, mine or his. I say nothing more. As I climb onto the bed, he smiles and rolls over, eyes still closed.

"Hi," he whispers. He slides towards me. Soon his lips are sliding all over my body, drawing out my weakness.

"Get some sleep," I say, pushing him off. I don't know why I got into the bed in the first place. If I make love to him again I'm too afraid I'll change my mind. I get up off the bed and go into the bathroom and shave, then get dressed. When I am through combing my hair, I return to find him asleep once more, so I decide to go get some coffee. Before I leave I place a bottle of Vicodin on the night stand next to a glass of water, then blow him a kiss.

It is not as warm today as I expected it to be. The moist air is too obtusive. I wish I would have moved back to California years ago. San Francisco, maybe even San Diego. Well, in a few hours I will be gone anyhow, quite possibly for good.

The skyscrapers lean over me, full of spies. I wonder who is watching from their corner office ten stories above. I wonder if anyone can see what goes on in my bedroom through the blinds at night when I leave the lights on. I suppose there is some guilt in thinking about this.

The coffee joint is crowded and I

wait in line behind well dressed, middle aged ladies who stare at the menu for five minutes before they place their order, and even then only after asking how much fat is in the 2% milk, or whether preservatives are used when the coffee is imported, and is it imported from Belize or Columbia? I want only a large drip and I don't understand why there isn't a separate line for people who have their shit together.

I finally get my coffee from the heavily tattooed young lady with the pierced eyebrows. She is wearing a pink bow in her hair today. Her voice is girlish and sweet.

"Same old thing again?" she asks as she hands me the coffee. Her eyes move down my chest.

"It's probably time for a change, isn't it?" I say. She shrugs. "But I'm leaving for Rome today anyhow."

"Wow, can I come with?" she asks.

I realize that I must look ridiculous to her in my too-tight shorts and my white tank top, bulging muscles refusing to deteriorate along with the rest of my body. I have all of my hair and not one strand has turned gray. The lines on my face are subtle enough to go unnoticed still, yet I am undeniably pushing forty and therefore should appear absurd to someone her age in anything other than Khaki slacks and a Polo shirt. Unfortunately, Ethan is too naive to see that.

"I guess I could stow you away in my suitcase. Just make sure you take out all of those piercings so you don't set off the metal detector."

"Forget it then!" she smiles. "Well you have a great trip Joe."

"Thanks, see you when I get back," I say, dropping a generous tip in the bucket, knowing I will never see her again. I walk back outside, past a mob of European tourists pointing in the direction of where the World Trade Center used to be and talking in loud, excited voices.

I decided to go on this trip last week after seeing a bum try to sell the ring of a bombing victim to a tourist for ten bucks and the tourist ended up buying it. I need a place where nothing so crass would exist, where I will be sur-

rounded by architecture that has gone untouched for hundreds of years, where nothing can take away the feeling that you have traveled back in time. I decided to go first to Rome and then Venice. From there, who knows. I am told I have up to three years left, and there's no telling what sort of miracle drugs might pop up during that time. I plan on making the most of it, however long it is.

I walk home slowly, avoiding eye contact with anyone. I don't want to run in to a neighbor or an old acquaintance now. To do so might bring me out of the mindset I am in and I want to feel nothing other than self-loathing. The coffee cup is too full and hot liquid sloshes onto my wrist, burning me. I rub it against my other arm. There is too much chaos here, but I am not prepared to go back. I rehearse everything in my mind, how I am going to lead up to it piece by piece. I tell myself that he will go easily, that he really doesn't care enough not to go easily. Soon, I have walked all the way up Battery and the mob of tourists has grown even thicker. I decide to head back.

I can hear the loud thump of my stereo blaring some hip-hop CD the moment I get off the elevator. I have had so many noise complaints the past six weeks, I am probably only one more away from eviction. I open the door slowly. The smell of bacon fills the room. Ethan is standing over the stove in the kitchen wearing a pair of my boxer-briefs. I set my coffee down on the counter and go to turn down the music.

"I'm making French toast," he announces. From the looks of it, the pills have already kicked in. He turns his back to me and throws an egg-battered piece of toast on the too-hot grill. It immediately starts smoking.

"Shit!" He grabs the pan and flips it over into the sink. The sound of cold water hitting the pan hurts my ears and I wince. "Sorry," he says. This is not the first time Ethan has attempted to cook, but it usually ends up with one of my pans getting ruined.

"I'm really not hungry," I say. He turns to get a new pan out of the cup-

board, then grabs a pair of tongs and takes the bacon off the grill.

"That's nice."

"Just stop what you're doing for a minute and come here," I say.

"Why? I'm busy."

"Please, Ethan." I turn and walk into the living room. He sighs and turns off the stove, then saunters over towards me in his usual fashion. He leans over to kiss me and I pull away.

"Sit down," I say. I realize that the boxers he is wearing are the same pair he wore our first morning together. He had cooked breakfast that morning as well. Pancakes, I think it was. What the hell was I thinking letting him stay?

We had met the night before at a club in the Village. Not somewhere I usually go, but I was in the mood to dance that night for some reason. He approached me as I was standing on the edge of the dance floor, debating whether or not I was drunk enough to make a complete ass of myself in front of all these people half my age. He grabbed my hand without saying a word and dragged me out onto the floor.

I couldn't take my eyes off him. He had taken his shirt off and had on a pair of tight black stretch pants. His chest was boyish, yet toned, and his lengthy black hair hung in his eyes in a way that made him look like a teen idol in the early 80's. His face was well proportioned and his features perfectly set into place, with bright green eyes that stood out in contrast against his black hair.

"Why don't you take your shirt off too? It's hot!" he yelled out over the music.

"No thanks," I smiled. He was swaying his hips wildly and I was barely moving mine.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Joseph," I said.

"I'm Ethan." He put his arms around my waist and swung my hips in sync with his. We danced like that for a long time but after awhile his rhythm started to become broken and he began to slow down his moves until he finally pulled away from me.

"Man, it's so hot," he said again,

fanning himself. His expression went to one of confusion, then what looked like exhaustion. "I think I need to go sit down for a moment. You stay here," he said, wagging his finger. "I'll be right back. Don't dance with anyone else," he called out over his shoulder as he was walking away.

"I'll go with you," I said.

"No," he panted. "I'll just be a second." I turned and watched him stumble over to the barstool and after a moment I followed. I figured he must have been high on something but I didn't have much experience with drugs, other than all of my prescriptions.

"You all right?" I asked. His face had gone pale and his eyes were glassy and dilated.

"Yeah, hang on," he said. He leaned over, nearly falling out of his chair, then got up and stumbled into the bathroom. I waited for nearly five minutes before I went in to check on him.

I found him lying on the floor near the sink. Luckily, he hadn't slipped in his own vomit. It looked like he had simply fallen over. His eyes were still open. I leaned over him in panic.

"Ethan," I said, shaking him. I had never been in a situation like this before and I didn't know if I should call for help or just try and draw him back.

"Look at the snowflakes," he said, his voice drowsy and guttural. He held up his hand and gazed at the tips of his fingers.

"You have to get up," I said, shaking him. "You don't want anyone to find you here like this." He looked up at me and nodded. Slowly, he leaned over on his arm, then pulled himself into a sitting position. I grabbed a paper towel and wiped the rest of the vomit off of his chin, then helped him to his feet.

"Thanks," he said, then to my amazement he started to walk away.

"Wait!" I called. "Where are you going?"

"Back to the dance floor, come on" he called, as if nothing had happened.

"Wait," I said again, running up behind him and grabbing him by the shoulder. He turned towards me and

the look in his eyes told me everything I needed to know. "Why don't you come with me."

He had been close to incoherent most of the night, unable to finish one thought before he moved on to the next. Like when he was telling me about how, as a little boy, his mother used have sex with her boyfriends while he was laying in bed next to them, which I thought was pretty serious, but a moment later he was laughing hysterically about how silly Japanese soap operas were. I just sat and listened for hours, holding him, fascinated by everything he said. Somewhere around 3 a.m. he stopped talking and asked if he could use my shower. When he came out of the bathroom he was completely naked and I just gazed at his body, mesmerized, not caring what was going on in either of our heads.

"The bacon's getting cold," Ethan says, breaking me out of my daze.

"It can wait," I say.

"Why are you so serious looking?" he asks, eyes shifting nervously. He leans forward and grabs the remote, then turns on the television and starts rattling on about what happened on *The Young and the Restless* the day before. I sit back and stare, tuning out his voice completely. I picture myself standing in front of the Coliseum, haggling with a Gypsy vendor over the price of some gaudy Catholic souvenir.

"This is serious, Ethan," I say when he finally stops, sounding more authoritative than I ever have with him. "At some point, it has to be."

"Whatever," he says, eyes lowered. I lean back into the couch and sigh. I hate the way I sound talking to him right now, as if he were a child. I never wanted to treat him that way.

"I'm going on a trip. I need to clear my head and not have to worry about anything, or anyone, for awhile," I pause looking at him. "I'll probably be gone a few months." Ethan just stares at the floor. "I can help you find a place to stay," I mutter, my voice starting to choke, which I absolutely cannot allow to happen again. I try to pretend like none of this is real, it is just a scene from movie or one of Ethan's soap

operas. All I have to do is say the lines I have rehearsed so carefully and it will all be over. Ethan says nothing. The tears come sooner than I expected and as I watch him, he seems utterly pathetic to me as he cries. Emotions I have never felt before swell up from somewhere inside of me. Ugly emotions. Cruel emotions. He looks up, not bothering to wipe his eyes.

"This is bullshit," he whispers, glaring at me. I want to slap him. Instead, I get up and stand up over him, then grab his chin and try to force him to look at me, but he turns his eyes away.

"I'm sorry," I say, firmly. He pulls back and covers his face with his hands. There is a long period of silence, then finally he asks,

"What this, all of a sudden? Are you fucking someone else?"

"Maybe I am," I say. "Maybe it's a lot of things. Like the drugs, for one. How can I trust you when you go around popping my pills behind my back all the time?" The expression of guilt on his face is terrific, but he surprises me by lifting up his head and looking me in the eyes.

"Your right," he says. "I don't know what to say, other than to tell you that I'll stop."

"Just like that? Well great, let's just forget about all this and go have a celebration fuck," I say, smirking.

"I'm serious," he says, eyes wild. The desperation in his voice is making me sick. I sit down.

"Bullshit, and it's more than that anyhow." I tell him. "It's the fact that you like hip-hop music and I like Nat King Cole. Or that you enjoy taking ecstasy and dancing all night until you fall over and I enjoy a quiet evening at home with a bottle of Merlot and an old movie. And it's the fact that if I let you stay here then I'm doing nothing but enabling you to keep throwing away your life." He wipes the tears from his face. The sun has risen high enough so that light is streaming in through the blinds and surrounding him completely. I can't see him clearly.

"The age difference doesn't mean shit. And neither does our differences,"

he says. The pain in his eyes is so deep, I have to look away. "I love you," he says. "I don't want to live without you. Just take me with you. We can get past all of this." If he only knew how much I would love to do just that. I have visions of him going back to the hotel room he had been staying at before I took him in, stripping off all of his clothes, then wrapping a noose around his neck and hanging himself. I become enraged.

"I need to go alone," I say. "And you know nothing about what it is to love someone other than yourself." This is a lie, but it seems the best way to put everything back on him, and he just might believe it too. It is so easy to make someone in his position think that they are being selfish. His tears come back and I shut my eyes. In my mind I see only an endless array of pill bottles, so many pills you had to have an electronic organizer to tell you when to take them all.

"You have to leave," I say. "Now. My flight takes off in three hours"

"But..."

"Now!" I shout. "Get dressed and go. I'll give you plenty of cash to get you by." I am expecting him to fall to his knees, have a temper tantrum, pull a knife on me. Instead, he climbs on top of me and starts kissing me, then I feel him grab my hand and press it to his crotch. I want to pull it out and suck him off, but instead I push him away, me so hard that he falls head first onto the floor. He tries to get up. My vision becomes blurry. I try and focus on something but cannot. All I can think about is hurting him. Never in my life have I been violent with anyone, but suddenly I lift up my leg and kick him in the side as hard as I can. He grabs his chest and begins sobbing hysterically. I turn and walk into the bedroom.

There is a safe in the wall behind the tapestry. I have been hiding my morphine supply in there ever since Ethan moved in. The pain that runs all throughout my body is almost constant now, but I refuse to take the morphine, despite what the doctor says. There is also a few thousand dollars in cash. I

open the safe and grab the cash, then tear open a syringe pack and dip it into a vial of morphine, and then another, until the syringe is full. I am so dizzy now that I can barely manage to close the safe. I see colors swirling in the air, forming rainbows. It is almost beautiful.

Back in the living room now. Ethan is still on the floor, his sobs growing louder by the moment. When he sees me he starts beating himself on the head with his fists, then tears his fingernails into his forearm so hard he draws blood. I want to kick him again. I want to hurt him so bad. He hurt me just by being here, how could it hurt so much?

"Stop it!" I yell, dropping to my knees on the floor next to him, the syringe in one hand and the cash in the other. I put down both and grab his arm.

"I'll follow you everywhere you go. I won't stop," he says. "You can't just get rid of me."

"As if you could even figure out how to get the fucking plane ticket. Jesus!" I stop and double over, clutching my chest, pain shooting through my rib cage. "Here," I say, grasping his arm just above the elbow. "This will make it all better." I hold the syringe out to him. He grabs it and looks at it for a moment, then smiles and lowers the needle into the vein on his forearm, letting the morphine enter his body slowly. That's when I notice there are quite a few red marks on his arm and his eyes become cloudy and his body is limp in my arms.

"I was in the safe earlier today too," he whispers. "Thanks. It's just what I needed."

"What? How the fuck did you know about the safe..." I say, my voice quivering. The colors have turned to black and the room is so cold. So dizzy now. I can barely hear him, his voice has become childlike.

"You keep the combination in your address book. Found it a few days ago. I slammed..." he pauses, catching his breath. "Two vials while you were gone." He smiles. "Felt great with the Vicodin."

"You..." I stutter, so hard to speak now. "You slammed two vials?"

Eyes roll back into his head and

he's breathing strange now mouth just drops open like an old man's, why do I feel so dizzy? It's almost funny, his expression and the white light glows from my chest, it is healing me. I can heal him too, he looks sick. Try to heal him but it doesn't work let myself try but his eyes oh god what the fuck is wrong with him have to do something.

"Ethan," I shake him. His head slides back and forth in slow motion. Have to say something, bring him back. "Open your eyes," I plead. He barely manages. Darkness falls all around me. I collapse to the floor. The tears, why I am I crying? I don't cry, not ever.

"Now you won't have to watch me die," I whisper, holding him. My voice is shaking. He touches my cheek. I lose all sense of time looking down at him, his beauty as his breath stops and his eyes sink back into his head. Blood dribbles from his left ear and his pulse is slowing now, it has stopped. I kiss him on the lips, put the syringe in his left palm. Have to get out of here.

I am getting out of here. Left the plane tickets on the counter and the suitcase is packed. Can't stay here now. Will take a cab, fuck the shuttle. Grab the suitcase the cash, he won't need that now got my coat. Want to leave but they'll think it's murder, you know, they'll be after me. My God, it was murder! Make sure it looks like suicide. Looking back at him now blood dribbles on the carpet, it will stain and someone else will clean it up and his body, what will they? Never mind. Have to go now. Head out the front door, there is no need to lock it, don't want nothing here. I am out the door now. Nothing but the pretty dead boy on drugs and the pills, oh god all of those pills, they stay behind in the medicine cabinet like a child's forgotten toys.

Saturday Night Fever Blisters

Paul Cordeiro

Steve sits next to Celia
and Tom sits nearer to Joyce.
Larry gets the taller Mary.
Steve says, "ask Celia
what she wants to drink."
Larry buys a round and asks.
"I want Sex-On-The-Beach," says Celia.
Everybody's eyes dance a striptease.
The boys have T-Bone steaks
while the three ladies nurse
their watered-down drinks.
"When do we dance?" Celia asks.
"These Brazilian passion songs
move too damn fast," says Steve.
Larry chews and doesn't care
which girl's lips move and what
itches between her legs.
"Their dames," Larry says,
"but we're brothers at war."
Larry shouts to the blond waitress
with the longest hair to bring him
another beer and a smile.
The noise and the smoke make Larry
think he's in the bush again.
"All I want is ten hours of sleep."
says Larry to Steve
who lights up a cigarette
after his steak hits the sweet spot.
"When are we going to dance?" Celia pleads.
"I'm waiting for the right slow one for us,"
Steve says over the drums and buzz
of voices clashing in the smoke.
He never whispers to Celia
that his engine's hot as Springsteen's
and how he wants to kiss her etcetera.

After resting on elbows for two hours
the house lights flood on
and their surrounded.
"I never got my dance," Celia says.
"Next time I won't bring them," Steve says,
and fiddles with the gold chain
dangling off the fat of his neck.
Steve and Larry and Tom go to their cars.
Mary and Joyce get in their cars.
"Good night, Steve." waves Celia, straggling
behind in the parking lot.
She looks up at the moon
and breathes a few deep breaths
and sighs. She's going to stop
at the first liquor store she sees.

The cigarette

Philip Madden

My grandmother would often light a
cigarette, place it in an ashtray and
then watch it burn down to the butt.
Unsmoked and untouched it would burn
itself away, disappearing into nothingness.

I would try to understand the reason
for this unnecessary waste, but being
young I was looking into a tarpit on
a dark, moonless night

Rationale For My Theatrics

Paul Cordeiro

She says Tom's different I've known him for twenty years
if you went out to screw somebody new
you'd be doing it for spite and that's not fair
so why don't you make the morning coffee and pay
another pile of bills and stop acting like Marlon Brando
and just treat me right and do whatever I want honey.
You ain't that good looking to me anymore
since you chose to turn his pockets inside out before
you ironed his pants I say love's bullshit
getting angrier than Marlon ever got at Stella
for forgetting to handwash his dozen white T's

Tom Love's Women Because

Paul Cordeiro

I ask Tom if she's the one he's been the most in love with ever
but he says he forgets and can't compare and he'll get back
to me on that like the commitment he hasn't made to Marlana
though he's finally getting closer to love like a coffin to the dirt hole
he's making of our friendship though he's quick to say buddy
guys have to stick together and the gals meaning the suckers
don't mind and get used to the way he has fun and teases
and slow grinds on them and why don't I act manly like him and stop
asking dumb blond questions he can't remember again

Tom's Eyes Said It All Too Clear

Paul Cordeiro

Knew they'd be lies and head games from the night
when Tom had that scared look in his eyes like when a cop car
siren turns on. Marlana sat there doing an eye twitch a slight
squirm on his lap nothing much to write on but the red hair I saw

turned to flames as his lung sacs sucked a crackhouse on fire
and the door barred with him in it as I discovered his eyes said
that I wasn't getting any celebration with them and her white skin
that loved lotion wasn't going to lather mine
and that's when I got pissed off and haven't stopped spitting

WAITING

Robert Thimmesh

Her body, pear-
shaped by
sixty-five years
of waiting for

mail
food stamps
rides
doctors
love
social workers
landlords
exterminators
death
relatives
medicine
sales clerks
salvation

Waiting for
Ebullient sunshine days,
Pain free wooded walks,
Coffee conversations,
Companionship's warm embrace,
Depression's flight,

She waits for
more than her
existence. Waiting for
a new existence of
pure being, no waiting.

Ballet

Alison Sadowski

A Group of girls,
In the middle of December.
Standing and waiting at the theater.
To go see the Nutcracker,
Because their mothers brought them.

WAITING

Robert Thimmesh

Her body, pear-
shaped by
sixty-five years
of waiting for

mail
food stamps
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A Prayer

Reed Roles

I pass from light
into shadow
and wrestle
the dark
alone.

The sun
has now gone
and the moon
whispers
her sleepy
drug.

But I won't sleep.
Somewhere in the night
he is there,
with the throat of god —
full of animal grace.

I lean on this vision
as if in need of a doctor.
I gather this prayer
into balls of light.

The Bee

Reed Roles

There is a humming
in my brain —
like a bee
trapped aainst a windowpane,
beating against the invisible
with desperate wings
trying in vain
for the other side
where flowers stem
the tide
of green fields.

Rue

Kelley J. White

I wanted to watch someone grow old
someone who remembered me beautiful
someone who would find me so now

I thought I would learn so much,
no, I thought I would be accepted
if time let me, maybe, love well

She who once was...

Kelley J. White

how foolish to be
a mother near fifty
braids down to my waist
but every day someone says
beautiful hair
and that is the only thing left to me
beautiful

Distance

Jack Dylan

a new cold enters the window
I lie naked in bed
wishing the wind will pick up
the things I have left on and around the floor
will transform, transcend, the laws of gravity

as I look for reassurance in my companion
next to me, i find that her hair is all mixed
up with the sheets, and not in the way
that used to be so endearing

her drool is sprayed on the pillow
and her arms are tangled in a web
I see this, and know that I too
must look hideous in her eyes.

I wonder how much longer this will go.

Mother Liberty

Steve Manchester

The twins were slain before her eyes
on the morn of 9-1-1,
when a band of cowards struck them down
in a Kamikaze run.

The screams came from a nightmare.
The black smoke choked the sky.
The hopes and dreams they held within
were gone with one last cry.

But mother had been watching,
where she stood on the shore.
As innocence crashed to its knees,
she heard it gasp, "To War..."

She'd always promised safety;
a better way of life.
"They thought they'd kill democracy
with cardboard cutting knives?"

While heroes sifted rubble
and thousands said good-bye,
she realized terror had not won?
her torch was still held high.

She gazed upon the skyline
where her twins once stood tall.
With pain and rage, she wailed aloud,
"You didn't kill us all!"

In time, the dust would settle.
She'd make the killers see:
The spirit of her children
was the reason they were free.

In the city some say never sleeps,
evil chose its path-
to taste the fruit of justice;
a grieving mother's wrath!



Two Minutes With Ayn Rand

Janet Kuypers

I don't believe in things that aren't proven,
that we have no evidence of, but sometimes,
sometimes, I still think about what I would do
if I had two minutes to talk to you

when someone asked me what I'd say
I said I'd rather hear you speak
I'm sure the words you would part unto me
would mean infinitely more
than what I could say to you

and if I could talk to you
I wouldn't know what to say

But I know I'd have to tell you
like so many of your fans in the past
that I thank you
for showing me
that there are logical people in the world
that man can live by reason
that reason is a virtue
that selfishness is a virtue
that I have a right to what I earn
to what I create
to what I know to be true

I would have been still searching blindly
for philosophical answers
to the meaning of life
if you never told me
that I am worth something
that I am my own end

and it's nice to know
that even when I'm surrounded by these
unthinking masses
that there are people who hold their minds
as the highest value
out there somewhere in the world

and the fact that they exist
helps me through my days

but you knew that
you wrote about these heroes
over the years
and how could you manage to write
gripping, thousand-page novels
about heroes that a rational mind
can't help but love
and did you really find that hero in real life?

Because I'm still looking.

You've created these heroes
but are they just created
does anyone else understand
these values as I do?

Yes, thank you
for giving me the answers
I've been looking for,
but tell me that someone else out there
found the answers too

so maybe, if those who posed
this unreasonable illogical ethical question
in the first place, if they could give me
another two minutes
so you could do some talking
maybe then you could explain to me
how to get through the days
when no one understands you
how to accept less than perfection
when you've seen the purity and the clarity
of the thinking mind

**Writers were asked to write: if you could talk to a
revered writer for two minutes, what would you say?
Kuypers chose a writer and a philosopher.**

True Happiness in the New Millennium

Janet Kuypers

“The only true freedom is freedom from the heart’s desires
And the only true happiness this way lies”

- Matt Johnson

I’m here to usher in a whole new millennium
I’m the new savior the savior of science
the savior of strength
the savior of survival
survival of the fittest
survival of the best
and I’m here to tell you we’re starting anew
so fasten your seat belts
hang on to your hats
place your seat trays in their upright and locked position
for it’s a bumpy ride, and I’ll tell you why

I’m here to usher in a whole new millennium
the millennium of reason and logic and strength
and I don’t want to hear about your self-destruction
I don’t want to hear your whining, psychosis,
your depression, suicide, alcohol and drugs
and just what made you think that playing with needles
and escape would make things better somehow
God, I’ve always hated needles anyway
what is it with you people

well, you need a leader and I’m stepping up to the plate
you keep asking for a big brother and I’m here to set you straight
you want someone to wipe your noses for you
well, pick up the damn tissue and do it yourself
because when you give up your rights, you take away mine
and we’re not having any of that

I’m here to usher in a whole new millennium
and you say to me you need crystal meth
so you can stay awake through work
and you say to me that you don’t need to drink,
that you just like the taste
and you say to me that with all your escapism
you still don’t feel any better
and you say to me that sometimes suicide
is the only answer

I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium
I'm here to usher in a whole new generation
so stop asking for things and start working for things
because X is for ecstasy as long as it's fast
and X is for extra but there's always a cost
and ecstasy doesn't come without extra work
no matter how many corners you cut
and you know, X is for X-Ray and I see right through that

they say that Eve ate from the tree from knowledge
but you know, she shouldn't have stopped just then
cause the loggers are raping the trees of knowledge
the loggers are raping the forests of talent
the forests of ability the forests of reason
of skill of logic preserverance and life
we're letting them rape the forests of excellence
and you know it's now time to take it all back
because I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium
and I'm here to tell you how it's going to be done

you're looking for peace in all the wrong places
you're asking your leaders to save you from yourself
but your leaders are losers and they're worse off than you

I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium
where it's time to take charge and it's time fess up
only you can deliver you from your own sins
but first you must know what sin really is

it's time to make choices and it's time to lay claim
to everything we've been blindly giving away
because I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium
take charge of yourself, and I'll take charge of me
I'm my leader, not yours, so wipe your own damn noses

take it in to your hands, people, mold your own tools
this is the new millennium, and this is your chance
because no one should be showing us how to fail
people mastered that feat a millennia ago
so set your own rules and do something fast
cause it's time to take charge and it's time to be alive

I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium
And I'm waiting for you to usher in yours
Because true happiness this way lies, my friend
and I won't wait long if you lag behind
cause I'm setting my rules so step out of my way

I'm here to tell you there's a new sensation
and I'm here to tell you there's a new salvation
and that true happiness this way lies

Social Theory

Anna Cates

Begins something like this:
Only the strongest survive—
Only the smallest
Crust of the upper 1%—

Meaner than the paper-thin sliver of cake
Slanted onto Scarlet O'Hara's china plate.

She pecked one crumb before lamenting,
"Oh I declare—I just can't eat another bite!"

The rest of us are floating
In a river like a yellow-haired hound.
Cold currents beat against our steady dog paddle
Till we loose our upstream pace, floundering,
And burble down the flow,
Subsiding, submerging,
Helplessly, hopelessly downing.

Social theory
Ends something like this:
Water-logged,
We wash up the bank,
Under the deadened brambles
At the foot of the loneliest range
To furnish the soil our fertilizing mange.

caroline brings me oranges

John Dorsey

and i always forget to say thank you
too drunk always too drunk

and too chicken shit to say
i think i love you

so instead of using them for baseballs
i swallow their meat
and pour the juice into old wounds

this is the closest thing
to graditude
i can think of before 3 pm.

untitled

Jack Dylan

I never possessed humanity
nor did I think I did
All I thought I really had was
a cheap suit
a few cigarettes
and a drink
to carry me through the night
these things would offer nothing
and i offered nothing in return.
What could I offer the night?,
the black, dark, night,
the night that I knew nothing of
except for the fact that
2 and a half seconds meant a lot there.

After Thanksgiving

Anna Cates

Raindrops fall heavier than yesterday's cheeseburgers
and turkey.
Pellets pound down like harsh words over a trailer park
family,
Experiencing the aftermath of feasting.

A son pukes in the shower and just leaves it there—
The phone is off the hook,
But all the flowers have been watered.

A daughter stands before the looking glass and drowns
inside the mirror,
Screaming inside, mouth wide open—
Fat, where a tan should be.

A mother has thrown herself into bed,
Wanting to go back to a time when her face was not so
ripe and red and
Heavy arms and legs didn't pin her down to the mat-
tress like she were dead.

Her hand stretches out as if an apple has been released.
She stares outside the dripping window,
Remembering when she forced herself a jog.
The sounds of rain keep speeding up
Like runners that catch up with you then pass you by.

Junior's little head jots around the room.
Happier than all the rest,
He laughs at how they seem to love themselves the best.

My old memories
they came back to me
and not in the way that old memories usually do.
They came back with her gesture
they came back with her hand on my shoulder
they came back with her perfect lips
smiling at me
telling me that she loved me

And then I was lost
I didn't know how to react
I didn't know what to do
I didn't know what was the appropriate thing to do
and I didn't really care
So I took Jane in my arms
and I hugged her
her hair- smelling of cigarette smoke
her hair, deep and black and thick
her hair, the jungle to lose myself in as I had before
to lose myself in with symphony music playing
years ago
in the outdoor symphony
with me- no idea where to go from there
and with her-
right there holding my hand
having no idea where to go herself

But now things are different
now we are all grown up
now, we have responsibilities
and people to account to and
God knows what else.

But in that hair,
in that smell of that hair,
in that hint of that hair,
there was something else lingering under the surface
and we were both trying to figure out what it was.

untitled

Jack Dylan

"And here's one
I came up with the other night"
He said, and we all listened
Mike is always full of
dumb ideas
so we take them for what they're worth.

"What if instead of mixing your drinks
with coke and all that other bad shit
that does nothing but dehydrate you
you mix it with V8 and gatorade
so instead of the hangover
you get the cure?"

The idea sounded sickening
and with good reason.
Unless you're one to drink Red Bull
with Gin
you'll know what I'm talking about.

Sure all of us that imbibe hate the hangover
but it's part of the experience
you might feel like shit
but you feel like you're doing *something*
and that it's real.

Too much of our lives
we sway into and out of
situations
that never materialize in anything other
than our fantasies.

But here we have the excuse for everything
and you want to make an excuse for *that*?
it destroys the whole equation that we've created
and leaves us out in the cold.

playing with fire (for Caroline Gauger)

John Dorsey

we're sitting in a diner
when tim tells me to never sell out

meet an older woman
move to europe
you knew ginsberg

he's afraid i'll find a job
a house
a pattern behind some long picket fence
which all sounds pretty good

he wasn't there when i rolled quarters for condoms
in some little room in south philly
so as not to hear the pitter patter of tiny feet

he wasn't there when nobody told me i was beautiful
and that room closed in
old and silly like the bloom of some aicient tulip

and i'd like to tell him that nobody knows anyone anymore
except ghosts ringing bells on posts
who know my voice
and hear it still

but i can't because there's another girl
who's neck i'd like to kiss
younger than the last
who doesn't live in the spirit world.

ROOM 13

David-Matthew Barnes

You brought me here,
You son of a bitch.
You couldn't stand to be alone.
Lay me down.
You think you're so cool, thick,
Like your wallet.

The carpet is the color of rotten apricots.
I can hear orgasms through the wall.
Scares me a little, to look at you.
I have to go now.
I have a bus to catch.
Thanks for the ashtray.

Snacks

by Irving

As war broke out in one country,
fat arses in another, longed to sit down
and get fatter
while watching TV and eating snacks.

As the troops raged,
for whatever reasons they had been told
they were fighting for,
another nation of people stuffed burgers
in their mouths
with their beer and TV
close at hand

"What are we fighting for?"
said one soldier, longing for a burger.
His friend turned to answer, thinking of a sofa

At the same time he spoke,
fat arses sat, beer got drank
and snacks got consumed
like there was no tomorrow

"We are fighting so we can be free to...."
Eat snacks, watch TV, drink beer
and sit on sofas

"Don't you want to do something worthwhile?"
said a TV advertisement for the army
the viewers continued with their snacks.

Patriotism Prayer

Joe Hart

At the Catholic costume party
The Pope dressed up like a clown,
And two airplanes went up
And two buildings fell down.
And we got "what we deserve"
Jerry Falwell said.
And the Reverend W. Bush
Bowed his head.
And the people hung their flags out
And asked for heaven's pity
While all night long it rained
In New York City.
It rained upon the rubble
And it rained upon the diggers.
And Jesus loves just everyone
But heathens, queers and niggers.
And the Vatican spoke out
To avert a war.
The Church does not burn witches
Anymore.

On George's other friends

Joseph Hart

Love as many people as you like,
Have as many lovers as you want,
Just don't fall in love with someone else,
And love me best.
I will be here after you have gone
In my dusty ill-considered house
Imagining you as the morning comes
And wishing we were on the telephone;
Submitting my indifferent little poems
To indifferent little magazines;
But not growing older. No, not me.

Flashbacks

Pierre Roustan

Every time I see
Her face tremble,
The tyrants of fear
Teeming in her heart--

Every time I watch
Her look at me
With eyes upon a demon
Desiring to devour her--

Every time I hear
Her convulsions carry
The king of chaos
In her fragile voice--

Every time I touch
Naked time on her skin,
Feeling it shed
Sheer contamination--

I remember the man
Who did this to her
In the past--
Wishing I could kill him.

Lovestruck

Pierre Roustan

Her cinnamon sensuality enchants
My eyes--her eyes
Coddle me, a sweet starry
Ambrosia is she.

Her fascinating beauty,
Her blueberry charm,
Her passion of peace
Showers me like
Fudge over vanilla icecream--
It amazes me.

Like brindled gingerbread,
I stand before her--
Her gossamer
Wings breezing me,
Her cavalier spirit
And her flippant features
Of strawberry candy
Hues giving supple sentiments,
The mirror made
Easier to envision my face.

To know who I am
That is pure and good--
And wishing I could sleep
Inside her,
This sacred place.

Climax

Pierre Roustan

The rise--
It builds in me,
My body shaking hard
At the high cliff's edge; I leap off
Screaming.

Ben, I Have Not Dreamed

Karyna McGlynn

Ben, I have not dreamed
of your dead mother's old blue Chevy.

Ben, I have not dreamed
I am crawling across that cracked vinyl to you.

I have not dreamed of the Aqua-Net air,
the cold cream air-conditioning. Ben,

I have not dreamed
we are going to pick ripe figs today,

have not dreamed I am feeling
the tiny rivers of juice
down my arm when we split them.

Ben, I have not dreamed:
the cigar smoke,
the gold bond smoke,
the stuck window.

I have not dreamed that I will jump out for beans
and fill my pockets,
that they will 'snap'
like green bones in our fingers.

I have not dreamed I am watching Mud-Dauber nests
while you polish saddles, have not dreamed

the blood of your swift knife inside the cold fish,
have not dreamed

of your red Vizsla dying at your boots, Ben,

I have not dreamed you are sending me letters
that I am not answering, Ben,

have not dreamed of the lines that crease your eyelids
and the liver-spots,

have not dreamed of this house
cinching you in like a yellowing corset.

Ben, I have not dreamed of age
sifting the boulders from your voice
and leaving sand.

Ben, I have not dreamed that I am outliving you,
have not dreamed that I am only a little girl,
or of the weeds in the onion rows.

Ben, I have not dreamed of the rotting Fig
dropping fruit at my feet,

have not dreamed the dreamless nights,
crossing drunk waters
to your hot Louisiana bed.

Ben, I have not dreamed the memory
of your leather arms and white shirts entwining,
snapping at my wheels and heels
as I come for you in fever.

Ben, I have not dreamed
of looking down at my sticky hands
and waiting for your heart to turn over again
like an old blue Chevy.

Essay on a News Report (67)

Michael Ceraolo

With the approach of the first anniversary of the tragedy
the 'corporate citizens' day was made
by the pseudo-news stories that heavily advertised
the fact that on the pseudo-holiday
they would refrain from advertising

acceptable levels

Roger Stukey

all your life the reclusive
"they" sell you chemicals
in your food
in your water
in your air
and then when you die of...
(whatever)
someone finally shows
some courage
(and fills you with chemicals
in person)

performance art

from a live Chicago performance art show, reading & CD

this show, called "Six One One," was performed live in Chicago June 11 2001. It is also available on CD.

NASA Project

I've always loved astronomy.

I've kept the telescope I had since I was a child, I remember tracking the motion of the stars to the horizon when I was six with my sister when she took a high school astronomy class, I've witnessed two comets, I've even had a star past the base of the constellation cygnus named after me.

I've studied black holes, tried to learn more about astro-physics, the whole nine yards.

And I have noted that there are studies and possibly plans for NASA, after setting up the space station, may be planning a colony on the moon for inhabitants, as part of a test to study which would also entail the long-term-effects of a change in gravitation force on the human body.

And I heard this, that there may be plans for this within the next twenty or thirty years, and I thought,
my god,
I am meant for this,
I would be perfect for this.

But then I thought,
what would I do there, why would they want me there

and...

I'm a journalist, I've written all my life
and I'm a designer
and my job would be
to catalog what is going on at the colony
and to distribute news to the colony
about what is going on on the moon
and maybe also even about what is going on on earth.



And I liked this plan, it would seem fitting, give me occasional feeds through occasional transmittals of information for me to pass on to the colony, and I would catalog historically what is happening here for people on earth to learn from, this sounds like the perfect thing for me

and then I though,
wow,

I would disseminate all information to this colony of people on the moon. I would be their only link to news.

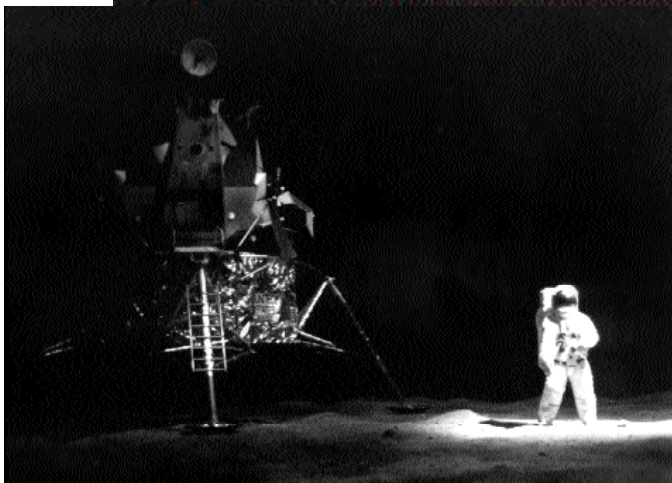
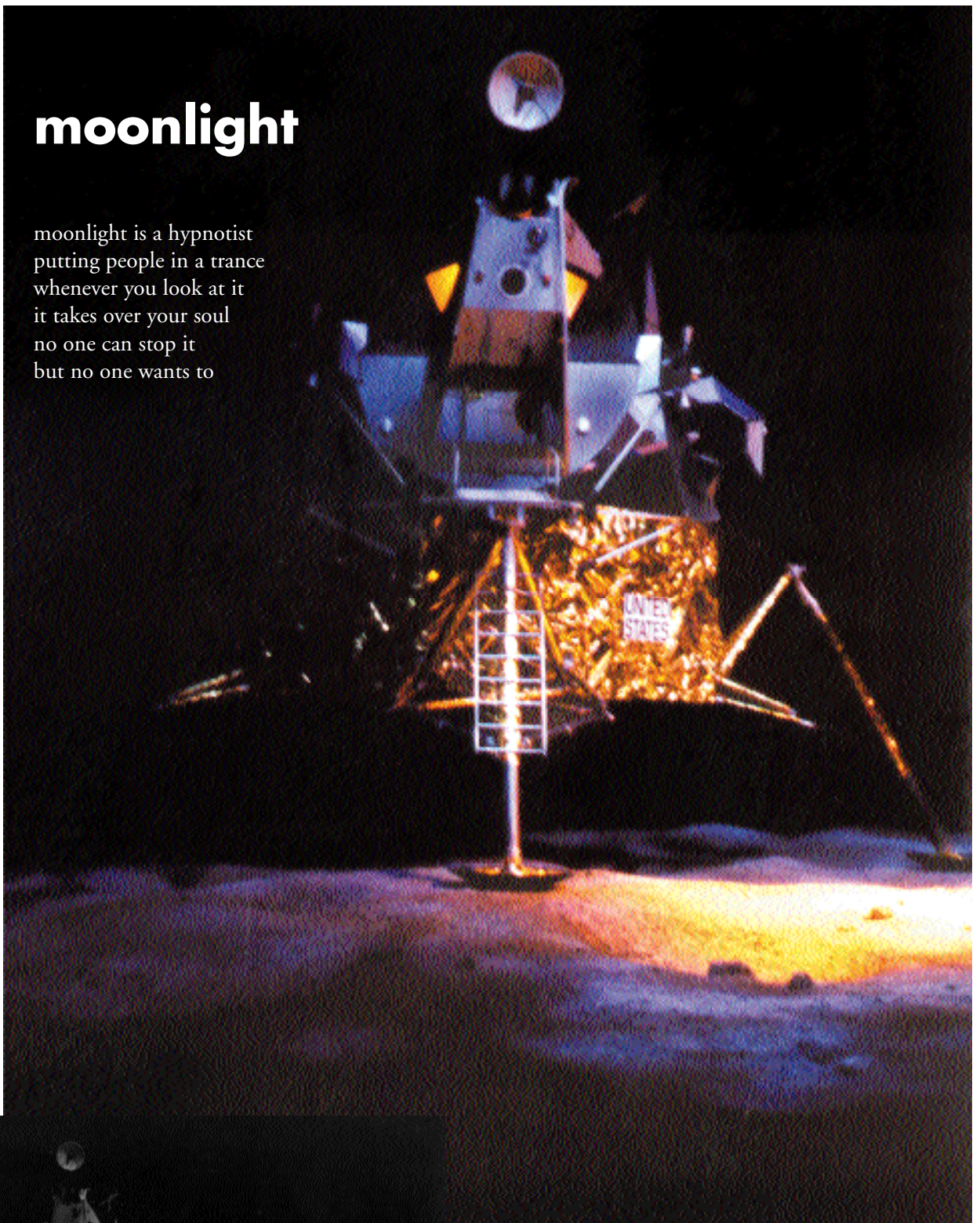
I could tell them anything.

Just think about this for a moment: I could tell them anything and they wouldn't be able to use another source to prove me wrong, I could tell them I sang the national anthem for the President,
no really, I don't have that bad of a voice,
because we were leaving to live on the moon,
and these people would believe me.

I wonder if I had to write reports to send back to earth, would I have to tell them about the hypnotic effects of the earthlight, because, you know, everyone talks about how wonderful it is to be in the moonlight.

moonlight

moonlight is a hypnotist
putting people in a trance
whenever you look at it
it takes over your soul
no one can stop it
but no one wants to



looking for a worthy adversary

I've been looking for a worthy adversary
someone I can lock horns with
because although my life makes more sense when I'm alone
it's not nearly as interesting

I've been looking for a worthy adversary
someone I can battle to the death with
because it can't be about love, you see
love can't exist on the terms I demand
it's never that pure

I've been looking for a worthy adversary
and so I slither up to you like a snake
and I tempt you with a golden apple

but all I was offering you
was fruit from the tree of knowledge

I didn't know how willing you were
and I didn't know you'd have
a thing or two to each me too

because as I've been looking for a worthy adversary
all this time I've been playing a part
an actress on a stage, spouting the lines on cue
and that role was getting tiresome
but those stage lights still came on night after night
and I still had to play my part

until on my night off I saw your performance
at the theatre down the street
and you know, your protagonist
was doing what I was doing
right down to faking it with people who don't matter
right down to going home and still feeling empty

and you know, I'm beginning to wonder
if we can get together
and write our own play

it would be a masterful performance, you know
and as that curtain would close we'd hold each other's hands
and walk off the stage
and the audience would know that there is a happy ending

and now when I walk out on to the set
and there you stand, in front, stage left
I wait for my cue to make my move
none of the rest of the scene matters to me, you know

maybe they'd like our little play, maybe they wouldn't
who really cares

you now tempt me and tease me and torment me
and tell me everything I was too afraid to believe
and show me the knowledge that always escaped me

and when you talk you reach your hand into my brain
and pull out my thoughts and shove them into your mouth
and spit them back at me

and instead of filling me with terror
it fills me with joy

I've been looking for a worthy adversary
and maybe you are much more than that

because now every day is Valentine's Day
and now it's like candy and flowers and springtime
and hearts and cupids and sunshine
and you know it's scary
these cleches are actually beginning to make sense

because now I wait for you to come on stage again
for our next wonderful performance
where we have our happy ending
where you tell me what I already know

Work Journal One

At my job I'm hated for being good at my work and I'm hated for trying to make myself better. Everyone has given up here, so I have to pick up the pieces after them. Others scream because they don't like hearing the answers I give to the questions they ask. They all just want me to do everything, and they want me to smile about it. No one can finish a job here; no one cares to. Then everyone wonders why I'm not *happy* here; then everyone thinks I'm overreacting. With my coworkers now there's no sense of pride or else there's an egoism coupled with a complete disregard for others. And the thing is, I hate the fact that people hate me when I'm right. I feel like I'll have to settle for the rest of my life.

Settle for idiots telling me what to do.

Settle for idiots hating me because I have pride.

Settle for idiots loving me, idiots who don't know why they love me.

I feel like I can't be an optimist forever when the odds are continually stacked against me. I have nothing but my mind to help me with this fight, when everyone else is fighting me by shutting their minds off.

How do I live in the middle of a barren desert?

Remember and Get it straight, Janet - Keep telling this to yourself and maybe you'll believe it: Whenever you're at work, **YOU'RE NEVER RIGHT**. You're overbearing, obnoxious, and you always think you're right. All you have to do is follow orders. No one wants you to use your mind. Just follow the whims of everyone who wants to rule you. Don't make waves. When they change their minds, don't ask why. Always take the blame, especially when it's not your fault. Always smile. Always be courteous. Always thank people, even if it's for doing something they were responsible for. Especially thank them for that, because who are you to think that people should know or do anything? Who are you to think?



Work Journal Two

Why I'll Never Get Married



at work we've been looking
for a new employee
we've sifted through resumes
we've interviewed a few

and some were good
some were very good
and we took some time to decide
and then we called our #1 choice

and they said they wanted
more money than we offered
so we said our goodbyes
and we called our second choice

and they said they couldn't work
at such a small place
so someone at work said
we should interview some more

and that's when i knew
at the rate we were going
we'd never find anyone
and no one would want us

A co-worker quit from the company I work for today. I work in an office with about thirty-five people. Now this co-worker was in charge of our trade shows and quit two days before our annual trade show was about to begin. Apparently she was at a meeting about the trade show and someone else started badgering her and twenty minutes after the meeting she was on the phone with her husband saying, "It's been bad enough that every day after work I cry when I get home, but now I'm on the phone crying while I'm at work." So her husband told her it's okay if she wants to leave, they can work it out. So leave she did. She collected her things, said, "Fuck you all, I'm quitting," and just... left.

Now I only got to hear about this scene second-hand, I didn't actually see her or even get to say good-bye to her, and that's a real shame because I probably would have shook her hand and thanked her for doing something that just about every person in our office has pretty much dreamt about on a daily basis. I mean, when I heard about what she did I let out a low, sadistic laugh, you know, one of those laughs that comes from really deep down, because we haven't had one of those angry quitting scenes in a while, and believe me, they're always fun to watch.

And I laughed like that because I know what she was going through and I know what a relief it must have been for her to do it.

She's not the first person to do this to my boss, and I'm sure she won't be the last. Once I saw a saleswoman walk right up to my boss in the hallway, get right up in his face, and tell him, "You're an ass-hole. You have no idea how to run this business. You are incompetent, and so are your favorite employees. You make me sick. I quit."

I've only been here four years, and I can tell I can't take it here much longer, but in these past four years I've seen a turnover rate of like forty percent or something and the retraining alone puts too much stress on a staff...

the Battle at Hand

I wanted you to know
that I was on a mission when I saw you
and that I was a warrior
and you were just a helpless victim
that couldn't fight my weaponry

that wouldn't fight my weaponry

I would come in to town
and pillage and rape
and rape and pillage
depending on how you put it

and rape is such a hard word, you know,
entirely inappropriate for this
because I made sure that you wanted me
before it was all over
because I have a knack for doing that
when I fight my battles

this is how I care to think of you.
I was on a conquest
and i came fully equipped with ammunition
I had bayonets
I had a rifle
with rounds of bullets in a chain
thrown over my shoulder
I had a .22 caliber magazine loaded hand-gun

I didn't even need to use the hand-grenade
or the tear gas

even before i started using my tongue as a weapon with a kiss
I used it as a weapon with words
and I knew I had won you won over from the start
you looked at me when I spoke
and I think you might have actually wanted to listen to me

and I would never have to resort to violence
to get what I wanted from you

I know I wasn't ready for a battle before
but I want you to know
that I came ready to fight

and no, it was not a momentous moment in my life
it was just a moment
a conquest, a battle,
and in my own mind,
I won the war

you thought I would always want you
and you know, I liked winning the battle,
but I'll have to work again
so that you don't come back to haunt me
because we weren't meant to be anything to each other
and you were just a conquest for me
a battle won

people thought we would never get along.
but I know better
I know there is no such thing as NOT getting along with
me
and I know I can make anyone like me
as I did with you

you were easy prey, you know.



The Effects of Nine One One

Today is June Eleventh, exactly 9 months after the September 11 crashes.

It's strange, has everyone even thought about the fact that the terrorists decided to destroy greatness on nine one one?

It's strange, how close I came to losing friends and family:

my friend didn't happen to go to the Trade Center on business that week,
my brother-in-law lost a slew of contacts who died in New York,
the Pennsylvania plane landed a mile from my sister-in-law's house,
my friend in D.C. wasn't hurt but he talked about how different streets would be closed on different days and that there were so many military guard there you felt like you were in a war zone,

which in a way, you were.

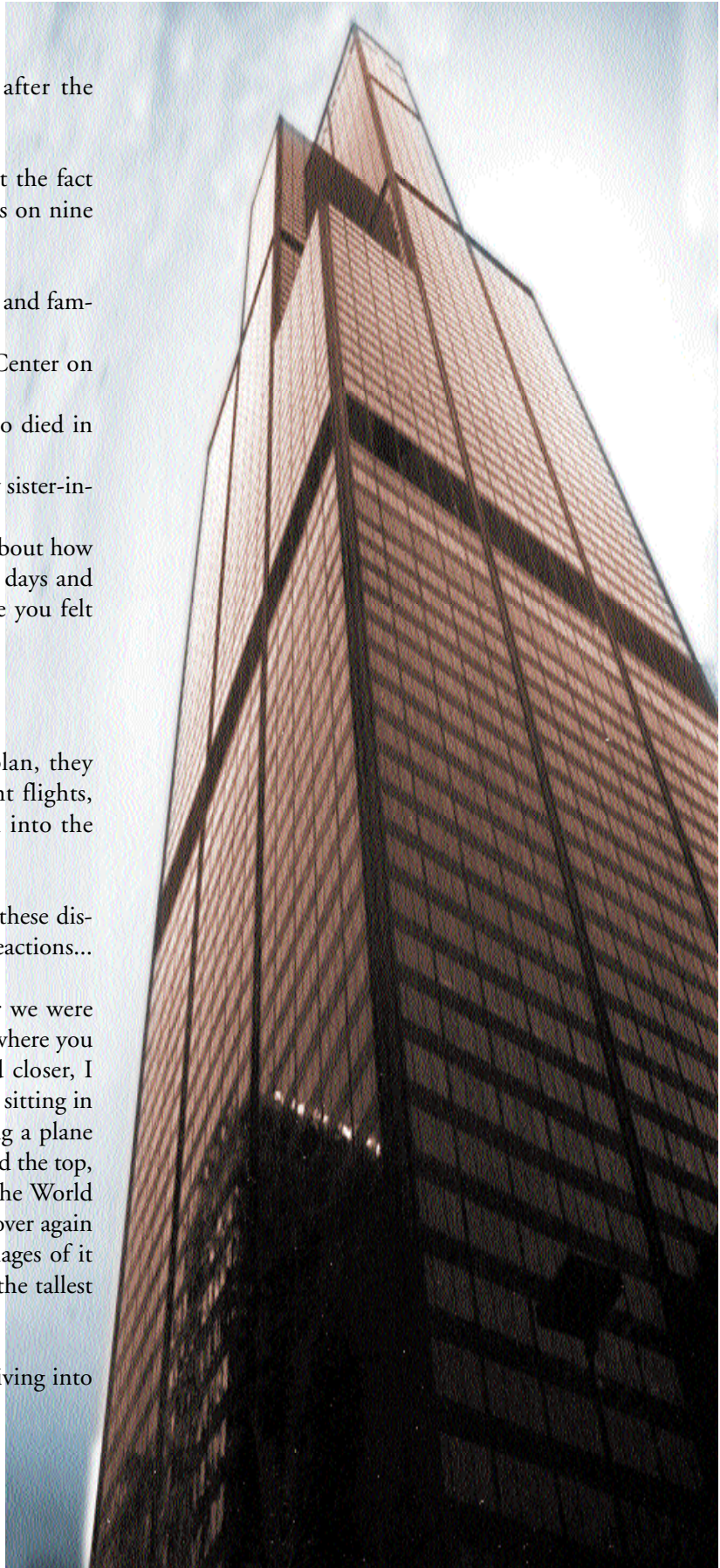
And these terrorists, they had a masterful plan, they were stopped that day from starting different flights, and one of them was slated, I think, to sun into the Sears Tower.

I mean, think about the emotional effects of these disasters. I know different people had different reactions...

I know that for months afterward whenever we were driving toward the loop, taking the Kennedy where you could see the Chicago skyline get closer and closer, I know that every time we drove by, I would be sitting in the passenger seat and I would imagine seeing a plane fly right into the side of the Sears Tower, toward the top, to the side, exactly like how it happened to the World Trade Centers. Like how you saw it over and over again on television, when we were flooded with images of it on the news. I'd see a plane flying right into the tallest building, this landmark to Chicago.

I still see that sometimes, whenever we are driving into the city,

imagining witnessing the destruction,
seeing it all,
and thinking,
what do you do then?





New to Chicago

I'm still new to this city
I know, I know, I've been here for years
but I haven't gone to the Sears Tower Observatory
since my Junior Prom

but when I walk by the First Chicago building
the beams along the north side
sloping up, parabolic pillars curving up to the sky

when I walk by the First Chicago building
I walk up along the side
and lean up against one of the sloping pillars
press my body against the cold concrete
feel the cold against my chin, my breasts, by thighs

and look up along the curve,
stretching up towards the sky

you know, these pillars look like race tracks
and I could see something come rushing down that curve
a matchbox car, a race car
a marble, a bowling ball
a two-ton weight

I see the seed, the power, and it
almost makes me afraid to look up

and every time I walk by the First Chicago building
I do the same thing, I do this little ritual
and it feels like the first time

from **Right There, By Your Heart**

have you ever had that feeling before, you know, the one when someone is telling you something you don't want to hear, like if someone was about to tell you that someone died and you knew what they were going to say and you still didn't want to hear it, or if someone did something to you you didn't like, like when you were little and the kids at the bus stop shot pebbles and spit balls at you every day because you were smart and you still had to go to the bus stop every morning and just try to ignore them? and when that happens it feels like a medium sized rock just fell into the bottom of your stomach, and you don't want to move because you're afraid that the rock will hurt the inside of your stomach and so you just have to sit there and hope the rock goes away? or else you get the feeling in your chest, right between your lungs, it feels like someone is pressing against the bone there, right there by your heart, and you've got to breathe, you're not going to be able to take that pressure, that force any longer?

i don't know how many times the idea of seeing him went through my mind. at least once a week i'd imagine a scene where he'd confront me, and i'd somehow be able to fight him back, to show him that he didn't bother me any more, to show him that the rock wasn't there any more. to somehow be able to prove that i wasn't a victim any more. i was a survivor. that's what they call it now, you see, survivor, because victim sounds too trying for someone who has been raped. so i keep saying i'm over it but i keep imagining mark all over again, not raping me, but following me on the street, coming to my door with flowers, or sending me a valentine. but once, when i saw him walking out of a record store as i was walking in, the rock fell so hard that i thought i was going to be sick right there by the cash register, right there by those metal things at the doorway that beep when you try to take merchandise out of the store, you know what those things are, i just can't think of what they're called. but if i did that, then he'd know he was still winning, to this day. how many years has it been? how many years since he did that to me? how many years since i've been wanting to fight him, since i've been feeling that rock in my god-damned stomach? i managed to hide my face from him in the store so he didn't see me as he walked out. when i saw he was gone, i wondered why i still felt the pressure in my chest. i thought the pressure was going to turn my body inside-out. i reached for my heart, grabbed at my shirt. maybe the pain was always there, right there, by my heart, but i try not to think of it until i go through times like those.

the Burning



I take the final swig of vodka
feel it burn it's way down my throat
hiss at it scorching my tongue
and reach for the bottle to pour myself another.
I think of how my tonsils scream
every time I let the alcohol rape me.
Then I look down at my hands --
shaking -- holding the glass of poison --
and think of how these were the hands
that should have pushed you away from me.
But didn't. And I keep wondering
why I took your hell, took your poison.
I remember how you burned your way
through me. You corrupted me
from the inside out, and I kept coming back.
I let you infect me, and now you've
burned a hole through me. I hated it.
Now I have to rid myself of you,
and my escape is flowing between the
ice cubes in the glass nestled in my palm.
But I have to drink more. The burning
doesn't last as long as you do.



Death Takes Many Forms.

It is winter now.
The trees have lost their leaves;
the city is covered in a thin layer of soot and snow.
The grass is dead.
In the sunless sky black birds circle overhead
searching for prey.
An eerie cold settles over everything.
Nothing is growing anymore.

Death takes many forms.
For you, death first came when you were five years old
and your mother had to give you three shots of insulin a day
until you could take a needle to yourself.
Did it hurt to push that needle into your arm, the first time?
Or did it hurt you more to know you had no choice?

Death takes many forms.
Death can be someone telling you without trying
that they are losing their sight.
Behind coke-bottle glasses you would see me and say,
"That's a nice black suit you're wearing."
And I would tell you, "It's green."
And you wouldn't believe me.
You wouldn't hear the howling wind of the changing seasons.
Death takes many forms.
I know what follows the autumn wind.
It is winter now.
Do you remember when it happened?
The changes are subtle, the temperature drops,
first only slightly. It's almost imperceptible.
Only when the first snow falls do you realize
where the seasons have gone.

Death takes many forms.
Death can be a sweat-soaked shirt, the shakes, dizziness
when you needed food.
You would look as pale as a ghost
as I would hold your cold wet arm and steady you.
Quick, some sugar will make everything better.
Isn't everything better yet?

Death takes many forms.
The signs of death can come
when you lose your circulation.
"My feet are numb, Janet," you'd say.
"I can't feel my feet anymore."

And I would rub your feet for you,
and you would say it makes a difference,
you feel better.
If only I could do this forever.

Death takes many forms.
I said good bye to you to travel my own road
but I didn't think it was the last good bye.
How was I to know?

Are you trying to teach me a lesson?
Because if you are, well,
I've learned it. Trust me, I have.
You can come back now.

Death takes many forms.
And now, now it seems
you've taken me down with you
you've taken me into that casket with you
and I'm running my hand along your jacket lapel
and I can feel the coldness of winter all around me
and I can hear them shoveling the dirt over my head
and I want to get out
and I want to take you with me.

Death takes many forms.
Death can be that hole you left,
you know, right over here, just a little to the left.
I keep wondering when the pain will go away.
When will everything be better.

You once showed me that winter could be beautiful.
Instead of the dark and dirty snow lacing the city streets
you showed me a quieting snowfall,
over a lake at your parent's back yard
glistening in an untouched whiteness.
I told you I hated winters
and you told me, "This you don't hate."

Well, I'm still learning.

It is winter now.
And death takes many forms.
The seasons change for you and I.
It is snowing. And something is ending.
It is snowing. Somewhere
it is snowing.

Seven One One Part One

Dave, after I dated him for a year and a half, was the gentleman who died.

I was traveling when he died and was unable to go to his funeral.

I never saw him lying in the casket, {where the undertakers had to sew his lips together,} maybe I needed to see him so I could really say goodbye.

Because four months later,

on seven eleven,

I almost died in a car accident, unconscious for eleven days, had severe skull fractures.

After losing my car, my home and my health, all I could do was try to recover.

They even called me Elvira Doe in the hospital because they couldn't find any identification, which was buried under the seat of my totaled car.



But while in the hospital I kept imagining Dave coming to visit me, he came in through another hospital entrance so no one saw him

and no one knew he was alive, and he was there for me.

And I wasn't alone.

I felt so alone in the hospital all those weeks, maybe it was my brain's way of trying to fill in all the unexplained gaps in my life.

While recovering I even imagined my friend Brian, who now lives in San Francisco,

Dressing up in old woman's clothing and staying in the room like a patient with me so I wouldn't be alone.

And no, he was never in the hospital,

and yes, I shared my hospital room with an old woman who was a patient I had never met before,

and no, I never even talked to this lady,

While recovering I even hallucinated that I was in my apartment and not in a hospital bed

Because I REFUSED to believe that ANYTHING was wrong with me

Death is a Dog

Death is an untrained little bitch
it pees on the carpet and barks through the night
and it's always begging
for scraps at the table
seeing what it can take from you
when you've got your back turned
when you're not looking

when you want it to heal,
well, it never does
and it never rolls over
and it never plays dead

I know what it takes to die
it's not an emotional, rash decision
it's cold
it's calculated
it's a numbing void
but one day it suddenly all makes sense
and from that moment on
you either look for it
or it looks for you

Death is an untrained little bitch
and I've been begging for it, I tell you
but it doesn't come when you call
I leave a bowl of water out
and a bowl of dried dog food
and you know, I never see it eating
but when I check the bowl is empty

and I still refill the bowl

and vacuum the dog hair
that sticks to the couch
and spray air freshener
in the living room
because no matter how hard you try
you can never get rid of the smell

Death is an untrained little bitch, I tell you
and what it boils down to is this:
you won't get along with her
and she won't get along with you

under the bed,
eating your slipper,
while you try to sleep
and remind yourself
that there are no monsters
waiting for you
to shut your eyes



she'll claim her territory

Seven One One

Part Two

I was in pain all the time, painkillers didn't help, my back was sore, my head ALWAYS hurt, my sinuses were terrible. I wanted the Hell out of the hospital but I couldn't take the first steps to do it. I could barely even stand. They strapped me in my bed at night, and once I con-torted my way out of the harness, wrapped it up and set it on the nightstand; the nurses thought it was strange that the straps were next to my bed, and when my mother saw how the harness was wrapped, she KNEW that I had to have done it.

I had to fight every step of the way in that hospital. Three different doctors viewing my records even knick named me "miracle girl", but learning to walk was no miracle to me,

I just had to work harder to prove everyone wrong and try to get my life back.

Changing Garments

Agonies are
one of my changes of garments

I do not ask the wounded person
How
He
Feels
Or
Who
He
Is

I myself become the wounded person
My hurts turn livid upon me
As I lean on a cane and observe

Seven One One Part Three

After walking, I had to learn how to eat
Because they kept a tube in me while I was unconscious
And after a while it became time for me to eat again
And I thought,

I don't need to eat
I haven't been eating this entire time in here
Eating is really overrated, what do I need it for
So when they told me I could eat
I didn't.
They offered breakfast and I told them no.
They offered lunch and I told them no.
And by the time dinner came along
my stomach was making more noise than I was
I think it started a language of its own



So being a vegetarian I got an egg sandwich
and then I was faced with this task I didn't know how to undertake.
I had to rationalize it to myself.
You've eaten before, I told myself, you can do it again.
I know it seems foreign to you, but you can do it.
Put some food on the fork, put it in your mouth, remove the fork, start chewing, and then
just swallow it. You can do this. I had to talk myself through every step, the first bite was the
strangest thing to me, I ate only half of the food,
But I did it.
I know that once I got used to eating I ate ravenously, but
The next morning they offered food and I ate an egg sandwich again and I had to tell myself,
You did this yesterday, Janet.
I had to goad myself into eating again.

King of the Universe

I used to be king of the universe. I used to have meaning and order and direction in my life. People came to me for ideas and answers and I gave them exactly what they needed. Some times I even gave them more. Some times they were pleasantly surprised with the knowledge, with the intelligence, with the fact that sometimes pieces fit together so well that it almost seems they were meant to fit that way. Less often they were disappointed; they didn't see why my answers were better; they held my ability and my triumph against me. They could have been unintelligently avoiding the truth; they could have thought like a communist, thinking that someone else should not be revered, but the capitalist in them would think that it should have been THEM.

But it CAN be done. I used my brain and I proved them wrong. I was invincible. I produced RESULTS, and I did it with three times the speed of everyone else. People were amazed with me. I had a following.

There are many questions I ask. Maybe it is creativity in me that asks them and the engineer in me to want to find the answer. I have always been both. But when you get to the top, when you see the view from the top, well, when you see it all, what more do you have to ask?

I don't know God, but I wonder: what would she do for this situation? If she found someone like this, what does she do? My guess is that she would drop it, not kill it, because she is not a vengeful God, but she could punish it unjustly so that eventually God could then ask them: **so now what?** You've had all of the answers before, so **what do you do now?** When they get you out of the hospital, everyone will think that you are fine, but you are not; I **DO** that to you. And you'll have to deal with it all, and you'll have to remain **strong**, because **that is what you do**, you'll have to **be strong** for everyone else, and **inside you'll be falling apart**, and no one will understand.

Who's your messiah now?, she'll ask. Will you have an answer?

Seven One One Part Four

My sister started a journal while I was in the hospital for people to write in. My father, who never writes, wrote down while I was still unconscious,

*I squeeze your hand
But you don't squeeze back
But I still love you*

And my roommate, a man I dated and loved, was the first to write in the journal, and he wrote that he remembered me telling him just before the accident that I had written about a car accident, that he was a fantastic car crash,

And he wrote,
But it was supposed to be ME.

Fantastic Car Crash

and our life is one big road trip now
and we set the cruise control
and make our way down the expressway.



and most of the time we're just moving
in a straight line, and the scenery
blurs. there's nothing to see

but I know what's inside you and I
know what you're made of. I know
there's no such thing as a calm with you

you are a fantastic car crash. you stop
traffic in both directions as the gapers gawk and
the delay grows and they slow down and stare



everything shatters with you, you know.
it's a spectacular explosion. I try
to duck and cover as metal flies

through the air. and every time you leave
the scene of the accident
I am left picking up the shards of glass

from the windows. you know, the glass breaks
into such tiny little pieces. they look like
ice. it takes so long to pick up the pieces



even though I'm careful
I'm still picking up the pieces
and I'm still on my knees

and the glass cuts into my hands
and the blood drips down to the street.
think of it as my contribution

to this fantastic car crash
that is you, that is me, that is us
as I pull the glass from my hands

and I wave my hand to the line of traffic:
go ahead, keep driving, this happens
all the time, there's nothing to see here

Health Study Anti-Vegetarian, PETA Says

By Nikki Werking

Assistant University Editor

January 08, 2003

Officials for an animal rights activist group said Tuesday that they are protesting a UNC research study that could be funded with settlement money from a lawsuit against the McDonald's Corp. because the researcher is "anti-vegetarian."

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals said Steven Zeisel, professor and chairman of UNC's Department of Nutrition, should not be given the \$250,000 he is slated to receive from the settlement because his study does not support a "vegetarian organization."

In May 2002, McDonald's agreed to pay out \$12.5 million in a class action lawsuit filed by vegetarians concerned about the fast-food chain's deceptive use of beef flavoring in its french fries.

As part of the settlement, McDonald's will give \$6 million of the payout to "vegetarian organizations." Under that heading, Zeisel is set to receive \$250,000 of the settlement money to help fund a study examining the relationship between the amount of choline -- a nutrient commonly found in milk and eggs -- in a pregnant vegan woman's diet and the memory of the infant.

Judge Richard Siebel, a Cook County Circuit Court judge in Chicago, would not comment on the McDonald's settlement because the list of fund recipients has not been approved yet.

Hannah Schein, research associate for PETA's Research and Investigations Department, said Zeisel's study -- which also is funded by the American Egg Board and the United Egg Producers' Egg Nutrition Center -- opposes a strict vegetarian diet.

"The research itself is anti-vegetarian," she said. "He does research to support the egg industry."

But Zeisel said the funding from

the settlement money will be used to examine how choline affects the memories of infants born from mothers with vegan diets.

"The research will help vegetarians understand the relationship between their diets and brain development," he said.

Schein said PETA also is opposed to UNC's funding from the McDonald's settlement because of the University's alleged inhumane animal treatment controversy last year.

Last April, PETA released a video, shot by undercover investigator Kate Turlington, showing UNC researchers decapitating mice with scissors and live mice feeding on a dead mouse.

The video and complaints filed by PETA prompted the National Institutes of Health to request an investigation of UNC's animal care and use program.

Schein said PETA also disagrees with the funding of Zeisel's study because it involved the use of rats in its earlier stages.

"UNC conducts numerous animal research studies," she said. "We just don't believe in (experimentation on animals)."

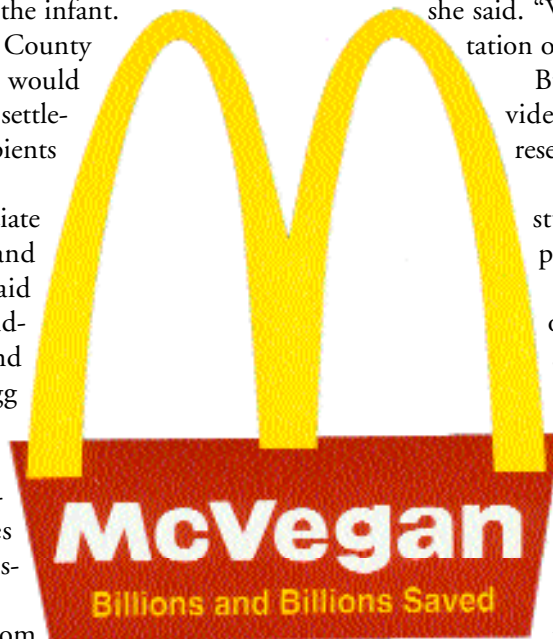
But Zeisel said the money being provided by the settlement will support research on human subjects only.

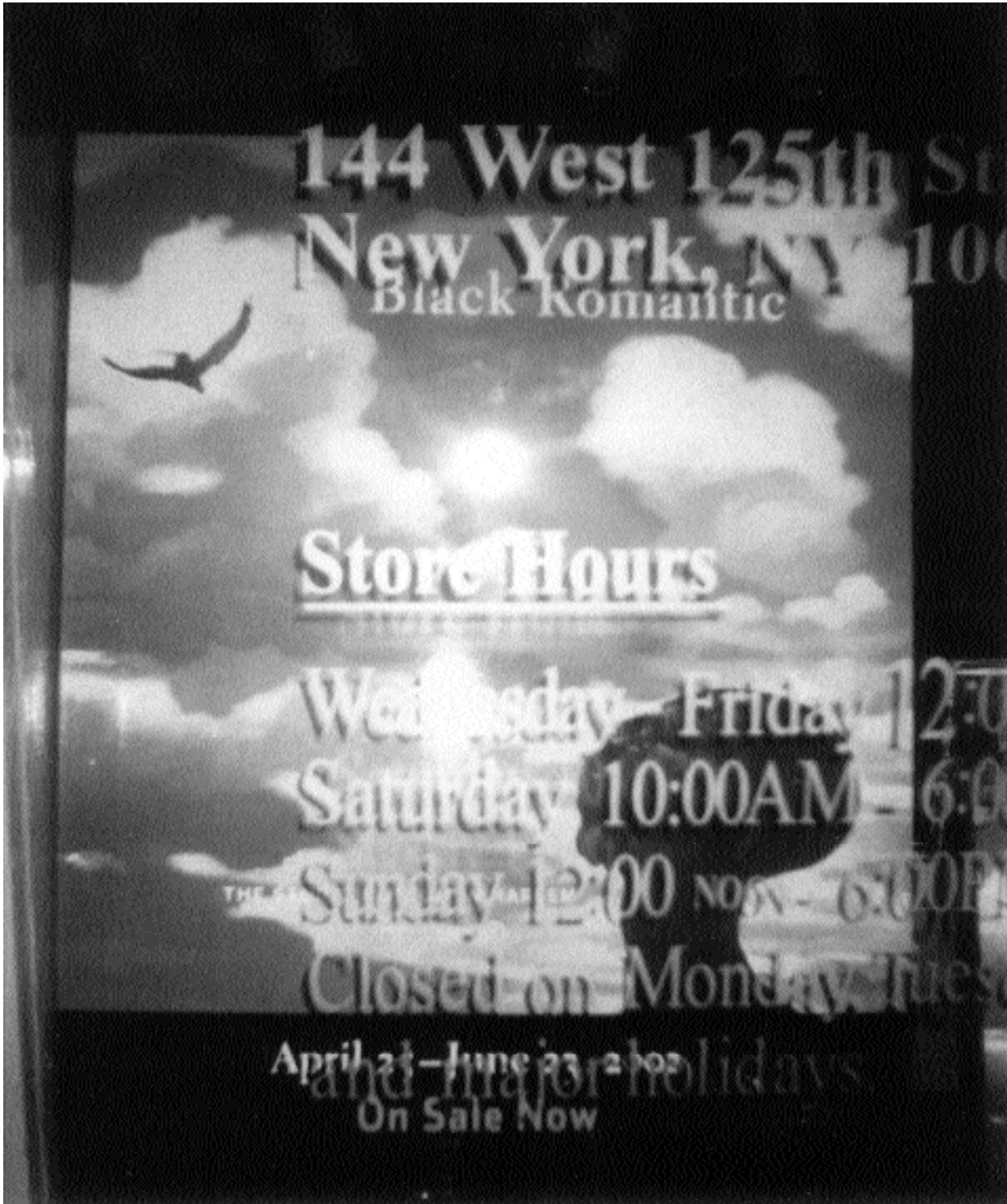
"There are no animals in this study," he said. "PETA has no right to protest."

Although Zeisel said PETA's opposition to his research is "unreasonable," Schein said the group will continue to lobby against funding for UNC through the McDonald's settlement.

"It's shocking that McDonald's would think UNC is an appropriate recipient (for this money)."

The University Editor can be reached at udesk@unc.edu.





artwork by **Xanadu**



artwork by **Xanadu**

Man's early hunting role in doubt

By Bob Holmes

Monday January 6, 02:00 PM

Hunting skills may not after all have triggered the tremendous burst of human evolution at the beginning of the ice ages nearly two million years ago. Instead of man the hunter, the driving force behind this evolutionary surge may have been woman the gatherer, with both mother and grandmother playing a vital role.

For 40 years, anthropologists have leaned toward the notion that rich, nourishing meat - brought home by hunters and shared out - played a crucial role in human origins. This would explain why evolution selected for larger, smarter hunters with lighter jaws and teeth: precisely the changes seen as *Homo erectus* arose in eastern Africa.

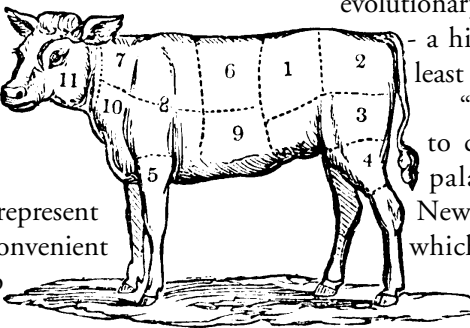
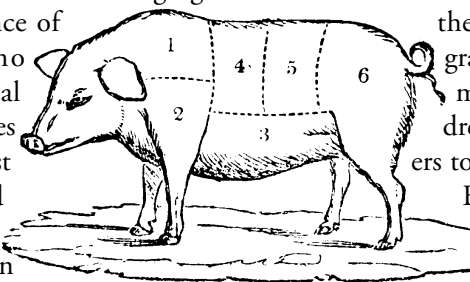
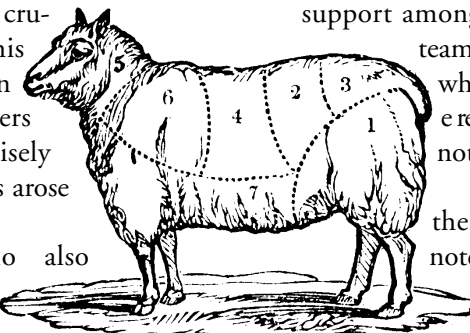
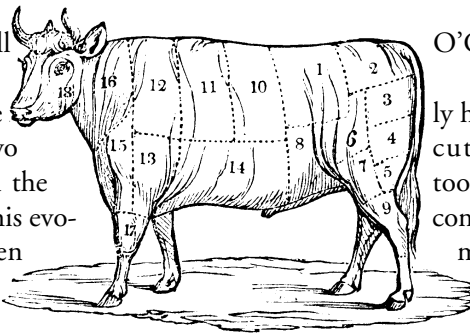
The hunter-driven scenario also included the formation of nuclear family groups, in which men hunted while women gathered plants and cared for their children, thus kicking off humans' social evolution as well.

But this picture may be wrong on several counts. To begin with, early men probably were not bringing meat home to the family. Most evidence of hunting by early African *Homo erectus* comes from archaeological sites containing both animal bones and primitive stone tools. But most of these lie next to rivers, the kind of predator-filled habitat that today's Hadza hunter-gatherers in Tanzania call a "city of lions".

"They're certainly not places where early humans were spending the night," says James O'Connell, an anthropologist at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. O'Connell is lead author of a critique of the hunting hypothesis published in the latest issue of the *Journal of Human Evolution* (vol 43, p 831).

Fast food

Instead, the remains probably represent temporary meal sites - perhaps a convenient patch of shade - where the group gathered around a fallen animal,



O'Connell and his team suggest.

Most likely, the "hunters" were not actually hunting either. Many of the bones bear both cut-marks from primitive stone tools and the tooth marks of animals. When the researchers compared these with marks on bones made in modern experiments, they found that the pattern of marks and the mix of bones were similar to those left by human scavengers (see graphic).

This suggests that early humans drove other predators away from freshly killed carcasses - a view now gaining support among palaeoanthropologists. But O'Connell's team went a step further. They wanted to know what kind of a living early African *Homo erectus* made if in fact they were scavengers, not hunters.

The Hadza people today scavenge avidly in the same way, and studies in the late 1980s noted that they found an average of one carcass every two to three weeks. Based on that observation, the team estimated that early humans might have picked up a carcass every few days in the wettest areas, but in drier areas might have got as little as one a month: nowhere near enough to live on.

Family affair

If fathers were not feeding their children meat most of the time, that means mothers and, perhaps, grandmothers must have been. Older women might have proved crucial in feeding children, the researchers say, allowing the mothers to get pregnant again more quickly.

Evolution would thus favour a long lifespan, which is closely linked to large body size and delayed maturity. Suddenly, all the major changes in human life history are explained by foraging, not hunting.

Critics point out that even if the meat supply was not reliable enough to live on, it must have been important in evolutionary terms. Humans have been top carnivores - a highly unusual role for a primate - since at least the Stone Age.

"Something special did happen with regard to carnivory," says Robert Blumenshine, a palaeoanthropologist at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. "The extent to which it shaped human evolution remains in question, but I would think it must have had some strong influence."

Why vegans were right all along

Famine can only be avoided if the rich give up meat, fish and dairy

Tuesday December 24, 2002

George Monbiot, *The Guardian*

The Christians stole the winter solstice from the pagans, and capitalism stole it from the Christians. But one feature of the celebrations has remained unchanged: the consumption of vast quantities of meat. The practice used to make sense. Livestock slaughtered in the autumn, before the grass ran out, would be about to decay, and fat-starved people would have to survive a further three months. Today we face the opposite problem: we spend the next three months trying to work it off.

Our seasonal excesses would be perfectly sustainable, if we weren't doing the same thing every other week of the year. But, because of the rich world's disproportionate purchasing power, many of us can feast every day. And this would also be fine, if we did not live in a finite world.

By comparison to most of the animals we eat, turkeys are relatively efficient converters: they produce about three times as much meat per pound of grain as feedlot cattle. But there are still plenty of reasons to feel uncomfortable about eating them. Most are reared in darkness, so tightly packed that they can scarcely move. Their beaks are removed with a hot knife to prevent them from hurting each other. As Christmas approaches, they become so heavy that their hips buckle. When you see the inside of a turkey broilerhouse, you begin to entertain grave doubts about European civilisation.

This is one of the reasons why many people have returned to eating red meat at Christmas. Beef cattle appear to be happier animals. But the improvement in animal welfare is offset by the loss in human welfare. The world produces enough food for its people and its livestock, though (largely because they are so poor) some 800 million are malnourished. But as the population rises, structural global famine will be avoided only if the rich start to eat less meat. The number of farm animals on earth has risen fivefold since 1950: humans are now outnumbered three to one. Livestock already consume half the world's grain, and their numbers are still growing almost exponentially.

This is why biotechnology - whose promoters claim that it will feed the world - has been deployed to produce not food but feed: it allows farmers to switch from grains which keep people alive to the production of more lucrative crops for livestock. Within as little as 10 years, the world will be faced with a choice: arable farming either continues to feed the world's animals or it continues to feed the world's people. It cannot do both.

The impending crisis will be accelerated by the depletion of both phosphate fertiliser and the water used to grow crops. Every kilogram of beef we consume, according to research by the agronomists David Pimental and Robert Goodland, requires around 100,000 litres of water. Aquifers are beginning the run dry all over the world, largely because of abstraction by farmers.

Many of those who have begun to understand the finity of global grain production have responded by becoming vegetarians. But vegetarians who continue to consume milk and eggs scarcely reduce their impact on the ecosystem. The conversion efficiency of dairy and egg production is generally better than meat rearing, but even if everyone who now eats beef were to eat cheese instead, this would merely delay the global famine. As both dairy cattle and poultry are often fed with fishmeal (which means that no one can claim to eat cheese but not fish), it might, in one respect, even accelerate it. The shift would be accompanied too by a massive deterioration in animal welfare: with the possible exception of intensively reared broilers and pigs, battery chickens and dairy cows are the farm animals which appear to suffer most.

We could eat pheasants, many of which are dumped in landfill after they've been shot, and whose price, at this time of the year, falls to around £2 a bird, but most people would feel uncomfortable about subsidising the bloodlust of brandy-soaked hoorays. Eating pheasants, which are also fed on grain, is sustainable only up to the point at which demand meets supply. We can eat fish, but only if we are prepared to contribute to the collapse of marine ecosystems and - as the European fleet plunders the seas off West Africa - the starvation of some of the hungriest people on earth. It's impossible to avoid the conclusion that the only sustainable and socially just option is for the inhabitants of the rich world to become, like most of the earth's people, broadly vegan, eating meat only on special occasions like Christmas.

As a meat-eater, I've long found it convenient to categorise veganism as a response to animal suffering or a health fad. But, faced with these figures, it now seems plain that it's the only ethical response to what is arguably the world's most urgent social justice issue. We stuff ourselves, and the poor get stuffed.

www.monbiot.com

1998 National Platform of the Libertarian Party

*Adopted in Convention
July 1998
Washington, D.C.*

Preamble

As Libertarians, we seek a world of liberty; a world in which all individuals are sovereign over their own lives, and no one is forced to sacrifice his or her values for the benefit of others.

We believe that respect for individual rights is the essential precondition for a free and prosperous world, that force and fraud must be banished from human relationships, and that only through freedom can peace and prosperity be realized.

Consequently, we defend each person's right to engage in any activity that is peaceful and honest, and welcome the diversity that freedom brings. The world we seek to build is one where individuals are free to follow their own dreams in their own ways, without interference from government or any authoritarian power.

In the following pages we have set forth our basic principles and enumerated various policy stands derived from those principles.

These specific policies are not our goal, however. Our goal is nothing more nor less than a world set free in our lifetime, and it is to this end that we take these stands.

INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL ORDER

No conflict exists between civil order and individual rights. Both concepts are based on the same fundamental principle: that no individual, group, or government may initiate force against any other individual, group, or government.

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

We believe that individuals should be free to make choices for themselves and to accept responsibility for the consequences of the choices they make. We must accept the right of others to choose for themselves if we are to

have the same right. Our support of an individual's right to make choices in life does not mean that we necessarily approve or disapprove of those choices.

We believe people must accept personal responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Libertarian policies will promote a society where people are free to make and learn from their own decisions. Personal responsibility is discouraged by government denying individuals the opportunity to exercise it. In fact, the denial of freedom fosters irresponsibility.

CRIME

The continuing high level of violent crime -- and the government's demonstrated inability to deal with it -- threatens the lives, happiness, and belongings of Americans. At the same time, governmental violations of rights undermine the people's sense of justice with regard to crime. The appropriate way to suppress crime is through consistent and impartial enforcement of laws that protect individual rights. Laws pertaining to "victimless crimes" should be repealed since such laws themselves violate individual rights and also breed genuine crime. We applaud the trend toward private protection services and voluntary community crime control groups. We support institutional changes, consistent with full respect for the rights of the accused, that would permit victims to direct the prosecution in criminal cases.

THE WAR ON DRUGS

The so-called "War on Drugs" is a grave threat to individual liberty, to domestic order and to peace in the world; furthermore, it has provided a rationale by which the power of the state has been expanded to restrict greatly our right to privacy and to be secure in our homes.

We call for the repeal of all laws establishing criminal or civil penalties for the use of drugs and of "anti-crime" measures restricting individual rights to be secure in our persons, homes, and property, or limiting our rights to keep and bear arms.

JURIES

We oppose the current practice of forced jury duty and favor all-volunteer juries. In addition, we urge the assertion of the common-law right of juries to judge not only the facts but also the justice of the law. In all cases to which the government is a party, the judge should be required to inform the jurors of their common law right to judge the law, as well as the facts, and to acquit a criminal defendant, and to find against the government in a civil trial, whenever they deem the law unjust or oppressive.

INDIVIDUAL SOVEREIGNTY

The only legitimate use of force is in defense of individual rights -- life, liberty, and justly acquired property - - against aggression, whether by force or fraud. This right inheres in the individual, who -- with his or her consent - - may be aided by any other individual or group.

The right of defense extends to defense against aggressive acts of government. We favor an immediate end to the doctrine of "Sovereign Immunity" which ignores the primacy of the individual over the abstraction of the State, and holds that the State, contrary to the tradition of redress of grievances, may not be sued without its permission or held accountable for its actions under civil law.

FREEDOM OF COMMUNICATION

We defend the rights of individuals to unrestricted freedom of speech, freedom of the press and the right of individuals to dissent from government itself. We recognize that full freedom of expression is possible only as part of a system of full property rights. The freedom to use one's own voice; the freedom to hire a hall; the freedom to own a printing press, a broadcasting station, or a transmission cable; the freedom to wave or burn one's own flag; and similar property-based freedoms are precisely what constitute freedom of communication. At the same time, we recognize that freedom of communication does not extend to the use of other people's property to promote one's ideas without the voluntary consent of the owners.

We oppose any abridgment of the freedom of speech through government censorship, regulation or control of communications media, including, but not limited to, laws concerning:

- Obscenity, including "pornography", as we hold this to be an abridgment of liberty of expression despite claims that it instigates rape or assault, or demeans and slanders women;

- Reception and storage equipment, such as digital

audio tape recorders and radar warning devices, and the manufacture of video terminals by telephone companies;

- Electronic bulletin boards, communications networks, and other interactive electronic media as we hold them to be the functional equivalent of speaking halls and printing presses in the age of electronic communications, and as such deserving of full freedom;

- Electronic newspapers, electronic "Yellow Pages", and other new information media, as these deserve full freedom.

- Commercial speech or advertising.

We oppose speech codes at all schools that are primarily tax funded. Language that is deemed offensive to certain groups is not a cause for legal action.

We favor the abolition of the Federal Communications Commission as we would provide for free market ownership of airwave frequencies, deserving of full First Amendment protection.

We oppose government ownership or subsidy of, or funding for, any communications organization.

We strongly oppose the government's burgeoning practice of invading newsrooms, or the premises of other innocent third parties, in the name of law enforcement. We further oppose court orders gagging news coverage of criminal proceedings -- the right to publish and broadcast must not be abridged merely for the convenience of the judicial system. We deplore any efforts to impose thought control on the media, either by the use of anti-trust laws, or by any other government action in the name of stopping "bias."

Removal of all of these regulations and practices throughout the communications media would open the way to diversity and innovation. We shall not be satisfied until the First Amendment is expanded to protect full, unconditional freedom of communication.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

We defend the rights of individuals to engage in (or abstain from) any religious activities that do not violate the rights of others. In order to defend freedom, we advocate a strict separation of church and State. We oppose government actions that either aid or attack any religion. We oppose taxation of church property for the same reason that we oppose all taxation. We oppose the harassment of churches by the Internal Revenue Service through threats to deny tax-exempt status to churches that refuse to disclose massive amounts of information about themselves.

We condemn the attempts by parents or any others - - via kidnappings or conservatorships -- to force children to conform to any religious views. Government harassment or obstruction of religious groups for their beliefs or non-violent activities must end.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

The individual's right to privacy, property, and right to speak or not to speak should not be infringed by the government. The government should not use electronic or other means of covert surveillance of an individual's actions or private property without the consent of the owner or occupant. Correspondence, bank and other financial transactions and records, doctors' and lawyers' communications, employment records, and the like should not be open to review by government without the consent of all parties involved in those actions.

We support the protections provided by the Fourth Amendment and oppose any government use of search warrants to examine or seize materials belonging to innocent third parties. We also oppose police roadblocks aimed at randomly, and without probable cause, testing drivers for intoxication and police practices to stop mass transit vehicles and search passengers without probable cause.

So long as the National Census and all federal, state, and other government agencies' compilations of data on an individual continue to exist, they should be conducted only with the consent of the persons from whom the data is sought.

We oppose all restrictions and regulations on the private development, sale, and use of encryption technology. We specifically oppose any requirement for disclosure of encryption methods or keys, including the government's proposals for so-called "key escrow" which is truly government access to keys, and any requirement for use of government-specified devices or protocols. We also oppose government classification of civilian research on encryption methods.

If a private employer screens prospective or current employees via questionnaires, polygraph tests, urine tests for drugs, blood tests for AIDS, or other means, this is a condition of that employer's labor contracts. Such screening does not violate the rights of employees, who have the right to boycott such employers if they choose. Private contractual arrangements, including labor contracts, must be founded on mutual consent and agreement in a society that upholds freedom of association. On the other hand, we oppose any use of such screening by government or regulations requiring government contractors to impose any such screening.

We oppose government regulations that require employers to provide health insurance coverage for employees, which often encourage unnecessary intrusions by employers into the privacy of their employees.

We oppose the issuance by the government of an identity card, to be required for any purpose, such as employment, voting, or border crossing.

We further oppose the nearly universal requirement for use of the Social Security Number as a personal iden-

tification code, whether by government agencies or by intimidation of private companies by governments.

GOVERNMENT SECRECY

We condemn the government's use of secret classifications to keep from the public information that it should have. We favor substituting a system in which no individual may be convicted for violating government secrecy classifications unless the government discharges its burden of proving that the publication:

a. violated the right of privacy of those who have been coerced into revealing confidential or proprietary information to government agents, or

b. disclosed defensive military plans so as to materially impair the capabilities to respond to attack.

It should always be a defense to such prosecution that information divulged shows that the government has violated the law.

THE RIGHT TO KEEP AND BEAR ARMS

The Bill of Rights recognizes that an armed citizenry is essential to a free society. We affirm the right to keep and bear arms and oppose all laws at any level of government restricting, regulating, or requiring the ownership, manufacture, transfer, or sale of firearms or ammunition. We oppose all laws requiring registration of firearms or ammunition. We also oppose any government efforts to ban or restrict the use of tear gas, "mace," or other self-protection devices. We further oppose all attempts to ban weapons or ammunition on the grounds that they are risky or unsafe.

We support repeal of the National Firearms Act of 1934 and the Federal Gun Control Act of 1968, and we demand the immediate abolition of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms.

We favor the repeal of laws banning the concealment of weapons or prohibiting pocket weapons. We also oppose the banning of inexpensive handguns ("Saturday night specials"), and semi-automatic or so-called assault weapons and their magazines or feeding devices.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ABORTION

We hold that individual rights should not be denied or abridged on the basis of sex. We call for repeal of all laws discriminating against women, such as protective labor laws and marriage or divorce laws which deny the full rights of men and women. We oppose all laws likely to impose restrictions on free choice and private property

or to widen tyranny through reverse discrimination.

Recognizing that abortion is a very sensitive issue and that libertarians can hold good-faith views on both sides, we believe the government should be kept entirely out of the question, allowing all individuals to be guided by their own consciences. We oppose all restrictions on the sale of RU 486, and on the sale of menstruation-inducing contraceptive pills, which block fertilized eggs from attaching themselves to the womb. We oppose legislation restricting or subsidizing women's access to abortion or other reproductive health services; this includes requiring consent of the prospective father, waiting periods, and mandatory indoctrination on fetal development, as well as Medicaid or any other taxpayer funding. It is particularly harsh to force someone who believes that abortion is murder to pay for another's abortion.

We also condemn state-mandated abortions.

It is the right and obligation of the pregnant woman, not the state, to decide the desirability or appropriateness of prenatal testing, Caesarean births, fetal surgery, voluntary surrogacy arrangements, and/or home births.

SEXUAL RIGHTS

We believe that adults have the right to private choice in consensual sexual activity.

We oppose any government attempt to dictate, prohibit, control, or encourage any private lifestyle, living arrangement or contractual relationship.

We support repeal of existing laws and policies which are intended to condemn, affirm, encourage, or deny sexual lifestyles or any set of attitudes about such lifestyles.

TRADE AND THE ECONOMY

We believe that each person has the right to offer goods and services to others on the free market. Therefore we oppose all intervention by government into the area of economics. The only proper role of existing governments in the economic realm is to protect property rights, adjudicate disputes, and provide a legal framework in which voluntary trade is protected.

Efforts to forcibly redistribute wealth or forcibly manage trade are intolerable. Government manipulation of the economy creates an entrenched privileged class -- those with access to tax money -- and an exploited class -- those who are net taxpayers.

We believe that all individuals have the right to dispose of the fruits of their labor as they see fit and that government has no right to take such wealth. We oppose government-enforced charity such as welfare programs and subsidies, but we heartily applaud those individuals and private charitable organizations that help the needy and

contribute to a wide array of worthwhile causes through voluntary activities.

TAXATION

Since we believe that all persons are entitled to keep the fruits of their labor, we oppose all government activity that consists of the forcible collection of money or goods from individuals in violation of their individual rights. Specifically, we:

a. recognize the right of any individual to challenge the payment of taxes on moral, religious, legal, or constitutional grounds;

b. oppose all personal and corporate income taxation, including capital gains taxes;

c. support the repeal of the Sixteenth Amendment, and oppose any increase in existing tax rates and the imposition of any new taxes;

d. support the eventual repeal of all taxation; and

e. support a declaration of unconditional amnesty for all those individuals who have been convicted of, or who now stand accused of, tax resistance.

As an interim measure, all criminal and civil sanctions against tax evasion should be terminated immediately.

We oppose as involuntary servitude any legal requirements forcing employers or business owners to serve as tax collectors for federal, state, or local tax agencies.

We oppose any and all increases in the rate of taxation or categories of taxpayers, including the elimination of deductions, exemptions, or credits in the spurious name of "fairness," "simplicity," or alleged "neutrality to the free market." No tax can ever be fair, simple, or neutral to the free market.

In the current fiscal crisis of states and municipalities, default is preferable to raising taxes or perpetual refinancing of growing public debt.

GOVERNMENT DEBT

We support the drive for a constitutional amendment requiring the national government to balance its budget, and also support similar amendments to require balanced state budgets. To be effective, a balanced budget amendment should provide:

a. that neither Congress nor the President be permitted to override this requirement;

b. that all off-budget items are included in the budget;

c. that the budget is balanced exclusively by cutting expenditures, and not by raising taxes; and

d. that no exception be made for periods of national emergency.

The Federal Reserve should be forbidden to acquire any additional government securities, thereby helping to eliminate the inflationary aspect of the deficit. Governments facing fiscal crises should always default in

preference to raising taxes. At a minimum, the level of government should be frozen.

MONOPOLIES

We condemn all coercive monopolies. We recognize that government is the source of monopoly, through its grants of legal privilege to special interests in the economy. In order to abolish monopolies, we advocate a strict separation of business and State.

“Anti-trust” laws do not prevent monopoly, but foster it by limiting competition. We therefore call for the repeal of all “anti-trust” laws, including the Robinson-Patman Act which restricts price discounts, the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, and the Clayton Anti-Trust Act. We further call for the abolition of the Federal Trade Commission and the anti-trust division of the Department of Justice.

We defend the right of individuals to form corporations, cooperatives, and other types of companies based on voluntary association. Laws of incorporation should not include grants of monopoly privilege. In particular, we oppose special limits on the liability of corporations for damages caused in noncontractual transactions. We also oppose state or federal limits on the size of private companies and on the right of companies to merge. We further oppose efforts, in the name of social responsibility, or any other reason, to expand federal chartering of corporations into a pretext for government control of business.

UNIONS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

We support the right of free persons to voluntarily establish, associate in, or not associate in, labor unions. An employer should have the right to recognize, or refuse to recognize, a union as the collective bargaining agent of some, or all, of its employees.

We oppose government interference in bargaining, such as compulsory arbitration or the imposition of an obligation to bargain. Therefore, we urge repeal of the National Labor Relations Act, and all state Right-to-Work Laws which prohibit employers from making voluntary contracts with unions. We oppose all government back-to-work orders as the imposition of a form of forced labor.

Government-mandated waiting periods for closure of factories or businesses hurt, rather than help, the wage-earner. We support all efforts to benefit workers, owners, and management by keeping government out of this area.

Workers and employers should have the right to organize secondary boycotts if they so choose. Nevertheless, boycotts or strikes do not justify the initiation of violence against other workers, employers, strike-breakers, and innocent bystanders.

DOMESTIC ILLS

Current problems in such areas as energy, pollution, health care delivery, decaying cities, and poverty are not solved, but are primarily caused, by government. The welfare state, supposedly designed to aid the poor, is in reality a growing and parasitic burden on all productive people, and injures, rather than benefits, the poor themselves.

POLLUTION

Pollution of other people’s property is a violation of individual rights. Present legal principles, particularly the unjust and false concept of “public property,” block privatization of the use of the environment and hence block resolution of controversies over resource use. We support the development of an objective legal system defining property rights to air and water. We call for a modification of the laws governing such torts as trespass and nuisance to cover damages done by air, water, radiation, and noise pollution. We oppose legislative proposals to exempt persons who claim damage from radiation from having to prove such damage was in fact caused by radiation. Strict liability, not government agencies and arbitrary government standards, should regulate pollution. We therefore demand the abolition of the Environmental Protection Agency. We also oppose government-mandated smoking and non-smoking areas in privately owned businesses.

Toxic waste disposal problems have been created by government policies that separate liability from property. Rather than making taxpayers pay for toxic waste cleanups, individual property owners, or in the case of corporations, the responsible managers and employees, should be held strictly liable for material damage done by their property. Claiming that one has abandoned a piece of property does not absolve one of the responsibility for actions one has set in motion. We condemn the EPA’s Superfund whose taxing powers are used to penalize all chemical firms, regardless of their conduct. Such cleanups are a subsidy of irresponsible companies at the expense of responsible ones.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

We support strong and effective laws against fraud and misrepresentation. However, we oppose paternalistic regulations which dictate to consumers, impose prices, define standards for products, or otherwise restrict risk-taking and free choice. We oppose governmental promotion or imposition of the metric system.

We oppose all so-called “consumer protection” legislation which infringes upon voluntary trade, and call for the abolition of the Consumer Product Safety Commission. We advocate the repeal of all laws banning or restricting the advertising of prices, products, or ser-

vices. We specifically oppose laws requiring an individual to buy or use so-called “self-protection” equipment such as safety belts, air bags, or crash helmets.

We advocate the abolition of the Federal Aviation Administration, which has jeopardized safety by arrogating to itself a monopoly of safety regulation and enforcement. We call for privatizing the air traffic control system and transferring the FAA’s other functions to private agencies.

We advocate the abolition of the Food and Drug Administration and particularly its policies of mandating specific nutritional requirements and denying the right of manufacturers to make non-fraudulent claims concerning their products. We advocate an end to compulsory fluoridation of water supplies. We specifically oppose government regulation of the price, potency, or quantity able to be produced or purchased of drugs or other consumer goods. There should be no laws regarding what substances (nicotine, alcohol, hallucinogens, narcotics, Laetrile, artificial sweeteners, vitamin supplements, or other “drugs”) a person may ingest or otherwise use.

EDUCATION

We advocate the complete separation of education and State. Government schools lead to the indoctrination of children and interfere with the free choice of individuals. Government ownership, operation, regulation, and subsidy of schools and colleges should be ended. We call for the repeal of the guarantees of tax-funded, government-provided education, which are found in most state constitutions.

As an interim measure to encourage the growth of private schools and variety in education, including home schooling, we support tax credits for tuition and other expenditures related to an individual’s education. We likewise favor tax credits for child care and oppose nationalization of the child-care industry. We oppose denial of tax-exempt status to schools because of those schools’ private policies on hiring, admissions, and student department. We support the repeal of all taxes on the income or property of private schools, whether for profit or non-profit.

We condemn compulsory education laws, which spawn prison-like schools with many of the problems associated with prisons, and we call for an immediate repeal of such laws.

Until government involvement in education is ended, we support elimination, within the governmental school system, of forced busing and corporal punishment. We further support immediate reduction of tax support for schools, and removal of the burden of school taxes from those not responsible for the education of children.

POPULATION

Recognizing that the American people are not a collective national resource, we oppose all coercive measures

for population control.

We oppose government actions that either compel or prohibit abortion, sterilization, or any other forms of birth control. Specifically, we condemn the vicious practice of forced sterilization of welfare recipients or of mentally retarded or “genetically defective” individuals.

We regard the tragedies caused by unplanned, unwanted pregnancies to be aggravated, if not created, by government policies of censorship, restriction, regulation, and prohibition. Therefore, we call for the repeal of all laws that restrict anyone, including children, from engaging in voluntary exchanges of goods, services, or information regarding human sexuality, reproduction, birth control, or related medical or biological technologies.

We equally oppose government laws and policies that restrict the opportunity to choose alternatives to abortion.

We support an end to all subsidies for childbearing built into our present laws, including welfare plans and the provision of tax-supported services for children. We urge the elimination of special tax burdens on single people and couples with few or no children.

POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Government fiscal and monetary measures that artificially foster business expansion guarantee an eventual increase in unemployment rather than curtailing it. We call for the immediate cessation of such policies as well as any governmental attempts to affect employment levels.

We support repeal of all laws that impede the ability of any person to find employment, such as minimum wage laws, so-called “protective” labor legislation for women and children, governmental restrictions on the establishment of private day-care centers, and the National Labor Relations Act. We deplore government-fostered forced retirement, which robs the elderly of the right to work.

We seek the elimination of occupational licensure, which prevents human beings from working in whatever trade they wish. We call for the abolition of all federal, state, and local government agencies that restrict entry into any profession, such as education and law, or regulate its practice. No worker should be legally penalized for lack of certification, and no consumer should be legally restrained from hiring unlicensed individuals.

We oppose all government welfare, relief projects, and “aid to the poor” programs. All these government programs are invasive of privacy, paternalistic, demeaning, and inefficient. The proper source of help for such persons is the voluntary efforts of private groups and individuals.

To speed the time when governmental programs are replaced by effective private institutions we advocate dollar-for-dollar tax credits for all charitable contributions.

HEALTH CARE

Recent decades have witnessed growing government involvement in the health care system. That involvement has led to bureaucratic top-down management, rapidly escalating prices, costly regulations, the criminalization of the practice of medicine, and a host of other problems. None of these problems was prevalent prior to the time when government began to increase its involvement. We believe that government involvement is the principal cause of many of the problems we face in the health care system today. Therefore we favor restoring and reviving a free market health care system.

We advocate a complete separation of medicine from the state. We recognize the right of individuals to determine free from government interference and its harmful side effects the level of insurance they want, the level of care they want, the care providers they want, the medicines and treatments they will use, and all other aspects of their medical care. We oppose any government restriction or funding of medical or scientific research, including cloning.

We support an end to government-provided health insurance and health care. Both of these functions can be more effectively provided in the private sector. The high cost of health insurance is largely due to government's excessive regulation of the industry. Government's role in any kind of insurance should only be to enforce contracts when necessary, not to dictate to insurance companies and consumers which kinds of insurance contracts they may voluntarily agree upon.

SOCIAL SECURITY

We favor replacing the current fraudulent, virtually bankrupt, government sponsored Social Security system with a private voluntary system. Pending that replacement, participation in Social Security should be made voluntary. Victims of the Social Security tax should have a claim against government property.

POSTAL SERVICE

We propose the abolition of the government Postal Service. The present system, in addition to being inefficient, encourages government surveillance of private correspondence. Pending abolition, we call for an end to the monopoly system and for allowing free competition in all aspects of postal service.

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ELECTION LAWS

We call for an end to government control of political parties, consistent with First Amendment rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression. As private

voluntary groups, political parties should be allowed to establish their own rules for nomination procedures, primaries, and conventions.

We urge repeal of the Federal Election Campaign Act which suppresses voluntary support of candidates and parties, compels taxpayers to subsidize politicians and political views which many do not wish to support, invades the privacy of American citizens, and protects the Republican and Democratic parties from competition. This law is particularly dangerous as it enables the federal government to control the elections of its own administrators and beneficiaries, thereby further reducing its accountability to the citizens.

Elections at all levels should be in the control of those who wish to participate in or support them voluntarily. We therefore call for an end to any tax-financed subsidies to candidates or parties and the repeal of all laws which restrict voluntary financing of election campaigns.

The Australian ballot system, introduced into the United States in the late nineteenth century, is an abridgment of freedom of expression and of voting rights. Under it, the names of all the officially approved candidates are printed in a single government sponsored format and the voter indicates his or her choice by marking it or by writing in an approved but unlisted candidate's name. We should return to the previous electoral system where there was no official ballot or candidate approval at all, and therefore no state or federal restriction of access to a "single ballot." Instead, voters submitted their own choices and had the option of using "tickets" or cards printed by candidates or political parties.

In order to grant voters a full range of choice in federal, state, and local elections, we propose the addition of the alternative "None of the above is acceptable" to all ballots. We further propose that in the event that "none of the above is acceptable" receives a plurality of votes in any election, the elective office for that term should remain unfilled and unfunded.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

American foreign policy should seek an America at peace with the world and the defense- against attack from abroad of the lives, liberty, and property of the American people on American soil. Provision of such defense must respect the individual rights of people everywhere.

The principle of non-intervention should guide relationships between governments. The United States government should return to the historic libertarian tradition of avoiding entangling alliances, abstaining totally from foreign quarrels and imperialist adventures, and recognizing the right to unrestricted trade, travel, and immigration.

Freedom against Sobriety? Reflections on Capacity-Building during the Digital Divide

by Prasenjit Maiti PhD

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“Fifty per cent of the world’s hungry live in five countries: India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Pakistan and Indonesia. Though we have heard these facts many times over, most of us can neither fathom the sufferings of the underprivileged, nor can we grasp the difficulties faced by millions of such people, barely clinging on to their lives.

“One of the most neglected forms of human deprivation is malnutrition, particularly among children. Scientific evidence suggests that the risk of death from common childhood diseases is doubled for a mildly malnourished child, tripled for a moderately malnourished child, and may be even as high as eight times for a severely malnourished child, when compared with the risks faced by a well-nourished child.”

- Ronald Anil Fernandes, Paramount Welfare Educational Trust, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

“The progress of freedom depends more upon the maintenance of peace and the spread of commerce and the diffusion of education than upon the labor of Cabinets or Foreign Offices.” - Richard Cobden

Introduction: The Problem

The idea of human freedom is essentially rooted in the concept of human development, according to Noble Laureate Professor Amartya Sen’s “Development as Freedom” thesis [that outlines an entitlement to capacity-building process]. And the idea of human progress is a construct that is designed around the axis of freedom. What is freedom? Is it only lack of societal constraint, withdrawal of discipline and punish, willing suspension of the panoptic Super Ego that they address as the “mainstream”? Or is freedom a concept much more fundamental, to be read into the texts of Rabindranath Tagore, Roman Rolland or even Walden?

Sociologists claim that civilization is what we are and culture is merely an arrangement of artifacts that we happen to use during the course of our politics everyday life. But then civilization is also a system of values that is handed down generations as a movement of socialization that laymen identify as “progress”.

Progress and Development: The Eternal Duo

But how can progress be distinguished from “development”, if at all? A most prominent item on today’s humanitarian global agenda, apart from mantras like good governance, social capital, neo-liberal communitarianism, grassroots empowerment, civil societal capacity-building and gender sensitization, is certainly the notion of sustainable development.[1] This has become almost a catchword of sorts in the Third World, decolonized state nations that are more or less grappling to muster a political system around pluralistic identities of nationhood enmeshed in ethnicity, language, religion, region and mutual distrust. It is almost as if “softy states” are hanging loose and can only be brought back on to the fast track of development [?] by way of external intervention and advocacy on the past of the Eurocentric West.

Development, it may be appreciated at this point, is not anything extrinsic like politics imposed from the above without any regard whatsoever to the end-users of limited political resources. Actors who are supposed to interface with their very own institutions are nearly always better comfortable if left alone with the material conditions of daily life that breed organic ethos of community existence. This is where the colonial masters went wrong in Asia, Africa and South America when they bled the colonies white and left behind a legacy of comprador bourgeois and crony capitalism that, in turn, fostered a repressive state apparatus and a perverted anti-people bureaucratic managerial state system that was not only anti-people but was also occasionally anti-progress.

What Richard Cobden[2] implies by “Cabinets or Foreign Offices” is actually this mechanistic attitude of the political élite [in capitalist systems] and party leadership [in socialist societies] that are smug in the cocoon of their mistaken convictions that people at the top echelons of power, authority and influence have necessarily a working knowledge of “the greatest good of the greatest number”. This is not a utilitarian or even a welfarist state approach - it is actually self-defeating as amply evidenced in the erstwhile USSR where an insane arms and space race with the United States [incidentally the only country in the entire world to have

actually materially gained from the First and Second World Wars with minimum military casualties] led the once powerful communist country to a more or less incredible situation of mind-boggling bankruptcy.

Military hardware and nukes were being manufactured at the cost of basic consumer requirements like bread, potatoes and vodka, following Stalin's rhetoric of an entire generation making sacrifices [read being purged if found to be politically incorrect] for the cause of a better Russia of the future. Moscow's huge and sprawling department store GUM was always nearly empty while the party's top brass were running around in their imported limousines, shopping in dollar shops selling Swiss chocolates and watches, Scotch whisky, French champagne and perfumes. Add rampant corruption and repression to accept a second-hand political ideology not originating from the ground realities of people and you have ideal recipes for killing fields like the infamous Prague Spring.

Back to Basics: Public Action Enterprises

We are reminded of Professor Mohammad Yunus of Bangladesh[3] in this respect - the magician of the Grameen Bank ["rural bank"] micro credit revolution who even hugely impressed Hilary Rodham Clinton. What Professor Yunus still does is amazingly simple - he organizes self-help groups in the manner of cooperatives and tries to make them economically self-reliant in areas as humble as poultry, weaving, dairy and even small-scale production. But when such cottage industries are linked ["forward and backward integration"] in the larger context of market forces they become formidable in their control of the overall agrarian and even the urban economy. Peasant women in Bangladesh carry mobile telephones to communicate with distant markets, distributors and dealers! This may sound incredible but it is true nevertheless, proving the validity of Cobden's observation.

Operation Flood in Anand [Gujarat, India] and the Lijjat and Kissan enterprises are other such brilliant instances of people working toward their common good [based on innovative techniques like outsourcing of manpower and material resources, subcontracting or leasing of plant and machinery, breaking down the production process to delimit financial risk liability ventures somewhat akin to Adam Smith's exposition of the division of labor dynamics] without any outside intervention whatsoever. One must remember that neither India nor Bangladesh tends to practise authoritarian régime maintenance. What was possible once in Beijing's Tiananmen Square when the People's Liberation Army crushed pro-reform students under tanks and armored carriers is unimaginable in either India or Bangladesh [that secured its liberation in 1971 by way of Indian military cooperation]. So democracy is an essential requirement if "the progress of freedom" is to continue unabated.

Voice of the People: Evolution of Democratic Policy Prescriptions

By democracy we ordinarily mean popular authority or rule. As made popular by Jean Jacques Rousseau, one of the ideologues of the French Revolution [that effectively altered the course of European history by beginning the disintegration process of the medieval and feudalistic Age of Empires], the voice of God is heard in the voice of the People. This was a far cry from the autocratic self-styled pronouncement of French Emperor Louis XIV - "I am the State". It was no wonder that Louis XVI's wife Marie Antoinette [later sentenced to die to rather unceremoniously at the guillotine] had once expressed her wonder in such a naive fashion on hearing about the simmering discontent among the Parisian mob standing in endless queues or bread lines and more often than not starting violent riots among themselves - "If they cannot eat bread why don't they eat cake!"

This vulgar ignorance of the ruled on the part of their rulers is rather inimical to democracy. But we must remember that democracy as dynamic capacity-building agency in the post 9/11 world has all of a sudden underscored its long-ignored extrinsic quality. Democracy is not really insular, stretching from the East Coast to the West Coast of the US. If the notion of external sovereignty has suffered quite extensively since the height of the Cold War when the world was almost vertically divided into the NATO and Warsaw Pact countries [save the NAM states being led by Nehru, Nasser and Tito], the idea of external democracy has gained much popular and diplomatic acceptance.

Simply put, powerful nations can no longer ignore internal human rights or civil rights agenda vis-à-vis world public opinion. But this is what the US is consistently trying to follow as its most shortsighted foreign policy since the Malta Summit Conference when President George Bush Senior and CPSU General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev officially declared the end of the Cold War, a historic event that even prompted Francis Fukuyama to write a banal work on the end of history and the last man.

Since the days of its Nineteenth Century isolationist Munroe Doctrine the US has put up apparently impregnable walls around itself that couldn't even be dismantled during the Marshall Plan for the Reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War or establishment of first the League of Nations [as an initiative of President Woodrow Wilson's historic Atlantic Charter] and then the UNO, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and now the omnipotent World Trade Organization that apparently dictates the movements of a new specter of the

new millennium, namely Globalization.

The US foreign policy has always been designed on lines of “muddle and meddle” - Vietnam, Korea, Bay of Pigs, Iran Contra scandal, Afghanistan and now Iraq. The country boasts of democracy and swears by it, boiling with righteous motivation to export Yankee democracy around the underdeveloped world, but has, however, classified the JFK assassination archives for no apparent reason whatsoever. Clandestine covert operations, the strategic defense initiative [Star War], research in biological and chemical weapons - you name it and you would find the dirty trick invariably up America’s [read the CIA and FBI’s] sleeves. In fact, it is the only nation till date that has used atomic weapons in war during war, destroying Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the process just to avenge the Pearl Harbor attack and crippling generations of Japanese children long after the holocaust as a result of toxic radioactive radiation carried forward genetically by succeeding generations.

Since the Gulf War fought by Senior Bush as the much-hyped Operation Desert Storm so graphically shown by CNN across million of idiot boxes around the world, nobody knows exactly how many innocent Iraqi children have died out of malnutrition, disease and hunger due to the US-imposed and UNO-condoned sanctions against Iraq. The US condemns Osama bin Laden but should actively engage in soul-searching regarding its own virulent international terrorist status in our contemporary unipolar world where might is right in a Hobbesian state of affairs where human life, property and security are all indeed “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, short”. The US, in brief, should radically reorient its foreign policy to address the dignity of human life and internal sovereignty of nation states around the world.

Clash of Civilizations?

“American political scientist Samuel Huntington had expressed apprehension way back in 1996 that the post-Cold War 21st Century would be marked by conflicts between Islam and the West, a throwback to the Crusades of the Middle Ages. This projection was also described in Western scholarship as the Jihad versus McWorld scenario, an eventuality that would test the resilience of the free world against the forces of fundamentalist insurgency . . . American [foreign] policy-makers should realize that it is high time they begin dismantling the country’s strategy of cultural isolation and indifference. It is a disquieting fact that an average urban student of the Third World knows more about the US than an average American undergraduate knows about other peoples and other cultures. Dissemination of multi-cultural knowledge should be facilitated both within and without the American academia, industry and social service sectors. Familiarity can also breed understanding and help expand world-views of an entire people. The logic of globalization more

often than not has worked in an discriminating manner, provoking even Western scholars to come up with insightful expressions like McDonaldisation, Coca-Colonization and The US is us!

“Moreover, the US should discontinue backing wrong horses and should realize that Less Developed Countries in the Third World may be impoverished but are not, however, bereft of dignity. Likeminded liberal democratic countries like India should be cultivated as reliable long-term allies on a level playing field by a series of confidence building measures. The US should also discontinue its interventionist policies that have generated such universal animosity and condemnation. Not for nothing has the expression Ugly American become well-known! Nobody has quite forgotten the acts committed by US Marines in Vietnam or the useless display of mind-boggling violence in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Third World has not yet come to terms with the missile attack on a children’s hospital in Baghdad during the Gulf War, to cite an example. Have the Americans themselves forgotten the faces of helpless women and children at Kosovo only a couple of years back? Americans should realize that the lives of non-Americans are also valuable in the context of the entire human civilization, and should also engage in soul-searching to understand the roots of this anti-US attitude around the world.

“The clash of civilizations has only just about begun - it is now the obligation of a more conscientious American people to learn from their mistakes of the near and distant past to salvage the future of their free and sanitized and once-impregnable World. They should talk less about Human Rights and should work more to safeguard Human Rights as the self-appointed policeman of the world. Those who do not learn from history, demonstrably and most regrettably, are often condemned to repeat it.”[4]

State and Market and Education

Economist John Williamson’s prescriptions that had informed the Washington Consensus were fiscal discipline, redirection of public expenditure, tax reforms, financial liberalization, adoption of a single and competitive exchange rate, trade liberalization, elimination of barriers to Foreign Direct Investment, privatization of state-owned enterprises, deregulation of market entry and competition and ensuring secure property rights.

The concept of distant education has taken a while to be accepted in the popular imagination in India and elsewhere where it has been traditionally accepted since Independence that the State will pay for higher education irrespective of the market, merit or even financial status. But the pinch is now being increasingly felt in the job market where virtually “unemployable human resources”

equipped with almost useless graduate or postgraduate degrees are being churned out year after year by our colleges and Universities. India is a welfarist country where subsidies [non-merit public expenditures] more or less benefit the privileged middle classes and higher education is considered to be a tool that facilitates proliferation of democracy. But "democratization of education" [read proletarianization of meritocracy] can never be a solution to the problem of unemployment and a stagnant job market.

Add unemployment and youth discontent to a serious population growth scenario and you get an explosive combination where the entire nation happens to sit on the top of a dormant volcano, apparently idling away time watching the World Cup of Cricket, while permanent employment and social security are fast becoming obsolete in a society where a job is supposed to be like your mother in terms of security and sustenance.

However, the open school or University system can address this simmering tension and disturbing state of affairs in an effective manner only if more professional courses are designed by professionals to accommodate our educated generalists, that is students with degrees in the humanities, literature and social sciences. One such option can be social work where the catchment area may cater to students from sociology, history, political science, anthropology, public administration and the like. The job market here is specific: the NGOs who sponsor the so-called third actor intervention, public action and civil societal advocacy.

Self-help and Youth Capacity-Building[5]

Science and commerce graduates may even be taught entrepreneurial and microcredit financing skills so that they may also contribute to the nation's self-help movement in the professional services sector. Netaji Subhas Open University, Calcutta is one of the foremost Indian educational institutions in this area, according to Professor Asish Guha, Director of Study Centres, NSOU.

The University Grants Commission's sponsored teachers' training programs in India like refresher and orientation courses for college and University lecturers are more or less like academic picnics where precious public money is wasted in a meaningless manner over a period of three weeks or so. As such our generalist colleges and Universities produce man power that is often not employable without any further skill enhancement in areas like computer literacy, management or any other technical training. But India's tax payers have to still bear the brunt of an expensive higher education system that almost entirely runs on subsidies and without any material returns to produce in exchange. Doctors and engineers and management professionals join the country's bureau-

cracy after their professional attainments, thus resulting in huge losses in terms of human resource management.

The UGC should seriously rethink its system of awarding scholarships, funding seminars, symposia, workshops, travel grants, book and equipment purchase and so on and so forth. Refresher and orientation courses are almost entirely useless as after completion of these programs the only people who happen to benefit [at the cost of the people] are the teachers themselves so far as their Career Advancement Scheme is concerned and nobody else. High theory is flaunted at these programs with no regard to the UGC's guidelines that undergraduate courses should primarily be brought into focus. Let's face it: the commonplace and average student doesn't really need to read about Plato or Aristotle - he or she is much better off studying how commodities are produced for and exchanged in the market. This may sound unduly harsh but students or trained human resources are, in the very last recourse, commodities in the market to be bought and sold against a value defined and determined by forces of demand and supply.

State versus Popular Initiatives: A Case Study

West Bengal's venture into microcredit for the rural poor has failed to make any real headway [unlike the case of neighboring Bangladesh] but the state government, notwithstanding empirical and readily available evidence, continues to contest this charge. Amalendu Halder, project coordinator of the Loknath Divine Life Mission, a Calcutta-based NGO, has recently claimed that the failure was evident in "the many loopholes" in the below-poverty-line and the above-poverty-line official estimates. "The venture has dismally failed," he confirmed.

State government mandarins, however, shot this serious allegation down promptly enough [shaking out of their habitual inaction and indifference bred by an impersonal Weberian culture of red tapism] without any supporting data whatsoever. They said that the Loknath Mission and other similar NGOs operating in the emergent area of microcredit and self-help groups have not yet adequately familiarized themselves with the working of the various governmental schemes.

[It is a most regrettable fact that civil servants in the Third World more often than not act as if they are the masters of the people rather than being their servants which, in constitutional terms, they actually are. This perverted phenomenon is a spillover from the colonial days when the questionable legacy of the "steel-frame of the administration" was passed down generations of bureaucrats. They were brainwashed at the administrative training college in Haileybury, England by the East India Company nabobs that they were about to return to India - the Brightest Jewel in the Crown - to assist the British in

their self-appointed task euphemistically called the White Man's Burden. This was nothing else but a sustained exercise over a couple of centuries to systematically fleece this once-rich country and its defenseless people like nobody's business. This "drain of wealth" resulted in the man-made Famines of 1770 and 1943 when sheer hunger provoked cannibalism and human tragedies like selling off one's wives and daughters into prostitution.]

"Loopholes or problems are situation-specific. At times they do vary widely but we try to sort these out as thoroughly as practicable by way of government monitoring and supervision," said Bhaskar Pal, a senior official in the Bishnupur area.

Broadly speaking, the Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana [a rural self-employment project jointly launched by the Government of India and the state government] has been in operation for two years. Potential beneficiaries either directly approach the district rural development cells manned by West Bengal Civil Service officers for approval or their individual cases are forwarded by NGOs.

Haldar said the project faces subsidy and incentive-related financial irregularities that also bedevil many other schemes of the panchayats [three-tier institutions of decentralized local governance at the district level]. BPL groups receive subsidies ranging from INR 7500-10,000 per INR 100,000 loan granted by cooperative banks. There have been major complaints that bank loans so extended to self-help groups under this project are not free from irregularities and currying of political favor [West Bengal is being ruled since 1977 by succeeding Left Front Governments, a coalition almost exclusively shepherded by the Big Brother, namely the Communist Party of India (Marxist). This is an unprecedented "record" worldwide.]

Pal, however, said only nationalized, cooperative and rural banks are authorized to extend loans and so far no reports of irregularities have reached the government. Sources in the State Institute of Panchayats and Rural Development, notwithstanding this self-explanatory and upbeat attitude [albeit unsubstantiated] of the state administration, confirmed there are widespread irregularities so far as implementation of the scheme is concerned. "It's a fact that there are serious grievances among self-help groups regarding APL and BPL estimates although there exist clear-cut Planning Commission guidelines in this regard. Anomalies have distorted the lists, thanks to vested vote bank interests of rural politicians," said an SIPRD official on condition of strict anonymity.[6]

Negotiating Globalization

Contemporary state systems guided by the dynamics of globalization are like so many Januses - the phenomenon assumes a most robust character in the developed North but an almost impotent identity in the developing or still underdeveloped South. So globalization necessi-

tates a dialog between the rich and the poor outside its essentialist assumptions of an uneven power discourse as conditions of Good Governance and Structural Adjustment Programs (Gary and Mayo, 1995) benchmark most Third World postcolonial democracies today (Ray, 1989, 1996).

While there are contentions that aggressive market forces make it difficult for welfarist governments to protect their citizens from transnational actors that are as elusive as their hot money, there are also counter-arguments (Keohane, 1998) that institutions like the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organization actually safeguard citizens from the administrative limitations of their respective national governments. There appears to be a consensus, however, that powerful markets tend to undermine political élites at home (Barber, 1996; Cox, 1993; McGrew, 1992; and Slater, 1996).

Global Village

John Echeverri-Gent (1997) has pointed out that if globalization, on the one hand, facilitates decentralization then, on the other, it also helps develop pockets of dynamic Free Trade Areas in large developing countries like China and India by reorganizing their economic geography, Foreign Direct Investment and global commodity chains. This process, however, creates large hinterlands of economic backwardness and entrenches economic inequality within the developing South. Globalization, therefore, intensifies regional disparities in the Third World. John Rapley (1996) has found that Structural Adjustment Programs have varied widely in the results they have yielded. While Latin America has partially benefited from structural adjustment, Africa has not. Rapley has also argued that Rolling Back the State - that is less government as an imperative of contemporary globalization - does not always lead to enhanced economic growth.

Globalization, therefore, would appear to be an open-ended journey toward a globalized world order whose weightless economy (Huws, 1999) may be described as one that defies both national and international borders so far as economic transactions are concerned. This is a situation where freight charges are nil and trade / tariff barriers would disappear. Such a pilgrim's progress, however, is nothing new. Technological innovations during the past five centuries have steadily helped integrate the global community into an emergent global civil society. Transatlantic communications have developed from sailing boats to steamships, to the telegraph, the telephone, the commercial aircraft and now the Internet where even nationalism as a conventional political ideology has been reduced to "banal nationalism" (Billig, 1995).

State and Civil Society

Liberal democratic régimes like India or even the US can only be politically successful, deliver the common good and thereby continue in power in a more stable [read pro-people] manner if they are able to correctly read the obtainable ground realities and problems thereof. These problems are more or less popular in nature, and have a propensity to develop into discontent of the ruled actors against their ruling institutions. So the actors in power have to continuously shuffle and delicately balance priorities of human development, well-being and accessible freedoms like the ever-important agenda of human rights and civil liberties, a responsive and responsible administrative machinery, transparency at all levels of public expenditures and domestic and international peacekeeping projects rather than playing mutually harmful “spy versus spy” games.

Eminent political scientist Subrata K. Mitra (1997: 23) has quite rightly cautioned that “If the wielders of power concede the point to those who challenge established values and norms, they risk losing their legitimacy. On the other hand, the failure to give satisfaction to the discontented might deepen their sense of outrage and alienation which can further reduce their legitimacy.”

Powers-that-be [“Cabinets or Foreign Offices”] will do well to continually redress grievances of political actors at the grassroots in a political manner by establishing and ably handling pro-people institutions. Only then organic identification would bind actors with institutions - only then the incipient involvement noticed at the level of “actors and institutions” would, arguably enough, transcend itself to the level of “actors in institutions”, consolidating both the level and the quality of progress of freedom in the process.[7]

Conclusion: Fear of Freedom?

So the question we are left with while winding up is: do we prefer freedom backed up by minimum government or would we be merely satisfied with sobriety that is imposed on our lives and liberty by the dictates of high politics from the above. It is amply clear by the beginning of a new millennium already imperiled by the grim possibility of a nuclear war that civilized human beings organized as systems of politics across porous international borders can no longer afford to unquestioningly follow the policy prescriptions of their domestic governments, foreign offices and state departments. More intense people-to-people contacts should be sustained on a long-term basis as such transnational networks can better work toward the so-called Track Two diplomacy between intellectuals and academics, social activists, policy analysts, development consultants and the common people (Maiti, 2001).

It is the unknown citizen who should really be

brought back into primary focus by Rolling Back the State - nowhere men and women like you and me should be constituted as indices of basic empowerment, freedom and development. Yet another fundamental war should be waged against hunger, poverty and illiteracy - based on endurable peace, better quality of education for all and a higher quality of material and ethical well-being in general. This sounds like a grand Utopia all right but even stranger events did happen during the course of human civilization and progress.

Endnotes

[1] Almost every aspect of sustainable development will be affected by the quality of civil society, political participation and decision-making, and responsible and reliable governance. Because good governance is the fundamental requirement for progress and sustainability, furthering it is at the core of U.S. strategy to foster sustainable development. <http://usembassy.state.gov/tokyo/www/hgl0469.html>

[2] Cobden, Richard (1804-65). British economist and statesman, known as the Apostle of Free Trade . . . In Parliament Cobden favored a laissez-faire economic philosophy, that is, minimum interference of government in business. He opposed factory reforms and trade unions and objected to the intervention of government in the affairs of foreign nations. His opposition to British foreign policy cost him his seat in Parliament in 1857. He was so respected by his political opponents, however, that Prime Minister Palmerston offered Cobden the post of president of the Board of Trade in his cabinet in 1859. Cobden rejected the offer, but remained politically active. The following year he negotiated an Anglo-French commercial treaty. His last important political action was to support the Union in the American Civil War, at a time when other British leaders were hesitant. He died in London on April 12, 1865.

<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/refpages/refarticle.aspx?refid=761557174>

[3] When we started giving out tiny loans under a system which later became known as the Grameen Bank, we never imagined that one day we would be reaching hundreds of thousands, let alone two million, borrowers . . . (Grameen Bank) Provides credit to the poorest of the poor in rural Bangladesh without any collateral. At Grameen Bank, credit is a cost effective weapon to fight poverty and it serves as a catalyst in the overall development of socio-economic (conditions) . . . There are now more than two dozen organizations within the Grameen family of enterprises. These include the replication and research activities of Grameen Trust, handloom enterprises of Grameen Udyog and fisheries pond management by Grameen Matsyho or the Fisheries Foundation. <http://www.grameen-info.org/>

[4] Prasenjit Maiti, “Clash of Civilizations?” The Humanist (Washington DC: American Humanist Association, 2001). This essay was provoked by 9/11 and its subsequent backlash in the form of tremors and apprehension of escalated violence and ethnic tension around the world. It is amply evident by now that the US State Department has aggravated rather than alleviated the course of the most challenging North-South dialog since the conclusion of the Second World War and the Cold War by its deplorable diplomatic shortsightedness and megalomania that are not always entirely in good taste.

[5] The contemporary view of capacity-building goes beyond the conventional perception of training. The central concerns of environmental management - to manage change, to resolve conflict, to manage institutional pluralism, to enhance coordination, to foster communication, and to ensure that data and information are shared - require a broad and holistic view of capacity development. This definition covers both institutional and community-based capacity-building. <http://nrm.massey.ac.nz/changelinks/capacity.html>

[6] Maiti, “Failure slur on self-help project”. The Telegraph [5 November 2002. Calcutta, India]. This news report was based on field surveys and interviews with NGOs, bureaucrats and newpersons. I’ve vindicated and concurred with Cobden’s valid contention that the onward march of human civilization based on material development of the everyday conditions of life depends more upon the absence of irksome bureaucratic interventionism, proliferation of natural markets, expansion of consumer-friendly hinterlands and resource-rich catchment areas and the dissemination of information [knowledge being power] rather than upon the policy prescriptions drafted away from the periphery and implemented none to well to empower marginal men and women at the grassroots who are bereft of any meaningful access to the process of decision-making that affects their livelihoods in the long run.

[7] — “A Human Ecological Analysis of the Narmada Bachao Andolan”. Electronic Green Journal (Idaho: University of Idaho Library, 2001). This paper written in support of the protracted Save the Narmada Movement in India indicates how the government, its insensitive bureaucracy and repressive system of police administration and even the judiciary can actually defeat - albeit temporarily - popular aims and aspirations. The Government of India has of late decided to link up all the major rivers of the country so that river water from the Gangetic Basin of North India can flow into the comparatively arid regions of South India and facilitate both irrigation and hydroelectricity generation. However, experts are convinced that this move would not only considerably dry up the already reduced water volume of the Ganges [as a result of the water sharing treaty with Bangladesh across the Farakka Barrage in West Bengal] but would also result in annual floods and siltification of the different river basins of South India as well. The Supreme Court of India - the country’s apex federal court - has already had set up a Water Disputes Tribunal to settle disputes and resolve bitter conflicts between states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in South India over the contentious issue of sharing water of the River Cauvery on a mutual basis as this river flows across both these states.

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