

ISSN#1068-5154

drowning in  
poetry, prose, art,  
news, philosophy  
& performance art

the unreligious,  
non-family-oriented  
literary  
& art mag

v. 131  
09/23/03  
Autumnal Equinox issue

children  
churches  
& daddies

<http://scars.tv>





## the boss lady's editorial

Hi... We wanted to inform you of changes to cc&d - again and already.

CC&D used to run as stapled 5.5" x 8.5" issues (1993 through 1995) of poetry and occasionally prose. In 1996 through 1998, cc&d ran its issues as standard-sized issues, adding news, philosophy, and the AIDSwatch. In 1999 through 2002 cc&d ran its acceptances only on the web and in collection books. Well, cc&d is keeping up the web and collection books but has run quarterly issues in 2003.

But we got wistful for the good ol' days, so in 2004 we are going to revert our issues to 5.5" x 8.5" format. We may include in some of these issues a compact disc of audio recordings, but we thought that leaving the magazine back in its smaller format will allow us to highlight the best work that we receive.

Although we like the fact that we can also deliver news and philosophy in our magazine issues now, we wonder if adding these thing distracts the reader from the good writing context that we accept for our issues. So... we're going to try to find a happy medium and only highlight news and philosophy in our 5.5" x 8.5" issues, so we can show off poetry

and prose.

Besides, news and philosophy are already on the web in special sections (the same way that writings are), so we thought this might be a better way to pull of what cc&d can showcase in regular print issues.

We hope you like the changes we have in store for cc&d to make it better in the future, and we'd love to hear your comments and input on the changes we're making. Please feel free to snail mail or e-mail us any questions of comments.

Oh, yeah, and we want your writing and art too - so send it in to us!



**janet kuypers**

managing editor

*Janet Kuypers*<sup>TM</sup>  
<http://www.janetkuypers.com>

page 4 .....	News you can use
page 6 .....	ADD info
page 13 .....	Art
page 14 .....	Prose
page 32 .....	Poetry
page 44 .....	Performance Art
page 76 .....	Philosophy Monthly

# toc

ISSN#1068-5154

# children churches & daddies

the unreligious, non-family oriented  
literary and art magazine

## Produced By

Scars Publications and Design

## Editorial Offices

Children, Churches and Daddies  
Scars Publications and Design  
829 Brian Court  
Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA

## Internet

ccandd96@scars.tv  
<http://scars.tv>

## Publishers/Designers Of

Children, Churches and Daddies magazine  
cc+d Ezines  
TheBurning mini poem books  
God Eyes mini poem books  
The Poetry Wall Calendar  
The Poetry Box  
The Poetry Sampler  
Mom's Favorite Vase Newsletters  
Reverberate Music Magazine  
Down In The Dirt magazine  
Freedom and Strength Press forum  
plus assorted chapbooks and books  
music, poetry compact discs  
live performances of songs and readings

## Sponsors Of

past editions:  
Poetry Chapbook Contest, Poetry Book Contest  
Prose Chapbook Contest, Prose Book Contest  
Poetry Calendar Contest  
current editions:  
Editor's Choice Award (writing and web sites)  
Collection Volumes

• **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.

• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (ISSN 1068-5154) is published quarterly by **Scars Publications and Design**, 829 Brian Court, Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA; attn: Janet Kuypers. Contact us via snail-mail or e-mail (ccandd96@scars.tv) for subscription rates or prices for annual collection books.

• To contributors: No racist, sexist or blatantly homophobic material. No originals; if mailed, include SASE & bio. Work sent on disks or through e-mail preferred. Previously published work accepted. Authors always retain rights to their own work. All magazine rights reserved. Reproduction of cc&d without publisher permission is forbidden. Copyright © 1993-2003 **Scars Publications and Design, Children, Churches and Daddies**, Janet Kuypers. All rights of pieces remain with their authors.









**news you can use**



# **DON'T BLAME OUR INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES--BLAME OUR UNPRINCIPLED FOREIGN POLICY**

***Sept. 11 could have been prevented only by having a principled foreign policy.***

***By Onkar Ghate***

The 900-page Congressional report criticizing the operations of the FBI and CIA in the months prior to the September 11 attacks misses the fundamental point. Whatever incompetence on the intelligence agencies' part, what made September 11 possible was a failure, not by our intelligence agencies--but by the accommodating, range-of-the-moment, unprincipled foreign policy that has shaped our government's decisions for decades.

September 11 was not the first time America was attacked by Islamic fundamentalists engaged in "holy war" against us. In 1979 theocratic Iran--which has spearheaded the "Islamic Revolution"--stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran and held 54 Americans hostage for over a year. In 1983 the Syrian- and Iranian-backed group Hezbollah bombed a U.S. marine barracks in Lebanon, killing 241 servicemen while they slept; the explosives came from Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement. In 1998 al-Qaeda blew up the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224 individuals. In 2000 al-Qaeda bombed the USS Cole in Yemen, killing 17 sailors.

So we already knew that al-Qaeda was actively engaged in attacking Americans. We even had evidence that agents connected to al-Qaeda had been responsible for the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. And we knew in 1996 that bin Laden had made an overt declaration of war against the "Satan" America.

But how did America react? Did our government adopt a principled approach and identify the fact that we were faced with a deadly threat from an ideological foe? Did we launch systematic counterattacks to wipe out such enemy organizations as al-Qaeda, Hezbollah and Fatah? Did we seek to eliminate enemy states like Iran? No--our responses were short-sighted and self-contradictory.

For instance, we initially expelled Iranian diplomats--but later sought an appeasing rapprochement with that ayatollah-led government. We intermittently cut off trade with Iran--but secretly negotiated weapons-for-hostages deals. When Israel had the courage to enter Lebanon in 1982 to destroy the PLO, we refused to uncompromisingly support our ally and instead brokered the killers' release. And with respect to al-Qaeda, we dropped a perfunctory bomb or two on one of its suspected camps, while our compliant diplomats waited for al-Qaeda's terrorist attacks to fade from the headlines.

At home, we treated our attackers as if they were isolated criminals rather than soldiers engaged in battle against us. In 1941 we did not attempt to indict the Japanese pilots who bombed Pearl Harbor--we declared war on the source. Yet we spent millions trying to indict specific terrorists--while we ignored their masters.

Despite emphatic pronouncements from Islamic leaders about a "jihad" against America, our political leaders failed to grasp the ideology that seeks our destruction. This left them unable to target that enemy's armed combatants--in Palestine, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia--and the governments that assist them. Is it



any wonder then that, although our intelligence agencies prevented many planned attacks, they could not prevent them all?

Unfortunately, little has changed since September 11. Our politicians' actions remain hopelessly unprincipled. Despite the Bush administration's rhetoric about ending states that sponsor terrorism, President Bush has left the most dangerous of these--Iran--untouched. The attack on Iraq, though justifiable, was hardly a priority in our war against militant Islam and the countries (principally Saudi Arabia and Iran) that promote it. Moreover, when Bush does strike at militant Islam, he does so only haltingly. Morally unsure of his right to protect American lives by wiping out the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, Bush feared in Afghanistan world disapproval over civilian casualties. Consequently, he reined in the military forces (as he also did in Iraq) and allowed numerous Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters to escape. And Bush continues to allow their comrades-in-arms in the Mideast to go unharmed. He pretends that the Palestinians and Islamic militants attacking Israel--and who have attacked Americans in the past and will try again in the future--are, somehow, different from the killers in Afghanistan and deserving of a "peace" plan.

Instead of taking consistent, principled action to destroy our terrorist adversaries, politicians from both parties continue to focus on details like reshuffling government bureaucracies and haggling over how much criticism of Saudi Arabia the 900-page Congressional report can contain. Thus, too unprincipled to identify the enemy and wage all-out war, but not yet completely blind to their own ineffectualness, our leaders resignedly admit that we're in for a "long war" and that there will be more terrorists attacks on U.S. soil.

There is only one way to prevent a future September 11: by rooting out the amoral, pragmatic expediency that now dominates our government's foreign policy.

*Onkar Ghate, Ph.D. in philosophy, is a resident fellow at the Ayn Rand Institute ([www.aynrand.org](http://www.aynrand.org)). The Institute promotes the philosophy of Ayn Rand, author of *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*. Send comments to [reaction@aynrand.org](mailto:reaction@aynrand.org)*

*Copyright © 2003 Ayn Rand® Institute*

## *Scars Publications' The Editor's Choice Award Writing-in-a-Book Contest*

**first prize: winning the Editor's Choice award  
and getting a copy of your work appearing in  
our next Collection Volume**

**send writing and a \$13 reading fee per  
poem and \$18 per short story  
(payable to Janet Kuypers) to**

**Janet Kuypers  
Contest - scars publications and design  
829 Brian Court  
Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA**



CDs  
available  
now  
from poetry  
performance  
art shows  
through  
Scars  
Publications





get the scoop on  
**ADD**  
(attention deficit disorder)



# ADULTS WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

## **Issue:**

Until recently, it was believed that ADD symptoms largely disappeared in adolescence. It is now known that many symptoms continue into adulthood for up to 70% of individuals with ADD. Adults with ADD experience problems at work and in relationships. They may also exhibit other emotional difficulties. Medications such as psychostimulants can be an effective intervention with adults with ADD.

## **Background:**

- Attention Deficit Disorder has only recently been recognized as an adult disability. Previously, it was believed that there is a resolution of ADD symptoms in adolescence due to brain development, hormonal change, or other developmental change.
- Follow-up studies documented that children with ADD continue to exhibit symptoms of the disability in adolescence and adulthood. 30-70% of children with ADD continue to have symptoms in adulthood. It has been conservatively estimated that 2-5 million adults are affected by ADD.
- It is now recognized that adults with ADD have similar symptoms as do children with ADD.
- Many adults with ADD were never diagnosed as children. Thus, they are not aware of, nor do they understand the consequences of, their disability. Indeed, since ADD was not recognized in adults until recently, many of these adults may have been previously treated for depression, antisocial personality, or character disorders.
- Diagnosing ADD in the adult requires an examination of childhood, academic and behavioral history. Symptoms are sometimes more readily recognized by a spouse than the individual with ADD. Psychoeducational and vocational testing, as well as a thorough evaluation of family relationships and interpersonal skills, can provide insight into a suitable intervention program.
- ADD in adults is often undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. This can lead to low self-esteem, increased frustration and educational or vocational failure. Years of struggling with the untreated disability places these adults at risk for other problems, such as drug abuse and depression.
- Most adults with ADD are restless, easily distracted, have difficulty sustaining attention and concentrating, are impulsive and impatient, have frequent mood swings and short tempers, are disorganized and fail to plan ahead.
- Adults with ADD often experience career difficulties. They may lose jobs due to poor job performance, attention and organizational problems, or relationship difficulties. Other times, they may simply quit out of boredom.
- On the other hand, adults who learn to adapt to their disability and to harness the energy and creativity that often accompanies ADD can thrive professionally. Many adults with ADD are successful entrepreneurs.
- Education is the first strategy for intervention. Most adults with ADD have little understanding of the disability. Once they have been accurately diagnosed, they are often relieved to learn their difficulties are due to a disability, as opposed to some personal flaw.
- Adults can benefit from learning to structure their environment. This may involve using an appointment book, a personal computer, or tape recorder. Other strategies include making a daily list of tasks, posting schedules and appointments throughout the home or office, learning time management skills, and setting up a self-reward system.
- Psychostimulant medications can be effective with adults who have ADD. Other medications, such as antidepressants can be helpful for treating substance abuse and depression, or when phobic, panic, anxiety and/or obsessive compulsive disorders are present.
- A primary goal of therapy with an adult who has ADD is to build on success. Vocational counseling designed



---

to identify employment well suited to the individual's strengths and skills can help to ensure success.

- Other intervention strategies include:
  - scheduling regular physical exercise
  - maintaining a sense of humor
  - eliminating negative self statements
  - avoiding, reducing or eliminating alcohol/drug use
  - enlisting a friend, relative or spouse to help finish tasks and remember commitments, and to provide feedback
- Short-term psychotherapy can help the patient identify how his or her disability might be associated with a history of sub-par performance and difficulties in personal relationships.
- Long-term psychotherapy can help address mood swings, stabilize relationships, and alleviate guilt and discouragement.

## **SYMPTOMS**

The core symptoms of AD/HD are inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. According to the current DSM-IV, these symptoms manifest themselves in different ways, including:

- failing to give close attention to details or making careless mistakes
    - difficulty sustaining attention
    - appearing not to listen when spoken to directly
    - not following through on instructions and failing to complete tasks
  - organizational difficulties
  - avoiding, or not liking, tasks that require sustained mental effort
    - losing things necessary for tasks
    - being easily distracted
    - forgetfulness
    - fidgeting
    - leaving your seat in situations where remaining in seat is expected
  - feelings of restlessness or excessive activity
  - difficulty engaging in leisure activities quietly
  - feeling as if "driven by a motor"
  - talking excessively
  - blurting out answers before questions have been completed
    - impatience - or difficulty waiting
    - interrupting others in activities or conversation
- By adulthood, other signs may also be present in addition to the above symptom list. These include:
- poor organization
  - rapidly shifting moods
  - hot temper
  - over-sensitivity
  - low frustration tolerance
  - physical hyperarousal

- over-reactivity
- emotional hyperarousal
- forgetfulness
- low ability to plan ahead
- depression
- low self-esteem
- relationship difficulties
- feelings of inadequacy
- poor financial management
- poor time management
- career uncertainty
- impulse buying
- accident proneness
- academic underachievement
- numerous job changes
- difficulty paying bills
- alcohol or drug abuse
- difficulty sleeping
- feelings of disappointment or guilt





---

# **TREATMENT**

## *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*

*Deficit vs. Potential--It All Depends on Treatment*

*Janice I. Roberts, M.S., L.P.C.*

The untreated ADHD child wonders confusedly “Why is everyone always angry with me?” “Why am I always in trouble?” “What’s wrong with me?” He doesn’t mean to break or ruin things--she doesn’t deliberately disobey or ignore instructions. Constant movement, insatiable exploration, and single-minded focus on one subject almost inevitably elicit negative reactions from most people around the child with ADHD, and if untreated, the course of that child’s life can be depicted fairly accurately. Constant disapproval and resulting rejection can contribute to the child’s sense of danger and fear of abandonment--resulting in a constant state of hyperarousal to protect oneself from harm. While serving the purpose of protecting for survival, constant hyperarousal can lead to the development of chronic somatic problems such as ulcers, soft-tissue rheumatism, and debilitating headaches.

There is an educational cost levied to the child with ADHD: difficulty in following instructions and some difficulty in motor control can negatively affect a child’s performance in school and thus contribute to a lessened interest in schoolwork, gaps in learning, and a growing sense of being slow or dumb. Where once there was insatiable curiosity--now there might be lethargic disinterest because of previous failures or disapproval and lack of acceptance. An emotional cost is evident as well. A sense of being bad, of not measuring up, of not being acceptable, of not belonging can all lead to depression, a fragmented self-identity, self-protective shutdown of emotion, addictive behaviors, and in some cases excessive and harmful antisocial behaviors.

A further painful adjunct to ADHD is the resulting cost in social interactions. An inability to read others’ reactions to moderate one’s interactions appropriately can result in social distancing by others.

Inappropriate comments, actions, and behaviors create further distancing. Repeated withdrawal by others augments the emotional sense of being flawed in some way and enhances the loneliness that a person with ADHD endures.

As the ADHD child becomes an adolescent or adult, the accrual of losses in health, education, self esteem, identity, and social interactions can be staggeringly painful. So much pain--so much lost opportunity--so much unnecessary waste.

Unnecessary, because there is positive effective treatment for ADHD: a) careful monitoring of medication (predominantly stimulant medication); b) psychotherapy to deal with endured losses and grief; and c) behavior modification for training in social skills, study and organization skills, and problem-solving skills. These three components working together comprise an effective blueprint for moderating brain chemistry, healing of debilitating accrued emotional pain, and remediation of educational, learning, and social deficits. With these components at work, the person with ADHD can function at a high level, can access the high intelligence usually present, and can explore and develop previously repressed or discounted creativity. With these factors present, the person with ADHD has the opportunity to harness his or her mental and creative abilities; to learn about self and to value who he/she is; and to develop into a fully-functioning, life-experiencing, socially-competent, self-appreciating, self-actualizing individual--high possibilities indeed and well worth the investment in time, thought, and expense. The potential for being in control of one’s ADHD symptoms, for harnessing one’s unique creativity and strengths, and for enjoying and appreciating one’s unique personality and identity is exciting and possible--it can be achieved!

## **ATTENTION DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD) ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER (ADD) -An Outline For Patients And Their Families-**

### **THE NAMES KEEP CHANGING**

A. In the past, this diagnosis was known as hyperkinetic syndrome, minimal brain dysfunction, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder-residual type (adult).

HOW DOES ADD/ADHD PRESENT ITSELF?

A. Four types of problems:

Inattention: problems staying on required tasks

Hyperactive: “always on the go” (may also be hypoactive)

Impulsivity: acting before one thinks

Social Functioning: problems with family or peers (poor social skills)



- B. The onset of some of the problem behaviours must occur before age 7.
- C. The problems exist in at least two settings, eg.: home, school, work, community.
- D. The problems do not usually come and go, but are continual over a long period of time. The behaviors are variable and inconsistent. At times they can be as 'good as gold'.
- E. One has to rule out other look alike conditions, as many other problems can mimic ADD.

## **HOW COMMON IS THIS DIAGNOSIS?**

- A. Between 3 to 8 percent of school age children
- B. Statistically 3 to 4 boys are diagnosed with ADD for every girl. Many females display a different constellation of difficulties and may therefore go undetected.
- C. Over half of the children diagnosed with ADD will continue to have problems through adolescence and adulthood.
- D. Most people with ADD will have average or above average intelligence ability.
- E. Runs in families if a child has it, then there is a greater chance a parent will have the disorder.

## **WHAT CAUSES ADD?**

- A. The cause of ADD remains unknown. Environmental factors, including parenting techniques, diet, and toxins, appear to affect the disorder, but they do not cause it.
- B. Biochemical interactions, related to the brain's neurotransmitters especially the dopamine and serotonin pathways are involved.
- C. The basic dysfunction of the disorder lies in the genetic makeup of the individual. ADD seems to run in families but the pattern of inheritance of is not clear.
- D. Prenatal risks and birth complications may be implicated in some cases.
- E. For some, diet (sensitivity to certain types of food additives, dyes, artificial flavors) and medications (given to treat other health concerns) can elicit and make worse the ADD problems.

## **WHAT HELP IS AVAILABLE FOR THE ADD PATIENT?**

- A. Understanding and knowledge (information) are essential keys in assisting the patient who has ADD and their family or friends.
- B. Patients will need more than just one type of treatment/therapy, to help them, (a multimodal approach is needed).
- C. Medications can be very helpful, but only if used in conjunction with other treatment programs.
- D. Stimulant medications such as Ritalin, Cylert, Dexedrine, work about 80% of the time. If one doesn't work or isn't as well tolerated, then another medication may be helpful.
- E. Stimulant medications are used only to assist the patient to increase his/her ability to attend. The individual makes the medication "work".
- F. Each medication has potential side effects. The most common are: decrease of appetite, rebound irritability, difficulties with falling asleep. The patient on medication needs to be followed regularly by their physician. Height and weight measurements along with blood testing for liver and kidney function should be done regularly.
- G. Other medications such as antidepressants, may also be used alone or with stimulant medications and have proven helpful to some individuals.
- H. Behavioral therapy along with academic and occupational remediation may also be necessary.
- I. Get involved with local support groups and ADD associations which can be a valuable source of information and assistance.
- F. Many individuals with ADD, children or adults, may have other problems along with ADD, such as a specific learning disability, a behaviour disorder, dysthymia or Tourette's Syndrome.

---

## **WHAT ARE THE CORE PROBLEM AREAS?**

These can be divided into specific core problem areas, such as;

Attention Level:

listening skills, processing skills, organization skills, distractibility

Activity Level:

motor activity, arousal level, alertness, effort level

Impulse Level:

task completion, inhibition/ control level, self monitoring, saliency determination

Social Level:

family interaction

peer interaction, emotional, self esteem

## **HOW IS A DIAGNOSIS OF ADD MADE?**

A. There is no one test that will confirm the diagnosis of ADD. It is a clinical diagnosis made by a specially trained medical doctor or clinical psychologist.

B. An experienced clinician gathers and interprets information from parents, school, previous reports and interviews with the patient and family.

C. The information will include:

1. Whether or not ADD symptoms are present and if so for how long, how consistent, how severe, etc.
2. Whether or not mood, anxiety, behavioural or other symptoms are present, and if so, for how long and how severe.
3. Family history to rule out familial medical or psychiatric problems and to review families situation (and stresses).
4. Social history including peer and family relationships.
5. A school and/ or work history.
6. A history of the patients growth and development.
7. Review of previous medical, psychological testing, review of rating scales e.g. L-ADD.
8. Review previous or current medications and their effectiveness.
9. An assessment of patients strengths.

## **WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS**

A. Earlier beliefs that children outgrew this condition are incorrect. Many hyperactive children become less “hyper” as they grow older, but still have problems with inattention, impulsivity and social interaction.

B. Can affect school achievement, occupational, and career goals.

C. Can involve the whole family and long term relationships.

D. If not treated effectively, it can lead to problems with the law, chemical dependency, and poor social outcomes.

E. Research shows that if treated and appropriate family and social support is provided, many individuals with ADD can develop effective coping strategies and go on to very rewarding and creative careers.

## **SEVEN “KEYS” TO OPTIMAL LIVING WITH ADD**

1. Support from family, school, work, friends
2. Acceptance by the individual and others
3. Planning and develop coping strategies
4. Skill development: educational and social
5. Ongoing self monitoring
6. Set goals- build self esteem
7. Perseverance: NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, QUIT!



---

key phrases and comments used for children with ADD:  
anger control, friendship skills, mistakes are...delicate

#### Keys for Anger Control

by John F. Taylor, Ph.D

##### Play the ACE

Adapt to the situation

- I create my anger
  - I can use it any way I want to hurt others or self to help others or self
  - Anger warns me that I have a problem to resolve
  - I can change my approach so I won't be so frustrated
- Confront means to talk
- I can use the energy from anger to
  - tell them to please stop
  - tell them what i want them to please do instead
  - tell them how I will support their change
  - talk to an adult

Escape means

Deciding to leave the situation:

talk to an adult first

Avoid being RUDE

Repeated useless venting

- pillow punching
- rehearsing the anger
- not confronting

Under-expressing the anger

Dumping on others, pets, etc.

Exaggerating often results in loss of control

#### Friendship Skills

by John F. Taylor, Ph.D

Friend goes first

Talk about your friend

Friend chooses what to play

Talk about your friend's topics

Instead of "hogging the ball," take turns

Show you're happy that your friend is happy

Let your friend control his/her half; don't be the "boss"

Be a friendly host; practice meeting the friend's needs

Use the politeness words "please" and "thank you"

Feed the friend; have supervised kitchen fun

Give small appropriate gifts and share

Friend says when to stop

Do small favors

#### Mistakes Are...Delicate

by John F. Taylor, Ph.D

Preventing Perfectionism by Encouraging a Healthy Attitude toward Mistakes

"Your mistakes are..."

Decreasing

"Look how far you've come"

"Things will get easier as you continue to practice"

Expected

"That's why pencils have erasers"

"Everybody makes mistakes; nobody is perfect"

Learning Tools

"Success means any forward progress"

"What can you learn from this experience for next time?"

Incompletions

"You didn't run out of talent; you just ran out of time"

"You're just not done with it yet; we'll work on it again later"

Caused

"Let's see what's giving you the trouble here"

"Every mistake has a cause"

Accidental

"You can't do a mistake on purpose"

"All mistakes are just accidents"

Temporary

"You're just not ready for this right now"

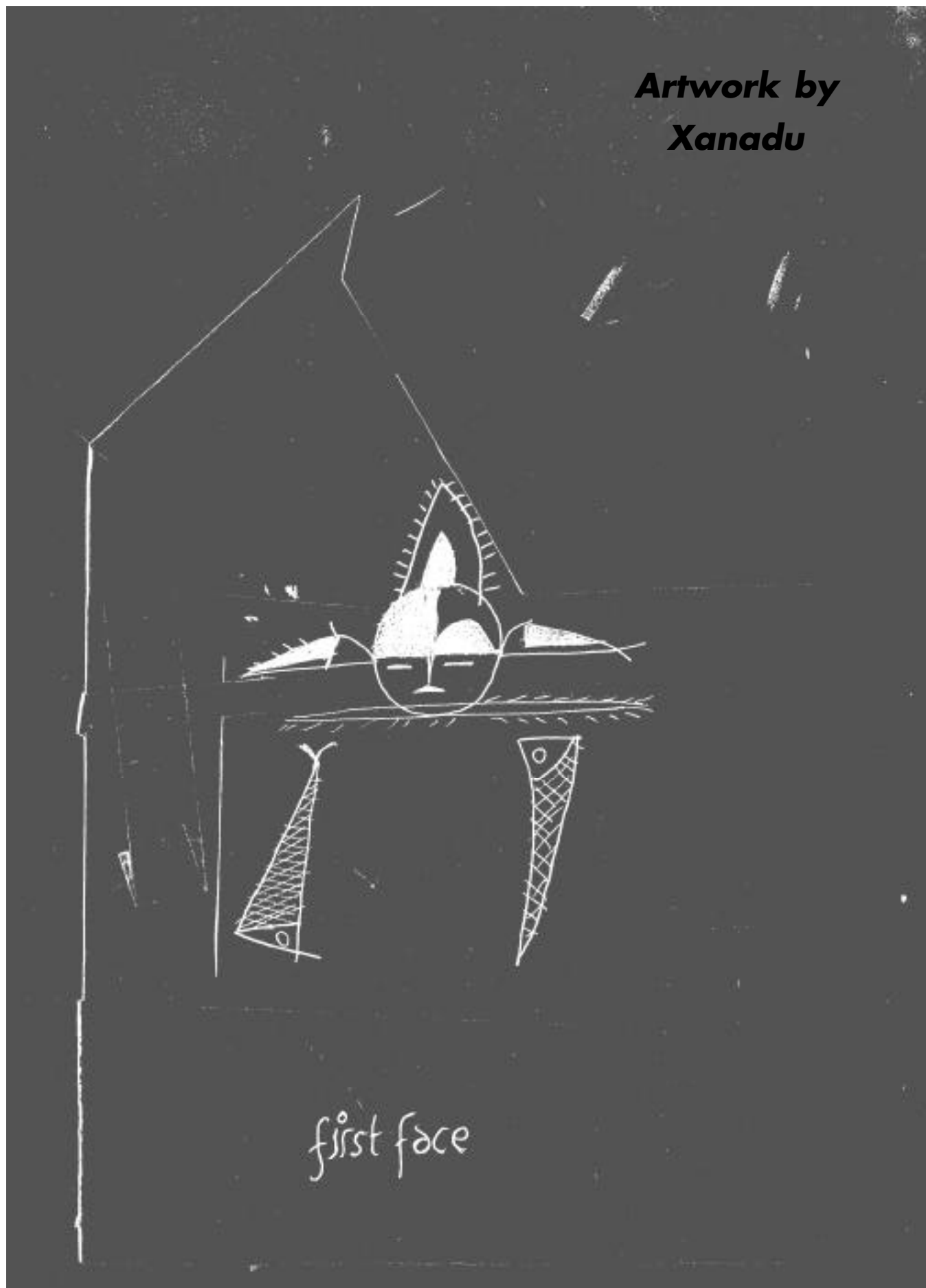
"This doesn't mean that you can't do it better later"

Effort Proofs

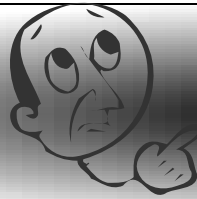
"Mistakes only prove you're trying"

"Mistakes are benchmarks on the path of effort"

**Artwork by  
Xanadu**







## A DAY IN THE LIFE

### *Clarence Fischer*

It was the year two thousand and twenty five when all hell broke loose.

There weren't any truly dazzling technological advances worth mentioning—except maybe the CondoToaster. It could toast any kind of bread or pastry, be it a bagel, a bun, a loaf, a muffin. It would even slice it for you if you wanted. But the most ingenious feature was, beyond doubt, the Condiment Applicator. Want butter on that toast? Done. Cream cheese and jelly on your bagel? You got it.

But getting back to my point... All hell broke loose that year. Lives were drastically altered. The government was overthrown. There was marshal law. The weak were weeded out. Death tolls rose while stress levels diminished (for some, anyway).

Here's a for instance:

Just the other day I was waiting for my turn at the automatic teller of my local Citibank (the only bank-chain still in operation, as it were). I was next in line. I sat impatiently in my car, a nice Nissan I had just leased (no, they're not the only car manufacturer left—there's Daewoo) waiting for the bugger in front of me to hurry the hell up and get on with it. So, I'm sitting there, this lady's taking her sweet time...and then I see it: she's trying to make a deposit.

A deposit.

Now, everybody knows you don't make a freakin' deposit in the godalmighty drive thru. You want to make a deposit? Well then take it inside. Don't hold up the rest of the world because you're too lazy to get out of your damn car!

So, what do I do about this travesty? I'll tell you what I do. I calmly lower my driver side glass with a verbal command. With my right hand I reach across my body and grip my gun. I then proceed to blow the ignoramus' hand off.

To my surprise, the young woman in the Nissan minivan behind me cheers for all get go. She pumps her arm up and down while she hangs out her window and yells, "I bet she won't pull that one again!"

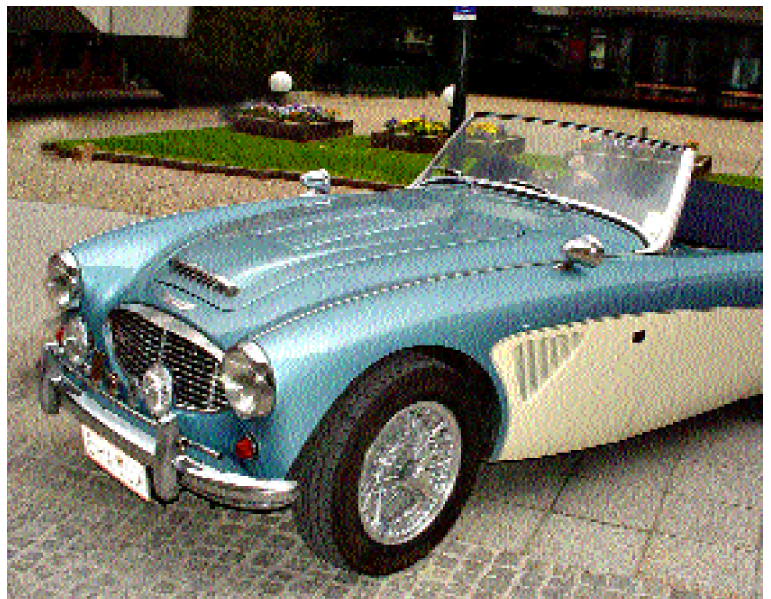
I nod in agreement as I replay the scene in my head. The woman had reached out to insert her deposit envelope and I nailed her dead on the wrist with one shot. I'm telling you, felt like some great weight was lifted off my shoulders. Free therapy.

The idiot now throws her car (it's a cheap Daewoo) in drive and hits the gas way too hard. She drives up on to the curb and her little toy car gets hung up there. I can see through her back window that she's flailing around like a headless chicken. Oh, well.

I pull up to the automatic teller and plug it. A wad of the crazy lady's cash is dispensed. Well, no need to access my account! I think.

I lean out my window and place half the cash on the keypad for the nice young lady behind me. I point to it, smile, and give her the thumbs up. She acknowledges with an enthusiastic wave.

Before driving off, I figure I'll give the douche-bag another shot—this time with the car. I put her in drive and floor the son of a bitch. My grill bashes into the rear of the cheapo Daewoo (good thing I have the crash bars, but I'm still going to need repairs; body shops make a killing these days, as you can imagine) compacting the



nonexistent  
ending some  
window fly-  
nt. I see  
space where  
was that the  
d flailing.

er her!

the tiny right-hander, hang a  
and exit the bank property. I'm thinking  
to have to see my auto body engineer  
tomorrow morning. He's been—  
when the cops pull up. Cop, really. There's just the one.  
one is plenty.

ts out of his cruiser and he's covered in that black plastic  
all wear. It's intimidating to say the least. He strolls up to  
chalant and says, "What's doin' kid?"

ing," I say.

me what happened," he says, and he makes a halfhearted effort  
towards the bank.

That."

rt with a spiel about how I was in such a hurry to get on with nothing, and the cop just  
perceptively. I try to look him in the eye as I speak, but all I see is my misshapen reflec-  
the blacked-out visor of his dark helmet.

go on about the whole incident he steps toward his car and leans in the open door like  
listening, but I know he is. He comes back out with a steaming cup o' joe and just  
without drinking.

blabbering on and on and he's still nodding and while I'm talking I'm wondering how  
ing to drink that coffee through that enormous helmet.

e doesn't. He just keeps holding on to it and nodding.

Then I rammed her for good measure," I say, and he flips up the visor of his lid. Finally,  
his eyes. They're cold and unemotional, I think, and coming from me that says a lot.

"Sounds routine to me," he says flatly, lifting the cup to the opening in the helmet.

Cripes! He's gonna burn his face off. I shout in my head, but as he brings the cup  
se to his face the space in front of his mouth parts, letting him sip naturally. I relax  
and let out a breath I didn't know I was holding.

"I'll just need your pedigree information," he tells me. "Then you're on your way."

I start giving him my name and he tells me to wait, stupid, so he can get his pad out.  
my truck starts idling rough. Really uncharacteristic, mind you. So, he's switching his  
s hot. drink—to his other hand and blam! . my car backfires. The cop is startled just  
o that he jumps the slightest bit. I watch as the brown liquid swashes around in the  
ing for the lip and then falling back down.

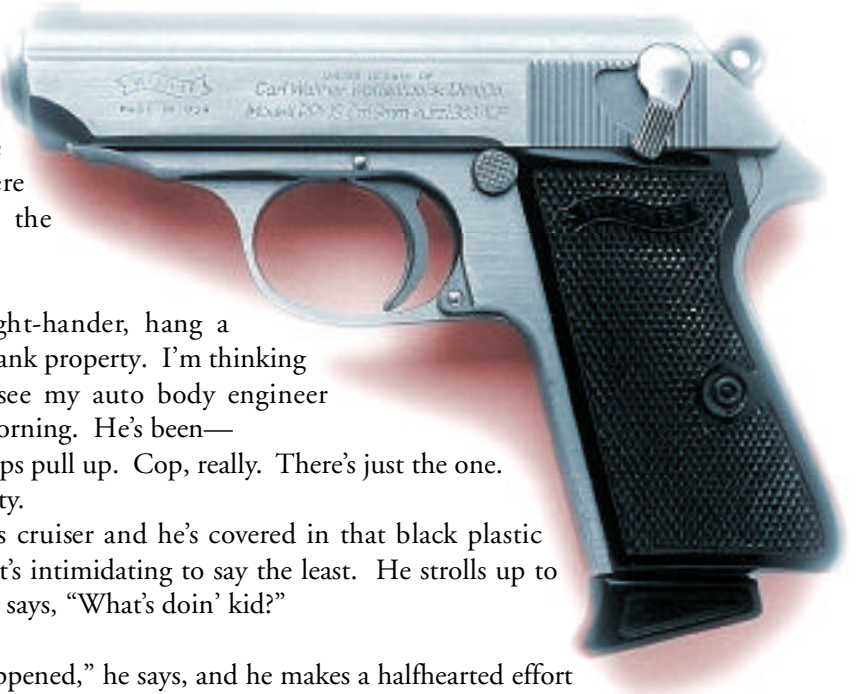
drop of sweat runs down my brow and into my eye. It stings terribly, but I don't dare  
wipe it away.

"HE SHOT ME!" yells that bitch from the bank, as she staggers around the corner of the  
ding. She's shaking her handless arm in front of her like she's a prosecutor and it's the  
evidence in a major murder trial (of which there are no more, coincidentally).

That did it. The cop jerks to his left and his coffee leaps out of the little cup and into  
r. It comes down on his left hand and he lets out one part yell, two parts angry growl,  
he draws his gun.

He blasts one from the hip, stopping the raving lunatic woman in her tracks. Then  
he pivots to me, extends his arm and jams his gun into my gut. "You asshole," he says.

Two rounds later, my story ends.





---

# PEOPLE LIKE US

*H.A. Fleming*

They had been gone for two weeks when Karla took a swig of her whiskey, looked at Jack and said, "Maybe we should kill someone." Amy, sitting cross-legged in the back seat, thought it was a joke and laughed nervously as she pulled at a tangle in her long blonde hair.

Jack kept his eyes on the road and was quiet for a moment before whispering, "I don't know, shit like that can stay with you a long time."

Karla picked at the scabs on the crook of her knee and said, "Nothing stays with me."

They hadn't meant to actually go through with it. It just happened, like a lot of shit just happens. Like how Amy ran away from home with Jack four months pregnant and when his girlfriend Karla caught up with them two days later all coked up kicked Amy in the gut until she wasn't anymore-- had just happened.

"How would you do it?" Jack asked Karla and pulled into a gas station.

"I don't think that matters," she said and got out to pump.

"She almost killed me," Amy said remembering how after the miscarriage she spent two hours curled up in the back seat, with Karla cursing and wiping the blood off the hot vinyl.

"Shut up, Amy," Jack said and grabbed Karla's bottle from the front seat and took a sip to wash down the last two of Amy's painkillers she got from the free clinic they ended up taking her to. He leaned his head against the back of his seat and sighed waiting for the tank to fill. His hair, dark and full of dust, curled over the top of the seat. Amy tried to remember what it smelled like as she watched the white line hit F.

"Karla get into the fucking car!" he yelled and he threw the car into first. Karla jumped in without paying and they took off down the highway. Amy watched from the rear window as the attendant ran out of the office and chased them a little while before they disappeared over a rise in the road.

They had already run out of the money Amy had saved working at Dairy Queen all summer. She wished they had lifted some Cokes before they got the gas; her throat was dry from the hot air that rushed in from the half open windows.

"I wish the air conditioning wasn't broken," Jack said and wiped a trickle of sweat off his cheek.

"Don't look at me, I didn't steal this piece a shit," Karla said opening a new pack of menthols.

Amy closed her eyes and tried to sleep. She hadn't slept much in days, and the sway of the car seemed to help. They slept outside, driving the Nova a little way off the side of the highway and set up camp. The plains reached out wide around them and each night Amy was afraid a police car might come by and asked them what the hell they thought they were doing taking a minor across state lines. When she sat awake the only thing to look at, other than the blackness, were the sleeping faces of Jack and Karla slipping in and out of the firelight. When the wind would change direction and their faces would disappear from sight, she thought for a second that when the light shifted again they'd be gone and just their rumpled bedding would be there.

Amy woke up to Jack veering off onto an exit. The tires squealed and she could smell them cooking on the pavement.

"Where we going?" Amy yelled, her voice small against the sound of the engine.

"I want a beer, we're stopping," he said and grabbed Karla's thigh.

"We have a six pack in the trunk," Amy said and held on hard to the door handle as they skidded around a corner.

"They're warm," Karla laughed and threw a lit cigarette butt at Amy.

They drove for a while looking for a crowded bar as Jack moved his hand into Karla's jeans.

"I don't want to go in," Amy whispered as they pulled slowly into a parking lot.

"You're coming, Karla's no good at getting free drinks," Jack said and pulled gently at Amy's hair. He touched his fingers to her cheek. He hadn't touched her since Karla found them and she missed the feel of his hands.

The smoke was thick and Amy coughed as they walked inside. She could feel the men at the door looking at her and felt the warmth of their bodies as they rubbed up against her as she passed.

"I'm tired can't we just go," she said tugging at Jack's sleeve. Karla and Jack left her alone at the bar, and watched from a table across the room to see if she could get them drinks. In the mirror behind the bar Amy could

see her face, pale and smudged with dirt, looking back at her. A man in too tight jeans and a baseball hat sat down next to her and touched her shoulder. His hands were red and large, and he offered her a cigarette.

"I don't smoke," she said and tucked her hair behind her ear.

"Oh, you're a good girl huh? You need to loosen up sweetheart," he laughed and slapped her on the ass. His breath was hot against her cheek as he leaned over to ask her if she wanted anything to drink. He bought her two beers and four shots of tequila. She did the shots one after another licking the salt off the back of his hand, but she saved the beers. When he went for more cigarettes she brought them over to Jack.

"I don't like how that guy has been following you around all night, grabbing at you," he said and took a sip.

"He's the one," Karla whispered and smiled. When he came back Karla went over and sat on the bar in front of him. Amy couldn't hear what she was saying but she could see Karla lean in close and run her hands over his thighs.

"What's going on?" Amy whispered and sat down next to Jack.

"Shhh, it's a good day," he said and wiped his nose. He pressed a small packet into Amy's palm. Her pulse quickened as she felt the sharp corners of the paper press into her skin. She didn't care what it was; she opened it and cupped her hand to her face.

Karla waved at Amy and headed towards the back door with the man. Amy and Jack followed them out the screen door, and Amy let the paper fall to the ground empty and licked clean.

They walked to the back of the parking lot to the guy's van and watched as Karla crawled in the back. Karla slammed the rusty black door behind her and smiled at Jack through the window. Amy sat on the hood of the car next to the van and listened to the sounds coming from the van. Someone was screaming. She turned to Jack but he wasn't there and the door to the van was open. The pale interior light made a line down the middle of Amy's body. She opened the door and touched her finger to a small drip of blood on the floor mat.

"Get in," Karla said laughing. She was smoking the man's cigarettes and her hands left dark red streaks on the white paper. She held it clenched in her teeth as she pulled on her underwear.

"We have to get out of here," Amy said and pushed open the door, knocking a woman who was standing outside the van to the ground. They didn't know that the man had come with his wife.

The women's eyes had looked at Amy as Jack grabbed her and pulled her into the van, as if to say please. Amy saw herself reflected back in her shiny upturned pupils.

"You don't see me," Amy said softly and wiped off

the woman's blood that splattered up onto her cheek with the back of her hand.

After they drove away from the field they dumped the bodies in, Jack and Karla split up their things. Karla wore her wedding ring and Jack took his cash.

"C'mon Amy don't you want something? It's not like we can do anything about it now," he said and threw a thin gold necklace into the back seat. She took it and let it trail out the window, watching it glint in the headlights of an oncoming truck before letting go.

"He didn't even know what hit him he was so wasted. It was like fucking and dying were the same thing," Karla whispered to her later as they set up camp. Karla gave her one of her clean shirts to sleep in. The sky was black and it was hard to find a good place for the fire, where it wouldn't light up the brush.

They finally got it lit and Karla and Jack fell asleep right away, their bodies still speckled in blood entwined together in the blanket. Karla's knife was folded in the pocket of her jeans, and Amy could see its bulge on her hip silhouetted against the fire. The smoke billowed white against the sky as Amy shielded her face with one hand and prodded the ashes with a stick with the other. She played with the few strands of long brittle grass that poked up between her feet and stared at the last of the flames. They licked and danced around the last of the wood, as if begging it to let them live awhile longer.

The fire spit an ember onto her leg and she jumped but let it sit on her thigh until it burned out. She touched the tiny blackened circle on her skin. Her eyes ached from the smoke but she tried to keep them open even when they grew watery and burned. When she closed them she couldn't help but think of the way the bodies looked, crumpled and still with bits of sand and dirt stuck to their skin as they buried them. They looked like things that were never actually people.

She thought of the man's bumble bee tattoo on the inside of his wrist, how she had first seen it as she leaned over to lick the white smear of salt from the crook of his thumb. She looked down at her own hands. She licked the bits of sand stuck under her fingernails, and she could feel it gritty and tasteless in her mouth.

The wind rushed over the flat ground, cooling her cheeks, and blowing tiny strands of her hair, tickling her nose and lips. Off in the distance she saw the white blink of headlights coming towards them, but she didn't worry. Jack had said "that no one would ever know, that people like them, like us, disappear everyday."

---

# Good Sunday

**By: Melanie Locay**

"I've never spoken to a convicted murderer before." After an hour of silence, this is all my mother could come up with to say.

"Daddy was a criminal defense attorney. I'm sure you've spoken to at least one before." I feel strange right after I say it. I haven't really mentioned Daddy since the trial.

"I know that dear but he was very good. None of the murderers he defended were ever convicted. Ironically, I bet he could have been the only one to get you out of this mess." This makes the nearby prison guard snicker.

I think she just noticed. I was hoping she would. My orange jump suit is a size four. Prison has done wonders for my figure. If only I could get the word out to all the poor women wasting their money at *Weight Watchers* and *Jenny Craig*.

"Yes. It is true, Daddy was a fantastic lawyer." I reply to her with my palms flat on the counter. The guard has requested I keep my hands there since last week's incident with the hairpin. I could really use a manicure.

"He wanted you to follow in his footsteps, Mia. Can you believe, after all this, USC is still badgering me to finish paying off your tuition? And I told them, if one of their top law students could be so unsuccessful in court, the fault obviously lies in their shoddy teaching. Then they came at me with that whole "pleaded guilty blah blah blah." I wonder if she has a nail file in that small yet tacky beaded purse of hers. Maybe that wouldn't be the smartest thing to have in front of the guard. Mommy's nails are perfectly manicured, long and blood red. Is she still talking?

"Mommy, I never would have been an attorney of Daddy's caliber. Oh, I said caliber!" I haven't had such a good laugh in a long time. I can see through the Plexiglas window that divides us my mother and I; She isn't getting the joke.

"No pun intended Mommy! Oh, come on, laugh. It's funny." Larry the guard is trying to control his laughter. He is standing about two feet away from me and I see his gun shaking as he holds in the giggles. Mom and I are the only ones in the visiting room. I'm sitting on the side with Larry and a single door that leads back to the cell-block. Mom is across from me; on her side there is a potted plant and a door that leads back to her Mercedes parked outside. This Plexiglas window dividing us is pretty familiar; it's been here all my life really.

Nose twitching and eyes squinting, she says to me in

her most scolding tone. "Mia, you're right you never would of been good like him." She has the nerve to look at me as if she is actually upset. No one has benefited more from this than her. But playing the role of the mourning widow suits her, attention craving moron.

"I never would have been as good as he? Is that what you are trying to say Mother?" It is so like her to see me in a good mood and have to just snatch it away.

"Here we go. I knew we couldn't have a conversation without you correcting your stupid mom." *Let the record show she said that.* "You and your father always did that. You two thought you were so above me. Look where you are now." I feign looking around, dramatically surprised I am in a Prison visitation room and not standing in line at Bloomingdale's.

Simple twit, Grandma was right she is nothing more than trailer trash. She could never understand why her only son turned a one-night-stand into his wife. Grandma would always say he could just never throw anything away.

"Mommy, I don't want to argue with you. He and I, we're not good people like you. He made money off the misery of others. He lost sight of what the word justice meant. It was replaced with phrases like plea bargain, reason of insanity, or anything else he could come up with just to get a client off, regardless of their innocent or guilt. He was an excellent pleader, Mommy. I would never have been able to plead as well as he did, Mommy. Do you want to hear about how he pleaded?" She follows my example and leans closely into the Plexiglas window. I lower my voice a bit to a whisper. "Oh, he pleaded up until the very end."

Mommy didn't want to attend the trial. She told me she hadn't watched any of the news about it nor read any of the newspapers. Which isn't hard to believe coming from this woman, whose number one source of news is *Woman's World* magazine.

"I want to know. Tell me about how he pleaded, Mia." The look in her eye could be categorized as one of morbid curiosity. I could see the white in her knuckles as she tightly clutches the tacky, small, beaded purse. That doesn't exactly clash her tacky beaded Gucci jacket, at least the rest of the ensemble consist of a simple black linen blouse and pants. After all, she is in mourning. After twenty-two years of living amongst the wealthy upper class, she's deflected any culture that may try to penetrate as if she were made of Teflon.



I light a cigarette and proceed to tell her my story. I never smoked before, but here I guess, I want to live the cliché to its full extent and it makes me look cool.

It was a beautiful autumn day. There had been a storm the night before, a lot of wind. The day was so gorgeous and clear. You could see the snow on the mountains. It was sunny, yet chilly enough that you still needed to wear a coat, my favorite type of weather. I have always hated Sundays. But that morning I knew that day would be different, unlike any other Sunday. I left home pretty early I wanted to run some errands before I saw daddy for lunch, our traditional Sunday lunch. My first stop was the bank. The Washington Mutual near school was open one Sunday every month.

\* \* \*

"Baby you shouldn't have! What color is it? Aww pink! That is my favorite color. You know me so well. I can't wait to see it. It's an extra small right? Uh what?! You bought me a large!! Are you trying to be funny?? Really, that is so not funny. You think I'm a large! Do I look like a large to you?"

No, actually you look like a talking lollipop. You look like a stick with a head attached. In this day and age when it is more convenient to speak into a cracker-sized little box than talking to the actual living person next to you. It's inevitable not to invite everyone around you into your personal conversations. In line at the Washington Mutual, on this beautiful Sunday, I have to become witness to one of the greatest injustices in American society. This girl, who proudly wears the emblem of XS, on every label, of every garment she owns, has been subjugated to today's equivalent to the Scarlet Letter, an L! The more I look at her, the more infuriated I too become with the person on the other end of her multi-colored, gay disco club looking phone. It is undoubtedly her boyfriend, who is bewildered as to why he deserves this verbal lashing. He must be quite the Adonis himself to be with a girl like her. Tiny waist, perky little...

"Oh I'm so sorry." She says as she falls into me. It feels like just the slightest movement of my hand would send her delicate frame flying into the nearby plastic fern.

"It is quite alright." Where was I? I remember now, perky little nose, butt, breast. I'll just go with perky little everything

"Look what you made me do! I know you can't look because you're on the phone. But you've gotten me so upset. I've bumped into the lady behind me!" She screeches into her tiny multi-colored, gay disco club looking phone

"Lady?" I can't help but mumble it to myself. I'm sure I am the same age as she is, if not younger. I see those crow's feet she is desperately trying to hide. Simply because I am not wearing a tight, pink, velour jumpsuit zippered just so

that *my* huge, fake, cleavage is exposed (obviously the uniform of some atrocious tramp patrol) does not mean I am some sort of old, frumpy, matronly woman. Her boyfriend's blunder is really a personal affront. Perfect body, long blonde hair, perfectly glossed and manicured. But yet perfect is not enough for this man? Then where do I lie on the spectrum of socially acceptable?? With my Gap size sixteen jeans and USC XL sweatshirt? This woman and her boyfriend could probably use my sweatshirt as a tent on their next camping trip.

"Hey!! Let go of my phone!" Ms. Pink Velour Suit screams.

She even has a perfect shriek. I grab her miniscule phone/slash gay disco.

"How dare you insult this freakishly thin and attractive woman and myself, mind you, by claiming that she would ever wear a large! If she is supposed to be a large, then I should be wearing some sort of car tarp size. And do I sound like an SUV to you? You ignorant, sizist bastard!"

\* \* \*

"Mommy, I hadn't cursed in years. I hadn't yelled at anyone like that ever. It felt so invigorating. Why are you laughing? I really haven't even gotten to the funny part. Which wasn't very funny to me at the time."

I wish I could say a Neanderthal sounding man, yelled profanity at me and told me that I did in fact sound like an SUV, or actually more like a mini van. But that was not the case.

\* \* \*

"Hun, try to take a breath?" I wasn't met with the voice of an Adonis. It was the voice of a woman, a kind sounding woman.

"Who is this?" I asked as if the phone were mine and the person I was supposed to have been talking to vanished.

"Well, I think that's what I should be asking. But it sounds like you're kind of tense. So I'll tell you that I'm Susan, Jenny's *girlfriend*. And I honestly don't comprehend woman's sizes, seeing as I purchase my own attire at men's and army surplus stores."

Embarrassment is an understatement for what I was feeling. Susan went on to tell me that I, in fact, did not sound like any sort of vehicle, but rather quite cute and if I would be interested in spending an evening with Ms. Pink Velour Suit (Jenny) and herself. I am paraphrasing quite a bit. Her proposal was much more colorful and graphic.

"Um, no thank you." I handed the tiny phone/gay disco back to Jenny. Her face was so scrunched in confusion. I thought her perky little nose might break off.

"Next in line please." The voice of the bank teller was like music to my ears. It took me a moment to catch my bearings and realize where I was. I quickly scuttled off to make my withdrawal. Walking to my car, it dawned on me that Susan thought I was cute and had propositioned me for sex. True, she did not see me in my full 200 plus-pound

glory, but it's nonetheless the first time I had ever been hit on. That brought a smile to my face. It was a going to be a good Sunday, one of "first-times".

I didn't need Daddy to give me another one of his lectures on how to dress seriously if I wanted to be taken seriously. I stopped back home to change before lunch. My roommate Lydia had papers strewn all over the living room floor and was in her favorite studying position, lying on her stomach on our shag-carpeted floor.

"Talk about a moment of insanity. Just imagine if you two would have gotten into a fistfight and were arrested. The steps taken by your attorney from that point on would be..." Lydia is relishing figuring out the steps to my imaginary case.

"Stop Lydia, please stop. I am having lunch with my father today. I am sure he will inundate me with law musings. I can't bear to hear any now, not on an empty stomach." Lydia was my best friend and only friend really. I felt so lucky to have her. When we met in college we became fast friends. We decided to become roommates at law school since we were both going to USC. She is the only person I could talk to openly. I could say things like, I feel hungry, even though she knew I had just secretly eaten in my bedroom closet. And she wouldn't criticize me. I allowed her to laugh at my mistakes because it wasn't the malicious laughter I've been so familiar with hearing throughout my life as the "fat girl", but she laughed with me, and knew when not to laugh at all.

"You should be taking notes of everything that man tells you. He is a genius. Do you know how much people pay to have a consultation with him?" To Lydia, Daddy was a hero. Edward Rosen, one of the best criminal defense attorneys's in the country. In college she recognized me by his name. She had read every article on him and new that I was his daughter. At first, I thought that was the only reason she was my friend, but then I convinced myself otherwise, believed we were true best friends.

"Lydia, *you* should be his daughter. You would benefit by it far more than I have. You're going to be this incredible lawyer like he is. Sometimes I wonder what I am doing here. I think I'm not cut out for this. I don't want to become a cold, heartless person like he is."

\* \* \*

"Mommy I swear I wasn't intending to hurt her, at least not at that point. I didn't think about it when I said it. But like I said, there was something about that Sunday. I wasn't thinking about any of my actions before I did them."

"No, you weren't. But that little bitch deserved everything she got." That was the smartest thing I'd heard her say all day.

\* \* \*

"But you have no difficulty envisioning me cold and

heartless?" She was so mad her voice was shaking. She threw a red cushion at me that we had bought at *Ikea* the day before. Our entire apartment was an *Ikea* wonderland. It was page 46 of the catalog. I was lucky it was the cushion that was closest to her and not the iron ashtray we had also purchased.

"No, Lydia that isn't what I said." Or was it?

"You are such an ungrateful little brat. I have to work for everything I have and you sit around getting fat while Daddy provides you with everything. And your daddy isn't a drunken loser like mine. No, he is an incredible man that is so determined to see you succeed. I will be proud if I have half the career he's had. I recognize his drive and conviction, those qualities your simple mind sees as cold and heartless."

I was stunned. Was she still talking about Daddy? She was taking it so seriously. And she called me fat. "You called me fat. You skinny, bitch."

"Of course that is the only thing you heard. Your mind can't ever go beyond your fat ass. Well then do something about it Mia. Take some of Daddy's money and join a gym. You better go, you're going to be late for your lunch date." With that, she stormed off into her room. I could hear her talking on the phone, yelling and swearing about how I had treated her, but I couldn't make out to whom she was talking to.

"Thanks for the stupendous advice buddy! I'll make sure to tell Edward Rosen his number one fan says hello," I yelled at her bedroom door.

I was so mad on the drive from my place to Daddy's favorite French bistro. But for once I felt truly proud to be Edward Rosen's daughter because it made me the source of envy for Lydia.

"Hi daddy, how are you?" The Sunday lunch thing had become more of a chore than a pleasantry. I think he felt the same. But like Lydia so astutely put it he was the man that financed my studies and pretty much my life. Not to say I wasn't grateful, as Lydia liked to think. But.

"Hello Mia. I am doing very well, thank you. I hope you're not squandering away any of my money. Your education is an investment in your future. I am giving you the greatest gift a parent can give their child. My worries lie with your spending on other frivolous things. How is your diet going?" By his reasoning my frivolous spending was on food. When I walked up to his favorite patio table he was snapping his cell phone shut. Talking to an important client no doubt, it must not have been good news. He seemed to be quite upset and he'd been eyeing me up and down closely, knowing perfectly well I hadn't lost any weight since the last time he saw me. The Sunday before at that same spot. But I was very grateful because he was an excellent father and he cared about me. The man was a genius. Lydia was right. What kind of selfish, stupid, fat idiot would I had been to not be grateful to him?

"It's coming along alright, Daddy. I was really busy this week with school and wasn't able to get to the gym. I didn't really lose any weight this week. I maintained." I can't look him in the eye when we discuss my weight. I made that mistake before and what I saw looking back at me were eyes filled with disappointment and longing for the thin, pretty, daughter he never had.

"You've maintained huh?" His voice was getting an angry tone I hadn't heard him use ever outside of the courtroom.

"What exactly are you maintaining Mia, your fat ass!!" The slamming of his fist against the table caused my glass of diet coke to spill onto my lap. I could feel the cold liquid penetrating into my pants onto my bulging thighs and untouched crouch. I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes.

"Daddy I'm sorry." I could manage to gurgle out between sobs. This outburst caught me off guard. I was accustomed to his silent disgust but he had never spoken to me this way before. I tried to tell myself it wasn't directed at me. The stupid client he had been talking to upset him, Daddy loved me, and he didn't mean this.

The waiter was cleaning my spilt soda off the table, off the floor, everywhere except for off me. I cursed Daddy in my head for always having to sit in the patio of the restaurant; particularly that day, that sunny, gorgeous Sunday in southern California. It is wasn't enough that all of Sous Le Nez En Ville was staring at me, but the people strolling by with babies or dogs at toe all got a show as well. Trying to figure out our scenario, were we a quarreling couple? Most obviously not. Daddy was often compared to George Clooney with his dark and ruggedly handsome features. If it's impossible to believe that I could be his offspring, it's even more preposterous to believe we could have been lovers.

"Stop crying," he said, his teeth tightly clenched in a frighteningly controlled voice. "I have many colleagues that come here and I will not be made a fool of nor the source of trashy gossip. Do you hear me Mia? You're becoming more of a whimpering fool like your mother everyday. But at least she isn't fat too."

If the outburst had caught me off guard, this was a turn I definitely was not expecting. It was always he and I against my mommy. I may have not gotten his looks but I had his intellect. "You listen to me. I may be fat and not the size two Hollywood attorney you dream of me being. But I am not the piece of dumb trash you married. That is what grandma calls her, isn't it?"

\* \* \*

"Sorry Mommy..." I meant it when I said it and I still think it today, but it felt necessary to apologize nonetheless. She just silently nodded. I knew she wanted me to get to the good part.

\* \* \*

By now our table had been completely cleared. The waiters were drawing straws to see who had to be the ones to ask us to leave or at least move to a more inconspicuous table.

"Mia." Daddy began to laugh. The malicious laugh from my childhood that I loathed. "Kiddo I think we've both said some stuff we didn't mean. I have a meeting to get to. You know, I have to go be the cold and heartless lawyer I am. Go get yourself some ice cream or something." He got up from the table, threw a twenty at me and was off. I felt like the wind had been knocked out of me. I realized at that moment that Lydia *was* daddy's biggest fan.

\* \* \*

"I can't go too much into detail of what happened next, Mommy. You know, where I went after the restaurant or how I got the gun. My lawyer needs me to keep all that confidential for the appeal. But I know the part you're dying to hear. I knew where I could find them because you were going to be out of town until Tuesday. It was close to sunset when I got to the house. The sky was that shade of pink it gets right before the sun completely disappears on the horizon."

\* \* \*

"Hello?" I don't know why I said that as I walked into the house. I couldn't believe my key still worked. Daddy was a maniac about changing the locks. Afraid of some of his not so trustworthy clients I am sure. All of the staff was off because it was Sunday, such a special Sunday. My old room was just as I had left it. A huge picture of Daddy and me in front of the Supreme Court stood on my dresser. I was small then and he could carry me on his shoulders. He told me how one day I would work there, the Supreme Court.

"Maybe I'll be tried there instead, Daddy." I whispered to the photograph. Just then I heard their moaning coming from his room.

"Oh my god Mia. What are you doing here?" Daddy frantically covered himself with the sheets. Lydia's body was as I always envisioned it would be naked. Perfectly tanned and toned.

"They didn't have the kind of ice cream I wanted Daddy. I got this instead." I pointed the gun toward them like I had seen them do in *Reservoir Dogs*. That movie had given me nightmares for days. It was one of Lydia's favorites. I was sure she would enjoy the pose. But all she could do was cry.

"Please don't do this Mia. I am so sorry. I didn't mean to call you fat. You're my best friend. I don't want to die!"

"Your laying stark naked, with my father, in my parents' bed, in the sheets I helped my mother pick out at *Linens N Things* and you think I am mad about you calling me fat? You're right." I shot her first, once in the stomach then in the face.





"Oh God, Oh God, Oh God. Mia put the gun down. Honey Daddy can get you out of this. We'll plead reason of insanity. We'll portray her as a whore that broke up my family and was threatening me. It will be okay. Please put the gun down. Please!" He was a lawyer to the end. He was standing next to the bed now splattered in Lydia's blood. The sheet had fallen and he was naked.

"Do you love me Daddy?"

"Yes, of course sweetheart. Give Daddy the gun." He was inching closer to me. I had never seen a naked man in person before much less that close up, or splattered in blood for that matter. He was shaking uncontrollably. At first I thought he was cold. But it was fear he exuded. The room filled with an odor of fear and blood.

"Do you think I'm sexy Daddy?" His eyes widened. For once in his life he was speechless.

"I think you're beautiful princess."

"That isn't what I asked!" I yelled back at him waving the gun around.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Yes I think you're very sexy. The sexiest woman I've ever seen." For once you could tell he was lying. He spoke the words as if he were choking on his own vomit.

"Well then give me a kiss daddy." We got closer to one another. He touched my face with his bloody hand. I had never kissed a man before. His tongue felt strange in my mouth, but I won't lie. I enjoyed it. I could feel his hand go for the gun. I pushed him away.

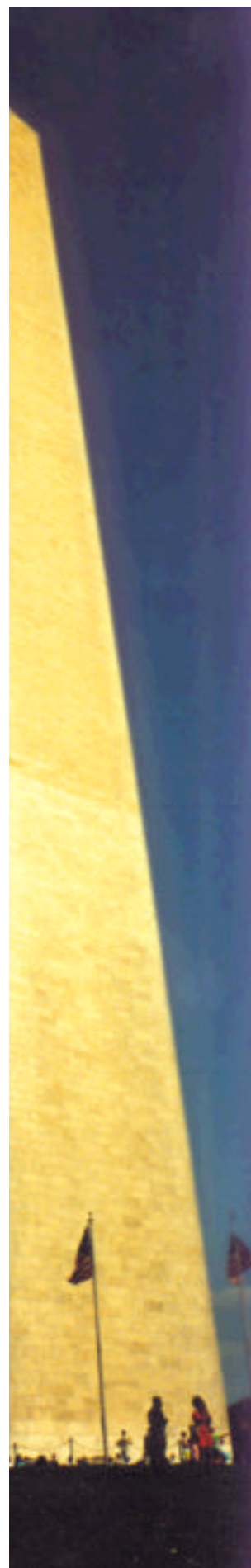
"You liar!" I yelled at him and kept firing until there were no bullets left in the gun.

\* \* \*

And the rest of the story you know because you were the one that found us. Sorry about using your Egyptian cotton towels to clean off the blood. They were just the first things I grabbed. Be glad it wasn't your *Prada* raincoat that was on the chair, am I right?"

"Why did I have to come home early?" Mommy says it aloud to herself. She looks like she's about to be sick. We sat in silence for what seemed like hours. Not really but I love how that sounds.

"So Mommy did you notice I lost weight in here?"



---

# The Family Jewels

*Scott Whittier*

Please let it be the girl in the red shirt.  
That's what I thought to myself the first morning.

I could hear water splashing into the sink. I could see sunlight and shadows glint and sparkle through the half-closed bathroom door. I wasn't sure how much I'd drunk, how much I'd slept, how much I'd done or with whom.  
The sheets only smelled half like me.

The faucet squeaked and went silent. I saw a sleeve as she gripped the door's edge. Red.  
Ruby walked into my room.

I can't go to breakfast without make-up.  
She was too beautiful.  
She was that kind of girl who didn't know it was the plain ones who needed her dedication. The kind of girl you remembered in red no matter how drunk you were or how long the night dragged on in blackness. She was stunning. But I was charming. And we had omelets. I paid with cash.

\*

Two years ago.  
That's when I learned how much things are really worth. How they can be taken away and taken back. I learned to take what I wanted. Because you can't buy love or happiness or trust--all that good stuff we already know about. But that was when I learned I could steal it.

I didn't tell Ruby about the divorce right away. I didn't tell her how they were throwing away thirty years and robbing me of every youthful memory. I didn't tell her how I gritted my teeth when her friends teased me about being too pretty, gelling my hair, shining my shoes, cufflinks on French cuffs. I never told her that dad broke our family and cheapened our name by becoming a liberated homosexual in his fifties.

I certainly never told her about the first time I signed dad's name to a check.

Mom laughed nervously. She understood resentment. It was practically a joint account anyway. After the fifth signature, she stopped laughing.

When I used his credit card to buy dinner, Ruby noticed. I laughed it off.

And it felt good, like revenge, like freedom, like taking back something that had been stolen from me. But in the end it was just money. It wasn't personal. There was a part of that feeling that wasn't satisfying. Its value was too easily replaced. And it couldn't repay the emotional debt I was owed.

I needed sentimental value. It's not about making them pay. It's about making them feel it. I knew my theory was right the day mom got the restraining order.

I had to smile to myself as I twirled the diamond earrings between my fingers inside the pocket of my pants. Like change. Like payment handed back to me.

So I stopped visiting. The divorce really upset me. I didn't want to be pushed and pulled between them. Everyone understood.

\*

I just started spending the weekends with Ruby's family.

I even had my own room there. Ruby slept upstairs in the preserved suite of a teenage princess. I wanted that family. So I took part. I took it.

They had everything. House, money, all-American kids who actually visited on weekends, lapdogs, canopy beds, even insurance. Her mother didn't blink when the pearls disappeared.

This place is a mess. There have been carpenters and plumbers and pool men in and out of here all summer long.

It's the only thing Pearl said before she picked up the phone and called her insurance. Pearl loved me like a son. Like a family heirloom that would gain value in future years.

I was the handsome rich kid--fancy boy. I hated it until it was taken away. And then I wore the old me like a disguise. I smiled and laughed and paid for dinner. No one suspected I wasn't genuine. Overlooked obvious flaws.

\*

Everyone and their sister keeps their jewelry in their underwear drawer.

That was true. I knew it.

Ruby was pretty upset when the bracelets vanished from their hiding place under all her silky unmentionables. Thin threads of jewels, like straps. So easy to slide off. Strapless.

You were the only person who knew where they were. That was true. She knew it.

But it wasn't hard to imagine someone looking in the top drawer, peeling back her panties. It wasn't hard to imagine the friends of friends and late-night parties that revolve around a house of pretty roommates.

It wasn't hard to imagine what people would think. The things that would have to be said about someone's boyfriend's gambling problem, someone else's lapse in fidelity, the kind of men, the possibility of strangers. Self-incriminating accusations.

How much was it really worth? Relationships? Friendships? Us? Priceless.

\*

No lease. Cash is fine. Half the utilities. I'll deal with the landlord.

The usual deal. But not the usual reasons.

She wasn't the type to cut ties and her losses when the debt got too deep. I should have known. Short hair with brassy tips. A little overweight. A little too much make-up. A nurse who chain smoked and used the c-word. She did what it took to do what she wanted.

Low-class bitch. A rich girl would have known better. She would have taken aerobics and gotten a pedicure.

Brassy just talked on the phone to her wispy little boyfriend, blew smoke at the receiver, stroked her cat. Pussy. At least that's a more polite word.

But she had a Rolex.

\*

Brassy found gay porn on his computer, you know.

They all sat around the table that night with their drinks and added giggles to the bar noise. As if someone would admit something like that. As if girls tell secrets about their boyfriends that only make themselves look worse. No one here ever would.

I looked over at Ruby and smiled.

And Brassy is a slut.

No one likes sluts, not even other sluts. Ruby's cheap little roommates tittered and gasped and never mentioned the men who spent the night when their boyfriends were away. We never mentioned them either. We just passed in

the halls on those mornings and pretended to be half asleep. There are so many things people don't mention.

Secrets are good. They make you feel safe. Something to protect that protects you in return. A little bit of knowledge, a few words, a tiny fact that gets locked away like a trinket. No one can take it away. It almost disappears, ceases to exist. But you never lose it because you know where it is, right where you put it in your tiny stash of hidden treasures.

\*

Time flies. Watches disappear. Shit happens. There have been so many people over here. There hadn't.

Friends of friends. I didn't know half of them. What about that guy you had over?

Brassy didn't flinch at the hint of blackmail. That guy was months ago. No one ever came over, and she knew it. But it hardly mattered. I was moving. I just couldn't live with her and the cat and the smoke and the phone. Bitch. Everyone understood completely.

Can you believe she's suing me for back rent and utilities? Of course I paid. Cash as always. No I didn't get a receipt. We were roommates. I trusted her. Bitch.

I almost used the c-word. But that would have been classless.

\*

Ugly. Old. Probably not even antique. But they belonged to her grandmother and she was supposed to love them even if she never wore the rings.

I didn't hear her roommate's stories until the tarnished little gold circles were long gone. But it increased their value in my internal account. I knew. I could tell. I could feel it when I saw their own little box inside the box, tucked under all the prettier pieces. I could feel their warm weight and rich history resting in the palm of my hand.

Goldie threw a fit. She was always a spoiled little brat. She was short and slim and pretty in that way brunettes manage cute when they should really go blonde. This one would be a piece of cake.

She accused me right away, at the top of her lungs, irrational.

You know he did it. Your bracelets. The stuff at your mother's house. It's so obvious.



Coincidences. She probably just lost them, left them at her parents' house, dropped them in her closet. There were a million explanations.

Why blame me?

But I wanted her to. It was so easy to be the rational one as she stood there screaming.

Call her bluff. Cooperate. Deny.

Please, call the police. I want to clear my name.

Fingerprint me. Give me a lie detector.

As if Goldie could facilitate such a complicated process.

Is it really as easy as seen on TV? Slices, dices, cubic zirconia...

\*

There were a few things I didn't count when I appraised my worth.

I didn't expect Ruby to be so levelheaded. She was supposed to be overcome with emotion or scandal or denial.

It doesn't matter if you did it. But for some reason I can't bring myself to defend you. Why don't I want to stick up for my own boyfriend? I can't date someone I can't trust.

But I could have fixed it. She wasn't serious. She'd cool down and come back. After two years, I had earned some sentimental value of my own. Within days, she was calling.

But then that airhead Goldie actually called the police.

They couldn't do anything about it. But they could tell her about the checks and the court dates and the restraining order.

Still. I could have fixed it. I was upset. The divorce. My poor mother. I wasn't myself. And I didn't want to worry Ruby. She could be so emotional. She could understand.

But then there was Brassy.



I could have fixed everything else. I should have known better. She wasn't just rational. She was tenacious. Like a bulldog. Short, fat, squat, ugly. Dog. Bitch. C-word.

How many pawn shops are in this city? How many Rolexes are there in those pawn shops? How many stacks of papers are filed away with rows of social security numbers from sellers of jewelry and stereos and guitars?

An inefficient formality that never led anywhere—a convoluted treasure map.

But she deciphered it, followed the trail, retraced my steps.

She found it all—the shop, the Rolex, the paper, my incriminating number.

Turns out gaudy, overpriced watches have serial numbers that can be as unique and incriminating as my own nine digits. Turns out there is paperwork that comes with a six-thousand-dollar timepiece. Turns out the paperwork was halfway across the country with her fairy ex-boyfriend.

\*

He put it in the mail Monday. Or so I hear.

And that was the last I heard.

An old roommate passed me on the street and pretended not to see me.

I don't care. That's not what I care about.

They will never find the rest of it. Not even if I remembered and admitted. But I don't care about that either. It doesn't matter anymore. They ruined it. It's all worthless now. They uncovered my treasure. They exposed my truth and revealed my true value. They took my prized possessions. They stole my secrets.

---

# THE FIFTY YEAR REUNION PARTY

*Bruce Adkins*

At eight o'clock that hot summer night it was not yet dark. Outside the bus station Archie Craig, a tall, husky high school football player, paced nervously back and forth with his eyes riveted on the street.

Archie still couldn't believe his 68 year old Uncle Andrew Diamond, an oil and real estate developer, actually called and offered him a deal that would make him rich. "Meet me at the Trailway Bus station in one hour if you're interested," Uncle Andrew said.

Archie was so absorbed in his thoughts that he didn't recognize his uncle in a brand new Rolls-Royce. "Get in, Lad," a familiar voice called out.

A mass of cool air and soft music greeted Archie as he entered the car. The cushy leather upholstery and the shiny interior reeked of luxury, and the car ran so smooth that Archie could hardly tell he was moving.

"How are you, Lad?" Andrew asked, as the car sped through town and out on the open highway. "I thought I'd show you my ranch if you have the time."

Archie hadn't seen his wealthy uncle since he mother's funeral five years ago and was shocked at how ill he looked. Uncle Andrew had lost a lot of weight. His face was chalky white, his eyes bloodshot, and his brownish red hair, his best feature, was really a wig.

"Oh yeah, plenty of time," Archie said. Andrew inquired about Archie's parents and about his football career as they drove the short distance to the ranch.

"I live in Switzerland most of my time, Lad. I came back to Valley Brook to attend my high school reunion tomorrow night," Andrew said, as he slowed down in front of the big gate. The sign on the gate displaced a picture of a buffalo with the words, ANDREW DIAMOND RANCH inscribed on it.

"It's my fifty year reunion, kind of a farewell fling," Andrew said, pushing a button and watching the gate rise.

They rode down a narrow road that led to a spacious brick house, bordered by a tree-lined pond on one side and two red barns on the other. It was dark now, but the brightness of the moon and stars made it almost as light as day. Andrew stopped his car in back of the house.

Archie followed Andrew down concrete steps that led to a basement under the house. "I call this my fallout shelter," Andrew said. "It's air conditioned and sound proof."

The large two-room layout included a storage closet and a small bathroom. The back room was filled with kitchen furnishings. The front room was sparsely furnished with a television set, two easy chairs and a computer. In one corner there was an unmade bed and on a

coffee table beside it lay a copy of the Wall Street Journals and a package of juicy Fruit chewing gum.

"Here's the deal, Lad," Andrew said, pausing and bending over to cough. "I'd like you to pick up an old high school buddy of mine at our reunion tomorrow night and escort him out to my little hideout here where we're going to have a party. It will be a big surprise."

"Of course, my buddy might not be eager to come," Andrew continued, pausing to clear his throat. "So you may have to issue him a special invitation."

"You mean like kidnap him," said Archie.

"I'd call it gentle persuasion," said Andrew.

Uncle Andrew must be insane, Archie thought a few minutes later as they headed back to town. This was kidnapping, pure and simple. "Uncle Andrew, are you going to harm this guy when you get him back to the ranch?"

Andrew's face broke into a broad grin. "Let's just say I want to say goodbye to an old friend in a personal way," Andrew said. Then he pulled into the outside lane and slowed the car. "Lad," he said, lowering his voice, "I've got cancer and I don't have over six months to live."

"You're kidding!" Archie stuttered. "does Mary and Bart know?"

"Bart knows all about my condition. He's taking over most of my financial affairs. Mary is in a nursing home with Alzheimer's. Outside of Mary, you and Bart are my only living kin," Andrew said.

As Andrew neared town, he turned off the main highway and drove to the back of the Valley Brook country club with its golf course and thick row of cedar trees. He stopped at an opening in the cedar trees that looked out on a top of tennis courts. The lights were on and two men with protruding stomachs were playing a game of tennis in slow motion.

"Lad, Howard Simpson and I will be standing out there alone on one of those tennis courts between eleven and twelve o'clock tomorrow night," said Andrew. "All I want you to do is take old Howard out to the ranch and wait till I get there."

Then Andrew drove Archie back to the bus station and let him out. "Now Lad, here's the deal," he said. Archie wished Uncle Andrew would stop calling him Lad. He had gained status as a football player and didn't like anyone addressing him in such a condescending way.

"I'll pay you 100 grand if you'll help me."

"You mean 100 thousand dollars!" Archie asked. He felt his heart speed up and his eyes quiver with excitement.

"You got it, Lad," Andrew said. Meantime, here's

some pocket money." He opened his wallet and handed Archie ten, one hundred dollar bills. "Think it over and I'll call you in the morning."

Archie stayed up all night counting, fondling and smelling the hundred dollar bills. Yet, there was the promise of many more, he realized. Was he on his way to being a big time criminal, he asked himself.

Archie could see himself driving a Rolls-Royce like his uncle. He could see himself surrounded by beautiful girls and traveling the world in first class style.

Then, he saw his father and stepmother visiting him in jail. His dad was a school teacher. They didn't have much, but at least it was honest.

But a 100 grand, Archie thought. He could play the stock market and if he invested right he could become a millionaire. He could forget college. "Archie Craig, the eighteen year old millionaire genius," he said, smiling.

Poor Uncle Andrew, Archie thought. He only had six months to live. What was his uncle up to? The cancer must be in his brain. He mentally rehearsed a list of questions he was going to ask Uncle Andrew when he called, but he never got the chance.

"Lad, just say yes or no," Andrew said, with a note of finality.

No, Archie had made up his mind to say, but instead, after a few moments of hesitation, he said, "I guess so."

"Good, we have some details to go over."

At eleven o'clock the country club parking lot was filled with luxury cars. A steady breeze carried the sound of orchestra music and loud shrieks of laughter through the warm summer night.

Archie, dressed in dark coveralls and a black cowboy hat, sat in the van his uncle has provided, waiting to launch his criminal career. He held a .32 pistol, also provided by his uncle, but he'd never shot a gun in his life. He'd run before he'd shoot somebody, he thought.

It wasn't long until Archie heard his uncle's voice as two well dressed men came walking out on the tennis courts. They stopped by the net. Andrew waved to Archie.

In the dark, old Howard Simpson appeared to be a handsome man with white wavy hair and a white moustache. But he was slender and hump-shouldered.

As Archie approached old Howard, waving the gun in the air, he forgot his prepared speech. "Put your hands up and keep your frigging mouth shut or I'll shoot your ass off," Archie said, surprising himself at how mean he sounded. Then he put his hand over Howard's mouth and squeezed so hard he could feel the man's false teeth come loose. Howard squirmed like a hooked fish while Archie dragged him a few yards and gingerly maneuvered him into the back of the van and locked the door.

There's no turning back now, Archie thought, driving off waving at Andrew and listening to Howard's kicking

and banging on the side of the van.

Archie wondered what his football coach, what the kids at Valley Brook High would think of him now? He recalled the words of his football coach. "Archie Craig is not only an asset to our football team, but he is a young man with character and integrity." Asset my ass. My only asset, Archie thought, is kidnapping weak, helpless old men.

Archie directed Howard into the fallout shelter without a struggle. Archie couldn't get over how calm Howard suddenly appeared.

"Did Andrew put you up to this?" Howard asked while taking off his coat and tie and brushing off his clothes. "Do you know the penalty for kidnapping, young man?"

"Shut up," Archie said, waving the gun. He was uncomfortable holding it to Howard so he ushered him back to the storage closet, loaded with food supplies, and bolted the door. Then, he sat down in one of the easy chairs and turned the television on loud so he could drown out Howard's yelling and kicking the door.

Saturday Night Live was on. As Archie watched the various comedy skits he began to relax. For a few moments he forgot his criminal image.

It was one o'clock in the morning when Andrew came staggering down the steps with a drink in his hand. "Hello, Laddie. Where's our illustrious guest?" Andrew asked.

"Uncle Andrew, are you drunk?" asked Archie.

"Slightly," said the older man.

"Andrew, is that you?" Howard yelled, banging on the closet door. "Have you lost your mind?" Howard asked when Andrew popped open the closet door. "Is this some sort of game you're playing? Why did you allow this young hoodlum to drag me down in this disgusting hole? I haven't seen you in over 40 years and you treat me like this. I demand an explanation."

"Howard, you sound like some nervous old lady," Andrew said, taking off his glasses and removing his coat and tie.

"My wife will have the police out looking for me," Howard said.

"She already has," said Andrew.

At the mention of police, a sudden stab of anxiety swelled in Archie's gut. "The police are looking for us?" Archie asked.

Stripped to his waist Andrew was not a pleasant sight. His chest and arms had no muscle. He was all bones. "Prepare to defend yourself," Andrew yelled. "Let the party begin."

"You want to fight me?" Howard asked. "What for? I'm not going to fight. You're a sick man. Just look at you. Besides, I have a heart condition. I can't afford to get excited."

"Uncle Andrew, you old guys can't be fighting now," said Archie.



"Don't worry, he couldn't knock a flea off my butt," said Andrew.

"Gong, there's the bell for round one!" said Andrew. Archie watched in amazement as Andrew, so drunk he could hardly stand up, danced around, waving his pipe stem arms and tiny fists in the air. Then, Andrew crashed a light weight blow off Howard's chest.

"That's for all the times you told Daisy Hancock all those lies and spread all those rumors about me," Andrew said. "This is for the time you told Daisy I wouldn't dance so you could take her to the prom," Andrew said, swinging again and missing badly.

Howard stood there motionless. He refused to defend himself. He appeared in shock. "This is crazy," he said to Archie. "He belongs in an institution."

"Uncle Andrew, you're acting crazy now," said Archie.

"Remember the time you told it all over the school that I had sex with Daisy. Daisy hated me and never spoke to me again. Then she was killed in that car wreck, and I never got a chance to explain what a liar you were. You ruined my life and I've never gotten over it," Andrew said, his bloodshot eyes burning toward Howard.

"Andrew, I'll admit I did a lot of dumb things back when we were kids, but we're all grown up now. I'm a born-again Christian now, and I beg your forgiveness," Howard pleaded.

"Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord," said Archie.

"Yeah, well I'm going to help the Lord out this time," Andrew said. With both fists flailing, Andrew betted into Howard knocking him against the wall, and blood squirted everywhere. Howard landed on top of Andrew and they both hit the floor hard.

Howard's shirt was torn down the front and the mop of grey hair on his chest was covered with blood and curled into balls. Finally aroused, Howard punched Andrew in the stomach. Andrew groaned like he was dying and then came alive and threw a looping right hand that connected with Howard's eye.

"Gong, end of round! You old guys better break it up now," Archie pleaded while they rolled around on the floor squirming, gouging, and kicking.

One man had cancer and the other had heart trouble. What if one or both of them died?? thought Archie. They would have him up for murder.

"That's enough, Uncle Andrew," Archie yelled, as both men lay panting and groaning for air. The nostrils of Andrew's nose were soaked with blood and Howard had a black eye that was clearly swollen shut. They took turns trading punches, but with no impact. Finally, in a bloody heap, their bodies exhausted and physically spent, they gave up.

"You got your revenge?" Howard asked, between groans. "You satisfied, Andrew?"

"When I get my strength back, I'm going to get up

and kick your ass," Andrew said.

"You already have," said Howard.

"Y'all can be friends now," said Archie.

"Level with me, Howard," said Andrew. "Did anything happen that night after the prom when you and Daisy sat out in your car outside her house for two hours?"

"How could it when you kept circling the block and honking every time minutes," said Howard. They both laughed. The tension subsided and Archie breathed a sigh of relief.

Howard sat up. "Look," he said, glancing out of his one good eye. "It's 2:30 in the morning. I've got to get back to the hotel."

"Are you going to turn my in to the police?" Archie asked.

"I ought to," said Howard. "I resent being manhandled by a punk like you. But you know that high school reunion party was a bore. And to tell you the truth I've always had a certain affection for old Andrew here. We were best friends all though school until Daisy came along. Isn't that right, Andrew?" Howard asked, smiling and holding out his hand in a gesture of friendship.

"Go on, get out of here, you sorry bastard," Andrew said, refusing to shake the extended hand.

While Howard brushed off his clothes and combed his hair, Archie lifted Andrew into his bed and bathed his face with a cold cloth. "I'm all right, Lad. Just tired," said Andrew.

Archie let Howard out within a block of his hotel and when he came back to the ranch Andrew was gone. Sometime after daylight, Archie located his uncle in the intensive care unit of the hospital. Andrew had been found, passed out, in his car at a signal light.

About the same time the TV announced that Howard Simpson, a well-known Chicago banker, was feared kidnapped from his high-school reunion. Later in the morning he turned up safe and sound. Mr. Simpson stated he left his reunion, voluntarily, to attend another party where he had a great time. Although Me. Simpson had a black eye, he was otherwise unhurt and there was no indication of foul play.

Two days later, Archie went to the hospital to see Andrew, but he was gone. Andrew was reported on his way back to Switzerland.

Did Uncle Andrew run out on him? Archie wondered. Would he ever receive his 100 grand? All Archie knew for sure was that every time he saw a policeman he wanted to hide. In his heart, he was a criminal and feared he would be arrested when he least expected it.

Finally, Archie went to the police and confessed. "I did a criminal act and deserve to be in jail. I kidnapped an old man," he told the desk sergeant. But after a brief investigation the police laughed and dismissed Archie as someone who watched too much television.



Two months passed. Archie enrolled in college, reported for football practice, and acquired a steady girl friend when he finally received news about his Uncle Andrew.

Dear Archie, the letter began.

I'm writing to let you know my dad dies yesterday in Switzerland. His funeral service will be held next Wednesday there in Valley Brook.

Before Dad died, he made out a trust fund to you for one hundred thousand dollars that you will be eligible to claim when you're 35 years old.

I'll tell you more about it when I see you at the funeral.

Your cousin,  
Bart Diamond

At first Archie was disappointed that Uncle Andrew made him wait 12 years to reap his fortune. But at least his dead uncle kept his word. Maybe now he could concentrate on football. Maybe now he could quit dreaming the police were after him. Maybe now he could quit thinking about that 50 year reunion party.

---

# THE POWER

*Rebecca Jung*

"The written word," he sneered. "What elitist bull. For starters, it's not accessible to everyone; you have to be able to read to experience it. Do you have any idea what the literacy rate is worldwide?"

We at least agreed on one thing: music probably had the ability to influence people more than any other art form. But I was going to have to make a hell of a case if I was ever going to convince him that writing was the second most powerful art.

"People can listen," I said. "Literature can always be read to them."

Ian shook his head, not even acknowledging my point. "The visual arts are a much more universal, potent force. Every society, no matter how primitive, expresses itself through painting, drawing, sculpture, visual depictions. It's one of the most basic human drives."

"No more so than language," I argued. "It's one of our characteristics that identifies us as human beings; we're hardwired with it. Besides, why is there such a history of fascist or other repressive organizations shutting down newspapers, imprisoning their writers, their poets, for god's sake, if not for the power these writers and their agents hold over the general public?" I added.

He smiled at me condescendingly and then turned to his Mac to resume the layout for the brochure I'd written copy for.

"Show a man -- excuse me -- show a person a picture, show him or her a written page. Now which do you think will have the greater impact?"

Sometimes you have to cut your losses, walk away, and bide your time until a better day. It's called choosing your battles, and I did a lot of this with Ian.

"You've got too much copy here for a six-panel, Deb," he told me, suddenly all business, his full attention on the Mac. "Can't you delete something? Edit it so it's more, you know, succinct? Not as wordy?" He spun around on his chair to face me, grinning. "Let the pictures tell the story."

"I'll see what I can do about it," I said through clenched teeth.

+++

I called him at the office from home Friday morning.

"Ian, I'm on my way out the door for work. Got a minute?"

"Yeah."

"I want to run some creative copy by you that I've been working on in my free time, see what you think," I said.



---

"Read away, my dear." I could hear him settling back in his chair.

"Okay," I said. "Here goes. This simple dress I wear, fastened with small pearl buttons, the first two unbuttoned because my breasts have spilled out..."

"Yeah?"

"...of the thin cloth,s confinement, waiting for you to cup them in your hands like water, to kiss them, to drink from them with your mouth and tongue.

"I'll undress you, to see you naked..."

He groaned into the phone.

"...to taste all of you, to breathe in your scent. I want to press my body into your chest, your stomach, run my hands and fingers down your arms and legs, bury my face in your groin, nuzzle your warm, dark pubic hair and breathe you in."

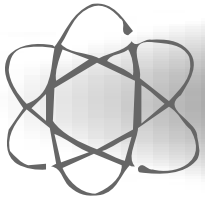
"I gotta go," he said quickly, but he didn't hang up.

"I'll ride you, deep, thrusting my pelvis into yours. I want to feel you in me, I want you inside me, in the core of me. Deeper and deeper, so that when you burst inside me my spine will snap off the bed in an electric arc of ecstasy and I'll feel the hot flood of you wash through me, I want to drown in you. Ian?"

Not a sound on the other end of the phone. Except for what sounded like someone breathing very carefully.

"Well, will you look at the time," I marvelled. "Gotta go, see you."

And I hung up.



## the fast animal

**Irene  
Ferraro**

honey  
sigh in the dark  
oh hush  
black velvet runner  
pungent glass full  
like a tiger stalking  
upside down leaving stars  
pulling the red moon  
fishing for salt  
in a big blue garden



---

# Stairway

## Cynthia Oliver

Under the frosted barred window  
the child curls up- a cacooned green  
caterpillar winged in sleep.  
The stars sit nestled in separate pills  
downed by the moons swallowing child  
praying in tiny gasps for rain.

Later under pelts of winter rain  
the child's drowsy head tilts on the window  
as an elderly woman leaning on a child  
for support. Chilled in her tight green  
sweater, she glares in curses to the pills  
packed under cotton that force sleep

like a provisional nightlight. Facing verging sleep  
her leaded lids pulse rampant with the torrent rain.  
Peering through angry slits cutting the pills  
into damaged roads, the shaking window  
bounces her head- the bruised ego of green  
thumbs. Arms circling calves, the child

moans in whimpers as sweltering children,  
who flower like the heads of artichokes- sleep  
on brown clover patches, where green  
is inhaled with mildewed whips by transparent rain.  
She hovers over temptation, shaking the fogging window,  
while thunder beats the table, pounding the pills

to the wood slats like a slapping parent. The rolling pills  
swerve in roads towards the tempted child,  
dispersed as splattered paint on the cracking window.  
The whipping rain pardons her ominous sleep,  
stifles it as rainbows waiting out the rain-  
stomping it as verdure only shuts in green.

Outside her yard, the unexpected sprouting green  
stems seep into the shape of the oval pills  
and roll towards the top stair, the end this rain.  
The outstretched legs of the unbent child  
elongate with numb, pressure-induced sleep  
while the humid air collects and buries the window.

Squinting to see the sprouting green clovers, the child  
hears the rain squealing, the pills counting the stairs,  
waves over the dewed pane and sways to sleep.



---

# Unsealed

## Cynthia Oliver

"No one ever keeps a secret so well as a child"  
Victor Hugo

Head on knees arms clenching calves,  
she pivots her face to the right and peeks.  
The frayed carpet is snagged and thin,  
her only mode of escape, the filmy window,  
drains cold air and the rusted nails  
are layered in tan stubbornness.

Stringy fingers curl the curtain's lace in her palm  
while outside nuns walk in gasps at the neon signs  
and suits scurry quickly over spiked curbs.  
Inside spiders sew webs to the leaky roof  
above the hovering staleness.  
The corner light beacons the slanted street,  
tilts it's interest in the sidewalk.

There are no children here,  
the failing limbs of the forgotten swelter.  
Ms. Mason,s poppies bloom and die cyclically,  
wilting under whimpers, the capsuled seeds  
swept into slick street hands cupped like  
an anxious child.

She envies those to whom life denies only want,  
seeing her sidewalk squares smeared.  
Her mom sang about buying mockingbirds  
but the rag doll with black thread eyes lays limp  
on her bed, torn and sore on tired springs.

Drugged with frailty,  
night envies her patience.  
Petulant on the hard wood,  
shuddering and cumbersome,  
light struggles in flickers of bad wiring.  
Drooped eyelids bring hunched shoulders  
as she feels him cup the banister  
like a young girl,s pale knee.

The stairs cry in creaks to her,

Disappear they beg.

---

# Heart Burn

*Colin Pope*

at 3 am alone  
my stomach grumbles something  
in broken spanish

i imagine my stomach to be  
lewd, saucy,  
sitting on a balcony harassing  
large breasted brunette women in  
red heels  
toothpick between yellowed teeth

"Ay ma-ma-ci-ta" with those  
overemphasized syllables that  
burn themselves into the brain

nonchalantly raise up  
and shuffle towards the

bathroom  
and give the pepto bismol an  
open mouthed kiss

## June 17th

*Colin Pope*

stagnant, fat;  
my brain started squeaking today  
after i watched The Simpsons horizontally  
for the third time

my mother trickled by, looked down on me  
like i was some neglected shower curtain  
i couldn't comprehend her words  
especially over TV and silence  
and with only one ear anyway

i forgot about the kitchen but  
she walked down to it with heavy, deadened legs  
(by 5:30 work generally filled her up  
to a dragging plumpness which  
made her testy)

i'd apparently left whole milk sitting  
on the starry, starry lucite counter  
inches from the refridgerator  
which stood aghast, like it was missing a hand

so i wrinkled myself upright  
my ear flowered open and  
i rolled into the kitchen  
as a fly beat itself against the living room







## On Sunday

*David Napollin*

There are holes in heaven  
When you look through the trees  
Especially at morning  
When rain in swift descent  
Veers from the sky  
When air is asleep  
Except for birds.  
The murmured drenching of leaves  
And rumble  
Of a distant train  
An articulate six o'clock  
With no gold but gray  
And slow heave of foliage.

Why revere a cathedral  
When trees in shadow  
Spread wider and more varied  
Than any church?  
And who would not, without an altar,  
Worship the inscrutable silence of a tree  
Or loneliness of early rain?

## steatopygia

*Colin Pope*

in front of the venus figurine exhibit  
(an exhibit of ancient turkish  
female fertility figurines) our tour group  
listened to the anthropologist say that women with  
big asses were evolutionarily advantaged because  
the feast and famine nature of their food schedule  
meant that women who store fat more efficiently  
survived the few dry fruitless summer months  
so my wife grins inwardly and glances toward the  
few waifs of the group who worry briefly that  
they're not perfect enough or less evolved so  
i chuckle and step away and allow myself  
to dream about the hunt and life and  
my well rounded wife in the upper paleolithic  
when she would not be so insecure and i  
could say she's perfect and she could believe me  
and we could live so tightly and free and our  
euphoric love would make the wrath filled gods so  
jealous and we would live so long and die so  
honorably in the Catal Huyuk dusts where our  
sun bleached bones would lay and preserve so well that  
a man in a khaki hat could desecrate our graves  
three thousand calm and peaceful years after  
i told my super assed wife i loved her for  
the very last time ever just so he can guess as to  
why women with larger hip structure and  
buttocks are made into tiny figurines  
that the bony little public gawk and giggle at

---

# IN ONE SHOT

*Lyn Lifshin*

only a small plume  
of smoke, hardly there  
at the right of the  
square where every  
thing else looks  
ordinary. A brown  
cube like a Rothko  
painting, still, long,  
quiet calm. A few  
birds gliding thru  
the clear air that  
you could never  
believe were  
people jumping

# Vacation

*Lyn Lifshin*

My mother always re-packed the trunk.  
My sister stayed in the car, ate bologna sandwiches.  
When we were younger we let our dolls turn  
brown in the air.  
Packing for them was better than going

My sister stayed in the car, as if leaving now  
to be difficult.  
My father wrote down every penny he spent.  
Packing for vacation was better than going  
We ate at Bill and Thelma's for 99 cents a dinner.

My father kept a notebook where he wrote every  
cent he spent.  
My mother had to coax him to go to musical theaters.  
We ate at Bill and Thelma's every night.  
When I saw Brigadoon I wanted to never come back  
from fantasy.

My mother had to coax him to go to the musicals.  
She beamed when he liked it.  
I wanted to dance, live in a dream, never come  
back  
We needed the mists of the gloaming to blur  
what wasn't said in the car

My mother beamed when my mother liked  
anything.  
My sister was the beauty, better at ballet and boys.  
I wanted to live in a dream, in fog.  
My mother with her own dreams of father  
named me Rosalyn Diana

My mother beamed at almost everything I did.  
After she died, a theater bought her clothes from the 40's.  
At least her clothes would be on stage.  
She would have beamed, she would have liked being there  
to repack them.







# WAR

*Lyn Lifshin*

if I could not talk, nobody would know

When they came to my farm I said, "Do you have children?" and when he said "yes," I pleaded, "Please think about our children." He said, "it doesn't interest me. Lets start." And then 14 of the 15 men were dead, their bodies covered with straw, doused with gasoline. His face once bronzed, not is lips reduced to pus and scabs and bloody sores bubble from his single hair, cheeks dried white and black, bandages streaked red by blood and iodine. "All the men were killed," he says, "their blood trickled down my face. I didn't dare breathe, smelled the gasoline. The bodies on top of me protected me a little but the heat became intense. I didn't know if there were any still there, if crawling out would mean my certain death. Finally I knew I'd be burned alive, I pushed the body aside and opened the straw with my hands. That's when my face and hands were burned. I rolled out screaming, my clothes on fire. I pulled them off, stripping flesh from my nails, ran screaming into the yard where I found some water. That helped me find my senses. On the street, 20 corpses, cousins, a brother. I ran to my uncle's house, found my father, uncle, all elderly men-they didn't recognize me at first, hid me in the basement, put yogurt on my burns. I was conscious. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't move my hands. A week later, someone came to the house, put me in the back of a tractor carrying elderly men and we made it to the border

# WAR

*Lyn Lifshin*

at a morgue  
in the cold city  
a man works  
all day  
washing bodies  
trying to piece  
together the  
dead. Hands,  
arms and legs  
litter the bath  
room. "We  
don't know what  
belong to  
who," he says  
grimly. "Over  
the war, he's  
driven his  
hearse at least  
2000 times





**September 11  
2002**

***Lyn Lifshin***

my new kitten has  
found a new game  
as she does daily,  
attack toilet paper,  
toss the green  
beans up in the  
air and pounce on it.  
Mouse rehearsal.  
She is so small  
and wild, hardly  
afraid of anything  
except maybe  
the printer spewing  
white mysteries  
and making a  
clicking noise. I  
Was so unafraid a  
year ago, brash  
as she is running  
for the train, no  
fear of plans.  
Riding upstate,  
wild to see the  
Empire State  
Building, towers  
like my mother  
who asked in  
her last days where  
she'd go with  
the little life she  
had left beamed  
"New York City"

**September 11  
2002**

***Lyn Lifshin***

For my new cat  
it's a day of  
discovering  
new thing: wind  
and the thrill of  
unrolling toilet  
paper. Maybe  
mew babies are  
what keep the  
young widows  
alive, something  
to live for when  
hate unfolds  
like some man  
eating plant. I  
try to imagine  
a mother whose  
son died because  
he wanted to  
help someone in  
a wheel chair,  
how she could  
walk by his  
old room and  
not want to lie  
down in his quilt  
and never leave

---

# To Answer Your Question

I know nothing but my innards, but I'll try:

Follow that floating balloon no one says you can catch  
But you see that string dangling  
That string no one else can see  
And you can't believe they don't believe  
Because it's so shiny and so bright

Follow that road  
Follow it filled with brambles and manure and the  
Yucky things that you shy away from looking at  
Even when the flowers wilt  
And it isn't spring of summer or even fall anymore  
It's still your road

Leave the pit  
Leave the place where worms crawl at you and you  
Scream for help and they don't even see the worms  
I know it's hard to believe they don't see  
The gnats tearing at your arms even when you cry  
And you are itching and bleeding and maybe you're dying  
But you gotta leave the pit by yourself  
No one helps

So be the story  
Be the rushing prairie clouds and be the running thawing falls  
Be the icicles that! melt and be the sun that warms and bakes  
Be the energy made for life, be the power made for death  
Be the colors that show you night and the gushing seaside dawn  
Be the bow across the sky that has no end and no beginning but it  
Is as real  
As your heart  
As your living, breathing, strong, pumping  
Blood-filled, blood-curdling, blood-stained heart

You are all of this and more  
You are living and you're dying  
You are all of everything in this world  
And you are precious

***by Jenny Romalis***

## Eaten By Fire

***David Spierling***

Soon I'll walk on rusty nails

there's a fire in my stove fed  
to ravage by the war-charged air  
outside my home

I go home to flames all the time

to a mania of particulars  
of American political hypocrisy

the flames are walls, floors, ceilings,  
hairs, table, and food

there's a roaring inside me  
seeking to balance the fires

---

# Finally Friday

*Lucille Povey*

A week and two  
glasses of red wine later  
I finally reach  
Friday afternoon.

Early autumn evening  
is slowly setting in.  
The quiet and the calm  
wishes me to stay a while.

I wish I could.  
To be caressed  
by the wind of fall  
and sunset drawing close.

I wish I could.  
I wish.

# "The Pure Products of America": Twenty-First Century Edition

*Michael Ceraolo*

As they boarded the bus because  
they were clearly too young to drive,  
they made sure to flash a large wad of cash  
at the same time that they ostentatiously  
fumbled for a quarter to complete the fare  
Having nowhere to go but in a hurry to get there,  
they were notably noisy during the ride,  
calling the driver and other passengers names  
from the safety of the back of the bus  
When they got off the bus  
they signaled their low expectations  
with great exhortations  
Dissed daily based on bigotry,  
scorned for their style when in substance  
they are the ones who have most  
fully absorbed the majority's values



---

# "Terrace Avenue revisited"

*Maria Lapachet*

The same street,  
Empty as usual.  
The same trees  
Whispering your name  
As I walk by.  
The same leafs  
Murmuring you'll  
Never be mine  
As they fall.

# "Three way love affair"

*Maria Lapachet*

Standing in my basement alone  
I wait for you. I'm wondering  
What her lips taste like and  
How long it's been since  
You last kissed them.  
I wonder if she knows,  
If she cares,  
If you care.

# "Because"

*Maria Lapachet*

Because you looked at me in anger  
And said you were tired of me,

Because you compared me with your wife  
Knowing that I'm the first one in making comparisons,  
Knowing that I know I'm the one who loses,  
Knowing as you do that it hurts me,

Because it hurts me not to be her  
Cleaning your house,  
Taking care of your children,  
Making your lunches,  
Helping you with your pills,  
Cleaning your vomits,  
Dressing all of you in cute clothes,

Because you implied you were tired  
Of my untidiness, my laziness, and all my things,  
Of my way of complicating everything,  
Of the way in which I'm never happy,

Because you don't know if I listen to you when you speak  
And you don't know if I'll ever truly understand anything  
And I don't know if you listen to me when I speak  
And I don't know if you'll ever truly understand me,

Yesterday I felt sore and lone and ashamed,  
I wanted you to leave me.

Because you write that you love me,  
That you woke up with my breath in your mouth,  
And that means that somehow you love me,

This morning I love you again  
And I will love you tomorrow  
And the day after  
And the day after  
And the day after

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria Lapachet is not only a writer, she is also a photographer and a painter. Born in Spain, Maria lived in Ireland and England for short periods of time. She arrived in the U.S. and eventually settled in Long Island, New York, where she lives with her boyfriend. She went to Cordoba University (Cordoba, Spain), Granada University (Granada, Spain), the O'Keeffe Memorial Institute (Newmarket, Ireland), and the Nottingham Technological Center (Nottingham, England). She is currently attending Adelphi University (Long Island, New York) where she pursues a degree in Management and Communication. She has written nearly forty books. Lapachet describes her own ordinary experience with a unique, funny, and true to life style.









## performance art

from a live Chicago performance art show, reading & CD  
a show was based on the book "Changing Gears."



The show performed live in Chicago June 17 2003. The Show is also available on CD.

## starting the trip

I guess I should get some of the basics out of the way. I recently quit my job, decided I was too fed up with the corporate world, and since I had saved my money, I would take a year off and travel. I'm driving a central states route from my home in Chicago through to California and through the south to Florida before I head back home.

My roommate Eugene is going with me on the trip through the United States.

I don't think I'm going to miss anything in Chicago while I'm gone, though. And I really can't stand the weather - I don't really care to know the scientific explanation for it, but I don't understand how a place that can be so painfully cold one month can be a sweltering heat box the next month. So I'm trying to escape the brutally cold winter in Chicago by traveling around the country...

## Illinois

Eugene decided to bring his skis, in case he gets the opportunity to fall down a mountain while we're in

Colorado. He figures that since Michael Kennedy and Sonny Bono did it, it would be a cool way to die. Each ski is wedged around the driver's seat, making it fun to get in and out of the car.



I prepared food for the trip, and he didn't. He'll probably be stopping at every Taco John's he can find.

I don't know what it is with Eugene and Taco John's fast food.

He loves it like it was his mother's home cooking. He worked at a Taco John's restaurant while he was in college, and every time we're on a road trip and we get near a Taco John's he has to stop.

I mean, yes, the food is fine, but it's a bean burrito. His passion for it borders on an obsession.



## Iowa

I know from experience that driving through Iowa is almost as bad as driving through Ohio - it seems like the state just goes on forever.

As soon as Eugene took over the wheel, though, he took over the radio; he managed to find an R.E.O. Speedwagon song, "Keep On Loving You," as he fumbled through the stations past Iowa City, proving my theory about rural stations and bad music. It was on to the bad eighties songs. Like, Brian Adams were bad then; why would someone play their songs now, when we should have learned from our mistakes?

# Nebraska

Got into Nebraska and saw my friend Doug was there at his apartment waiting for us. Doug told us tonight while we were at dinner that people from Omaha refer to their town as “The Big O.” I don’t know if he was joking with me or not, but when I think of “The Big O,” I think everyone else thinks of something entirely different.

Eugene told us that he wanted human cloning, so that they could make a clone of him one day, but with no brain. I didn’t ask why, I only immediately said, “Oh, that’s a bit redundant.”

Doug burst into hysterics and Eugene continued. He didn’t want the other body so that he could have organ transplants as he got older, but so that he could take his brain out of his old, decrepit body when he was eighty and place it in the young, brainless clone body, so that he could live forever.

Doug was frightened by the concept of creating a brainless human being.

I thought Americans had been doing that for a while by merely procreating, but once again I digress.



We went to a bar, I played a game of “Ms. Pac Man,” and Eugene watched the Bulls game, in his usual obsessive fashion.

He yelled at the screen. (Did he think they can actually hear him?) He talked about Jordan, and he called Scottie Pippen “Scottie Scottie Port-A-Pottie.”



Driving west through Nebraska, I saw a sign on the side of the expressway for one of the original Pony Express Stations. It was a small shack with a bunch of plaques around it.

Then we saw a sign for the Sod House Museum, so

we stopped by. It was closed, but we saw that it was just a big barn with a big plow in the front yard.

I saw a sign for Buffalo Bill’s

Ranch. Eugene told me he hated Buffalo Bill. You know, because he slaughtered all the buffalo.



Did I mention we’re vegetarians?

“Can you just imagine seeing tons of buffalo running along here? Bar-um, bar-um, bar-um.... (That’s apparently the sound they would make charging.) Tens of thousands of them. That would be cool.”

Also really safe for us humans, big animals thundering through your path.

I just saw a llama; on the road I saw this animal walking along the side of the expressway.

The further west we go, the more country stations appear on the dial. And it’s getting warmer the farther west we drive.



# Colorado

## Boulder

Boulder is located pretty much at the base of mountains along the Rockies. Half the skyline is dominated by black mountains with snow trailing down the sides.

I noticed two things about the grocery store today. I noticed that the express lanes were for "15 items or fewer," and that the general population of Boulder probably understands the grammatical error of "15 items or less." I also noticed that the woman at the register wasn't fat, or undereducated, or even in a bad mood, which are the three common traits that bind all grocery store check-out clerks in Chicago.

No one seems to be fat in Boulder. People in Boulder also smoke a lot less; all bars have to have a non-smoking section, or they're a non-smoking bar. I asked Paul once how people like the non-smoking sections; Paul told me that there are generally only a few people in the non-smoking sections of bars, and the everyone pretty much crams into the smoking rooms.

So much for being healthy.

Went hiking in the mountains yesterday afternoon. We kept climbing out onto rocks that were right at the edge of the mountain side, and I briefly thought of my friend Joe, when we hiked up a mountain and hung out near a metal power line tower, and Joe climbed up the large metal structure and started walking out along one of the girders, like it was a balance beam only three feet from the ground. If he fell from that thin metal beam he would have fallen for quite a ways. I don't know if he would have been able to survive a fall.

I told him about my fears, but he said, "Walking on this line is just like walking on a tile seam on your kitchen floor. You are capable of doing it. You mind is just telling you that you can't."



## Denver

Compared to Boulder, Denver is a city - it has steel and glass high-rises, a downtown you can see from the expressway, and surrounding good and bad neighborhoods. It hosts the Denver Broncos, which are going to the super bowl a week from today.

Tom is another friend of mine from college. I can't really describe Tom's personality, other than by saying that he's just so... nice. No, I mean that. He's genuine, and nice, and considerate. He never has a bad word to say. And every time I see Tom, his cheerful disposition always makes me smile.

After dinner Tom took us to a posh bar that serves martinis and wines and plays swing music. It was nice... Until Eugene had to start complaining. We were seated at a table right next to the bar, where their garbage can was, and periodically one of the

bartenders would throw an empty glass bottle in the trash and it would make the loudest noise imaginable, right next to us.

Eugene went up to the bar and argued that it was one thing to throw them in a large loud college bar late at night, but there were no more than twenty people in the bar, and it was a quiet, relaxing environment where throwing the bottles instead of placing them in the trash was not called for.

He said something to the effect of "Excuse me, is it really necessary to throw the glass bottles into the trash? My friends and I are sitting right here, and it's quiet in here and we're







his head in the boy's locker room toilet and flushed, "Oh, it scared you?"



couldn't go up to the bar because we had been ostracized because of Eugene.

So Tom got a bunch of his friends together and we met up at a bar, and Eugene's friend Dave met us there and we just had ten people at a big table and we talked about dumb things like "South Park" and "The Simpsons" and stuff.

One day, Tom told us to bundle up and he was taking us to the mountains for a hike. So we get in the car and stop at a tiny, tiny town right at the base of one of the mountains.

"What are we doing here?"

"Oh, there's a little bar up here I wanted to take you to. We can grab a beer."

It was Sunday afternoon, before four. I imagined a hole in the wall with three people drinking in the corner. When we got in, I looked around to see the place was packed and there was a six-person band playing live on stage. Everything was carved roughly from wood - the poles, the railings, the ceiling beams - even the bar. We managed to find a little room at the bar and Tom, Eugene and I shared a pitcher of a local micro brew. People were dancing in the corner.

We then drove in the mountains, saw some elks (apparently they only live in alti-

tudes of about 8,000 feet). On the way home we sang eighties songs in the car with the radio.

We later went to Golden, Colorado. "Golden" was a stopping point for people who needed to pick up last-minute supplies on their way to the gold rush.

We found a Taco John's, of course, but sine we saw the Coors factory and there were signs pointing to the brewery tours, we figured we'd take a free tour. The entire place smelled like malt but at least afterward they gave us three beers and told everyone that they were welcome to come back any time, and ask for the short tour (which would take them straight to the free beer).

Buffalo Bill's grave was located at the top of one of the mountains there, for more tourist stuff to see and learn from.

Then what we heard a bartender say to him, in the tone of a bully to a kid right before he stuck

his head in the boy's locker room toilet and flushed, "Oh, it scared you?"

Then another bartender put on his little bully voice and said, "Oh, no, it startled him."

So after that the waitress didn't come back to the table and the last cosmopolitan I got tasted terrible, and of course I

couldn't go up to the bar because we had been ostracized because of Eugene.

So Tom got a bunch of his friends together and we met up at a bar, and Eugene's friend Dave met us there and we just had ten people at a big table and we talked about dumb things like "South Park" and "The Simpsons" and stuff.

One day, Tom told us to bundle up and he was taking us to the mountains for a hike. So we get in the car and stop at a tiny, tiny town right at the base of one of the mountains.

"What are we doing here?"

"Oh, there's a little bar up here I wanted to take you to. We can grab a beer."

It was Sunday afternoon, before four. I imagined a hole in the wall with three people drinking in the corner. When we got in, I looked around to see the place was packed and there was a six-person band playing live on stage. Everything was carved roughly from wood - the poles, the railings, the ceiling beams - even the bar. We managed to find a little room at the bar and Tom, Eugene and I shared a pitcher of a local micro brew. People were dancing in the corner.



much less pay any attention to her, so to be talking to three other fans was pretty amazing). Christen bought me a shot of Goldschlager, some stranger named John bought a drink for everyone in the bar so he could make a toast to friends of his. We



talked about school (Christen said she once called a professor a “fucking prick” in front of the class), we ended up going to another bar, the “Lion’s Lair.” There Dave taught us what a meme was. In essence, there is a theory that ideas have lives - the way a virus does, and that an idea can spread from one host to another, therefore prolonging its life. This can refer to anything from a joke to a bit of trivia or blueprints for an invention.



things before, so Hell, we watched them processing tons of metal, making pennies and quarters.

Went out with Tom and his roommate Jason for dinner. Stayed at Christen’s one night. We visited the Capitol building, joined onto a tour group late, then figured out the tour group was a bunch of junior high Baptist school students.

We went to visit the Molly Brown house (she was a survivor of the Titanic), and we went to the Denver Art Museum. But now we leave for camping in Southern Utah, visiting as many National Parks as we can before we hit Las Vegas.

The pool room the basement of Dave’s apartment building had ten people there and a keg of beer. So we went down there and drank their beer, and then I realized that they were playing strip pool, and the next thing I knew there was this guy in his underwear in the next room playing pool, then he was stark naked. Eventually a woman became topless, and people there kept sneaking glimpses.



We drove through a tunnel that passed us through the Continental Divide (the ridge of mountains that defines the drainage of water, either to the Mississippi or to the Pacific basin). We passed through Vail. We visited Glenwood Canyon and drove through the White River National Forest. Periodically we would stop and take pictures and walk along the river.

## Montana

Montana doesn’t have a day time speed limit, which originally sounds cool - in fact, I kept the cruise control locked in at 88 for the first 20 miles of the state. But then I read a notice that said that doesn’t mean you can speed, per se, because cops can still pull you over if they think you are driving irresponsibly. Unambiguity in the law. Yummy.

## Idaho

What did I want to see in Idaho? You know, I really have no idea. Why am I here? For the potatoes? Oh, just drive through to Wyoming...



## Wyoming

As I’m driving to Yosemite, these excellent mountains are along the horizon, and I even took a picture of them while I’m driving.

At Yosemite and I saw cool trees, and Old Faithful erupted every hour and 10 minutes.

Driving south, I even had to stop because a bunch of bison were just walking across the road. And at another point in the road, I tried to photograph a small gold fox that started darting away when he saw me, so I couldn’t take a photo.

So Llamas, Elk, Foxes, and bison. I wonder what other animals I could see along here if I don’t get in nature’s way.

---

# everything was alive and dying

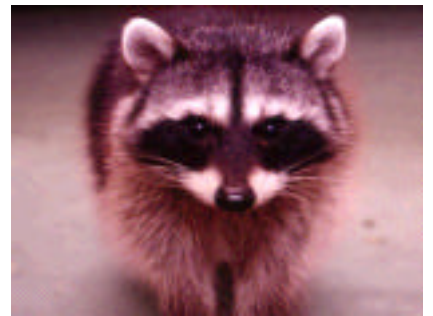


I

I had a dream the other night  
I walked out of the city  
to a forest  
and there were neatly paved bicycle paths  
and trash cans every fifty feet  
and trash every ten



and then a raccoon came right up to me  
she had a few little baby raccoons  
following her, it was so cute, I  
wish I had my camera



and she spoke to me,  
she said, thank you  
thank you for not buying furs,  
I know you humans are pretty smart,  
you have to be able to figure out a way  
to keep yourselves warm  
without killing me

and I said, you know they don't  
do it for warmth,  
they do it for fashion, they do it  
for power. And she said I know.  
But thank you anyway.

II

Then I walked a little further  
and there was a stray cat  
she still had her little neon collar on  
with a little bell  
and she walked a few feet,  
stretched her front paws,  
oh, she looked so darling  
and then she walked right up to me  
and she said thank you  
and I said for what?  
And she just looked at me for a moment,  
her little ears were standing straight up,  
and then she said, you know,  
in some countries I'm considered  
a delicacy. And I said how





do you know of these things?  
And she said  
when somebody eats one of you  
word gets around  
and then she looked up at me again  
and said, and in some countries  
the cow is sacred. Wouldn't they  
love to see how you humans  
prepare them for slaughter, how you  
hang them upside-down  
and slit their throats  
so their still beating hearts  
will drain out all the blood for you  
and she said isn't it funny  
how arbitrary your decision  
to eat meat is?  
and I said, don't put me  
in that category, I don't eat meat  
and she said I know



### III

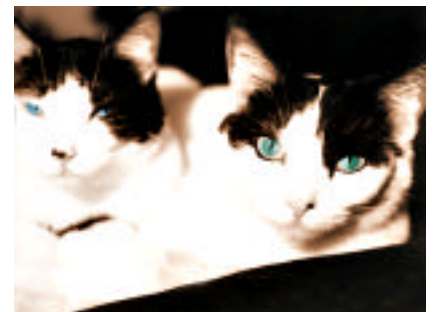
And I walked deeper in to the forest  
managed to get away from the  
picnic tables and the outhouses  
that lined the forest edges  
the roaring cars gave way to the  
rustling of tree branches  
crackling of fallen leaves  
under my step



when the wind tunneled through  
the wind whistled and sang  
as it flew past the bark

and leaves

I walked  
listened to the crack of dead branches  
under my feet  
and I felt a branch against my shoulder  
I looked up and I could hear  
the trees speak to me,  
and they said  
thank you for letting the  
endangered animals live here amongst us  
we do think they're so pretty  
and it would be a shame to see them go  
and thank you for recycling paper







because you're saving us  
for just a little while longer

we've been on this planet for so long  
embedded in the earth  
we do have souls, you know  
you can hear it in our songs  
we cling with our roots  
we don't want to let go

and I said, but I don't do much,  
I don't do enough  
and they said we know  
but we'll take what we can get

IV

and I woke up in a sweat

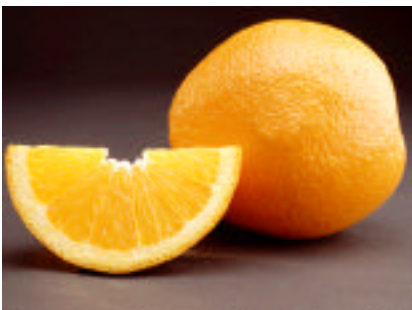
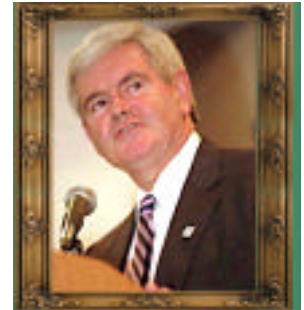
V

so tell me, Bob Dole  
so tell me, Newt Gingrich  
so tell me, Pat Buchanan  
so tell me, Jesse Helms  
if you woke up from that dream  
would you be in a sweat, too?

VI

Do you even know why  
we should save the rain forest?  
Oh preserve the delicate balance,  
just tear the whole forest down,  
what difference does it make?  
Put in some orange groves  
so our concentrate orange juice  
can be a little cheaper

did you know that medical researchers  
have a very, very hard time  
trying to come up with synthetic  
cures for diseases on their own?  
It helps them out a little if they can first  
find the substance in nature.  
A tree that appears in the rain forest  
may be the only one of its species.  
Or one like it may be two miles away,  
instead of right next to it. I wonder



how many cures we've destroyed  
to plant more orange groves.  
Serves us right.

VII

You know my motives aren't selfless  
I know that these things are worthwhile in my life



I'd like to find a cure to these diseases  
before I die of them  
and I'm not just a vegetarian  
because I think it's wrong to kill an animal  
unless I have to  
I also know the excess protein  
pulls the calcium away from my bones  
and gives me osteoporosis  
and the excess fat gives me heart attacks  
and I also know that we could be feeding  
ten times more people  
with the same resources used for meat production



You know, I know you're looking at me  
and calling me an extremist  
but I'm sitting here, looking around me  
looking at the destruction caused by family values  
and thinking the right, moral, non-violent decisions  
are also those extreme ones

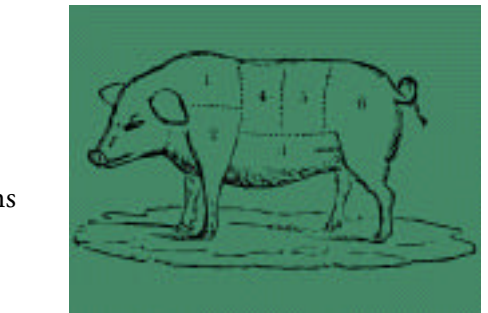
VIII

everything is linked here  
we destroy our animals  
so we can be wasteful and violent  
we destroy our plants  
we destroy our earth  
we're even destroying our air  
we wreak havoc on the soil, on the atmosphere  
we dump our wastes into our lakes  
we pump aerosol cans and exhaust pipes

and you tell me I'm extreme

and these animals and forests keep calling out to me  
the oceans, the wind

and I'm beginning to think  
that we just keep doing it  
because we don't know how to stop





and deep inside we feel the pain of  
all that we've killed  
and we try to control it by  
popping a chemical-filled pain-killer



we live through the guilt  
by taking caffeine, nicotine, morphine  
and we keep ourselves thin with saccharin  
and we keep ourselves sane with our alcohol poisoning  
and when that's not enough  
maybe a line of coke



maybe shoot ourselves in the head  
in front of the mirror in the master bedroom  
or maybe just take some pills  
walk into the garage, turn on the car  
and just  
fall asleep



in the wild  
you have no power over anyone else

now that we're civilized  
we create our own wild



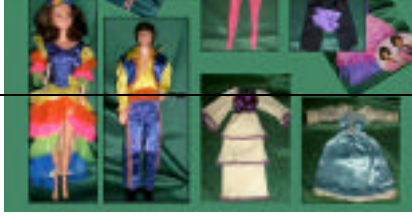
maybe when we have all this power  
the only choice we have  
is to destroy ourselves

and so we do





# Utah



As soon as we crossed the sign welcoming us into Utah, I got so excited. And then it occurred to me that I was also excited about being in Utah because I remember when I was little that I asked my mom if we could plan a vacation to Utah so that I might be able to visit the Osmonds.

God, I was so retarded.

A part of me has been wondering if Utah would be a good place to move to. I mean, I'm guessing property taxes are pretty low, and land is probably cheaper, so it might be easier for me to afford those 100 acres I want so that I can live in seclusion and avoid all the stupid people. Then again, the Mormons are here...

We pulled off the interstate so we could take a good look at the stars. It was so amazing to see so many stars. (You forget that I'm used to seeing the city-light-stained orange glow of the overcast Chicago night sky, complete with an occasional plane. And if you're lucky, you might see the glow of what would be the moon behind the thick layer of smog covering the entire city.)

But tonight camping is not a part of the plan. Since we got in so late, and since camping would have costed \$13.00, we figured we could spend the extra \$10.00 to get a hotel room with a shower and bath and television with cable and phone and while we're at it, heat.

In the hotel there was a clip on a television show about hair replacement technologies that included implanted cranial snaps. In layman's terms, the system was a toupee with four snaps that attach to bases implanted surgically into your skull.

Eugene asked me if that was going too far for cosmetic purposes. I reminded him that face lifts entail cutting the skin all along the forehead, then using a metal wedge to separate all the skin from the muscles in the forehead - all the way down to the eyebrows. You know, so doctors can then pull the skin up so the patient's forehead will look years younger.

That didn't seem to explain it to him.

Eugene opened the night stand drawer and found not the Bible but the Book of Mormon. Fitting. I recalled an X Files episode about the usual government conspiracies and asked Eugene to check the book to see if there was a bug in it, so the government could keep tabs on what everyone travelling is doing. Because you know, the Bible is the most trusted and unquestioned item in the hotel room. No one would think twice about it being there, and it could have a wire on it monitoring everything said in the room.

I told Eugene to check the spine, because that would be the easiest place to plant a bug. He actually checked, just for show.

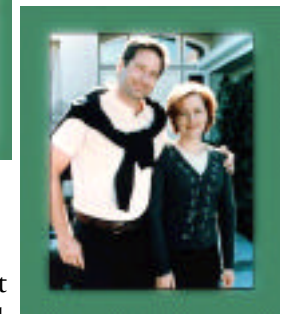
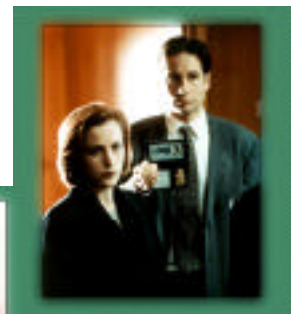
Then I asked him to check the book for information about multiple wives. He checked the index for polygamy; it said:

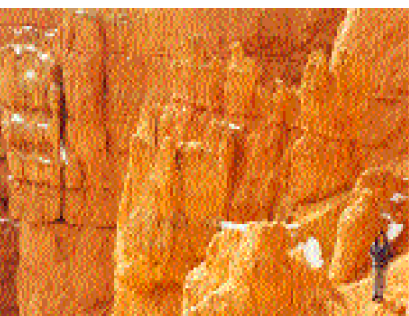
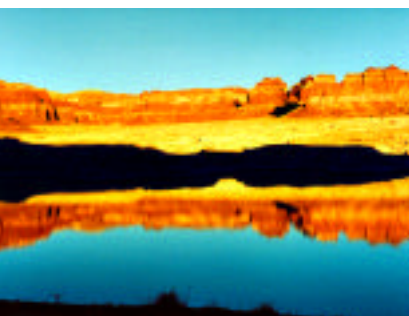
polygamy: see marriage.

We had yet another good laugh.

One morning we went first to Crystal Geyser, that supposedly went off every 13-17 hours, but no one recorded when they went off in the past, so we had no way of knowing when it would go off. We listened to the water gurgle under the surface and found a bubbling puddle about 30 feet away from the geyser. Eventually we gave up on the geyser and left for Arches National Park.

There were 35 foot tall rocks, weighing 3,500 tons, balancing on top of 120 foot rock poles.





The last arch we decided to hike to was almost two miles uphill. I was panting climbing the rocks, and Eugene was just trotting along like he was on one of those people movers you find in airport terminals. At one point I told Eugene to go on without me. When I sat down and looked at the scene around me - I sat in the middle, near the top of this mountain range - a large, smooth bed of sandstone, and looked at the canyons, plant life and ridges around me. It was phenomenal. I stopped moving and rustling around and listen to the sounds around me. There was absolutely nothing. During the entire time I sat there I heard a plane once and a bird once. No wind. No motion.

When you live in a city, that's something you're never used to. Living on a main street in Chicago, I hear semi trucks and souped up cars and people yelling at all hours of the night. And here it was perfectly silent.

Camping was free at this time of year in Canyonlands National Park.

There were no towns around us for at least forty miles, and there was not a single cloud in the sky. It was absolutely amazing. We could see the Milky Way very clearly, and in the winter sky we could easily spot Orion, Scorpio, the Pleiades Cluster, and the bottom half of the Big Dipper, dropping into the horizon. I'm not sure if I have ever seen that many stars in the night sky before.



Eugene then told me that he just saw a meteor. I remember when I was little, my sister Sandy would join me and my friend Sheri on our front yard, and we'd all sit on either yard chairs or a big old comforter stretched out on our front yard, and we'd wait for the annual Perseid meteor shower that occurred in the second week of August. Ever since I was a child I have been fascinated with the stars, with astronomy. I had a telescope, I wrote articles as a child for children's astronomy magazines, I read books on astronomy.

Eugene noticed that it's impossible to imagine three dimensions in space. Everything looks like it's on a flat plane - all the stars, meteors, even airplanes circling overhead. It looks like a painting. It looks like a black sheet with a very dim light on the other side, and someone poked tiny, tiny holes all over the sheet.



In the morning we held bread and peanuts, and birds flew onto our fingers, staying in our hands and eating the food from the palms of our hands.

We passed the Monti-La Sal National Forest, and went to Natural Bridges National Monument, then to Glen Canyon, Bryce Canyon (which was breath taking, Bryce Canyon and Arches National Park were the best ones to see) and Zion National Park.

In hotels in Utah I have seen (so far) The Book of Mormon in English, French, Chinese, Hebrew, Norwegian, Portuguese, German and Italian. Oh, there was also one from Denmark.



Utah had lots of different mountain ridges and national parks, and no big towns. Well, at least not in the southern half, and we didn't go up toward Salt Lake City - even though that's where the Osmonds live.



# Nevada

I've been to Las Vegas twice. The first time was when I was eighteen, with my sister Sandy and my parents. It was a month and a half before I was going to college, and the last thing I wanted to do was go to a place where I was restricted from all forms of recreation, since you had to be 21 to drink or gamble.

My parents were on a gambling junket that gave them tickets to a Mickey Gilley concert.

And as I said, I hate country music.

The second time I went to Las Vegas was for a trade show my old company was running. I worked on registration, and I was one of three photographers. The turn out for the trade show was so pathetic that my additional job at the convention center was to apologize to all the people who spent good money to come to such a terrible show.

Both times I had been to Vegas before I stayed at the Las Vegas Hilton. Not the Flamingo Hilton, not the tacky one, not the unique one, but the this-is-a-building-that-could-be-anywhere Hilton. But it was a worthwhile hot tub.

I remember the main conflict during my work trip to Las Vegas was that a few of the men on the trip were worried about spending time with female co-workers, because their wives might get the wrong idea.

Well, one of the men that was worried was the type that would cheat on his wife, so maybe he did have something to worry about. But the other guy was a born-again Christian, the most trustworthy



guy, and his wife had no reason to think that he would make any moves on any co-worker, or that he would accept the advances of any co-worker. But they were worried anyway, so on the first night, when you usually go out with all of your co-workers for dinner, they suggested that they shouldn't eat with the women. Ah, children.



On the second night they apologized for their behavior and invited a few of us lowly females to join them for dinner. The born-again Christian's brother joined us from Los Angeles for the night. That's where the problems started.

I got along well with the brother. He was a nice guy. We ended up talking for the entire night, and he never made it back to his hotel. (We really were just talking.) But the born-again was very displeased. He kept giving me the cold shoulder. I wanted to go up to him and tell him that I didn't defile his brother, but I figured that wouldn't be a good move, either.



# god eyes

It was a stupid point to argue about at 2 a.m., sitting in the lobby of the Las Vegas Hilton listening to the clink and whirr of slot machines and the dropping of tokens onto metal. You believed in God, I did not. Even after two rounds of Sam Adams and three rounds of Bailey's I knew you wouldn't change my mind, and I had no desire to change yours.



You told me of a dream you had: in it you and Christian Slater played a game of pool. You won. He looked at his hands and said, "I've got a beer in one hand, and a cigarette in the other. I guess this means it's time for me to seduce someone." And he walked away. You're a funny man. You make me laugh. Your brother even noticed that. And you even spoke like Slater, rough, mysterious.



You were the optimist: yes, there is meaning to life. I was doomed to nothingness, meaninglessness. But to me you were the pessimist: you believed you were not capable of creating the power, the passion you had within you. I had control in my life, even if in the end it was all for nothing. You think we are so different. We are not.



It's now after three and we listen to music: Al Jarreau, Whitney Houston, Billy Ocean, Mariah Carey. Natalie Cole, with her father. "That's why darling, it's incredible -" you mouth as you walk toward the washrooms - "that someone so unforgettable -" take a spin, watch me mouth the words with you as you walk away - "think that I am unforgettable too."



I tell you about the first time I got drunk - I was maybe ten, and asked my sister to make a mixed drink mom had that I liked. She made me a few. So there I was, walking to the neighbor's house in the summertime, wearing my sister's seventies zip-up boots, oversized and unzipped, carrying my seventh drink and sticking my tongue out to see the grenadine. You liked my story. You laughed.



---

Passion is a hard thing to describe. Passion for life. You must know and understand a spirituality behind it. You do your work, the things in life solely because you must - it is you, and you could not exist any other way. It is who you are. It is a feeling beyond mere enjoyment. You said that the spirituality was a God. I said it was my mind. Once again, we lock horns.

All of my life I have seen people espouse beliefs but not follow them. Tell me you're not like them. Our values are different, but tell me we both have values and will fight to the death for them. I need to know that there are people like that, like me. We are different, but at the core we are the same. We understand all this. I'm grasping straws here as the clock says 3:45 a.m. and the betting odds for football games roll by

on the television screen. You don't gamble. Neither do I. Why must you be so far away? You reminded me that I have a passion in life, that I have to keep fighting. But I get weak and tired of fighting these battles alone. I, the atheist, have no God and have to rely on my will. When I am low, I struggle. You have your God to fall back on, I only have me.

And you looked into my eyes as it approached the morning. You stared. We locked horns once again. I ask you again what you were thinking. And you said, "I see God in your eyes." Later you said it to me again. I asked you what you meant. You said, "I see a God in your eyes. I see a soul." Whether what you saw was your God or just me, my

passion, well, thank you for finding it. "Good-bye, Ms. Kuypers," you said when you left for good that day. I said nothing. Good-bye, Mr. Williams, I thought, then I closed the door, walked to the window, started singing unforgettable. I was alone in my hotel room, and the lights from the Stardust, the Frontier, the Riviera were still flashing. I'm not alone. Good-bye, Mr. Williams.



---

That was a strange trip. I also saw an old friend of mine that wanted to sleep with me, so I had to repeatedly reject his advances.

I don't imagine that this trip will be anything like either one of those trips. Eugene and I don't gamble, and we don't even have a hotel.

Las Vegas is a crazy place. Everything is extremely well-lit. None of the casinos have windows. They don't want you to know what time of day it is, because if you realize that it's dawn you might stop gambling. They have so much power from the Hoover Dam and they have to use so many lights and so much air conditioning that they actually cool off the air on the sidewalk right outside the front doors to the hotels and casinos.

It's sort of like going to another planet.

As I said, it's tacky, but it's something you have to experience.

And every time I saw the sign for the Mirage, the Beastie Boys' song "Sabotage" went through my head, and I had to quote the lyrics out loud: "Oh my God, It's a Mirage, I'm telling y'all, it's sabotage."

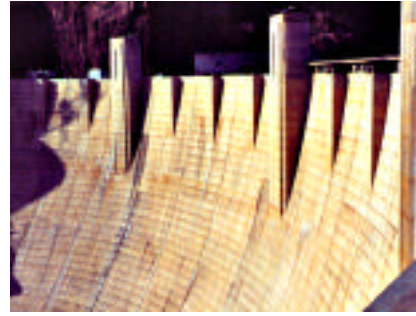
But by the end of the night, I think he was actually enjoying himself, and not bitching about how Las Vegas is robbing water from the Colorado River in order to survive in a desert.

Or whatever other political tirade he could go on.

I think he started to think of the place as a sort of New Orleans. It's not supposed to be real. It's not supposed to be questioned. It's like an alternate universe. So try to have fun.

Went to the Hoover Dam today. I remember when I flew into Las Vegas for the first time, my mother suggested I sit in her seat on the other side of the plane for the landing so that I could see the Hoover Dam out the window. I sat in the aisle next to my father, and he was like a little kid looking out the window. I remember him saying to himself, "Wow. Look at all the concrete."

Did I mention that he ran a construction company?



## in the air (exerpts)

From above in the air, the mountains look like the little mountains you see on topographically correct globes, little ridges, as if they're made of sand, if you just lean your head down a little bit, your exhaling can make them all blow away in the breeze.

Anyway, I was impressed by the Hoover Dam by its massive size. But by far the Dam had more tourists visiting and was more popular than any of the national parks we had visited. And I know it was winter, but a part of me was hoping there were more people at Hoover Dam because people were amazed at something that man did, versus some thing that nature did.





---

# "Type A" Person



## California

Stopped in a small town who's claim to fame was that it had the world's tallest thermometer. It was 134 feet tall, in honor of the high temperature Death Valley reached in the early 1900s.

We had to stop for an agricultural checkpoint in California - they want to make sure that no one brings fruit or things that could carry insects into the area.



I was in my friend's car once, and she was driving through the streets of Chicago, and she was letting people in who were getting in the right lane at an intersection when that right lane really should only be used for



turning right but they go straight and try to cut off the long line of traffic waiting at the light. Well, as I said, she's letting these people get in front of her, and she's stopping at four-way stop intersections and waving other cars to go in front of her, and when she

is going she's going under the speed limit, and I'm thinking, my god, she's under thirty years old and she's driving like she's twice her age and I want to tell her to get going because damnit, I don't want to die in this



car, I've got a lot of living to do, I've never jumped out of an airplane or made a million dollars or been in a lustful affair with a high-ranking political candidate, and if I am going to go out I surely don't want to die of boredom while someone else is staying in the most congested lane of traffic when they could just as easily get into the next lane and cut everyone off in front of them when they eventually have to merge, like I would most certainly do.



And then it occurred to me, and of course it filled me with a complete and utter sense of elation, because I just love being pigeon-holed into stereotypical psychological categories: I really am a Type A person.

There's an intersection near my house where from one direction you can either go straight or turn right,

and there are two streets that merge into this one, both turning right, so the middle street has a "no turn on red" sign. And usually when I'm on this road I'm on the street that's going straight, the left-most street, and these two streets are on my right, merging into my street. And I always catch the red light on this street, it's like the traffic gods are displeased with my constant efforts to circumvent their wrath, so I'm always catching the red light at this street, so I've learned a new trick: I turn right, onto the first street on my right, but instead of doing a U-turn I turn left



at the next block so I can get on that second street, all so I can turn right onto the street I was on originally before both of the other streets get to go so I can beat every one of those slow bastards to the next intersection.



I mean, yes, I'm the one that's yelling and banging the steering wheel of my car when people on the road are idiots. Yes, I'm that person who has to race so that I can slam on my brakes at that next intersection, only 100 feet away, and yes, I am only driving a Saturn SL1, a sedan with about as much power as a 1982 Ford Mustang, but damnit, I won't go down without a fight, I will be out there cutting everyone off, weaving in and out of traffic; I will be the one getting there before you, trust me, I will.



And even when I'm tuning the radio while driving, because, you see, I do that and put on my make-up and take notes for work and check over my schedule



and if I was the Hindu god Vishnu and had ten arms I'd get a cel phone and send out faxes and eat dinner and write a novel while I was at it, but, as I said, even when I'm tuning the radio

while I'm driving I only let the first second-and-a-half of the song play before I'm disgusted and change the dial to the next pre-programmed station, just to instantaneously become disgusted another six times and have to find a tape to play because all those stupid corporate pieces of shit think they should play crap over and over again in order to keep the mindless tuned in.

Well, not me, thank you very much, I don't have the patience for that.

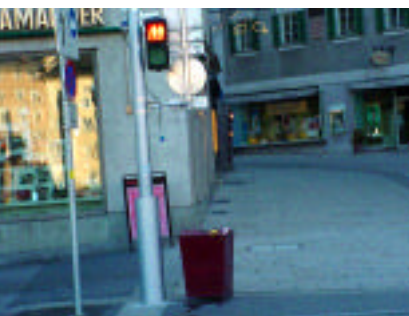
So, needless to say, I've discovered that this is a problem of mine, I wish there was some sort of therapy group for this so I could go to my weekly "Type A Anonymous" meetings, but we'd probably all be pushing each other out of the doorway thirty seconds before the meeting is supposed to start, saying, "Get out of my way ass-hole, you should have thought about being late before you tried to cut me off," and the meetings themselves would probably be filled with people yelling, "Hey, jerk, I think I was talking, what, do you think you're god or something, show some respect."

God, and I know this is a problem of mine, I know this "Type A-ness"

transcends into every realm of my life. When I get on the elevator in the morning to get to my office on the eighteenth floor, I try to make the doors close as quickly as possible so no one can get on the elevator with me, because you know, I really do hate all people and surely don't want to be in a cramped confined space with a bunch of strangers. But when people do get on the same elevator as me, they invariably press the buttons for floors fifteen, sixteen and seventeen, and I start pursing my lips, stopping myself from saying, "Oh, you people couldn't stand to walk a flight of stairs, you just had to press all of these buttons and stop me from getting to my god-damned floor in a reasonable amount of time."

Even walking on the sidewalk in the city, I always get stuck behind someone that's a full foot shorter than





me and a full thirty pounds heavier, someone who labors to walk very, very slowly, someone who actually sways rhythmically when they walk, like a metronome, or like a person standing on the edge of a dance floor, rocking back and forth, back and forth all too afraid to actually ask someone to dance, or else afraid

to go out and dance and make a fool of themselves in front of the cool people who have figured out what rhythm really is. And I'm walking behind this person, almost tripping over myself because this walking pace is just unnaturally slow, so to pass the time until there's an opening on the left side of the sidewalk so I can pass them and walk like a human being again I start to mimic them, swaying with my walk, more for my own entertainment than anyone else's.

Yes, more than a human being I'm a human doing, and I hate having to depend on the schedules of others in order to get ahead of them all.

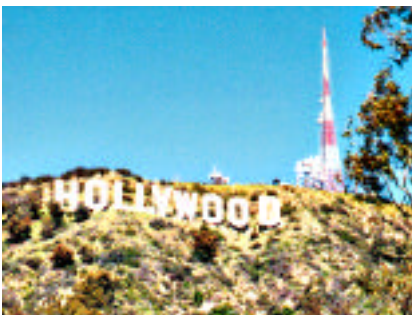
Yes, I am the person in line at the grocery store with three items, shifting my weight from foot to foot, frantically scanning the other lines, the person who wants to ask the person in front of them, "can't I get in front of you, I've only got three items and you have two full grocery carts full of crap like Cheetos, Pepsi, fish sticks and Haagen Daz Cookie Dough ice cream." Yes, I am the person who has four different sets of plans for any given evening because if any one

event gets too boring I can pick up and say, "Oh, sorry, I'm supposed to be at a meeting by now," instead of having to tell them that they're too boring or that I just have no idea whatsoever of how to relax. Yes, I am the person who coasts toward an intersection when I know the timed pattern of the traffic lights, and know that I can manage to get to this intersection without ever having to make a complete stop so when that light does change I can accelerate faster than everyone else, pass everyone by, and have the open road to myself, wide open in front of me.



I'm already guessing that at my funeral, when the long procession of cars is creeping toward the cemetery, I'll be opening that casket up and whispering to the driver of the hearse, "hey, what do you say we floor it and blow everyone off in line? We could probably grab a beer at the corner bar and still be able to beat everyone to the grave site," because, as I said, I'm a "Type A" person, and I'm going to make damn sure I do as much living as I possibly can, I'm not going down without a fight, and wherever that god-damned goal line is, I swear, I'll beat everyone to it.





I noticed that driving on the 10 (one of the main interstates in the Los Angeles area) was one of the most frightening experiences know to man. Now I'm used to driving in Chicago, and by far I'm a Type A driver. In fact, I think driving in Chicago are just as bad as driving in New York, so I've usually thought that I've seen the worst of traffic. Driving the 10, however, is more like driving in an auto race than in a traffic jam, and all the competitors are out for blood.

Well, there haven't been many freeway shootings lately, so I shouldn't complain.

Everyone drove very fast, and people changed lanes without discretion. It really was a bit like a video game.

At least everyone uses their turn signal here, even when changing lanes on expressways, which is something that most people in Chicago were not taught.

Went to the beach. It was sunny today, but with the storms that have been around recently it was very windy. We saw on the Santa Monica Pier a film crew taping a 1-800-COLLECT commercial with the guy who used to play Ed Bundy on Married With Children. He was saying to a mime, "Dial 1-800-COLLECT. It's the only way to dial collect." He was wearing a wind breaker that said "Phone Patrol" in huge letters on the back.

Oh, but wait, I didn't tell you yet about my day trip to Mexico.



---

# Diane Talking About her Trip to Mexico City

So I decided to take a trip to Mexico City. I decided that this was going to be the trip I take by myself, this is going to be the trip where I reclaim my independence. This is going to be the trip where I venture out, take on the world, all without help from a travel companion, from a man.

So I went there, and really, it wasn't as frightening as I thought it would be. I needed to learn more of the language, but otherwise I got along just fine. Oh, I got lost once, and men in cars kept offering to give me rides, "hey, baby, you want your own private taxi?" and I'd have to move away from them, but one guy told me which bus I wanted, so I was fine.

But the man that ran the hotel thought it wasn't safe for me, and he asked me if my parents loved me, if my family loved me, if anyone loved me, anyone at all, because if anyone did, why would they let me go on this trip alone?

And then as I was touring I went to an old church where there was a saint, and they're considered a saint because their body doesn't decompose. It's not like religion in America, because they had to put this saint's body in a glass case because all the people who came to see him would pick off part of his face as a souvenir.

And then as I was touring I went to a nunnery, a place where supposedly all the bad young girls were sent to live out the remainder of their days. And they showed me around in the tour, and they said, "Here are the crosses that

the young women had to carry when they walked around in circles in the courtyard. And these, over here, these are the crowns of thorns the women wore." And I looked at the crosses, the crowns, and there was still blood on them.

This is how things were, I guess. And they looked at me as strange because I was taking a trip alone. No one in Mexico City understood why I'd want to do this there.

No one understood why I'd want to be alone.

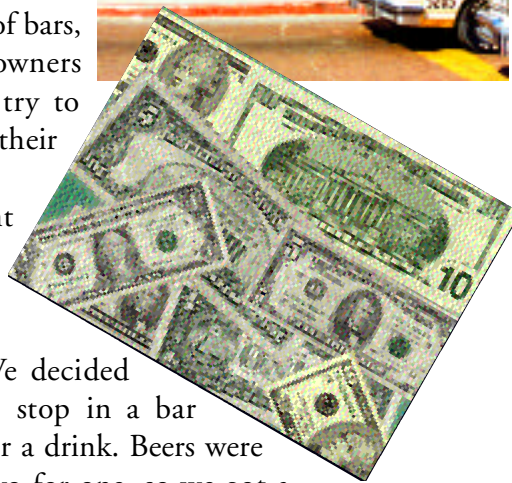




# Mexico

I was told before we left that Tijuana was a dirty place. I had no idea how dirty it would really be, though. The streets are really tiny and not well maintained, the shops are crammed along the sides of the streets. There is a stop sign at every block. The Spanish word for stop is "alto." Men try to flag you into driving into their auto transmission shops. On a few streets you see a man with a camera and a donkey fully painted to look like a zebra, waiting for you to spend your money on a tourist photo in Tijuana. They even supply a sombrero if you'd like to wear one in your photo. There are a ton of bars, mostly dance clubs. Shop owners stand at the sidewalk and try to convince you to come into their store.

The desperately want American money.



We decided to stop in a bar for a drink. Beers were two for one, so we got a bucket of beers, then the waiter brought us free shots of tequila. Eugene doesn't drink hard liquor, so I drank his for him, because I mean, when in Rome... I ended up drinking around 13 shots after we met Tammy, Janice and Justin, from San Diego. We drank more beer.



They kept giving us free shots. At one point, the bartender, wearing a sombrero and blowing on a whistle, threw a napkin around my neck and poured tequila down my throat. When he was done he shook my head and smashed a paper cup on top of my head (apparently that's festive too).

We were dancing to the Macarena in a bar in Mexico at four in the afternoon with these people we just met, and they ended up bringing us back to the United States and gave us a place to stay for the night.

In a nutshell, Tijuana is pretty much an alternate universe, the way that Las Vegas or New Orleans is, much on a much different level.

And if you can't hold your liquor, just don't go there. Trust me.





---

# Mohave Desert

We arrived in the Mohave Desert by nightfall. There was a sign on the road telling us to be careful for there were cows and burros in the area and they could cross the street at any point. The gravel roads were difficult to drive on. Certain kinds of clay and dirt, when driven on repeatedly, start receding in grooves that resemble the waves of ocean water on the sand below. These grooves cross the dirt and gravel roads, and feel like you're driving on the grooved patches of road before you hit a toll booth - except this is a lot stronger and a lot more painful. After over ten miles of this ugly road we made it to the campsite. Not only was there a charge to camp, but it was also full - with big buses and recreational vehicles. It occurred to us that in the desert, on the dry ground, there may not be as many patches to even be able to camp on, because there are sporadic plants keeping the ground from blowing away. Then it started to rain.

In the desert.

Yes, the Mohave Desert probably gets between three and nine inches of rainfall a year, and we happened to attempt to camp there on one of the few nights during the year where it actually rained.

Then the car looked like it was overheating. We noticed that it was when we drove slowly that it started to overheat - which we pretty much needed to do to get around the grooves in the road and the crevasses that were like gigantic pot holes in the dirt road.

Then the fog set in. Could barely see twenty feet in front of us. And on, last minute, Eugene last minute had to slam on his brakes because there were about ten cows crossing the street in front of us.

## Arizona

I hung out in Arizona once, when it reached a record high temperature - 122 degrees.

I remember sitting outside back then, and after a few minutes, I smelled a familiar smell, but it took me a few moments to place it. It was the smell from inside of a dry heat sauna. Mmm, burning flesh smell. I only stayed out for about twenty minutes.

Al I could say was that the "but it's dry heat" argument is crap.

This time it was cool where we were, so it would be an interesting and quiet visit to the Grand Canyon. It was a cold morning, but it was beautiful. We drove up to the south rim and followed it east.

It was pretty magnificent.

We drove to the Sunset Crater Volcano, which was less than an hour away from the Grand Canyon and checked out the large deposits of black lava all over the national forest.

## New Mexico

As we crossed the border into New Mexico from Arizona, the Indian villages immediately disappeared. I noticed as we drove through the last miles of Arizona that there were trading posts and tons of places to purchase genuine Indian arts and crafts. But when we entered New Mexico, the tee pees and the mountains disappeared.

Our destination was Albuquerque, home of the National Poetry Festival this week. I am performing in a show with five other Chicago writers.

Everyone seemed to like the show. Some people would come up to us and say things like, "Chicago poets ROCK!", which I thought was kind of funny. Some of the performers, like Jason, had plans to read at other shows the next day, but me and Krystal and Eugene were wanting to have a break from the readings, and I think Eugene were too used to travel to be able to stay around.

All in all, New Mexico has a good alternative portion of town. There's lots of coffee shops and independent book stores and thrift stores. There are mountains on the horizon, although they're not quite as impressive as Colorado's. The southwestern art is getting on my nerves, however...

---

# Texas

The mountains were now gone from our landscape; they were eventually replaced by small oil pumps in the fields, rhythmically pumping back and forth. Almost as soon as we got into Texas, we noticed the signs for Propane. And we noticed that gas prices were a lot cheaper - less than a dollar a gallon. In fact, as we drove through some of the small towns, we even saw middle-aged men standing in their driveways in groups with their beers in their hands and their pick-up trucks in the driveways.

The only thing that the show "King of the Hill" has wrong about Texas is that in the cartoon it doesn't look quite so poor.

We went out once we got to Austin for the night, and I had noticed that there was a Louisiana-style Jazz bar, as well as a bar called Fat Tuesday and a bar called Tropical Isle, which is also located in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

What I realized it actually **was** Fat Tuesday only six hours away in New Orleans.

I also didn't realize that people living in Austin, Texas, took Mardi Gras so seriously. We managed to park right off 6th street, but noticed that the streets were being blocked off and that police cars were stationed at each intersection. People were crowding into the streets. There was a fifty-foot line of people waiting to get into Fat Tuesday. There was a sex shop, selling toys and leather clothes - much like most of the sex shops in New Orleans. There were people on roof tops and balconies screaming at people in the street. Everyone was wearing plastic Mardi Gras beads. Some people were even beginning to remove their clothes.

I don't understand him. Most people collect souvenirs. I write down notes of my experiences. I take pictures. I even take match books from places I've been. Eugene pulls over to the side of the road and collects rocks from the places he's driven past. Sometimes I'm convinced he values rocks and plants and animals more than he values human beings. I wonder what it's like, hating your own species so much.



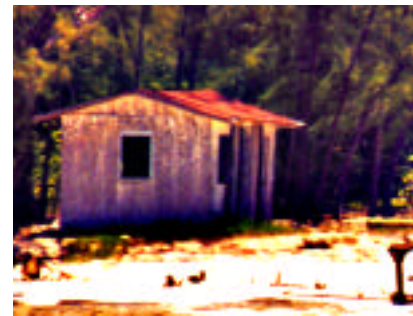
## Louisiana

the bridge to new orleans

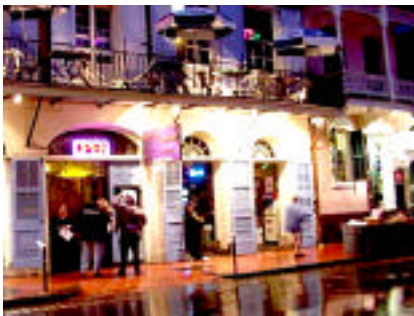
you have to pass the desolation  
before you get there  
long, long bridges  
overlooking swamps, decaying trees  
occasionally a home  
foundation crumbling  
wet wood peeling away

what do those people see  
the people in those homes  
crocodiles, snakes  
bugs along the water  
a ripple of the murky  
water under the full moon  
the vultures perched  
along the treetops

they have the isolation  
the beauty of the solitude  
but it's a different kind of  
decay they see  
a different kind of decay  
a different kind



Going to New Orleans by car, I thought the swamps were cool, the water was cool. I thought the style of the small buildings in the French Quarter were cool. I thought the catacombs were cool (although these catacombs are above-ground cemeteries, not under ground, the cemeteries have to be above ground because of the amount of water in the ground). I liked the lack of open-container laws as well.



Since that first trip I've been to New Orleans a number of times, a few times for work, to run the trade show, and a few times to get away for a weekend.

Through work I met

a chef named Mike Parr who has a balcony on Bourbon street, and every time we were there he'd invite us up. I've been there and met my friend Doug there. I most recently went to New Orleans to see Mardi Gras.

In the evenings, you head to the Quarter with your beads, ready to bargain for favors. This is how it works in New Orleans. Have good enough beads, and you can get people to get naked on the street for you. I called it a "prostitution-for-beads form of Capitalism."



## Jackson Square/Bourbon Street

we'll read your palm  
we'll sketch your face  
we'll take you for a carriage ride

we'll pipe you full of liquor  
we'll give you naked women  
we'll make you happy

aren't you happy, friend





---

# Mississippi

So this is my experience with New Orleans. There are a lot of little shops there, some are cheesy t-shirt shops, some are art galleries, some are sex shops, some are 16th century antique stores. It's a town of money and debauchery.

Kind of like Vegas, but on a different scale.

Oh, and Eugene is gone. This fills me with a joy that I cannot explain on human terms. I have a whole month without him. I know, I know, he has a heart of gold and he's a good guy, but patience is *not* one of my virtues.

We went to dinner. There was nothing vegetarian on the menu. I had to have them make something special up for me. The waiter acted like a surfer. Everything he said ended with the phrase, "right on." I was with my sister and her friend, and they were sure he was on drugs.

My socks and underwear and a shirt and shorts are hanging in my windows now, still drying from my washing them this morning. Ah, living a life of leisure...

We went to dinner the next night, and my sister and her friend started complaining about their last waitress there; they were sure she was high. I told them they think every person that serves them a meal is high. The manager later told us that the reason why we haven't had an attentive waiter is because he is in the back - washing dishes.

At one point, the hostess (whom we called "Miss Happy," because she was the most depressing looking woman we had seen in a long while) was missing, and as we were looking for our waiter, we noticed he was seating people.

Hostess, waiter and wash boy.

To make a long story short, we were at the restaurant for over an hour and a half. We got our food comped.

Then we ran out of there.

Then we went down toward Decatur street and ordered frozen drinks. We walked over to Cafe du Monde and we had a few more beignets.

I spent part of a day in Mississippi. Stopped at the first exit, because there was a NASA Space Center there.



I went on a tour of the grounds, got to see models of engines used for the Space Shuttle, and went through the museum to see a history of

Americans in Space.

I love the idea of being in space.

I always loved astronomy, even when I was a child. I went outside with my sister and mapped locations of certain stars. Every time Eugene and I have been driving, I have been able to look out my window and see Orion in the Winter sky.





## Florida *in the air (exerpts)*

Seeing Fort Myers Florida, the city always looks different from any other place, all those palm trees, the marshes. Like you're going somewhere foreign, and pretty soon the big tour will begin. You can feel the heat, the humidity sticking your shirt to your back between your shoulder blades, and your neck, sticking to your neck too, before you even walk outside.



My car reached 100,000 miles while I was on the road from Tampa to Naples. Eugene had told me that when my car reached 100,000 miles I was supposed to pull over and run around the car, you know, like a Chinese fire drill. So I pulled over on I75 and ran around my car. Then I drove on.

I visited my parents in Naples, southwest Florida. My parents aren't going to be around forever. It's funny, if you asked me ten years ago if I would look forward to visiting my parents, I would have laughed at you. But then again, ten years ago I thought everyone was invincible. Since then, my mother had breast Cancer and a radical hystorectomy. It changes you, seeing a possible end, and trying to guess the next steps to take.



# My mother My mother My mother

We went to see my mother this weekend. You see, my mother has cancer, and we decided to go across the country for a weekend to surprise her and see how she was doing. it was breast cancer, so it really was the best case scenario, i suppose, so i managed to put it out of my mind until we actually had to fly there

The night before i couldn't bring myself to pack. it was two in the morning when i finally pulled my suitcase out from the pantry shelf.

i kept telling people at work, "well, you see, I have to go visit my mother because she has cancer, so I have to miss a few days of work," but I was always able to say it so matter-of-factly until I had to actually visit her

In fact, when my sister told me the diagnosis, it was right around Christmas time, and there was so much work to do and I still had presents to wrap and a meal to prepare and Christmas was supposed to be a happy time

that I managed to postpone even thinking about it until we all decided to surprise her for a visit. And then I had to pack. To decide what to take, what to leave behind, put my life into a little black box with a handle and wheels, and go

It shouldn't be this way, and I knew that, I knew that I shouldn't be visiting my mother under these circumstances and I knew how she never wants to think about bad things because they always make her cry and this would make her want to cry and cry because the only reason why we're there is because things are bad

But I wasn't supposed to think that way, things would be just fine.

So I finished packing at four in the morning and the next thing I remember is I was on the plane with my sisters, cracking jokes as we picked up the rental car. and then we got to mom and dad's house

and everyone was so happy to see each other, it was one big family reunion and we were laughing and talking and trying to figure out where we were all going to sleep

and the sisters and dad walked into the front room to see if the couches were good enough to sleep on or if we would have to get out an air mattress and I was alone in the den with mom

so I suddenly became serious and sat down next to her and asked her how she was really doing. And that is when she started to cry, saying that the cancer spread, but what she was most concerned with was the fact that she didn't want to spoil the time that we came to visit her. But what I don't think she understood was that we couldn't have come at a better time, and nothing she could do would spoil our trip.





I found a great passage from the book I'm reading. It's a little long, about a page, but it's worth it - it's from the book "Darwin's Dangerous Idea." It's a bit scientific (which I appreciate) but it continually comes back to the question that most people grapple with when it comes to Darwinism: how do evolution and religion coexist? It's interesting. Hey, they even mention memes.

\*\*\*

I'm in Tallahassee now.

There's a women's prison across the street from this strip mall here. Watched the Oscars last night. Cher wore something hideous, as usual. Would it really be the Oscars if she didn't?



## Alabama

The drive stinks through Alabama. Oh, wait, I saw two billboards worth mentioning. One had a picture of a man putting a wedding ring on a woman's hand, and it said, "Safe Sex: It was God's plan from the start." The other one had no picture on it. It just said, "Go to Church - or the devil will get you."



## Tennessee

Met C Ra Mcguirt last night. I have worked with him in the poetry world ever since Scars Publications started back in 1993. He submitted work to my magazine, and was so thankful that I accepted his work he asked what he could do for me. I told him to start his own magazine and publish me. So he did. He started the magazine "the Penny Dreadful Review." Thus started "Penny Dreadful Press."



We went out to dinner Sunday night, where we got yelled at for pipe smoking.

Then later a ton of poets got together at his place, and I remember one of the poets, whom cc&d magazine had published, pulled out his gun and got a bullet into the wall above my head.

On this trip, a man i've dated for a year and a half died, and a gun was shot over my head. Now my trip is complete.



# Kentucky



I've been to Louisville (country town, from what I could tell) and to Shepherdsville. Everything has meat in it here; all I could eat once was green beans and mashed potatoes. That is, until I tasted the green beans and realized that they had been cooked in bacon fat.

These are my memories of Kentucky.

I saw where they hold the Kentucky Derby.

I know, that doesn't say much about Kentucky...



## Indiana

Stopped in Bloomington to see my friend Brian. Bloomington is a college town, a relatively nice one, and only four hours from Chicago. There are slopes in the roads that are vaguely reminiscent of hills, which are vaguely reminiscent in an interesting landscape, versus the blinding flatness of the Illinois plains. The Indiana University campus has really nice buildings too.

And somewhere I heard that Bloomington Indiana had the highest gay population in the country. No, not San Francisco, or some larger metropolitan area, but Bloomington, Indiana.

A few people asked me yesterday after hearing about my trip if I was excited about coming home. The only thing I was excited about was doing a little settling down, was not having to worry about someone else's schedule or imposing on someone else. I could buy food and make my own meals in my own kitchen. Beyond that, no, I'm not looking forward to coming home. Now I'm going to go back where no one valued the things I value and do things that no one understands. I'll have more interesting stories to tell because of this trip (like anyone wants to hear them anyway). Now people's first question to me will not longer be, "Where are you now?", but "So when are you going to get a job?"







# Home Again



I'm home now. As soon as I got into the Friday afternoon traffic of the Dan Ryan and the Kennedy expressways I was back to my old self. That is, yelling at cars and changing lanes and becoming Type A person again. Old habits die hard.



But as soon as I got back, well, Eugene had been home a month when I got back, and I found, among other things:

- dirty plastic cups in the kitchen cabinets
  - dirty aluminum cans in the kitchen cabinets
  - uncovered food in the refrigerator
  - Eugene's open suitcase in the living room
  - a small pile of tissues on the toilet (I'm guessing it was Eugene's excuse for toilet paper).
- All I could think was that I bought toilet paper for one and a half years as his roommate. He will buy some tomorrow.

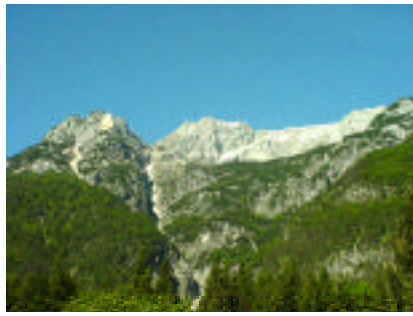


I could have mentioned that there was an empty paper bag from Taco John's in the refrigerator, but then I would have sounded like I was bitching...

And I came home, and Eugene had come and gone, and the dishes were still on the counter, as were the aluminum cans, and nothing was moved from the dining room (like his open suitcase).







## Reflections

Even though I don't know what all the answers are yet, I feel like for once I have choices. And I'm not afraid to make them.

The long trip is over, I suppose, but my life hasn't gone back to the way it was.

The past few months have been filled with wonderful things and terrible things. I have laughed and cried, gained new friends and lost people very close to me. I don't quite know yet how this will all affect my future, but everyone has told me that this has been a bold step for me to take in my life.

I never thought it was bold. I just had to do it..



So what have I learned after all of this? I've learned that there is a lot out there. I've learned that mountains are beautiful. I've realized that

being a stranger in a place allows me to be things and say things I normally wouldn't. I've learned that life is short, and the price I paid for that knowledge was too high. I know that I have to make a conscious effort to live and to be happy, because it is too easy to let yourself fall into a slump and let life happen to you instead. What is the point of living life if you are just waiting for your death?





## The Illness of Volunteerism

When I opened up my copy of USA Today this morning (April 22, 1997) I saw a chart as the illustration for the lead story. The chart stated, "Volunteerism: How Strong is the Drive?" and then asked the question, "If your place of work gave its employees the chance to take paid time off of work to do community volunteer work, how likely are you to take the time off?"

The results showed that 51 percent of people surveyed would in fact take the time off to volunteer.

But what they asked for was not volunteerism - what the question asked is would you volunteer if you were still being paid by someone. By definition, that's not volunteering.

Ask the same group of people if they'd be willing to put in the same amount of time when it was their own time, and they were not being paid for it.

I'm sure the results would be much, much lower.

People work for a living. They go to work in the morning, come home at night, and live off of what they earned - that's Capitalism, and for the most part, that's America (at least that's what this country was founded on). People, for the most part, don't want to give away their labor - or their money - to people who haven't earned it.

A summit to encourage people to come together to volunteer is one thing. Asking individuals to volunteer to help out the "less fortunate" is one thing. People have the right to choose what to do with their own time. Making it sound like volunteerism is the responsibility of individual companies is another.

Businesses, by producing better goods and services, have increased the standard of living - for everyone in this country (consider that poor people can purchase televisions, have entertainment and other "luxuries" that no one could afford fifty years ago). Businesses are doing a service to the world as well as to themselves when they produce. They earn a product; competition brings better products; everyone wins. It is not the responsibility of businesses to lose their workers to regular volunteer times, because they don't owe anything to "the community."

"The community" consists of a group of individuals. Individual rights is how this country was founded. Expecting business owners to shell out money to employees for not working - for volunteering - is just another way of extracting money from the producers. Won't that hurt the economy in the end, which affects the standard of living for all?

The article went on, stating that there were philosophical questions with wide-scale, imposed volunteerism:

"How should the role of the government be balanced with the roles of companies, individuals and non-profit groups?" It shouldn't be balanced; the government shouldn't be involved. Government intervention would mean more taxes and less freedom for individuals. Companies should not feel the need to volunteer, as imposed by a government; if they want to help, they can, but should not be expected to. They do enough by producing better goods and services for the individuals that purchase them.

"Is volunteerism a politically popular but lightweight response to the intractable social problems government leaders can't, or won't manage?" Now we're getting somewhere. Volunteerism won't solve a problem if the individual you are helping doesn't want to help themselves, or expects to be helped instead of working on finding their own solution. The government, when involved with other aspects of our lives, has made a very expensive tangled mess of red tape - consider education, for example. Pressure groups have pulled funding back and forth for education, providing not the best education, but what the right people wanted. The result? a poor educational system that the government thinks more money will solve. When more money doesn't help, add more money, and tax the people some more.

"Volunteerism is one of the great glories in America," states Will Marshall of the Progressive Party Institute. No it isn't. It's a great glory to communism, where people are supposed to make sure everyone is equal and not be able to advance with their achievements, therefore giving them no incentive to achieve. It's a great glory to Christianity, because you're not supposed to rise above everybody else, you're supposed to not like the things to earn. "The meek shall inherit the earth." No, it's individual rights, and the right to own your accomplishments and achievements that is one of the great glories of America, and that directly opposes volunteerism. The right to produce and create and succeed is the American way - and it developed this country into the greatest country in the world. But for years now, we've been told that we need to help others. Since we've heard that cry, our country has been slipping.

General Colin Powell is working on the volunteerism summit, and he added that it is in individual's best inter-



Marcus, said, "We don't do it (volunteerism) because it increases our business." Well, then, your business isn't running as efficiently as it should be. Where are the costs of volunteerism going? Probably the prices of the goods and services the company sells. When you don't see a return on an investment, the loss has to be eaten up somewhere.

In 1993 Maryland Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend "pushed through a controversial requirement that all her state's public high school students must do 75 hours of community service before they graduate," the article goes on to say. What does that teach students? That the government has the right to tell people how to spend their time, that the government can tell people what to do, that the government can force people to do things, whether or not they want to do it? Does it teach students that volunteerism isn't actually volunteer work, but a required activity? Does it teach them their achievements don't matter, that other people matter more than they do? A "requirement" to do "community service" is not volunteering.

At the end of the article, there was another chart with the results of a survey. It asked people, "Who should take the lead role in meeting the following goals (providing medical care for the poor, caring for the elderly, reducing homelessness, reducing hunger, helping illiterate adults learn to read, providing job training for youth): the government, through programs and funding, or individuals and businesses, through donations and volunteer work?"



ests to look beyond their neighborhoods when volunteering. Why? How is it in any individual's best interest to do work for free that doesn't affect their lives? No answer.

Companies may be interested in participating in volunteering programs because it bolsters their image in their community, providing business. Or it may give the employees a feeling that their company cares about others, which may reduce the turnover rate. Or it may be a tax write-off. Either way, the only reasons a business should - in order to be an efficient business - explore volunteerism, is in order to help their own business out somehow. The CEO of Home Depot, Bernie

Answers varied, but people thought the government should help out in all of these areas. But how are they going to do it? With your tax money, deciding how to spend it without conferring with you. If it were the responsibility of individuals and businesses, on a volunteer-basis, at least you would know where your money was going.

But then it occurred to me: it's not the government's responsibility, and it's not a business person's or producing individual's responsibility - it's the responsibility for those in need to do something with their lives, to satisfy that need and accomplish their own goals. "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" means that people have a right to their lives, and the right to do what they want with their lives. They can't infringe on other's rights to help them.







