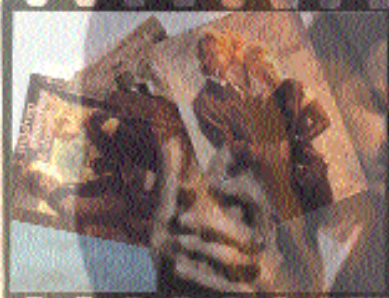


v. 132
12/21/03
the Winter Solstice Edition

Everything's in here
from poetry to prose
to art ... heck, even
performance art.
We threw in some news
& a regular dose of
philosophy, even...

children churches & daddies

ISSN#1068-5154



the unreligious,
nonfamily-oriented
literary & art mag

the boss lady's editorial

Hi, and in a bizarre way, we wanted to say good bye.

No, I know, we're not leaving for ever, but for the time being this is the last standard-sized magazine issue of cc&d available. We're going to start running cc&d again in digest sized formats (5.5 x 8.5, saddle stitched), the way we did when we first started cc&d in 1993.

Although in some ways it may seem sad to change formats, because the issues are smaller this way, but in some ways it is better. By changing our format in print to digest size,, we are avoiding running the news and possibly the philosophy in our issues - which means that you get more of the talented writers of poetry and prose in our issues. However this may be different from the past issues of cc&d (volumes 1 through 74, 1993 through 1995), because we are running full color covers, and we have a greater propensity to run prose in issues as well - thanks to the great submissions we have been getting from our contributors.



janet kuypers
managing editor

Janet Kuypers
<http://www.janetkuypers.com>

With these changes, keep in mind that this could be your chance to have a bigger presence in the magazine issues when your writing and art is published. If you want to know what I mean, consider that these digest-sized issues will not have news and may not have philosophy in it, so accepted writings will have a much greater presence in the book. Also note that with digest-sized pages, there probably won't be many poems placed on the same page, so an accepted poem (unless it is as short as a haiku) will probably be showcased on display in these printed pages. Also, there is a chance that some of the accepted poems may even be designed for magazine display - making some accepted poems displayed almost as an art form!

So keep in mind that we'd love to have you still share with cc&d magazine - in print as well as on the web (which has PDF files, a "writings" section, art pages, and even audio like mp3 files and videos of reading of writings)...

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children & churches & daddies

the unreligious, non-family oriented
literary and art magazine

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

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AMERICA'S FAILING WAR EFFORT: A REPORT CARD

Pro-American Citizen's Group Criticizes Bush Administration's War Plans as Feeble, Morally Compromised

Contact: Jason Crawford (917) 696-7877 or media@defenseofamerica.org

NEW YORK--Patriots for the Defense of America today issued "America's Failing War Effort: A Report Card," a scathing critique of the Bush administration's foreign policy.

Unlike left-leaning voices critical of the war, Patriots criticizes the Bush administration from a pro-American, pro-defense perspective. It maintains that Bush has failed to uphold the moral obligation of his government to defend American lives and interests.

Patriots assigned the Administration an average grade of "D+" for its failure to execute a war against the most pressing foreign threats. The categories graded are as follows:

1. The "Hot War" (Iraq and Afghanistan): Iraq posed a real threat to the U.S., but not as great as that posed by nations like Iran and North Korea. Each of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were fought in a shameful manner, sacrificing American troops to unjustifiably restrictive "rules of engagement."

Grade: C

2. The "Cold War" (Iran and North Korea): Two out of three members of the "axis of evil" have

gone unpunished, despite the overwhelming terrorist and/or nuclear threats they pose. Even worse, the U.S. has appeased them, encouraging further aggression.

Grade: D-

3. The "Breeding Grounds" (Saudi Arabia and Pakistan): These governments claim to be allies in the war against militant Islamic terrorism, but fail to suppress terrorists in their own midst. Bush has failed to issue an ultimatum demanding their cooperation.

Grade: C-

4. Israel and the Palestinians: The American "road map" for peace has forced Israel to negotiate with Palestinian terrorists, requiring Israel to abdicate its right to self-defense. This policy is self-defeating for America, since Israel is a natural ally in the war against militant Islam.

Grade: F

5. Military Deployment and Readiness: Despite massive new defense spending, the Bush administration has failed to use its military power--especially the threat of its nuclear arsenal--in a way that minimizes risks to American troops, and maximizes the American ability to destroy the

enemy.

Grade: C

6. International Law and Diplomacy: While American policy is widely criticized as too "unilateral," in reality the Bush administration has demonstrated an undue, self-abasing deference to international opinion and the U.N.--resulting in pointless delays and setbacks in the war.

Grade: D+

A copy of the 19-page report is available for download at <http://defenseofamerica.org/report-card>

Patriots for the Defense of America was founded in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. Its mission is to promote America's moral right to self-defense and to advocate a strong, uncompromising foreign policy.

Patriots for the Defense of America

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<http://defenseofamerica.org>

THE TIMID WAR ON TERRORISM

Despite America's military prowess, she is not winning the war

By Elan Journo and Yaron Brook

Although American forces impressively deposed the tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein, the nearly two-year-long War on Terrorism is, in fact, going badly.

The tragedy is that we lack not weapons, nor military prowess, nor bravery; our military is the most powerful in the history of the world. The problem lies not with our armed forces, but with the ideas guiding our military campaign. Consider how we fought the two major battles of the war so far: Afghanistan and Iraq.

In Afghanistan we exposed our self-crippling ambivalence about the purpose of the war. If our goal was to wipe out al Qaeda terrorists and their Taliban hosts as a step toward eliminating militant Islam, we should have attacked ruthlessly. But we were tentative. As we dropped bombs, we also showered the country with food and medicines, some of which doubtless made it into the hands of the Taliban.

Early on President Bush had promised: "I will not yield, I will not rest, I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people." Yet in Afghanistan, on orders from Washington, our military *did* yield--refraining from bombing mosques; it *did* rest--calling for needless cease-fires during the Tora Bora siege; it *did* relent--catering to the wishes of our coalition "allies," who demanded that we limit the number of American ground forces. In deference to the wishes of such "allies" as Saudi Arabia, a known financier of terrorism, our military had to rely largely on proxy soldiers led by venal warlords, who let the enemy flee.

By hampering our military operations, Washington subverted them. The forces of al Qaeda, scattered rather than eradicated, continue to plot against us. American soldiers die almost daily in skirmishes with lingering Taliban and al Qaeda forces.

In the war against Iraq, the timidity of the Administration was obvious. Though President Bush had explained the threat of Iraqi weapons and expertise falling into the hands of terrorists--and our urgent need to act--he dithered, groveling abjectly before the United Nations for approval. The battle plans he finally issued were seemingly calculated to thwart the efforts of our military. Even as we sought to wipe out Hussein's regime, our goal, apparently, was to avoid upsetting Iraqis. As was true in Afghanistan, high-priority targets such as power stations were to be spared, and our military was ordered methodically to pull their punches. It is much to the credit of our soldiers that they succeeded while bearing only minor casualties,

despite Washington's contradictory injunctions.

The Iraq war, however, has done nothing to quell Islamic terrorism. Whereas Afghanistan, the stronghold of al Qaeda, was a plausible first target, Iraq was not a major base of terrorists, nor the most significant supporter of them. We have let the arch-sponsors of Islamic terrorism--Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iran--believe that they are untouchable. Observe that terrorism against American and Western interests--from Indonesia to Kenya to Morocco--continues unabated. The American people, urged by Washington to believe that Iraq was a success, cannot fathom why more of our soldiers are dying there now than during the hostilities. We should not be surprised if our resolve to fight is diminishing.

To defend American lives properly, we should target not terrorism, a tactic, but militant Islam, the ideology that motivates the terrorists. But we have been flailing in unpredictable directions, unsure of where to go next, because the war lacks a clear purpose.

Why? The Bush Administration lacks moral confidence. At every turn we blushinglly pretended that we are fighting to liberate the oppressed Afghans or tyrannized Iraqis--anything but confess what we should proclaim loudly: that we value and seek to protect American lives. Facing the prospect of civilian casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Administration quailed. It should have asserted that, though such casualties are regrettable, they are the responsibility of the regime that initiated force against us. Instead, America was guilt-ridden, apologetic and appeasing.

We are not winning the war, but we could be.

Our Founding Fathers did not have even one hundredth of America's present military power, but they were armed with the conviction that political freedom is an ideal worth fighting for. Their moral certainty gave them the courage necessary to fight for their independence from England, the 18th century's lone superpower. We are at war with militant Islamists who lust for our annihilation. Our survival depends, not only on having a more powerful military, but on the courage to use our might--to act on what is *morally* proper--to act on our urgent need of ferocious self-defense.

*Dr. Yaron Brook is executive director of the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI). Elan Journo is a senior writer for ARI in Irvine, Calif. The Institute (www.aynrand.org/medialink) promotes the philosophy of Ayn Rand, author of *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*. The Institute promotes the philosophy of Ayn Rand, author of *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*. Send comments to reaction@aynrand.org*

CLONING IS MORAL

By Alex Epstein

Biotechnological progress, long under moral and legal attack, was granted a two-year reprieve last Thursday when the United Nations announced that it is postponing consideration of an international ban on human cloning. Members of that body have been fiercely divided between those, including the United States, who seek to ban all cloning internationally, and those who seek to ban “only” reproductive cloning. Although each side has claimed the moral high ground, both positions are profoundly **immoral**. Any attempt to ban human cloning technology should be rejected permanently, because cloning--therapeutic **and** reproductive--is morally good.

Consider first therapeutic cloning, which opponents perversely condemn as “anti-life.” Senator Sam Brownback, who has sponsored a Congressional ban on all cloning, says therapeutic cloning is “creating human life to destroy [it].” President Bush calls it “growing human beings for spare body parts.”

In fact, therapeutic cloning is a highly **pro**-life technology, since cloned embryos can be used to extract medically potent embryonic stem cells. A cloned embryo is created by inserting the nucleus of a human body cell into a denucleated egg, which is then induced to divide until it reaches the embryo stage. These embryos are not human beings, but microscopic bits of protoplasm the width of a human hair. They have the **potential** to grow into human beings, but **actual** human beings are the ones dying for lack of this technology. The embryonic stem cells extracted from a cloned embryo can become any other type of human cell. In the future, they may be used to develop pancreatic cells for curing diabetes, cardiac muscle cells for curing heart disease, brain cells for curing Alzheimer's--or even entire new organs for transplantation. “There’s not an area of medicine that this technology will not potentially impact,” says Nobel laureate Harold Varmus.

Opponents of therapeutic cloning know all this, but are unmoved. This is because their fundamental objection is not that therapeutic cloning is antilife, but that it entails “playing God”--i.e., remaking nature to serve human purposes. “[Human cloning] would be taking a major step into making man himself simply another one of the man-made things,” says Leon Kass, chairman of the President’s Council on Bioethics. “Human nature becomes merely the last part of nature to succumb to the technological project, which turns all of nature into raw material at human disposal.” Columnist Armstrong Williams condemns all cloning as “human egotism, or

the desire to exert our will over every aspect of our surroundings,” and cautions: “We’re not God.”

The one truth in the anticloning position is that cloning does represent “the desire to exert our will over every aspect of our surroundings.” But such a desire is not immoral--it is a mark of virtue. Using technology to alter nature is a requirement of human life. It is what brought man from the cave to civilization. Where would we be without the men who “exerted their will” over their surroundings and constructed the first hut, cottage, and skyscraper? Every advance in human history is part of “the technological project,” and has made man’s life longer, healthier, and happier. These advances are produced by those who hold the premise that suffering and disease are a curse, not to be humbly accepted as “God’s will,” but to be fought proudly with all the power of man’s rational mind.

The same virtue applies to reproductive cloning--which, despite the ridiculous, horror-movie scenarios conjured up by its opponents, would simply result in time-separated twins just as human as anyone else. Once it becomes safe, reproductive cloning will have legitimate uses for infertile couples and for preventing the transmission of genetic diseases. Even more important, it is significant as an early form of a tremendous value: **genetic engineering**, which most anticloners object to because as such it entails “playing God” with the genetic makeup of one’s child. At stake with reproductive cloning is not only whether you can conceive a child who shares your genetic makeup, but whether you have the right to improve the genetic makeup of your children: to prevent them from getting genetic diseases, to prolong their lifespan or to improve their physical appearance. You should have such rights just as you have the right to vaccinate your children or to fit them with braces.

The mentalities that denounce cloning and “playing God” have consistently opposed technological progress, especially in medicine. They objected to anesthesia, smallpox inoculations, contraception, heart transplants, in vitro fertilization--on the grounds that these innovations were “unnatural” and contrary to God’s will. To let them cripple biotechnological progress by banning cloning would be a moral abomination.

*Alex Epstein is a writer for the Ayn Rand Institute (www.aynrand.org) in Irvine, California. The Institute promotes the philosophy of Ayn Rand, author of *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*. Send comments to reaction@aynrand.org*

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"HATE CRIMES" LAW UNDERMINES PROTECTION OF RIGHTS

Criminal Law Should Not Be Used to Enforce Ideological Orthodoxy

Robert W. Tracinski

Leaders from both parties--Republican Senator Orrin Hatch and Democrat Ted Kennedy--have vowed to push through a new, wide-reaching federal "hate crimes" bill before the end of the current session. A "hate crimes" law would make crimes motivated by enmity toward blacks, gays or other protected groups into a special federal offense. The ostensible purpose of such a law is to protect minorities from persecution. The result, however, would be the exact opposite. Targeting those with "politically incorrect" motives undermines the principle of objective law which undergirds our legal system's protection of rights.

Criminal law exists to prohibit certain actions--to safeguard individuals against force or fraud. For this purpose, there is no shortage of existing statutes. For instance, the killer of Matthew Shepard, the gay college student from Wyoming, was charged with a state crime.

What, then, will a "hate crimes" law add? Despite its name, it is not "hatred" as such that the proposed law targets. After all, which crimes aren't motivated by hatred? Are assaults and murders usually committed out of benevolence toward the victim? The real target is the criminal's ideas. The proposed law declares that criminals motivated by a government-designated set of intolerable ideas--racism, sexism, religious sectarianism, anti-homosexuality--deserve special prosecution and additional punishment.

But to subject someone to trial and punishment on the basis of his ideas--regardless of how despicable those ideas might be--constitutes a politicization of criminal law. Why, for example, should a racist be prosecuted for the special crime of targeting blacks, while the Unabomber is not subject to special prosecution for his hatred of scientists and business executives? The only answer is that the Unabomber's ideas are considered more "politically correct" than the racist's.

A "hate crimes" law would expand the law's concern from criminal action to "criminal thought." It would institute the premise that the purpose of our legal system is not to defend the rights of the victim, but to punish socially unacceptable ideas. This is a premise that should be abhorrent to a free society.

In addition, if committing a crime based on bad ideas warrants greater punishment, then committing a crime based on "politically correct" ideas should warrant lesser punishment. The judicial process would have to focus on the criminal's ideology, rather than on the objective violation of his victim's rights.

The beginnings of this politicization of crime are already in place. When anti-Vietnam War protesters, for example, forcibly occupied buildings and bombed laboratories in the '60s and '70s, they were heralded as "political dissenters," deserving of special leniency--while today, those who commit similar crimes in the name of racism are considered deserving of special penalties.

Similarly, in recent years the left has (properly) campaigned for laws to prevent anti-abortion protesters from harassing doctors and halting access to abortion clinics. Yet its own protesters routinely use force--such as the occupation of timberland to prevent logging--with no fear of special government prosecution.

Nor is the attempt to politicize the criminal law limited to the left. Several years ago, a conservative judge suspended the sentences of two priests--arrested for physically blocking entry to an abortion clinic--because they were motivated by "sincere religious beliefs."

Under such a system, anything goes. The entire criminal justice apparatus can be used as a political tool by whatever faction happens to be in power. Crimes can be white-washed if done for the "correct" political motives, while extra punishment can be meted out to those with "incorrect" motives.

Where will this end? If a man convicted of an actual criminal act can be sentenced to additional years in prison simply for his ideas--then, in logic, why can't someone be punished solely for his ideas? Even if he has not committed a single action against another person, why can't he be tried simply for being a "purveyor of hate"? Indeed, this development is already foreshadowed by campus "speech codes," which bar statements deemed "offensive" to protected groups.

The first official step on this deadly path--the creation of a special category of "hate crimes"--should be resoundingly rejected. It is an attempt to import into America's legal system a class of crimes formerly reserved only to dictatorships: political crimes. Instead, we should insist on the one principle that forms the foundation for the protection of all rights, i.e., that the purpose of law is to punish criminals for initiating force against others--not for holding bad ideas.

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Should Americans Surrender their Freedom for Government Drugs?

by Richard E. Ralston

September 8, 2003
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A Congressional conference committee is now attempting to reach a compromise between a bad Medicare prescription drug bill passed by the House and a worse drug bill passed by the Senate. The only possible outcome is something awful -- and President Bush, who is pressuring Republicans to compromise, has pledged to sign practically any bill to emerge.

Citizens who care about their health, their finances, and their freedom can only hope that the Senate and House of Representatives reject whatever comes out of the conference committee.

Both bills propose the largest expansion of government in nearly 40 years. With the federal budget running the largest deficit in history, even the grossly underestimated additional cost of \$400 billion over ten years is an outrageous burden on taxpayers. If both Social Security and Medicare are in crisis over the prospect of millions of Baby Boomers, this Medicare drug bill can only make matters much worse. Yet this is the least important fault of this legislation.

Despite being among the richest generations of older humans over age 65 in history, retired Americans, according to those who favor Medicare drug subsidies, can't afford prescription drugs. There's no doubt drug costs are rising, but where is the evidence that most seniors have to choose between drugs and dinner?

On the contrary, the last 30 years have seen the most phenomenal growth in new drugs in history -- drugs that improve both the quality and the length of life. People are living longer, better lives due to the brilliant scientific breakthroughs produced by U.S. pharmaceutical firms.

But Bush and the bill's Congressional proponents apparently believe that drug companies -- confronted by price controls and new Medicare regulations dictating which drugs doctors can prescribe for seniors -- will continue to spend \$22 billion on research and development.

The biggest bait and switch lies in the delusion that the plan will actually pay for prescriptions. Bill proponents don't say much about higher Medicare pre-

miums or bigger co-payments, or rising deductibles, or restrictive formularies, which include many low cost drugs --- but not the drugs doctors prefer to prescribe. Your doctor will continue to recommend what you need. The government will decide what you get.

Some people do have a hard time paying for their prescriptions. They would have an easier time if they were not taxed for the dollars they spend on prescriptions and free market reforms, such as tax-free medical savings accounts, are more likely to help than a hand-out with strings attached.

But the fact that some people have a tough time paying for drugs does not make it right for the government to force everyone to use and pay for government-run health care. Someone's need is not a claim on everyone else's income. If you have trouble paying for your prescriptions now, just wait until you have to pay for everyone's prescriptions.

The politicians -- from virtually every Congressman to President Bush, who has vowed to sign almost any Medicare expansion bill regardless of cost or merit -- have it half-right. The way Americans buy prescription drugs -- indeed, the way Americans finance their use of the medical profession -- desperately needs an expansion.

But politicians, as usual, have the drug issue exactly backwards: what ought to be expanded is not government-controlled medicine. What ought to be expanded is freedom - the freedom to choose, pay for and control one's health care. Congress and the White House ought to embrace the concept of choice in medicine and kill the Medicare prescription drug bill.

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Transgender Thoughts aka anti-static thought patterns (on enforced thinking)

Marie Kazalia

Dawn--D-A-W-N not Don D-O-N --tho that used to be her name. Gussed that, even before she'd shown me the first book published on Rock stars-- interviews with Janis Joplin and what's-his name from the Doors-- there was her old name Donald, listed as a interviewer for that book project. She'd made money from it in the 60's in New York, where she was he and used to walk home a lot with her neighbor Nico, from a fringe membership in the Warhol Factory crowd--but Dawn and I had become friends based on other things. Why was she trying to snowball me into accepting her-- when I already had, I'd assumed, because I like her, talking to her --her intelligence, insights-- yeah, love some of those old rock songs and Janis, but I've never been a rock groupie. Dawn had had some interesting experiences. That's all I thought of them. And I didn't behave as she expected.

Other people I'd mentioned her to, certain guy friends, wanted to jump right on interviewing Dawn, only because of who she'd known, and I thought, well, maybe Dawn and I could write something together-- collaborate and sell an article or something like that. We discussed a collaboration-- she'd been thinking of it too-- but then later she started saying things like those other guys, like a pre-programmed behavior, suspicious of my motives. I told her outright we'd work on it together and split what ever came from it--if anything. Always for me, talking thru that kind of ignorant naivety a tiresome bore --want out of that mind-set, not going to let it worm it's way into me. So I lost interest in the project-- too hard dealing with someone who thinks that way, would rather not get involved, let it into my inner life --not fun-- profit not my motive--she can write it herself, alone, with someone else, I shrugged. Shit--the more I came to know her the more old-fashioned I realized her ways of thinking--assumptions.

Still we had fun together talking, hanging out in a

local cafe drinking coffee --what bothered me most tho, when we walked out the door together, she always let me go first, like a man would.

And when a certain woman we both know said to me that it was nice of me to go around with Dawn, laughing, knew what she referred to and just ignored her words, that way of thinking.

Soon after, sitting drinking coffee together, Dawn asked if she could ask me a question. Then she wanted to know if she and I would ever have sex together. My thoughts on-- how do you have sex with someone who had once been a man, and had his sex organs removed in Bangkok? She had told me the story of how she'd awoken from the sex change surgery and the doctor told her he'd thrown in the free removal of her Adam's Apple too. I like a bizarre story, but for practicality sake and in the here and now, I could not devise any associated emotions--any desires to the sex act I suddenly narrowed it down to, with her. Didn't think she was open enough to tell me physical methods-- besides I'd heard about them before. So just then, as a kind way of brushing her off I replied truthfully to her question, that I didn't know if we'd have sex or not, and she sounded surprised and pleased that at least I hadn't said no, there might be a possibility. The thought then I had for a long time, of taking her hand, saying, well, you know we can touch and be affectionate and hug one another if nothing else, but something stopped my hand from moving, my mouth from speaking my thoughts. Not afraid I told myself-- just into other things from different worlds. Later, making the excuse that Dawn's so conservative, my reason for holding back, when I might show affection at least-- more freely and with less fore-thought. As I found myself doing with others I liked even less than her.

Sometime later, Dawn and I went to a huge party in a warehouse studio with a live jazz band playing when

we walked in, that changed to DJ's and choreographed dance performances by dancers in body-art costumes. Films projected onto installations of on layered fabric panels hanging from the high ceiling, a light show flashing all around. Dawn said this reminded her of the Factory-- this was a present day version of what the Factory had been about. We had some drinks, and Dawn said she was looking for a lover, she hadn't had one in a long time. She pointed out various people as possibilities and asked me what I thought of each-- yet she never left my side all night at the party. I thought of her doing this as either a bizarre honesty or a very male ploy. As I recall it now, I attributed my lack of interest in her to our age difference-- I usually like younger men, for some reason that's been my pattern. Then other things about Dawn, like her methodical paleontology research--her long days and nights looking at tiny fossils thru a microscope, writing scientific research papers. Her trips to give her papers at conferences in Germany and Peru--really dull in practice under the initial interest, curiosity. But she also made sculpture, she referred to as statues, and so I thought her old fashioned again. Her love for Camille Claudel, pretending she'd been Camille and all the usual flaming queen kind of stuff.

Dawn considered herself a lesbian at times, a transgender at other times-- had established those categories. I wanted my own ways, as much freedom as possible outside pre-defined roles.

Well weeks later--one day in a hot tub at a women-only bathhouse with my friend Teresa, both of us in the large tile-lined hot tub-- movement of someone coming into the room caught my attention. The back of a naked man's body, long hippy kind of hair like Dawn's, tall, broad shoulders, had a man's ass definitely--when in doubt other men tell by looking at the ass, some say the legs, some say the hands, the Adam's apple--Dawn had her Adams' apple surgically removed. This naked man had man's legs, my instant thought *why is a man in here invading our women-only place of privacy* and then I figured he must be a sex-change. He turned, had tiny hormone-puffed breasts and a bush of hair left where his penis had been removed. His voice low manly-low as he spoke, trying to demurely slide into the hot tub beside me. I made some excuse to turn away, checking the handles that controlled the hot water bubble streams, and he trying hard to speak in the flow pattern of a woman, said *oh, how do you control the bubbles?*

I found it difficult to turn and speak with him as I normally would, when speaking to just most people. I couldn't take my thoughts from the violence he'd done

to himself-- that horrible surgery. Trying to become some static definition of what a woman is, there amid naked butch dyke lesbians still more womanly naturally than his attempts to be a woman. Still I could not fake any sort of acceptance, with this one-- with Dawn at least she always had her clothes on, and we had real stuff to talk about. Smalltalk faked left my own disguised open-minded-ness naked. With my naked body in the hot tub next to the transgender's I realized it was the so-called sex change operation that bothered me, that I had been avoiding deciding what it was. Why Dawn or this guy in the water could not accept themselves as they'd been born. Why couldn't they be some sort of lesbian, only with real cocks, and do whatever they wanted with what they had-- wear all sorts of clothes male and female. Whatever happened to the concept of uni-sex clothing? Why did transgenders feel compelled to use clothing and sexual preferences to define all of themselves, totally, instead of keeping things in control-- allowing aspects of who they are, in whatever variation. Working with what they had. Their obviously bad attempts to apply some assumed conformity--this guy in the hot tub looked just like a man in every way. Their own non-acceptance of themselves caused them to do something so horrible to their own intimate bodies as cut off their penis and testicles. That made me feel scarred--pained inside my chest. Really, so very little about both Dawn and this one in the water had stopped being male, attitude, behaviors.

Seemed to me they were hiding out from the world-- no longer male they could criticism macho behavior/thinking, yet keep some of it as they wished, as it suited them. Technically enter a bathhouse as a woman, adopting this other category, all used as means of escaping. Couldn't they see that!?! When in the company of lesbians, seeking acceptance/admittance or lovers, Dawn referred to herself as lesbian. When with so-called and obviously straight people Dawn admitted to transgender and watched everyone's eyes pop out as they made excuses to scurry away. When Dawn demanded acceptance and her rights, in public, in her profession, who around her even had any pre-programmed behavior expectations to apply to her!-- of what a transgender was supposed to act like!-- So she cleverly side-stepped all sexual roles and expectations. Yet, still-- in spite of feeling all my life that I want to try and understand all sorts of people, my thoughts of Dawn and the man in the water were painful, and did not inspire an urge in me to touch...

The Bouncer

D.B. Rubin

I.

The two codgers sitting storefront on their morning watch on Ashland saw a glint of movement in the car parked across the street. Jack's platinum hair was rising in a morning fog as was his view of the passenger seat containing a pile of money and a 9mm Glock with the chrome handle. It was his car, but he did not remember driving to this spot. Aside from remembering his name, he had no idea of time or place, nor how this mound of cash or and gun arrived to greet him like a perverse mountain seeking its prophet. Jack could be a prophet of doom but he wasn't kicking like that lately. His pent-up anger had found its release on others over the past decade and a half and now was directed inward.

Last he remembered, it was Monday night about 10 PM and he was sitting in a nearly empty rock-bar. Monday night was the evening for those in the tavern trade to hit the pubs of their choice. It was their night, posers were less likely to go out late on a Monday night. That night it was The Exit, equipped with its Goth biker decor and the glare of the blue painting across and above the bar. Jack was the bar's bouncer but was off duty that night. Upon entry to Exit, Jack's ritual was to down a shot of Maker's, bang the shot glass mouth down on the bar, and raise his middle finger to the painting: a portrait of 5 smiley faces including a famous local mass murderer who worked part-time as a clown, a dead rocker and Hitler. Next to him was an already wasted and loquacious Jerkboy with his silent sidekick and guru, Doc. Jack, Jerkboy and Doc were old friends, the troika from the hood.

Doc actually had attended a few years of medical school but was kicked out, a rare event in academia. He had to have done something more than a little lame than flunking a few classes. Questions on this and other sensitive matters were met with an icy stare that froze close any door to discussion especially if the inquirer was familiar with Doc's rep. Doc's name derived from his drug supplying and anatomical talents. Aside from an unlimited supply of pills, he had surgical ability to put a blade in hurtful places. Jerkboy, his loyal acolyte was handy with an ice pick. Jerkboy was a dumb jerk but his moniker was based on the beef jerkies that incessantly hung from his pre-pubescent mouth fed by a less-than-interested-or-talented-cook of a mother. Jack used to run towards trouble with his buddies. Back then, it's where the truth lay, he

thought, where brute force would yield answers. Nowadays, life as a bouncer with side jobs in construction kept life simple and a bit safer.

Jack shook his head, hurting with the glare of sun and dazed with a residual buzz of some kind. Across the street he saw two gray heads staring at him and laughing. Laughing he could take, disorientation and creeping panic was something else. He recalled that Jerkboy was complaining to Doc about his banged up right shoulder, a birthday gift provided by Jack the prior weekend when he laid down the old hood's ceremony of one punch per year plus one for good luck. Jerkboy was a southpaw and spared his left shoulder birthday smacks. At 30, that cost JB a big black and blue. The birthday boy and the crowd had egged on Jack and JB had been numb enough from a variety of sources and was going to take it like a man. Jack, generally slow to heat up, didn't want to be shtucked into socking Jerkboy. He even had words with Doc who rarely lost his temper. He knew there would be repercussions. Somehow during that evening-through-the-fog, Jack sensed the complaints were an overture to his repayment of debt. That's the way it always was with the buddies. Shit and cream stayed evenly spread between them.

But then again, what did his memories of those final clear moments in a darkly lit rock bar have to do with the money that stunk to him like unwashed underwear and a gun that hadn't been recently fired but clearly stunk of his fingerprints. The Glock 9 mm was his, a legacy from his dead cop father. It was an unregistered, non-standard issue sidearm that dad tucked under his trousers. Since dad's death, Jack worked well with the piece over the years. Practiced regularly at the target range/gun shop on Mannheim toward O'Hare. In his Jerkboy/Doc running days, used it to threaten and hit people, but never fired. Dad was a tactical officer for the CPD. His job, "correct the situation, whatever the cost". That's how this single parent raised him and his younger sister Jen. Part of their legacy embedded in them as well was the way they took on life like he did: a hard living, hard loving, passionate, dispassionate, and paranoid. They also had Dad's sense of street justice.

Looking at the gun triggered his instinct to "correct the situation" and augmented his panic when he remembered that the gun was supposed to be under his pillow or in a drawer by the bedside. How did it get next to a pile of money? The bills were used, a mix of



5s, 10s, 20s, and some 50s. Based on the weekend hauls of bar cash he escorted to the safe, he guessed about 5 thousand bucks. He stuffed most of the cash under the front seat and tucked away about \$500 and the gun in his jacket. One small blessing, the gun had not been recently fired. One small curse, there was rusty brown coating on the edge of the silver handle. Blood, not his. "SheeITE", he thought. I did something bad and I don't know to whom but I know payback is around the corner. He gazed up at the gray-boys laughing and pointing. The growing sense of confusion and anxiety were taking hold when the alligator brain slowly emerged, took over, calmed the beast, who looked at the mirror, took deep Sufi-meditation breaths, the color of asphalt. Opening his eyes, he saw calm and one day's beard growth. Cool, oriented to person AND place. However long he's been zoned; it's just been one night and part of it in his car. Parked across the seats on two dudes, poster children for the neighbor hood watchmen. Jack opened the door. Alligator boy was ready to schmooze.

II

The rumble of the Lake St. El thundering just outside the open window woke up Doc. He had a helluva headache and was broiling with anger. After leaving Jack and Jerkboy at Exit he hopped on his Harley and

picked up his stash of cash, this week in a key-locker at the Greyhound bus station. This was to be his down payment for a cacophony of euphoric and hype buttons his customers swallowed: some Ex, some acid, some meth, and some barbs. Something for everybody. Doc never was kicked out of medical school. He quit. Realized his old street ways and need for living on the edge made it incompatible with 8 years or more of books, 4 walls, and sick people. He channeled his therapeutic instincts into distributing happy pills to the rich, bored and sad. He also realized in his first year of med school that he was a bonafide sickie himself, a sadist who enjoyed seeing pain in others. His epiphany was found rounding with an anesthesiologist on the pain service. He grew a boner on the groans of the morbidly ill and dying. He also dug the quick fix a gas passer and narcotizer could lay on others as well as himself. Having a squirrely sense of honor, Doc understood that being a sadist and a physician would clearly get him in trouble. So he quit school and channeled these dark energies into distributing street medicine and an occasional incision to drain an abscess who wouldn't pay the laudable green pus when a bill was due.

Doc's place was an illegal abode. Against many code violations his large one-room loft was tagged for demolition/renovation. His bedroom, living room, bathroom, kitchen combo, took up an entire floor of an

abandoned warehouse downtown next to the Lake St. El looping around the center of the big city. Looping like a hangman's noose around Doc's anonymity. A long dark hall and creaky creepy stairway led to this nondescript hideaway. He slipped the landlord cash and drugs to stay here and had been doing so for the past few years. One thing about Doc, after his stint in med school he dropped out of radar view in a manner of speaking. He left no paper or electric trail. Registered an address only in a P.O. box where identity was guarded by a monthly slip of bills. His licenses were phony IDs. He signed no contracts, wrote no checks, never used plastic, and unlike all others in the trade, wore no pager. All transactions were in cash. Most conversations were face-to-face or over a pay phone.

His place was Spartan, clean, and because of its palatial proportion and its turn-of-the-last-century trim, elegant. Weapons, cash and passports were hidden behind loose boards where no one but he and the many hidden house rats knew. These and other essentials were appropriately stowed, ready to roll out at any moment. Inside Doc's head was a seismograph that sensitively read the tilt of the land like a Coke bottle upside down, balanced on its mouth in a metal bowl, a Chinese earthquake device used by his distant cousins in Hunan.

Sometime about midnight there was a major tectonic drift of his terra. Coming home, a gun was pointed in his face while climbing up the dimly lit metal stairs that clanged loudly in the empty warehouse with the stomp of his boots. No words were said. A bag was weakly tugged but let loose by angry hands already planning revenge. A head was hit against its left temple that rang a bell and draped a blanket all at one time. When Doc awoke, about 6 hours reckoning by the street sounds and sunlight, he knew he had a hell of a concussion. If he were a man of paper and electric footprints, he knew he would go to an ER, get a CAT scan, and be observed. But he was not such a man. If necessary he would contact "friends/customers" who would provide the appropriate services, discretely.

Grabbing ice, codeine and old espresso redacted to hypercaf over 24 hours on his turned off makeshift stove top, Doc began to think. It wasn't a turf war. One, he paid his narcos and Streets and San Man for protection and a 'board of exchange seat' to do business in the designated Wards. Two, if it was a turf war, he'd have been warned or dead. Next, only Jack, Jerkboy, the rats and his landlord knew where he lived. In that group, the rats were the only ones he trusted and just under them, Jack. But, only Jack owned the Glock he saw imbedded forever on his cheek. More than once Jack let him play with it at the shooting range.

It didn't make sense unless Jack planned to heist his cash and leave town without a trace for Doc to sniff out.

This could have been Jack's long-in-coming suicide gesture, for Jack knew first hand Doc's homicidal tendencies. Back at the bar, he last heard Jack ranting to JB about his dead father, the cop. Jack said he would have committed suicide if he had the Glock on hand, but at the time of this low-point he had only a 22 Lugar target pistol. Doc would be happy to pull a twisted Kevorkian on anybody especially with someone with whom he had special empathy. It couldn't have been Jerkboy. The dude was too dumb and too loyal. Plus what's his motive? JB had no ambition and was happy with the not-too-unsubstantial crumbs Doc threw his way. Sometimes it seemed that JB needed Doc in order to change his underwear or blow his nose. Doc knew his next step was to find Jack and get some answers, one way or another.

III

The old guys were a bit startled to see a short muscular white boy emerge from the car and stroll toward them. There was something friendly but threatening about the pace of his approach. A tense reptilian smile gave him away. Jack's initial inquiries about his whereabouts were met with no me comprende until Jack started rattling off Spanish and waved a 20 at each of them which was stuffed into their shirt pockets. As he figured, the two grizzled faces were eyes and ears for a Mexican gang that ran illegals to the neighborhood and then juiced their charges for various and sundry services including false I-dees and bribes to INS agents. One of the old boys was up at 4:00 making a mix of sugar and hypercaffinated tealeaves called mate. He described Jack's car pulling up around then. A big bald guy with a black hooded jacket gets out of the front seat, pulls Jack behind the wheel, shuts the door gently and runs like hell down the block.

The revelation shocked Jack on one level but made sense on another. The ex-brasero was describing Jerkboy. What did he and Jerkboy do and whom did they do it too? Were Doc and JB setting him up? When his pager buzzed the number of a public phone in a strip club near Grand and Milwaukee, he had one of his questions answered. The voice he heard chilled his heart, loaded his gun, and placed a rearview mirror on his head. A meeting was planned tonight after he closed down Exit.

IV

The last of those who needed a fix of a warm room and loud noise as a refuge from hustling their bodies all night had left. Neither the girls, nor girl/boys from North Ave bridge nor those from the nearby clubs for men who had a more 'graceful bearing' than the street-johns were in the mood to argue with Jack when he escorted them to the street. They rarely gave him as



much trouble as the drunk Shaumburgois looking to be a weekend Goth biker. Once in a while, when they were a tad too threatening, Jack needed to come from behind and rapidly twist their heads just so, as to induce a rapid neuro-shock and drop them to the floor. But tonight wasn't one of those nights. Jack was glad there was no trouble. He was looking to conserve his energy. He was straight edge tonight. Didn't let friendly customers buy him shots as he usually did. The weight of his upcoming encounter and that of the loaded gun on his ankle kept him focused.

As Jack locked the front steel door, a familiar rumble pulled up to the curb in front of the club. Doc looked like crap, pale and bandaged over his forehead. First thing Jack said was that he thought he had something of Doc's but wasn't clear how he got it. Doc's get up made that point crystal clear. Doc didn't argue, just

drew an automatic and pointed Jack toward the alley, littered with the detritus of an evening's work of his after-3 AM clientele. Traffic was light, no obvious cops. Jack did as he was told. As he turned into the unlit alley 10 feet in front stood a hulking silhouette of Doc's right hand man.

Like a runner caught stealing home he was in a dark alley between Doc at home-plate and Jerkboy on third. Reaching to his right hip because there was no time to bend and draw from his ankle, Jack picked out his metal flashlight from its holster and tossed it straight at the giant's head. This toss was very practiced and over the years was the most effective tool for Jack in the bouncer trade. The crack followed by a whimper was unmistakable as were the clumped hump on concrete and the rictus smile on Doc's face. Jack thought for sure that move was his last. But Doc's silent joy became an out loud laugh, something new to Jack's ears. Out of JB's pocket an ice pick and shiny gun, a replica of Jack's, was removed. Doc next removed Jerkboy's I-Ds, face and fingertips. He sliced off the tip of the fifth digit and put it in a thin bottle of fixative that dangled on the end of a gold chain that Doc put around his neck and tucked under his shirt. Doc then tossed the body and a bag of writhing groceries into a bin just cleaned and picked out an hour ago, not to be revisited for at least a week. By then, Doc's roommates especially trapped for the occasion would be sated.

There was reported a fire early in the AM the next week along the Lake St. el. An abandoned warehouse burned. Destruction was total. When they parted company, Doc clarified his preparedness with the fixative and all. He told Jack that originally he was convinced it would be Jack's pinkie around his neck and had called on JB for the ambush. But it was unsettling to Doc's forensic mind that he was held up and clouted by a strong left. When he saw Jack lock the club door with his right hand and pocket the keys on the right with the flashlight on the right, everything fell into place. Jerkboy was a lefty who Doc figured had a motive harbored by at least 3 sinful inclinations including anger, jealousy and greed. The breaking point appeared to be his 30th birthday, a milestone to some, but a millstone to Jerkboy. JB thought he'd never reach 30 and agonized over the years of him feeling lauded over by two guys who were supposed to be his closest friends. He hated Jack and Doc but as a man who was spiked metal he could never articulate his sense of insecurity except as a thrust of a sharp point through the nose or ear.

JB thought, mistakenly, that he wasn't as dumb as everyone thought. All went according to plans. Created a fight between Jack and Doc over the arm punching ritual. Drugged Jack, found Jack's signature piece' under his pillow, quietly jumped and knocked out Doc and set up a shoot out between each nemesis. While Doc was feeding the fish in Bubbly Creek, he'd step into the business vacuum created by Doc's absence. In case of poor marksmanship he brought a gun and the ice pick. What he didn't bring was a stem-cell implant that rewired him to heal quickly and become ambidextrous.

Jack couldn't stomach Doc's penchant for violence though understood how to apply it in order to survive. He knew that he'd never see Doc again. Never could see Doc again without retching. He also felt abandoned. An orphan cut off from his past. There would be his stories that no one else but Jerkboy and Doc could translate. He'd have to find new old friends and that could take another lifetime..

from the "Give A Man A Fish" series

by Janet Kuypers

the book of Helena

time: 26 CE

place: Alexandria, Egypt

Helena only passively kept interest in Antony, the man who had once courted her in Greece, though he kept his eye on her. Her state treated her and other women on very unequal footing with men, but she knew that her country thought she had some value, even if her value could only be through raising children or tending a home for a future husband.

Knowing she wanted to tell the world about injustices she had seen in society as she was raised in Greece, she looked forward to her chance at further education and reading through the extensive libraries in Egypt. Thinking about chances to learn in new lecture amphitheatres and study in exquisite libraries and museums, Helena was sure her future would be strong and bright, finding fascinating new people to interact with and experiencing new elements in her society for her potential new loves of life.

Her awakening was after her moving out of her parent's house to live and study. There were great libraries in Alexandria, and her friend was moving there to work and study with Helena.

Everything was going to be different for her once she got out on her own.

Haimon and Rheia, Helena's parents, worried that it was not a good idea to let Helena to move to another country and live without a man, they worried she may be thought of as a loose woman and she would not find a man to marry and would resort to prostitution. But Helena's pleas were unrelenting; they knew of the greater chances she would have by working and studying in Alexandria versus their small town in Greece,

and they understood that her intelligence and strength would help her through her life, and she could always come home if things on her own did not work well quickly. They wondered how she would be able to study in libraries to learn while there; but after Helena and her future roommate relented, Helena's parents were able to pay for her half of paying for Helena and Lana's home for one year. After a tearful good-bye with her parents just after she turned eighteen, Helena left with a carriage full of belongings with her friend Lana.

Lana and Helena were close friends, but they had their differences. Lana liked different music styles and had different interests from Helena. Lana was even thrilled with watching the colosseum attacks in Greece - but Helena wasn't interested in Lana's interests and realized their differences when she was so much more interested in studying at the Library of Alexandria than Lana.

Either way, they were both happy to be on their own and were ready to celebrate their new home on their own.

Antony had worked the previous year for the State in Alexandria, and he was thrilled that Helena and Lana were moving to his city to study and work. He would live less than one mile from them; knowing they would be unfamiliar with customs and styles in their new town in this new country to them, he arrived at their home on the Sunday afternoon they arrived at their new home to help them move in.

When they first walked into the rooms where they were staying, Helena saw the area first as she carried her belongings in. As Lana and Helena scanned the space for where their belongings could go, they had to quickly decide where they would sleep and where their clothing would belong. Because of a lack of money and the difficulty in getting places to live in Alexandria, their home was one large room, so they shared the same area for sleeping, working and eating. They even just knew which side of the room each of them would sleep in - Helena liked being near where their book cases would be for her work; Lana liked being closer to spaces she can clean herself up to make herself beautiful for going out of having company over.

They knew they had more unpacking and rearranging to do of their things, but they were getting tired - and hungry - and they wanted to just take a breath and enjoy the fact that they were in their home - and in a new land - for the first time in their lives. Although they had moved most everything into their home, sunset was approaching and they had not considered food. After Antony explained to them that there are so many people from different countries in Alexandria they would not have to worry at all about learning another language to fit in, Antony then offered food and drink that he would bring to their new

place a little later in the day.

The sun started to hide behind an adjacent building, so Helena pulled their candles out and placed them in lamps so they would have light for the evening. Lana grabbed one of the candles and went to a mirror to brush her hair. "Helena, you should be getting ready for Antony coming Over," Lana said.

"I'm just trying to clean up as much as we can tonight, so we can find our way through here more easily when we wake up tomorrow," Helena called back as she searched through boxes she was trying to still unpack.

"Well, he's your boyfriend, I'd think you'd want to look nice for him."

"Lana, I..." Helena tried to come up with the rest of her sentence before she finally knew what she wanted to say. "I - I'm not his girlfriend, we dated before, but we're just hanging out now."

"You still date though, right?"

"...Yes, but he's not courting me for a wife."

"You don't think. He still likes you, girl, and you could think of liking him back. He's could be a stable man for a good home for you -"

"I'll worry about making sure I'm stable first, but thanks, Lana..." Helena turned back to the stack of books to start putting them on shelves so there was less to step over in the morning. she heard Lana yelling from the other side of their home, "Why did the two of you break up anyway?"

"Lana, he moved. He's been in Alexandria for almost a year working. He would come back to our town to visit his family, and that's why we still saw each other occasionally. Besides, I don't know, he may have spent time courting others and dating women since he's moved, and it doesn't break my heart that we're not dating - I don't think we were meant for each other."

Just as Helena finished her last words, they heard a loud thumping on their door. Because Lana was near the door, Lana ran to the door and asked through the wall, "Who is it?"

She could hear a muffled voice from outside. "It's Antony. Is that Lana?"

Lana laughed as she opened her door and saw Antony standing there with his arms filled with cloth bags for food and his fingers wrapped around a few bottles of wine and liquor. "Do you need any help carrying anything?" Lana asked as Antony made his first step toward to the doorway and Helena started to walk toward the front door.

"No, I'm fine, but thanks. Where is the table so I -"

"That table is right back here, before the cooking area," Helena said. She looked at what he brought in and asked, "Did you get all this food for us?"

"I know that cooking is done earlier in the day and you two wouldn't have a chance to go to a market right

away, so there are a lot of fruits and nuts that can keep in this bag."

"And you brought lots of wine!" Lana said as she walked toward them after closing the door and joining them.

"One container is of water, because you won't be able to get water until tomorrow. And the wine is drink for us to celebrate your moving tonight into your new home."

"I'm excited ... and nervous," Helena said. "I hope I'll be able to leave the house enough to read or get books from the main library."

"I see all the beautiful veils over by your beds," Antony said. And I know a few people who work in the libraries near here, and I think you can go to the library for work and stay in a corner where you can remove your veil and read. I've told my friends that you'll be moving in today, so you should be fine to read and study there. And you know, Helena," Antony said as he reached for her hand so he could pull her toward him to embrace her, "my friends didn't understand why you moved away to study."

"They haven't lives where we came from, Antony, and they must be too used to living here in Alexandria. It is amazing here."

"But Helena, I think they thought it was strange that a woman was so interested in reading and learning instead of finding a suitor and taking care of a home." Antony gave her a look to let her know that she would be thought of as an improper woman for wanting something more than what women are supposed to normally ever want.

"Well, if I'm supposed to be a proper girl and meet a future husband, this would be the place for me to go, no?" She said, smiling after glancing at Lana. "And where would I find a proper man? Well, libraries would hold men of intellect, so -"

Lana cut in. "You've come up with quite the system, Helena..."

"I had to convince my parents there was a good reason for my coming here to study, Lana..." Helena said.

"Well, you'll have plenty of time to acclimate yourselves here," Antony said, "and - do you have money for food from the market? Because -"

"My parents gave us a set amount of money for this home for a year," Helena said, "but I found the place, and I know it's small, but it's much cheaper than what we had for money for this house, so we should have plenty of money for food."

Lana laughed and reached for the wine. "That's why Helena does the negotiating with money - it saved us..."

Antony cut in when he saw Lana getting the bottle of wine. "Where are any glasses for the wine? You two should be celebrating." Helena got up to get glasses and Antony saw her head looking toward one wall,

So she got up to get glasses for the three of them. Antony came back with three cups and said, "I also have wine at home and I don't live far and my neighbors are going out tonight, so they might stop by with additional wine I had at my home, so we should have plenty for the evening."

"There's plenty here," Helena said, "I don't usually drink." Lana looked over at her when she said that to Antony, because Lana wanted to drink, and she wanted Antony to allow them to celebrate their new home together.

They only snacked on the fruits and nuts Antony brought them; after not eating most of the day they weren't hungry for a lot of food to fill them up. Antony kept refilling their drinks for them.

"It's a good thing my neighbors Senbi and Pamiu were going out this evening," Antony said as he finished pouring the last of his original bottles of wine into a glass for Lana. "If they didn't bring any more liquor, we'd have to call it an evening."

"But the night is young," Lana said.

Helena put on a mocking tone, saying, "Lana Kiya, what would your mother think..."

"My mother's not here," she retorted. "Are you going to be my mother now?"

Helena laughed. "Of course not. It's just fun to see you so excited to be on your own..." She thought in the back of her mind that it was strange that Antony was pushing so much liquor on Lana, but not as much on her. She eventually decided that he was probably just being nice to her because she said she didn't drink.

Helena was having a good evening, and it was nice to talk with someone other than Lana on her first night in Alexandria. Antony was there to bring food, though they didn't eat much of it that night, and he was like a servant bringing drinks for anyone who wanted it. "You know, it is usually the woman's job to cater to the group with food and drink pouring."

"I know, but I'm right here," Antony said, "and it's your first night here and you should enjoy yourselves. And you don't know how good it is to see the two of you," he said, as he moved over two feet so he could hug her. "It's nice to have people from my home town here, people I have memories with and stories from our past."

"Well, I'm glad you're here too, it's nice to have a sort of welcoming party for my arrival here."

"I wish we came earlier in the weekend," Lana said. "Then I might have places to go to celebrate our arrival."

"You have plenty of time for that," Antony said. "Besides, now you have all week to look around and see where you'd like to go next weekend when there are more people out and about."

Another hour or two passed, it was getting very late, and Lana looked like she was about to pass out. Helena was drunk from the evening of drinking too; she was having a hard time holding her head straight up and her speech was getting slurred. Antony finally spoke. "Lana, if you want to lay down, that's fine," and he turned to Helena and said more softly, "I can go home in the morning to get ready for work, so I can stay here." He then leaned over and kissed Helena.

"Um, if you want to, you can," Helena said, "but there's not a lot of room here." She looked over at their two beds, not five feet apart.

Antony glanced at Lana. She had passed out, still sitting at the corner of her bed. He looked back at Helena and put his arms around her. "I can find room."

Helena had to wake Lana from her sleeping sitting position in case she wanted to get ready for sleeping on her reed mat for the night, but Lana didn't even want to bother changing into clothes to sleep in. Lana just groaned, giggled a little when she saw that Antony was still there, and started to move her body so she could just rest there and get to sleep. When she found a blanket from one end of the mat, she dragged it up her body and turned her head to face the wall.

Turning around to walk back toward where Antony was sitting, she watched him pick up his glass of wine, then extend it out to her. "What? That's yours," Helena said about the drink he handed her, but Antony answered with "We still have some left to go through, and Lana won't mind."

"We shouldn't wake her."

Antony didn't even lower his voice, because nothing woke her. "Of course not. But I don't think she's moving anywhere." Antony looked over at her sleeping on the mat, and it seemed that she moved her body and the linen cloths over her so nothing would disturb her.

They talked for a few minutes; Antony then leaned over and ran his hand along the side of her face and said, "I've missed you," before moving to kiss her.

"...I've missed you, too," she said, though he wondered if she just appreciated there being someone she knew in this new town and new country more than missing him specifically. She didn't know what to think, but they were there together, and Lana wasn't waking up. She kissed him back. But Antony kept being more physical with her, and although she wanted him to go home, and although she didn't want to disturb her new roommate, passed out only feet away from her, she didn't think to say anything to him.

The next morning Antony was still there, and

Lana still wasn't waking up. Helena saw that he was there and knew he had to go so she curled up into a ball at the far end of the mat before waking him. "Antony, wake up. You have to go to work."

When Antony came to and saw that it was daylight, he sprung up to get his things together. He went over to Helena to embrace her and kiss her, but she moved herself away and whispered that he shouldn't be late for his work.

His running out woke Lana, but only hearing the noises, she did not see him as he left. "Helena... how long have I been sleeping?"

"It's morning, you're fine, Lana."

"Did..." Lana looked around their home and saw they were alone, "Did Antony stay over?"

Helena knew Lana wanted Antony to have stayed over, and if he did Lana would think Antony would be obliged to marry Helena. Helena knew she did not want to be with Antony, but she feared anyone knowing what he did to her.

"Do you see him here?" she asked, hoping that would be enough of an explanation and Lana would not ask any more questions. Helena used most of what little water they had to try to scrub her skin and clean off from him, but she needed to take buckets to the nearby stream to get more water. "Oh, I'm sorry, Lana, but I used most of the water we had," Helena said. "I was going to get water before you woke up."

"We've got extra barrels," Lana replied, "so I can go with you and we can get a lot of water so we don't run out right away," she said as she moved off her mat to find walking shoes before she brushed her hair for going out. Helena and Lana got their belongings together to make the trip to get water for themselves.

As they got to the stream, there were only a few women there; Helena figures that most of the women probably already got their water from the stream earlier in the morning. Lana walked to the water with a cup and bucket, crouched down at the edge of the water and started scooping up water for the first bucket. She was working for a while because the buckets were relatively large, and she hoped that if she filled the buckets separately, Helena could walk back and forth with the water because of their weight once filled. Lana was almost finished filling the first bucket when she looked up to see where Helena was, so she could get the water and take it back to their home. In the distance, she saw Helena standing in the stream, with her knees into the water, dipping her hands repeatedly into the stream and splashing water onto her face.

Lana didn't know what she was doing; no one else was getting into the water the way Helena was, and she started to worry. "Helena," she yelled, and saw her sil-

houette turn to face Lana. "What are you doing?"

Helena didn't have an answer, and waited a moment before yelling back her answer. "I had to do this after our move, Lana."

Lana knew the almost full bucket of water wasn't going to move, but instead of walking over to where Helena was, she thought about switching their roles and said, "I'll bring the water back to the home if you'll stay here to fill the buckets with water. Is that okay?"

Helena knew she couldn't walk back and forth to and from the house repeatedly if she was soaking wet, so she started walking toward Lana. "Sure," she said as she got closer. "I'm sorry I got drenched like this. I can fill the water buckets if you don't mind the walking."

"That's fine, I've got this first huge bucket almost filled, so I'll just take it now. You start filling the other ones here and I'll be back."

Lana reached down to get the large bucket filled with water for her trip back to their house. As she started to walk away, Helena took a bucket and saucer, then said, "Thanks, Lana," before starting to collect more water for them for their home.

Helena spent the rest of the morning working with Lana on getting food from the market they could keep for a week's worth of food, and they finished trying to rearrange their belongings in their new home. Lana wanted to go back to the market to see if there is anyone she could meet there; Helena wanted to head straight to the library to collect information.

Walking into the library, she tried to see where she'd need to go for books for the word she decided she wanted to do. As she turned a corner to go to a wing that contained Greek fiction and nonfiction, a gentleman walked up to her. "Pardon me, are you Helena -"

"Do I know you?" Helena answered, wondering who knew her name and wondering if she was not allowed there.

"I'm sorry, I'm a friend of Antony's, and he told me that his girl Helena is in town and would be coming to the library today."

She let a moment of silence pass before she answered. "I'm not his girl, but I am Helena."

"Oh," he answered. "Well, if you need anything at all, please feel free to track me down. My name is Pedibastet, and there are a few other people working here who knew of you being here, so I'm sure anyone can help you out."

"Thank you, I was just going to pull some books from authors like Sophocles and Socrates, or even some of Plato's writings."

"Helena, this section back here," the gentleman said as he walked further forward and turned right into a new wing with Helena following, "has Greek work

from writers as far back in time as Homer. Do you need help finding anything in particular?"

"No, I'd like to just do some reading and take some notes," she answered, holding her tablet.

"There are extra ink wells at the tables over there, so good luck with your work."

"Thank you, Pedibastet," Helena said, as she started walking toward the aisles of books to see what her choices were.

She turned one corner and started reading titles of authors in the books set in rows on the shelves, listed in order of the dates of the writings.

Homer	Hesiod
Alcaeus	Sappho
Archilochus	Aesop
Thales	Anacreon
Simonides	Theognis
Thespis	Aeschylus
Bacchylides	Pindar
Hecataeus	Sophocles
Euripides	Socrates
Lysias	Aristophanes
Plato	Herodotus
Thucydides	Xenophon
Demosthenes	Aristotle
Menander	Dyskolos

Helena grabbed two volumes from Plato's work and was about to grab a book from Socrates, when Pedibastet walked from aisle to aisle to find her. "Helena, we just received a copied set of books from the philosopher/mathematician Aristotle. I don't know what you're looking for, but there -"

"What do you have. I want to see them."

Pedibastet saw Helena's eyes turn to saucers when he mentioned Aristotle. "Yes, these books were apparently in a vault until about 100 years ago, and they have been in a library in Athens. Before they were taken and brought to Rome, a scribe made a copy of the writings, and we were just able to get a copy of the volumes. So we have around 25 books."

Where are they? I'd like to look them over, please. And thank you."

They walked over to where the collection of books was held, and Helena immediately grabbed **Nicomachean Ethics**. "I might take **Magna Moralia** after I look over this one."

"Good first choice. I've heard people say that **Nicomachean Ethics** is usually favored over **Eudemian Ethics**."

"I've got plenty of work to do right now, with these other two books I first took. But thank you for letting

me know about Aristotle's writings here in the library."

"Not a problem at all. What are you studying for?"

"I..." Helena didn't know what to answer, because the ideas she just created in her head was that she wanted to write, but she knew that as a woman her writings would be ignored. "I'm collecting writings and data for future work on a book."

"Does the writer have anything in the library?" Pedibastet asked.

"He doesn't, as of yet, I think he has just been collecting essays."

Oh. Maybe I know of his writings. What's his name?"

Helena had to quickly think of her pen name. "Agathangelos Alcaeus is his full writing name."

"Strength, and an angelic messenger - wonderful name for his work. I've never heard of the name, but I'll keep an eye out for it."

"Well, I should get to work for him, but thank you for everything."

Pedibastet smiled and went back to the other hall where he was originally working, and Helena turned to the row of tables so she could read and starting taking notes on her tablet for future work. As soon as she sat down, she pulled the pen from the holder and gave it some ink so she could write down her first thing in her notes. At the top and center on the page, she wrote 'Agathangelos Alcaeus', because she just gave herself a name for her future work.

The first thing she did was start reading over **Nicomachean Ethics**. She scribbled notes, and started immediately generating theories of moral and sound treatments for women who have been abused by men.

"...and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right?"

Aristotle, **Nicomachean Ethics**,
book 1 chapter 2

Helena knew that women were taught to be there for men, and they were taught to not fight back; she knew that women would not want to stand up for themselves, but something would have to be done if women would not be hurt from men in the future.

She had to stop and pull back from the table. She

put her hand over her mouth. All she thought about was a forceful attack by a man to a woman, but this didn't happen to her. He just gave her liquor. "I know I don't drink," Helena thought, but there is no crime in drinking the way she did. Or the way Lana did, who drank more than her.

Wait, she thought, Antony was pushing the wine of Lana more than her, she remembered that much. But why was he doing that? Helena thought all along it was because he wanted the two of them to have fun, but then it occurred to her that Antony didn't have to worry about making any noises to wake Lana because she had passed out on the other mat.

It then clicked in Helena's mind. It was his intentional effort to make her roommate pass out so no one would stop him from doing what he thought he could do to Helena.

When she realized this, the thought made her sick.

Then she realized there were many ways people could be using their power to gain more power, but she was sure that there'd be no allowance for hurting others to achieve your own happiness. She happened to have **Nicomachean Ethics** in front of her, and this would only be one more scrap of evidence she would need to know that what was done to her was wrong.

She knew she couldn't tell anyone about it, she'd be forced to marry him - which she did not want. Maybe her writing would be her only way to win her rights back.

###

Days after their arrival, Helena let Antony know that she did not want to see him; although he did not understand why, Antony had no choice but to let her go. During the next three months Helena worked in the library feverishly with help from Pedibastet and other men who worked at the library like Eutropius and Paramonos, and especially Ariston, a transcriber for book printings. After reading extensively from Aristotle, Pythagoras, a little writing from Parmenides. She tried to find writings from Anaxagoras and Anaximander, and during this time she learned to match writing styles to these philosophers and construct a number of essays on philosophy in reaction to non-violent behavior.

She made a point to make sure her references were not focused on treatment specifically, but underlying these readings, they could be used to help women as well. She managed through circulars to post smaller portions of some of her essays in common places so

people could view them, and she even heard people talking about seeing the notes and reading them when they were in market near the postings.

One mid-week day in the library Helena found Ariston and asked him about his press capabilities.

"I don't work at a printer and declare what gets printed and distributed, but I transcribe things for those who need the type before printing," Ariston said.

"Oh," Helena said almost under her breath.

"What do you need it for?"

Helena looked up at him and asked, "Have you heard of Agathangelos Alcaeus?"

"...Yeah, I've seen postings of his around town. Alcaeus is a good writer, but I - wait - why did you ask me about him?"

"I've been taking notes for him and he was been writing in his spare time."

"Why doesn't he take the notes?"

"I don't think he has the time, Ariston. Besides, I don't mind doing the work and helping him out."

Ariston leaned back, and then moved forward to ask Helena his next question more personally. "You know, I do know people at the presses, and I think they'd like to get a hold of his works - especially the presses that do textbook printings. They might like his work. I can talk to them to see if they want his writing, or if they want to meet with him."

Helena couldn't quite believe what she was hearing. "I ... I'm sure he'd be thrilled ... He likes to lead a solitary life and he doesn't get out to talk to people, I'm sure I can talk to him about this, but he might want me to do his representing, but I can give you anything of his writings and do anything I can to help."

"Sure, that would be great."

"I could get rough copies of his writings for you, but I may only have one copy of some of the essays."

"Helena, I can transcribe anything, so I could probably make duplicates of everything so he doesn't have to lose his copy."

"Oh Ariston, that's wonderful. When would you like the writings?"

Ariston smiled. "Whenever you would like to give them to me."

Helena was too thrilled and said, "Name your time and place."

"...I can take you out to dinner and get these papers for transcribing."

"Let me give you notes to show you where I live," she answered, as she kept smiling and turned to a blank page to place directions on.

Dying Words

Julie Lein

Jill reclined in her uncomfortable plastic chair, crossing her arms as she stared at her grandmother on the hospital bed. They had been here for days, ever since her grandmother had lapsed into a coma. Jill had discovered her grandmother collapsed on the kitchen floor.

The doctors were baffled. Jill's grandmother was in perfect health, all the medical tests came back normal. Her grandmother shouldn't be in a coma, yet she was. All they could do was wait and hope she woke up.

Jill yawned, fighting fatigue. She'd been up for days by her grandmother's bedside, just waiting. She'd rest for just a few minutes. If her grandmother awoke, Jill would be right here. She leaned forward, resting her head on her arms on her grandmother's bed. Closing her eyes, she was soon asleep.

"I'm a witch."

"What? Grandma?" Jill asked, startled out of her nap. Lifting her head off the hospital bed, she looked into her grandmother's eyes.

"I'm a witch and so are you," she whispered again.

Jill's flesh grew cold, her heart pounded. She opened her mouth to speak, but no words came. She thought she saw a flicker of life in her grandma's eyes.

"Can you hear me? Grandma?" Jill implored. Then she saw her grandmother's eyes drift out of focus, looking right through her.

"Grandma, can you see me?" Jill stood, gripping her grandmother's hand as she moved in closer. Her grandmother's eyes then closed and she was gone.

Jill looked up in time to see her grandmother's heart monitor flat line. Her grandmother's heart had stopped beating!

"No!" She screamed as a team of medical personnel rushed past her, pushing her out of the way. She let go of her grandmother's hand as they surrounded her grandmother's bed. Jill saw the bright red crash cart being wheeled in and the doctor prep the shock paddles.

"Clear!" He yelled at the medical team. They stopped working and moved off her grandmother as he positioned the paddles and administered the shock.

Her grandmother's tiny body lifted up off the bed in a violent jolt from the electric shock before falling back onto the bed. The doctor shocked her again and again, each time increasing the power, all with no change in her grandmother's EKG. The deafening sound of the heart monitor was all she could hear. The flat line remained.

Giving up, the doctor shook his head, replacing the shock paddles.

"Time of death, 8:30 PM," he spoke in monotone.

He then turned to Jill and approached her as the rest of the staff left the room in silence.

"Jill, I'm so sorry."

Jill took a deep breath to stop her tears from flowing before speaking. After collecting herself, she looked up at the doctor.

"You did all that could to try and save her. Thank you for all your help."

She paused before adding, "I'd like to be alone with her now."

"I understand."

Without hesitation, the doctor left, shutting the door behind him. Overwhelmed with emotion, Jill's body shook out of control. She hugged herself and sobbed.

"Grandma, I love you, I'll miss you," she said as she sat down again by her grandmother's bedside and held her still warm hand.

Did her grandmother say that she was a witch? No, couldn't be. She shook her head. She closed her eyes and placed her grandmother's hand on her cheek.

All of a sudden, she felt her grandmother's fingers move on her face, she opened her eyes in time to see her grandmother's head turn towards her and she was smiling, her eyes full of life and light.

Jill backed up in her chair, dropping her grandmother's hand and falling backwards onto the tile floor. Her heart raced as she pushed herself off the floor and again looked at her grandmother lying on the bed.

Her grandmother's eyes were shut and her head hadn't moved as she thought it had. She looked the same as she did when Jill first sat down beside her just seconds ago.

Am I losing my mind? She thought. Jill picked up her grandmother's hand and, with tenderness, kissed it before replacing it on the hospital bed beside her.

After making arrangements for her grandmother, Jill drove home exhausted, feeling empty inside. She didn't realize she could miss someone so much, she thought, wiping away fresh tears. It had always been Jill and her grandma since she had been a little girl and her parents had given her up after divorcing. She never knew them and never wanted to, she had been content with her grandma, content and happy.

"I miss you so much, grandma," Jill spoke out loud as

she pulled into her garage. She shut off her car and sat for a long time before entering the house that she and her grandma had shared.

Jill tossed and turned in bed that night. In every dream, she could see her grandmother's face looking up at her and hear her dying words, "I'm a witch" repeated over and over.

Jill sat up, running her hands through her tousled blonde mane. She had to see her again. She had to see her grandma one more time. Jill rushed to her closet, got dressed and hurried downstairs to grab her car keys before hustling out of the empty house. She hoped she would get there in time.

After the short drive back to the hospital, Jill found and entered the morgue, in search of her grandmother. As she made her way across the large, dark room, she saw her lying on a metal table, a sheet pulled up to her chin. She made eye contact with the one remaining medical examiner before speaking.

"I'm her granddaughter," was all Jill could think to say. The medical examiner gave her an odd look, but said nothing as she stepped away from the grandmother's body.

"I'll give you some time," she said, leaving the room. The metal doors slammed together behind her as she left, echoing throughout the lab.

What now? Jill thought.

She reached out and touched her grandmother's cheek, the flesh felt cool to the touch. Jill held her grandmother's hand as she did in her grandmother's hospital room.

She noticed the star shaped birthmark on her grandmother's right cheekbone, just in front of her right ear. Jill's free hand moved to her own cheek, touching the same star shaped birthmark on her right cheekbone. She remembered her grandmother always telling her, even when Jill was very little, that the birthmark made her special, different from any other girl. Did the birthmark make them witches?

How could she find out for sure?

Jill knew of only one thing to do.

She sat down on the steel table next to her grandmother. With all her energy, Jill pulled her grandmother's fragile body up and held her to her chest, making sure the birthmarks on their cheeks touched as she held her grandmother close. Jill then felt an intense heat in her right cheek. She could see the glow in her periphery emanating from their cheeks touching. The heat scalded her, but she refused to let go.

"Come back to me," she whispered into her grandmother's ear.

"Come back to me," she repeated, this time through tears.

Jill closed her eyes and rocked her grandmother back and forth, trying to block out the pain. She knew only a few seconds had passed, but it seemed more like minutes or even hours, still she held on.

"Please, grandma, please," Jill pleaded through tears that were now overflowing.

Then in an instant, the pain and the heat were gone.

Just a second later, she felt her grandmother's arms come to life and hug her.

"I'm here," her grandmother whispered into Jill's ear.



Seeing Things Differently

Janet Kuypers

I was sitting at Sbarro's Pizza in the mall taking a break from shopping and eating a slice of deep-dish cheese pizza when I caught parts of a conversation happening two tables next to me. It was two-thirty in the afternoon, so it was kind of empty in the eatery.

"So what's it like to be back?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know, to be free again - I mean, to be back to the places you haven't seen for so long?"

"Well, of course I missed it. It's strange being back, actually."

"How so?"

"Well, everything looks different now."

"Well, it has been nearly six years, a lot happens, even to a suburb. There's been a lot of construction around here, and -"

"I don't mean it looks different because it changed. I mean it looks different because I have."

"How have you changed?"

"You mean how did being in prison for half a decade affect me?"

"Well, what do you mean you see things differently? Like colors look wrong? I don't get it."

"No, it's not like my vision is different, at least not literally. It's just that people seem different to me now. The places all look the same, one street looks the same as the next, it looks the same as it did five years ago. But I see things about people now, things I never noticed before."

"Like what?"

"I don't know, exactly. But I read people. It's like I know what they're thinking without having to talk to them, or even know them."

Then they both paused. I guess their timed pattern of one person eating while the other one talked finally got messed up and they were both eating at the same time. Oh, did I mention that they were both women? One had a baby in a stroller sleeping next to her, that one was the one that didn't go to prison. They both looked like they were about twenty-eight years old. Regular suburban women.

"You see, it's like this: when I was in prison, I was all alone. Being in a federal prison means the crimes are big time, so everyone in there had a big chip on their shoulder and wanted to either have you for their girlfriend or beat the shit out of you when you were on laundry duty. And of course everyone knew that I was the cop killer, and everyone also knew that I swore up and down that I didn't do it. So when I went in there they all thought I

was some big sissy, and I knew right away that I was going to be in big trouble if I didn't do something fast."

"So what'd you do?"

"Well, I figured they knew that I wasn't a tough bitch or anything, so the only persona I could put on that would make people scared of me would be to act like perfectly calm ninety percent of the time, calm, but tense, like I was about to snap. And periodically I would have a fit, or threaten violence in front of guards, timed perfectly so that I would never actually have to do anything, but enough to make everyone else think that I was a little off the deep end, a bit crazy. Then they'd give me space."

"So... did that work?"

"Yeah, for the most part. But the first thing I had to learn was how to make my face unreadable."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you can see someone walk by and know they're bored, or sad or angry, or happy, right?"

"Well, sometimes..."

"Well, I had to make sure that when people looked at me all they saw was a complete lack of emotion. Absolute nothingness. I needed people to look at me and wonder what the hell was going through my head. Then all I'd have to do is squint my eyes just a little bit and everyone would see so much anger in my face, you know, because usually there was nothing in my face to give me away."

"And when you got angry -"

"- And when I got angry and threw a fit and smashed chairs and screamed at the top of my lungs and contorted my face all over the place; I just looked that much more crazed and in a rage. Like out of control."

"Wow. That's wild."

"And I became completely solitary. I talked to two other people the whole time I was there, at least in friendship."

"Wow, two people?"

"Well, in a screaming fit, or in a fight, then I'd be yelling at people, but yeah, I had to limit the people I talked to. Couldn't let others see what I was like."

So I was sitting here eating my pizza listening to this, and then I remembered, oh yeah, I remember this story from a long time ago, they convicted this women of killing a cop, shooting him at point-blank range, and just in the local paper three weeks ago they found the person who really killed the cop, and they let the women they convicted of the crime five years ago free.

It seems the cop pulled her over and had her license in his car when the murderer

came up in another car, and this woman managed to get away, but the cop died and her license was there on

the scene. So I get up and go to the fountain machine and refill my Diet RC Cola and come back to my seat and I just start thinking that that's got to be rough, I mean, going to federal prison for over five years for a crime you didn't commit and then having them come up years later and let you out early and say, "oh, we're sorry, we had the wrong person all along." It's like, oh, silly us, we made a mistake, please do forgive us.

But how do you get those years back, and how do you get rid of those memories?

So I just spaced out on that thought for a minute and the next thing I knew they were talking again.

"And I knew from the start this one woman didn't like me, I could just tell from her face. We never spoke, she was like my unspoken enemy. And so once I was doing laundry work, and there are rows of machines and tables for folding and shoots for dirty clothes to fall onto the floor and pipes running all along the ceilings and steam coming out everywhere. And there were others there with us, and guards, too, but once I looked up and it was totally silent and no one else was around except for her. No other prisoners, no other guards, nothing. And she was just standing there, facing me square on, and she was swaying a bit, like she was getting ready to pounce. And I knew that she planned this, and got some of the other inmates to distract the guards, so that she could kill me."

"Oh my God, so what did you do?"

"Well, I turned so my side was to her, and I grabbed a cigarette from my pocket and put it in my mouth. Than I said, 'Look, I'm not interested in fighting you, so-', and then I reached into my pocket, the one that was away from her, like to get a lighter, and then I took my two hands and clenched them together like this, and then I just swung around like I was swinging a ball-and-chain, and I just hit her real hard with my hands."

"Oh my God."

"Yeah, I was hoping that I could just get in one good blow then get out of there, like teach her not to fuck with me again."

"Oh my God, so what happened?"

"Yeah, so here's the punch line, so when I hit her she fell back and hit her head on a beam that ran from floor to ceiling, and just fell to the floor. So I go through a back hallway and find everyone in the next room and just sort of slip in there, but then I hear a guard asking about Terry, that was the woman I hit. and everyone looks around and they see me, and I have no expression on my face, so they don't even know if Terry saw me or not, and so everyone starts to look for Terry and they find her dead, right where I left her."

"Oh my God, you killed her?"

"Well, she hit her head on the beam, my blow didn't

kill her. But no one knew who did it to her, and of course no one bothered with an investigation, so there was no problem. But after that, no one ever bothered me again."

"Holy shit. You killed her. When did you know she was dead?"

"When they found her, probably. Not when they saw what kind of shape she was in, but the instant they saw her I thought, 'she hasn't moved.' And I knew then she was dead. It was kind of unsettling, but I couldn't react."

"Kind of unsettling? I think I'd be screaming."

"But that's the thing, all these women had killed before, at least most of them had. I'd be condemning myself if I reacted."

"Wow."

They sat in silence, the young mother staring at the other while she ate the last of her pizza.

The murderer grabbed her soda and drank in between words.

"Yeah, so prison - and everything after that, really - seemed different. I figured out how to remove all emotion from myself when I had to."

"...That's wild."

"And once I figured that out, how to make my face unreadable, it was easy to be able to read what other inmates were thinking. I could read anyone's face. Someone could twitch once and I'd know whether they were afraid of me or not. Any movement made it obvious to me what they thought of me, themselves, or their life. That's why I look around here and just see what everyone else is feeling."

"Really? What do you see?"

"I see some dopey men and some bitchy women."

"Shut up."

"No, it's true - and they care about little details in their life, but they don't give a damn about the big picture. They scream if someone cuts them off in traffic, they freak out if they have food stuck in their teeth after a meal. But they don't care what they're doing in their lives."

They got up and walked over to the trash can, dumped their paper plates and napkins into the trash.

"I see a lot of people walking around with a blank stare, but it's not an emotionless stare. It's that they're all resigned, it's like they all assume that this is the way their life has to be."

"Oh, come on, it's not that bad."

"Yeah, it is. It's like they all were in prison too."

And they walked out into the mall, and I sat there, staring at my drink.

THE RESOLUTION OF JAY RANDOLPH

Bruce Adkins

After leaving the busy turnpike, Jay Randolph turned his new Subaru on to a lonely stretch of two lane highway. Jay still couldn't escape the conclusion that he must be insane. Why else would he drive 400 miles just to vent his anger over something that happened 38 years ago.

Even harder for Jay to understand was just how he was going to accomplish this venting of his anger. Short of murder, Jay didn't have a clue.

The old River Road still looked the same, Jay thought. The Snake River wound its way along one side of the road and on the other side the fields were alive with rich, golden wheat as far as the eyes could see. At the top of a hill a sign read CRATERVILLE-- 7 MILES. Jay slowed down so he could inhale the pollution free air and view the old countryside he knew so well as a boy.

Jay, a tall, skinny, 56 year old widower with a pencil line mustache and crew cut gray hair, was employed as an x-ray Technician at a large medical center.

For years now Jay had suffered horrible nightmares. In his nightmares he was always eluding the police. Women were always

After leaving the busy turnpike, Jay Randolph turned his new Subaru on to a lonely stretch of two lane highway. Jay still couldn't escape the conclusion that he must be insane. Why else would he drive 400 miles just to vent his anger over something that happened 38 years ago.

Even harder for Jay to understand was just how he was going to accomplish this venting of his anger. Short of murder, Jay didn't have a clue.

The old River Road still looked the same, Jay thought. The Snake River wound its way along one side of the road and on the other side the fields were alive with rich, golden wheat as far as the eyes could see. At the top of a hill a sign read CRATERVILLE-- 7 MILES. Jay slowed down so he could inhale the pollution free air and view the old countryside he knew so well as a boy.

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For years now Jay had suffered horrible nightmares. In his nightmares he was always eluding the police.

Women were always bailing him out. He was always facing the same old bald headed judge. Sometimes he woke himself up pleading not guilty, your honor. One night he dreamed he shot the judge and woke up scared to death.

His analyst friend convinced Jay that he was full of repressed anger. The anger, the analyst discovered after long sessions of exploration, stemmed from an incident that happened to Jay when he was a senior in high school. "You'll never get well until you resolve this inner conflict. You'll never be a free man until you deal with this matter," Jay's analyst told him.

The incident concerned Maggie Ann Ferris, a heavy set girl with buck teeth and stringy hair. Maggie Ann claimed Jay intentionally made contact with her large bosom in the hallway at school.

Jay maintained he didn't intentionally make contact with Maggie Ann's large bosom, that it happened accidentally while he was trying to squeeze by her on his way to study hall. Anyway, Maggie Ann hauled off from the right field and slapped Jay so hard he went sprawling across the crowded hallway floor.

After he recovered Jay tried to laugh it off and forgot it, but Brent Douglas, a star football player, wouldn't let him. "There's Jay Randolph, the little pervert," Brent told the football team. This and other similar remarks made by Brent kept the incident alive for the rest of the school year.

The principal called Jay into his office and reprimanded him. Girls looked at Jay in a strange, condescending way. Lisa Hatcher, a girl Jay had been trying to date would no longer speak to him. Even the school janitor got in on the act. "It is true you're a booby pincher?" the janitor asked Jay.

Jay forgot the incident as he went off to college. But now, after all these years, Jay was convinced the scar from the incident still lingered in his gut. It was like a cancer that wouldn't go away.

The two classmates responsible for Jay's anger were reported still living in Craterville. Brent Douglas was said to be a popular criminal attorney. Maggie Ann Ferris, now Maggie Ann Bruno, was a junior high school history teacher.

Jay had avoided attending all his high school class reunions in the past for fear of facing Brent Douglas

and Maggie Ann Bruno. But now Jay resolved to confront his old classmates face to face and settle his anger problem one way or another.

As Jay drove up and down the streets of his old home town he was amazed at how it had changed. The high school he attended had been converted to a junior high school. The movie theater was replaced by a big WalMart store. The corner drug store was now a parking lot.

A big street clock flashed 76 degrees and 2:37 PM when Jay checked in at the Old Midland Hotel, the one remaining fixture in town. In his room Jay removed his shoes, stretched out on the bed and spent a few minutes reading the sports page of USA TODAY.

Then Jay flung the newspaper aside and began pacing the floor. "Brent Douglas," Jay said, formulating his speech. "You may not remember me, but you helped ruin my senior year in high school. You taunted me, belittled me, called me a pervert. You humiliated me in front of the whole school."

"I wasn't man enough back in high school to take a stand against you, but I am now. I have come today to demand an apology from you or else I'm going to kick your ass right here and now."

Jay was working himself up in a rage. He stopped pacing and looked out his third floor window. There was a rodeo in town and a group of men wearing cowboy hats were milling around in the streets. Jay studied them for a moment and then began pacing again.

"As for you, Maggie Ann Bruno," Jay continued, "Do you remember the time you slapped my face back in high school? I'm sure you do. That was probably the highlight of your life."

"How could you ever be so conceited to think I would be interested in your breasts or any other part of your anatomy," Jay said, raising his voice. "Because of you I've had nightmares off and on for the last 38 years. I want you to know I'm not leaving here until you apologize to me."

Still in a rage Jay picked up the phone and dialed the law firm of Brent Douglas.

"This is the law office of Bennett, Dean and Jordan," a young girl said answering the phone.

"I'd like to speak to Brent Douglas, that famous criminal attorney," Jay said, laughing.

"Who is this?" the girl asked.

"None of your business," Jay snapped.

"What did you say?" the girl asked.

"This is Jay Randolph, an old high school buddy of Brent's," Jay said.

"Didn't you know? Mr. Douglas is dead. He was shot about three months ago," the girl said.

"You're joking, aren't you?" Jay asked.

"No, he's dead all right," said the girl. "I went to his funeral. He got involved in some type of romantic entanglement."

Probably shot by a jealous husband, Jay thought. Jay stood looking out the window again. The men wearing the cowboy hats were gone now and the streets were empty. Brent Douglas is dead, Jay thought. The good looking All State football player. That's so hard to believe. He was always so healthy, so invincible, Jay thought, and now he's dead.

Jay shook it off and called the residence of Maggie Ann Bruno. Once again, a young girl answered the phone. "I'd like to speak to Maggie Ann Bruno," Jay said.

"Maggie Bruno is a patient in St. Marks Hospital. May I ask who is calling?" the girl asked.

"An old acquaintance," Jay said and hung up.

Thirty minutes later a husky male attendant dressed in a white uniform let Jay down a long hall of the St. Marks Hospital. The attendant stopped and unlocked two double doors.

"They keep this place locked up?" Jay asked.

"Oh yes, this is a psychiatric ward," the attendant said.

Midway down the hall the attendant knocked at a door, then opened it without waiting for a response. Maggie Ann Bruno was sitting on the edge of her bed. She was skin and bones, a skeleton of her old self. Her hair, still stringy, was down in her face, her mouth hung open and there was a far away look in her eyes.

Jay was stunned at the sight of his old classmate, but he tried not to show it. "Hello Maggie Ann," Jay said.

"I'm not signing any autographs today. I'm not giving any interviews today," Maggie Ann said.

"She's the governor of Texas today," said the attendant. "Yesterday she was Hillary Clinton."

"Maggie Ann, it's me, Jay Randolph," Jay said. "Don't you remember me? We went to school together."

"What newspaper did you say you were with?" Maggie Ann asked.

At that point Jay gave up. "Sorry," said the attendant as he escorted Jay out of the building.

It took Jay a while to come to terms with the day's events. Although Jay didn't get to confront his old classmates as he had planned, he still felt somehow at peace with himself.

Two weeks later and after enjoying 14 straight nights of restful sleep, Jay woke up one morning convinced his nightmares were over. At last, Jay realized, his old pent up anger was gone.

poetry

why we don't quit our day job

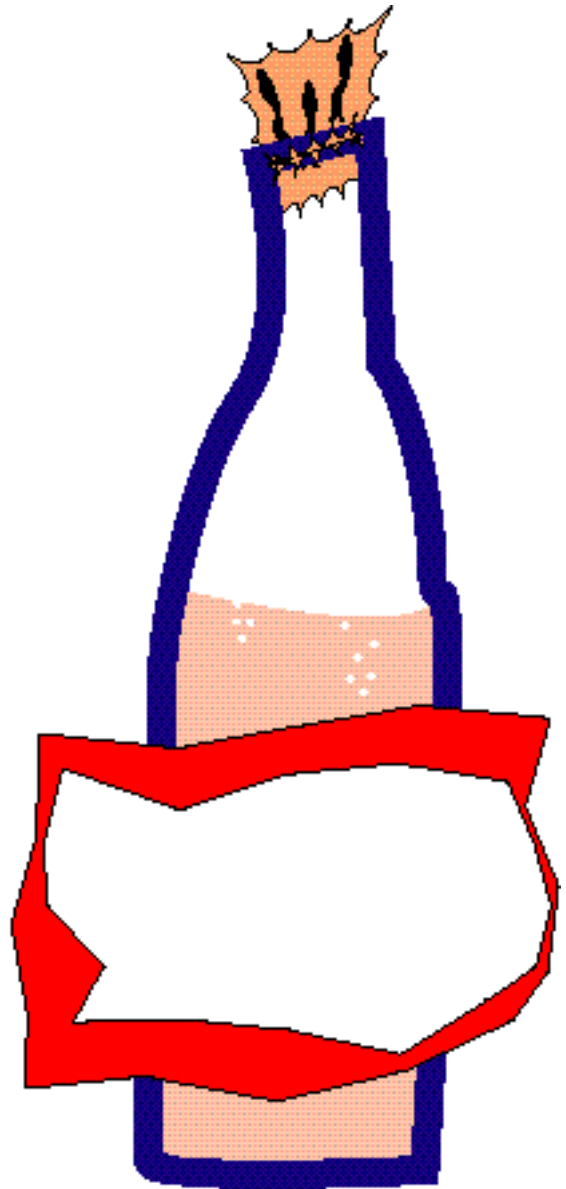
Liquor Lyle's

John Vick

We sit here and I become disgusted
with you. It's a blue-collar straight bar,
the last twofer happy hour in town,
and I don't want to discuss how long
it will take to cook the chicken,
what a bitch the upstairs neighbor has become,
or our latest home decorating project.
It's no place for the gay thing, and
no matter how many queens you think
you've spotted in the crowd
or how well-versed you are in sports trivia,
neither will make any difference in a fight.

I calm down, realize my own pride deficiency,
but now reel at your attempt to not be gay
and tip like a straight because cash is short.
I've been out of the closet for a quarter century
and will be damned if I'm going to swallow
my self-hatred one minute
and leave a cheap tip the next.

I wish walking home
that the sun would set earlier
so I could sneak my hand
into yours and press hard,
thankful for my best buddy,
and that the ordeal has ended,
regardless of anything
because I know at home
we will converse in many languages
and all is gratis.



Got Meth(adone)?

John Vick

I'm going to flirt with you
by just raising my eyebrows and smiling.
That should be enough to bait
a middle-aged pot-bellied faggot.
I'm cute, I want a drink, and
Mom wouldn't pull her pocketbook.

So what I'm thirty years old,
live at home with my parents?
I just say, "You have no idea.
You have no idea." You'll nod
like you understand
when we both know you don't.

I tell you I deliver pizzas but
I walked that job months ago.
Mom and Dad think I'm going
there when I'm coming here, to see you.
I say, "You know, I love you dude"
and then I've got you for a cocktail.

I told you I take methadone
at the clinic across the river, tracks.
You don't know my story's bogus.
I never got addicted to smack
nearly died getting off; I lied

to get the methadone high. I queue up
every morning, even blizzards,
with other junkies waiting
for daily doses shopping
for benzos in a rig strewn parking lot.

I find you weed; take an eighth
and don't bother you for it again,
'til I can't find help to sleep.
Then I take half your bag.
After all, I'm your only connection.

I stay at your place for as long
as it takes my parents to go to bed
and will call them repeatedly
as though at work 'til
I'm sure they've bought my deceit.

You know I can't go home right now.
Can I change the channel?
Do you have any booze?

LAURA PONDERES THE ADVANTAGES OF HAVING HIM AROUND

John Grey

The main feature of this town
is the statue of a man
nobody remembers.
The best that can be said
of that equestrian sculpture
is that it provides a little shade
on hotter days.
It's like this man in your house,
occupying more than loving.
You must have had a good
reason to put him there once
but your memory was never
that strong in history.
Still, some days, the heat's
so searing, it feels like
it's out to get you
and he stands, so stoic, between
that flame and you.
So every day, you learn a little more
about why people put up such monuments.
It's not the names,
it's not what they did,
it's purely the construction.

'untitled'

*steven thomas
miller*

Painted Grins Around

Brion Joseph Humphrey

I left my name in Nebraska.
A hut, a house, a whole lotta laughs were they,
The ones who stayed behind, when the circus came to town.
Like I said, I left my name in Nebraska.
But now the lights have grown too bright,
And the cream cheese grease is melting.
A ball lies in the corner untouched. Unbounced. Unbroken.
Picture frames, cold copper cauliflower,
Nothing in its brash grasp.
The silver gleam has faded.
Blue and gold, a dash of red, the acid rain is falling,
It's fingertips upon my tent, tearing,
Clawing in a fetish frenzy,
Screaming entrance into the city,
Demanding recognition.
Not tonight.
The circus is open for business.
And my face is freshly painted.

'yes it will kill me. but when?'
i say about every recognizable chain
they grab the toilet which is
practically green
and head into
the smokey red room
with mostly empty 40 bottles
which are clenched tightly
in the hands of the
wire and twist-tie pigeons
that invite the useless kitchen's scraps
outside
there are no moments that exist
between the door and the bed
nothing small enough to count

Highlighter

Kelley Jean White MD

Damn, I tried.
to go in the supermarket and just buy
cat litter but I made it
just to the meat freezer and grabbed up.
had to go up and down the aisles in the same order
I do everytime everyweek.
even through baby food and automotive.
where I never buy things.
I had to.
How I got through Harvard Medical School.
reading every single hand out.
triple underlining.
a different color every day.
I am so ashamed.
to let you know
my secret.

Trinity High Guidance Counselor

Sheryl L. Nelms

Friday night
he's at

the Safari Lounge
drunk again

Monday morning
he's back at his
office

next-door to
the principal

telling students
how to live

their lives

Feng Shui

Sheryl L. Nelms

just because
we spent

every quarter
we had

sold our double
bed and

kitchen table
with chairs

watched as the gold Oldsmobile
was repossessed

leaving us stranded in
the desert west of Las Cruces

in a trailer
with no electricity

rent unpaid and
a landlord who threatened

to shoot us
tonight

don't think I
have given
up

my peacock feather
is in the right

sector

and the lid
is down

I EXPLAINED

Cheryl A Townsend

he and I
were never us
Sporadic satiation
better fits
definition
I only told him
what he wanted
to hear
It made things
so much easier
that way
and what I
opened to him
was not
my heart
Indeed
even he
could see
the distance

PUBLISHED in BABEL
THUNDER SANDWICH

ECO SYSTEMS

Cheryl A Townsend

I steal plants
along the road
Walk in the woods
and return with
wild basil
trillium and
mountain mint
bring them home
to naturalize them in
my unnatural flower
beds

PUBLISHED IN THE 2004 SCARS
PUBLICATIONS WALL CALENDAR

Fly

Sara Hemmings

I was deprived of winter
that February
the snow forgot to fall
on the statue in the park.
The nights were vast
and the skies were empty
as I stood on the bridge
waiting to fly.

PUBLISHED IN THE 2004 SCARS
PUBLICATIONS WALL CALENDAR

Winter

Sara Hemmings

Smoke billows
from across the field
at the end of February
when the cherry blossoms
show no life
this year again
near the far end of the passage I take
that leads toward
the attic.
As per the message you left,
I wandered through
the storm
to the cobwebbed passage we invented,
meandering the darkness to the broken lock
of the attic door
to find you shirtless
against a splintered post,
aching to experience
the madness of our love.

WATER

Donora Hillard

You know the taste of sand.

It is coarse and moist
and covers the eel.

There are no pearls.

They left for sea years ago
with the hero whose hand
you should have touched.

And why did you not?

It was raining.

You were covered in it.

It pulled at you until
your hair tore
and your legs were soaked.

The electric guitarist leered.

You hid your face.

The water there
was clear and selfless.

You know its taste.

It uncovers everything.

You can sink or swim in it.

DES

Donora Hillard

I am not winning any money for this.
And I am not
going to write about writing just so
you can tell me how chaste and noble
I am, how
Catholic an undertaking is my devotion
to the craft. Mine is a separate mission.
So when you come to see me, don't
mention an audience or offer "prizes."
Such things
are meant for the back alley of a carnival,
the toddler reaching and crying,
reaching and crying again.

'untitled'

steven thomas miller

to all the fallen arguments
that were so sweet and cold upon touching my
bare feet
are all the plots filled with you?
or are they just waiting until the land rejects
me?
this is the reason why
we've all stopped someone's heart at some point
as if there's a meaning for crashing
into water in every dream
or writing a murder confession for
your suicide
i've nearly drowned so many times
i wish that, like a dream, i would wake up
every time i'm about to die
the invincible 'i'
this is the reason why
i've never knowingly killed anything
but through all that i know about you,
i must have wanted you to die
and at that moment of realization
i wonder...
are these your biting teeth?

Want That Too, You Know

Shannon Peppers

I have this tendency to notice the details

I've noticed when you speak in passing
well, I noticed the double meaning
and maybe you weren't trying to
give a double meaning
maybe I'm just too aware

maybe I want something to work
we women want that too, you know

Wrong Attention

Shannon Peppers

I'm tired of being alone so much
and I'm tired of missing you
and I'm tired of wanting a future with you
and I'm tired of wanting you around me

sometimes I think when I'm about to sleep
that the extra pillow could be you

as I said, maybe I'm just dying for attention
maybe I've been looking for
the wrong attention

Have To Ask

Shannon Peppers

your sister was surprised
she was surprised that I thought
that you didn't have a photo of me in his wallet
but she never told me why she was surprised
so I'll have to ask

you will

Shannon Peppers

pieces of the puzzle:
i know how they fit

i've had to do this
puzzle thing for years
and I'm good at it

and i know i make you whole

i know it won't take long
as i said, i'm good at this

you'll feel good
about it when it's done

you don't think it
but you will

So Many Lies

Aeon Logan

I wish that people wouldn't
to lie to me so often
I'm so sick of people being condescending
to my face, telling me that I am the one that
doesn't understand

they understand how they think and
how I think

and no one has any idea of how I think

people I once trusted told me
well, wait, it is probably more
accurate to say that everyone tells me
they tell me, they tell me, they tell me
over and over again.

people I used to know, people
I used to trust, well, these people
I once trusted told me, tell me, so many
lies about what I know

In The Room

Mackenzie Silver

maybe i'm reading too much into this
maybe you're unhappy with her
I wonder what you're like when you are happy
when you're interested in talking
and you want to smile more
and live more
I want to know you when you're like that
maybe you act that way with me

Maybe That Is Enough

Mackenzie Silver

Sometimes things work out according to plan
And sometimes the plan is not exactly what you had in mind
But sometimes you can at least be happy with the plan

And I talked to you today
And I think neither one of us have plans for tonight
And there is a chance you will be in town for the holiday

And maybe that means I don't get to see you for the holiday
I still have to keep reminding myself
There is a chance
I mean something to you
And maybe that is enough

I Want More Than That

Mackenzie Silver

I am tired of the one night stands
I want something more
you gave me that
and now I want more than that
When what you give me means nothing
I wanted more than bland sex
can you give me that
was I barking up the wrong tree
Because who can do that for me
I was hoping that you could be that someone

Under The Sea

Janet Kuypers

I'd like to be
Under the sea
To see the fish go swim,
I'd like to squish
A jelly fish
And then let go of him.
I'd like to grab
A soft-shelled crab
And take him for a walk
I'd like to hurdle
Over a turtle
And teach dolphins to talk.
I'd like to see
A manatee
And then go play by him,
I'd like to do
All of these things
If only I could swim!

packing

Janet Kuypers

there are too many times
when i've said this before

never thought i'd really leave you
and now i sit here

in this apartment
popcorn bowl on the cocktail table

eleven thirty at night
the television playing static

it looks too clean in here,
not lived in

so i decide to take a trip
get out of this place

into the bedroom, time to start
packing: two dresses, two

pairs of shorts, shirts, loneliness,
anger, make-up, extra socks

it's amazing how much of your life
you can fit in a single suitcase

Jack wrote...

Marie Kazalia

many times
men love women and
never tell them...

many men have said
I love you, to me
and I never believed any
of them...

lava flow

Marie Kazalia

just before the long descent
into Mexico City
the plane flew straight over
a round red crater
at first I thought from a meteor
striking the earth there long ago--
then with further examination of the
visible clues from such a height--
could clearly see the old red lava flow
and the crater where the top of the mountain
had blown--a cinder crater I call it--
and the farming in the valley below--
edging the dead lava

out of the language of a thousand fears

Marie Kazalia

jesus christ in a jelly jar
sold in every store
and on every street corner
for 10 pesos
exchange rate equivalent to
about 1 US buck
more or less

spread him on your toast
wash him down with
weak brown coffee--

PUBLISHED IN THE 2004 SCARS
PUBLICATIONS WALL CALENDAR

oh my god

Marie Kazalia

Mexico City
5 a.m. noise-polluted hotel
waking me
some guy
loud puking and retching
down in the courtyard lobby
he stops
then starts puking
again
echoing off concrete archways
titled floors and stairs
inside my head
so loud
my final nite in this hotel
sounds like he's puking into the lobby
fountain--
hear the scraping of metal
buckets on the tile floors
mops & ringing-out rags
I can't tolerate this anymore

this morning I'm moving
to a quieter cheaper hotel
2 blocks down--

for the past 11 nites
at this noisy place
I've been wakened
with no consideration
no apology--
by laughing nite-shift desk clerks
playing tag
by 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. renovation
buzz-saw lumber-cutting & hammering
on weekends disco base
rhythm booming-up
thru floors & walls all till dawn
Sunday morning
kids playing tag giggling echoing--
Aztec dancers jingling ankle-bells loud
in and out to use the john--
men in hard-heeled boots
clomping tile floor after 3 a.m.

now I've taken up a quieter
cheaper place with a double-door balcony

eleven more nites alone

roadtrip vacation west

Marie Kazalia

when I was 17
my mother took me and my
one year younger sister
and 10 year younger brother
on a road trip across the west
all 4 of us in the back seat
of my Aunt Esther & Uncle Harold's
humongous American-made air-conditioned
monstrosity--
stopping every nite to stay in some motel room
in the morning hurrying
to keep Uncle Harold's "time made"
driving schedule--
my mother did the same thing every morning
stopped at the motel room door on her way out--
turned, surveyed the unmade beds
wet motel towels
raised both her hands then swatted them down
as if pushing something away
out of her mind--
I'd groan in disgusted teen fashion
or leave ahead of her to miss the ritual
roll my eyes
not bothering to tell her out-loud
one more time
the maid would change the sheets
and towels anyway
thinking how my mother never gave-a-shit
at home if I changed my bed-sheets or not
or if there were a ton of damp towels to wash--

then back to the road
too long
too fast
gone
another motel room
morning
the same thing--

A LOST PIECE OF PAPER

Michael H. Brownstein

A poem is stuck between page 139 and 140.
I fingernail it, but it has no give.
Nothing like rusty pipes in the basement
Or missing supports for a railing.
I read the poem on one side, then the other,
But try as I might, cannot reach the one in between.

WINTER SCREAMS

Michael H. Brownstein

Winter screams
The hard pavement soiled
Tendrils of silver birch
A last crown of leaf
great cottonwoods
Dried patches of river
A thickness of color
A wood airy as drafty rooms
litter of sunlight
The shape of shadow.

We sit on the large rock
winter's warmth
Ladybugs in the grass
The low croak of toads
The ground pumpkin orange
Mud and sand off blonde.
Look! Turkey vultures,
Large crows, pigeons
With scum on their legs.
Winter screams.

PUBLISHED IN THE 2004 SCARS
PUBLICATIONS WALL CALENDAR

When I Am Weak

Marina Arturo

There are many times when I am weak
My poor legs can no longer endure
I start to fall
I search for something to hold on to
And I usually find something to
Lean on until I am no longer weak
But there are times when there is
Nothing for me to grab on to
I feel lost
I continue to fall
But then I see you
You extend your arm and uncurl your fingers
You reach out to me and
Give me support
You help me become strong again

An Innocent Glance

Marina Arturo

An innocent glance
turned into a lengthy stare
A simple hello
turned into an intimate conversation
A common acquaintance
turned into a lover
My heaven
turned into my hell

for another woman
turned everything we had
into nothing

The Joshua Tree

Marina Arturo

The Joshua tree
is a tree with long branches
said to point toward
the Promised land

You remind me of
the Joshua tree
because you help me
and lead me
in the right direction

No Longer Pity You

Marina Arturo

Stop singing that song to me
I can no longer pity you
The words are hollow
And only echo in the past

You don't know what they mean
You can't know

It is not your luck that has turned you
It is your inability and unwillingness
To live

And yet you have Turned
And I can no longer pity you

That song has no meaning anymore

Now I'm strong

Marina Arturo

In the part I always thought I was alone
I was wrong
You helped me by giving love and giving hope
Now I'm strong

Listen To What You're Not Hearing

Sydney Anderson

I feign a smile
as the breeze comes
bouncing off the building
sweeping around
the backs of my legs

When the breeze
took my hair
it licked your face

You were annoyed

I wasn't surprised

You asked me
what was wrong

I said, "nothing"

And you believed me

I'm not trying to
make any moves
anymore

because I'm afraid
I'll make the
wrong move

I don't mean to
annoy you

Listen to
what you're not
hearing

Leather Jacket Faded Away In The Morning Fog

Sydney Anderson

at five-thirty in the morning
I sat in the kitchen
straining to swallow the tears
and you raced
to get your luggage into your truck

my mind wandered
to the candles
the roses
the pizza
and all I could think
was that the best chapter
of my meager life
was coming to a pathetic end

I looked at you
in your leather jacket
and you took my hand
and led me to dance

I really didn't mean to
but I couldn't help but cry
for the idea of our last dance
destroyed me
as you drove away

I dreamt that you came back
and said you wouldn't leave
but as the car lights
faded away in the morning fog
and you tuned the corner
I fell to the floor
screaming and crying
I had no one to blame but circumstance
and I couldn't fathom going on

Lunacy

Linda L. Bielowski, Ph.D.

What was I to know of fate, fear and loathing, or sleight of hand?

When all and everything I wanted was to spend time with you, on an evening perfect in its predictability, soothing in its sameness, waiting to purify us in a baptismal pool of tepid air. But you spiraled downward on a shaky staircase, moods waxing and waning in erratic cycles, lunar phases gone awry. You stole a soothsayer's prophecies and a fortune teller's deck, shuffling and turning them backwards and inside out until you picked nihilism for your trick. Hearing nagging voices call Ophelia, out of sight, out of time, out of touch, you took the razor blade, slicing through layers of numbness and somnambulism to quicken the dead. A slap on the birth ass, a shriek of becoming, and you freed the face behind the mask, the flesh beneath the make-up. The yoke of the moon ran rouge red over your full cheeks, as the clock pendulum mimicked your body--quivering and standing still--a lone bird shot in flight, cast from heaven.

At 11:59 p.m. your round photograph slipped from its silver frame and fell to earth.

Tango

Linda L. Bielowski, Ph.D.

Shoot me up
 With your transcendence
Tango through
 My open vein
Shake the dust
 Of death in living
Purge me
 From raw mortal pain

About the Author

Linda L. Bielowski, Ph.D.

The author is a practicing psychotherapist, a board certified pastoral counselor, and an English professor. She has published book reviews, psychological articles, short stories, and poetry in numerous anthologies, magazines, and journals. After a long hiatus, Dr. Bielowski turned back to her writing roots to complete her first collection of poems *Spirit Echoes*. She is at work on her second book, dedicated to the *Beat* poets.

Sin Eater

Linda L. Bielowski, Ph.D.

On certain nights
jumpy with expectancy
When she feels
the earth tilt on its axis
And she slides down
the slant of the moon
She sets out the tray of bread
and mazer of elderberry wine
A love offering awaits
His coming

During anxious hours
She hikes the Appalachian Trail
of her beginnings
Through hollows holy with song
the melodic call of the dulcimer
Counterpoints with the shrill warning whistle
that echoes from the mines
Foretelling another death
a reason to stop the mantle clock
And to cover the parlor mirror

No strangers to heartache
and hardship
Her beloved ones burrow underground
to become human moles
Unearthing precious ore
to stuff the tight pockets
Of the company boss
with silver and gold
Swallowing coal dust
until lungs blacken
And breath wheezes
like rusty steam pipes

Living in penitence
one image camouflaging another
She strips away layers of paint
to reveal her roots
And to welcome her people
tillers of soil
Tellers of stories
titans of faith
In life everlasting
fond of a tale
That sticks to memory
like mama's molasses syrup

Fables of Mother Jones
angel of the unions
Wandering the White Top Mountains
in her dark dress
Trimmed with lace and ribbons
lavender as a halo of laurel
Reckonings of a reverent recluse
who hides in the woods
Never to be looked upon
drinking from a cup inherited
Brimming with the trespasses
of the dead

On certain nights
jumpy with expectancy
When she feels
the earth tilt on its axis
And she slides down
the slant of the moon
She sets out the tray of bread
and the mazer of elderberry wine
A love offering
longing to look upon His face
She sees Him swallow her sins
and free her spirit

Pressure On Me Again

Helena Wolfe

Man, you put a lot of pressure on me
I'm so sick of not being in control of everything
I'm tired of defining how everything goes

I define my own life
how do I make all the changes
I'm all alone on this one

I have to define my own life
I need to take a magic marker
a big black bold marker
and create the path that defines who I am

I need to make my own choices
and color everything in
and make sure that I don't go past the lines
so it looks like I did a bad job
because no one I want to make sure
that no one can put that pressure on me again

Supposed To Be Done

Helena Wolfe

I was ten when they buried you

At twenty-eight, I tried to die

At twenty-eight, I tried to die
And get back, back to you

I thought even the bones would do

isn't that how it's
supposed to be done

don't need the crutches

Helena Wolfe

I can stand alone. I don't need you
you think there's more to it than that, but no, there isn't

this is the world and sometimes you have to survive
everything that is thrown in your direction.

it is important to understand that I don't need the crutches
it is true, I don't need you, and I can get along fine without you

three months later
do I feel any different
should the world be now revolving at a different pace
was everyone just used to the world

or is it just me, feeling the change,
is it just me, thinking that things are different

people go through life with a lack of emotion, feeling, thought
I have never been asked to function that way
I have never been able to just let life go by

the hunter and the fox

Helena Wolfe

I've been a hunter, you know
I've been working at it for a while
I've gotten pretty good at it

I've been looking for the right prey
all this time
someone I could dominate
isn't that my role, you know

I have been looking for an animal for a fox
someone that would be a good show-piece

I've been looking all this time
and I'm still looking

so where is he

I Look At The Letters Again

Alexandria Rand

"This isn't supposed to happen,"
I said under my breath
as I threw the letters aside.
Thoughts quickly rushed through my mind
as quickly as the nights passed
in the Arizona heat.
Why do I even save these letters?
Why do I keep reading them over and over again?
Why do I hold them to my mouth,
hoping that you may slip out between the words,
touch my face, kiss my lips

I picked up the letters again

I remember when you asked me
about my political and religious beliefs
You asked me about my past
and my dreams for the future
It seemed as if you wanted to know
every little detail about me,
so that you could only love me more
I was happy to tell you

I look at the letters again
I hold them once more to my lips -
but this time,
not in the hope that you may touch me,
but in the hope that I may be able to touch you
I kiss the letters
I can't put them down.

I have my dreams

Gabriel Athens

I don't even care
if you call me anymore
because I have my dreams
and they make me happier
than you

i must believe

Gabriel Athens

i've never had regrets before
i've never had any fears before
i've never been alone before

and now i wonder what i've done
and now i wonder where you've gone
and now i wonder if i'm dead

are you thinking of me right now?
can you feel me sliding under your skin
an injection coursing down your vein?

i must believe you know i'm here

before i learned better

Gabriel Athens

you'd think that the people that are most like you
are perfect for you
but if you find someone like that
and you're dating someone like that
you'll see
that they now have the same faults as you do
except their faults seem so much worse
and you want to kill them for the faults you have
and you want to crack their head open
and see their brains flowing out in the street

yeah, i know your mood swings, your hatred
your love of life and truth and fairness and art
and your anger
are all as strong as mine
but i'm still going to be hard on you
i'm still going to be hard on you
for being me
before i learned better

choices

Gabriel Athens

don't hate yourself
for the choices you've made
just make the right choices

The Flower of my Subconscious

Mather Schneider

Father

Mather Schneider

*“And above all he looked to be filled with a horrible sadness.
As if he harbored news of som horrendous loss
that no one else had heard of yet.
Some vast tragedy not of fact or incident or event
but of the way the world was.”*

- Cormac McCarthy

The old janitor has been up all night cleaning the school
and now it is nearly dawn
and he is at his last mirror

and his spray bottle is like the gun
that he will put in his mouth when he gets home

and the blue liquid tears run

and he wipes until the squeaking
sounds like morning birds.

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She's twenty two though she looks sixteen and she hails from Nicaragua although her family moved here when she was seven and now she's a student aide and the library and for some reason she comes up and talks to me which naturally causes me a single lonely man for thirty three to fall in love with her and she tells me she still lives with her parents and her mother still tells her what cloths she can and can't wear and she still has a curfew and she isn't allowed to go to a "boy's" house alone and I'd bet me left nut she's still a virgin and I'm sitting here thinking jesus by twenty two I had been living away from my parents for four years and had had two dozen jobs and sexual intercourse about a thousand time and I understood they were from Nicaragua and her parents were a little old fashioned but shit they has been living in this country for fifteen years and it seemed to me they were doing her a disservice by sheltering her so and I honestly can say I have never met a young person so non-rebellious so happy to be oppressed so unashamed to be telling me about these rules without a thought in her head of breaking them ever and all she can say is she would like to have a car which is a small start I guess but with that innocence of mind comes a body to stop a Peterbuilt truck and big brown eyes that could make the pope kick a hole in a stained glass window and I found myself thinking well maybe in their country it is appropriate for a girl's husband to be ten years older than her of course such tradition usually depends upon the older man having money and security which of course I don't but maybe I could start living the clean life and graduate from college and get a real job and take care of this woman this prize this treasure this trophy this female child and teach her how to please me sexually and know that no stronger loyalty exists outside of the canine family and maybe I could have kids with her and a house and three square hispanic meals a day and so in order not to go crazy I go home that day after she talks to me and I write a poem about her and the next day I give it to her all the passion she stirred in me hoping the words will make her fall down on the floor and spread her legs and of course she takes the poem and reads it off in some corner somewhere and in a result that is I fear the flower of my subconscious she never talks to me again

At the Ball Game

Michael Ceraolo

Based on the behavior exhibited,
those consuming the most beer
are those who can least afford
to kill any more brain cells



Opening Day

Michael Ceraolo

It is Easter Monday in the Church of Baseball
The regular parishoners are overrun
by the once-a-year celebrants bedecked
in their brand-new baseball bonnets,
partaking too much of the holy brew,
and engaging in excessive public displays of devotion
No one is fooled

arade (3)

Michael Ceraolo

At the parade that took place a few days before
the day designated to celebrate working people
the unions marching were in a small minority,
not prominently displayed,

not widely applauded,

while

the parade was dominated

by assorted sordid politicians

and numerous novelty acts

And the people were content to collect crumbs of candy
which, in honor of the holiday, were at least real crumbs

performance art

from a live Chicago performance art show, reading & CD

a show was based on the 2004 European travel book "The Other Side."

The show performed live in Chicago October 21 2003.

The Show is also available on CD (with additional studio recordings).

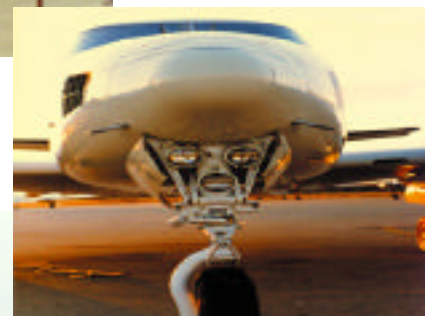
Five years ago I quit my job to travel around the United States and then go to Europe. A near-fatal car accident stopped me from going to Europe, but I wonder if a part of me was afraid to travel without a car to places where I wouldn't know the culture or the language.



Going to Europe now, I wondered what Europeans would think of Americans after our headstrong President decided to get his rocks off by being the bully and beating up a smaller country. I still felt that fear of not fitting in, even when I have the strong and intelligent John with me. He says he knows some German, so we should be fine in Austria, Germany and maybe Switzerland. But we're going to 8 countries (and we don't know Italian or French), so we'll learn phrases in other languages so we can TRY to be respectful...

On an Airplane With a Frequent Flyer

"I was once on a flight to Hawaii and I was waiting in line for the lavatory. There was always a line for a flight this long, you know, it seemed the washrooms were always on demand on a flight this long. So I finally got into the washroom, you know, and I looked into the toilet, and someone, well, lost the battle against a very healthy digestive system and left the "spoils" in the toilet, stuck. Maybe it didn't want to go down into the sewage tank where all the other waste from this long trip went to. Can you imagine all the stuff this airplane had to carry across the ocean? Well, anyway, so I saw this stuck in the toilet, and I went to the washroom, and when I was done i flushed and it still wouldn't budge, and so I opened the door and walked out into the aisle of the plane again. And there was this long line of people waiting to use this cramped little washroom, and I just wanted to tell them all, 'you know, I didn't do that.' And then it occurred to me that everyone, when they leave the bathroom on that plane, will think the exact same thing."



While at O'Hare Airport, we just went through customs and I was held back because there was metal either in my shoes or in my watch. But being here reminded me of the many times I've traveled before, the many times I've waited at airports...



done this before



My flight was delayed, I'm at O'Hare Airport, the airport that departs three planes every second, or is it one plane every three seconds, oh shit, I don't remember. I have to wait at least three hours for my next flight, hey, if so many planes take off here, then why can't I get

on one of them? Oh well, so I decided to waste my time in one of the airport cocktail bars, by gate L 4.

I'm so exasperated, I hate to wait, and all I have is a good book to keep me company.



It really isn't bad here in the cocktail bar by gate L 4, the chairs aren't that uncomfortable, even though they're a pretty ugly shade of green that

doesn't match anything in the room. It really isn't that bad, going to a foreign city.

You know, there's a blonde girl dressed well with a bad perm across the bar, and she's smoking a cigarette.

I know I don't smoke, but I'm almost tempted to ask her for one; I'd like to taste the tar, the nicotine; it's neurotic, but sometimes I need these crutches to keep me sane.

They're playing a song in the cocktail bar, a song that reminds me of an ex. I wanted to marry that man. He had a knack of being able to envelope me, to take my troubles away.

I don't know if I can take away my troubles myself anymore. I don't know if the liquor's helping, or the cigarettes. Your photo helps, my little bookmark in the only thing that keeps me company right now.

Sitting in this L 4 cocktail bar reminds me of my brother. When I was young he'd always pick us up at the airport, but if he wasn't waiting at the gate we knew to look for him at the seafood cocktail bar. a part of me expects him to come walking through the doorway now, flannel shirt, ski jacket, wind-blown greasy hair, coke-bottle glasses. You know, when I'd look at his eyes through those glasses, his eyes looked twice as big as they actually were. But now he has more to worry



about than his little sister. So I'll just sit here at this airport cocktail bar, remembering the days when I'd sit with him in a

place like this and I was too young to drink.

I took your picture out of my wallet, the wallet that has so many pictures of men who have come and gone in my life, men who have hurt me, men who I have gone through like... like dish washing liquid, or like something I use all the time and replace all the time and don't think twice about.

I'll just sit here, in this airport, trying to care just the right amount, looking at your photo, and wondering if I've done this before.

You know, I didn't put any thought into leaving the continent, I mean Hell, I had been to every state, Even the ones that aren't continental. But I was going through customs, and I needed my passport.

I have had this God-Damned passport for eight years, and I remember after recovering in the hospital and losing my home, I wanted to know where my passport was. THIS WAS IMPORTANT TO ME, I know I could get another one, but I wanted THIS ONE, I wanted to have something of my life back.

But after customs - this was when it hit me. I'm leaving everything I've ever known here. I'm leaving my language, I'm leaving my culture.

Packing

there are too many times when i've said this before but now i sit here

in this apartment popcorn bowl on the cocktail table

eleven thirty at night the television playing static

it looks too clean in here, not lived in

so i decide to take a trip get out of this place

into the bedroom, time to start packing: two dresses, two

pairs of shorts, shirts, loneliness, anger, make-up, extra socks

it's amazing how much of your life you can fit in a single suitcase



In Austria, other than *The Sound of Music*, John found out that Mozart, whom I love, was born in Salzburg, Austria.

John knows a little German, and we have translations of basic phrases in assorted languages to try to cover ourselves, like “Where is the toilet?” (because the toilet is separate from the shower, so you can’t just ask for a wash-room), “We do not speak (the language),” “We speak English,” “I am a vegetarian,” “Do you have an English menu,” or “Where is the (correct) train station?”

We got through the airports in Salzburg, where we had to take a bus to the terminal, we heard the usual: “Are any of the items in your luggage not your own,” or “Did anyone ask you to carry anything on board with you,” or “Have you ever left your luggage alone since you have been at the airport,” or “Are you in possession of firearms, contraband or fireworks...”

But I saw with John in Salzburg a lot of references to “Salzburger” at little diner signs, and I thought it was a reference to burgers from Salzburg, but John told me that in German that just meant they were *from* Salzburg.

I’ve seen mountains, but it’s amazing to be nestled in Bad Gastein with beautifully painted buildings, surrounded by the Alps.

There were cool things to notice here:

- We noticed that the doors here are “thicker” than American doors; the part that sticks out is wider than the frame to stop light from other rooms from coming in.
- There’s a Jacuzzi here, but it’s like 84°, so I called it a “tepid tub” to John, and we won’t go in. And you pay to go into the sauna, and the pictures had naked people in the sauna. We’re passing on this one too...
- Tipping is more like 10% for food. And people serving drinks don’t expect a tip at all.
- You don’t take food home with you from restaurants; that is considered very rude. So when we ordered, we’d have to stuff our faces because we couldn’t take food with us, which meant we went out to eat less often..
- Because of a lack of rainfall, there are pools of yellow pollen all along the sidewalks.
- Clocks are on 24 hour time; PM doesn’t exist, so remember military times when you read times like 17:30 and 22:14.
- Gorgeous cars and names are all over on the road. I’ve seen Alfa Romeos, Opels, Lancias, Fiats and other excellent names. I saw a strip of parked cars with an Audi, a BMW, a Mercedes, a Rover, and I said, “Wow, this must be where all the expensive cars park,” and John said, “These aren’t expensive.” The prices are just jacked up for the United States.

I wondered if English songs would be played in European countries, and last night we were in a bar,

and a song played that I thought I recognized, and I said,

“This song sounds familiar. I don’t know if I’ve heard it.”

John replied, “It’s Bob Dillon.”

I was a bit stunned. “Oh,”

I said, “I thought this was someone in German.”

John laughed his ass off at this, because it was a song I should have known, *All Along The Watchtower*.

When he started laughing, I said, “Well, it was a voice that sounded unrecognizable to me...” which made him laugh more.



We went to a bar where everyone spoke German, and I was standing near the doorway and the door opened, so I backed up, and a drunk old Austrian man came in and started

talking to me, in German, and I had *no* idea what he was saying. John couldn’t understand a single word this old man said, so I’d try to think of a single word to say, *and I don’t know German, all that was going through my head were Spanish phrases*, so I’d try to say something in English and he’d respond with another single-word in German, and he’d say it repeatedly to me (like that helps when you don’t know the language), and panicked, I’d try to say something in English, then *repeat* it in English (we both repeated things in other languages, like that helps), but then the bartender commanded him in German to leave as he kicked the drunk Austrian out of the bar.



sometimes the light

Sometime the understanding
Travels into the realms of the unknown
All we can do is hope
search
dream

Because we will never find.
Sometimes the light is not enough.



Too Much Light



too much light makes the
baby go blind
and too much light makes
the moth

rush into the flame

and die in a final
blaze of glory



and I have seen the light
and I have seen it

what is my choice:

burn in the flame
to burst quickly
to die young
or to slowly slip away
to die slowly
day by day
to let people in darkness
pull me in
inch by inch
until the light
kills me



We went to the Gastein Curative Tunnel - a place in the "Hohe Tauern" mountains where the air temperature ranges from 98 to 120 degrees, with humidity between 75 to 95 percent. There was a huge amount of Radon in the air there, and staying in the tunnel for certain lengths of time helped people with their ailments, because the Radon in the air helped make their body heal itself faster.

We went from Bad Gastein to Salzburg, then left Austria and went to Munich in Germany, we walked everywhere before going back to the Alps (with more mountains).

John noticed that the trains are amazingly quiet, and have huge windows on each side of the train.

And I noticed that every small village had one church, with a huge steeple. I wondered if it was there so people would be able to find the church easily, and John wondered if people had such a tall church to show the world how God looks upon them so favorably, because they have such a large church to worship Him in.

When walking home today, John noticed a radio station on a car tuned to 88.6, because Europe's radio stations fall on even numbers, unlike America's radio stations.

Almost as interesting as the fact that there are metal roofs throughout this town - it's cool to see the decaying, or painted homes.

Oh, I learned that in some countries that when eating, your hands should be above the table until you are done with your food. This was a tough thing to remember to do, but you don't want to look like an outsider.

We once tried to hike up a mountain in the Alps. It was wet because it was early and the dew and frost hadn't evaporated, but we went a while and we got to what we thought was close to the end, at the end of the ski lift. My shoes and socks were soaking wet from the puddles and mud we had to get around to get there, but John saw that the path continued. He guessed that we were only two thirds the way up the mountain. Since it gets colder the higher up the mountain you go, and since there wasn't a cloud in the sky to hold any of the heat to the earth, it was really cold, and we didn't bring clothes for cold weather, but we left, and the path almost disappeared. Then I saw that there was a twenty foot wide pool of mud that you'd *have* to walk through to continue. I just stopped in my tracks. I was already cold, and my feet were already soaked, but I was not going to walk through mud to have wet, muddy, cold feet.

When John saw the mud, he agreed that we'd just go home.

Well, at least we tried.

Went to a bar, and there was a big bread bowl on the bar, just sitting out. It's funny, but *here* foods don't have a ton of preservatives, so you can't keep bread sitting around. People buy everything fresh, from breads to fruits and vegetables.

John said this is why Europeans eat better; they have healthier food and don't eat processed foods. I thought *if Americans ate so many preservatives, would we stay pre-*

served longer if we were dead, but you'd think that if Americans were so health-conscious we'd eat better, but John said that Americans probably rush through life so much that they don't have the time to treat themselves better...

It was also so cool to go into a "pharmacia" when John needed to get an over-the-counter pain medication; unlike a Walgreens or a United States drug store, this place was a small shop with apothecary jars of medicines all along the walls. You actually felt like you were getting medicine, not that this was some generic little coated pill in a generic mass-produced box.



German was the second language John learned, but I forgot that he'd love drinking excellent weisse beers too...

We spent a day in Dachau, because we wanted to see the Concentration Camp Museum there. I have been to the memorial in Washington, DC and it was amazing, with all the information and artifacts; it took me five and a half hours to go through it alone in 2002. They had lighting right for the barracks, and you walk through quarters the size the prisoners were in. You even walk over planks the Jews had to use because the Germans wouldn't let them walk on the same land as them. There were glass boxes that housed the things the Jews had to give up once there were in the concentration camps, so you'd see a glass box filled with hairbrushes or black shoes. So if the United States museum was amazing, it should be stunning to see the Dachau Holocaust Museum, which was once an old concentration camp.

After getting to Dachau we walked about two miles (3 Kilometers) to get to the Dachau Holocaust Museum.

They had the original door to the concentration camp at one edge of the grounds, which said (in German), "Work Makes You Free" (John photographed it). They left the paint chipped away at parts of the wall so you could see what the walls were like. But they cleaned up a large part of the hall, and the entire museum, was us

just moving from room to room with large posters and sheets of data to read. Dachau was one of the first concentration camps in existence, and it was one of the only ones that lasted throughout the reign of Hitler (who, by the way, was not only Austrian and not German, but also was short and had hawk hair and dark eyes and was able to tell people that the better people were tall blondes with blue eyes). The Dachau site was used as an example for all future sites. The prisoners were even put on work detail at one point to build a new, larger camp, so others could be imprisoned like them. Later, people were arrested and sent to camp because they were "potential" criminals.

We saw a scale model of the entire grounds as it was during the Holocaust, and we were seeing only a small portion of the site used to be like. Seeing that the entire concentration camp area was that much larger was the only thing that helped me to see how monstrous this place actually once was.

We went back to Munich. The locals must have *loved* seeing another stupid American with her camera on a strap around her neck, but the architecture and statues and fountains were beautiful.

We found a small bar there, and the old regulars there kept yelling in German that they wanted music, but not with American voices. Well, someone else put a song on the jukebox with American lyrics, and they looked at us like it was our fault (we didn't do it, I love being blamed for something we didn't do, it's making me feel like I'm at home).

We got to the train station & saw Paulaner weisse beer cans (that cost less than in bars in Austria). You know, the beer just tastes better here, with no preservatives, the *cans* even tasted good too.





In Italy, Cicely had pieces of architecture from Greece there, and it was much more preserved than in Greece. But before that, we was Venice, where it is SO expensive. People come here to see the sights, so everything has a jacked up price.

Architecture was under construction. But it was cool to see parts of buildings - and it was cool to see stairs that led from the sidewalk to the water. Over time, sidewalks, roads, and foundations for

buildings would be lost to the water.

I did start to see excellent things here for food, though - like a caprice salad that was just cherry tomatoes and circles of fresh mozzarella with oil and spices - and fresh mozzarella sandwiches too..

Venice is the city that fell into the water, with gondolas and gorgeous churches now. Being there reminded me of New Orleans, with painted masks and liquor for sale everywhere - it's cool to see where these things you see in New Orleans actually originate from.



John also noted that he saw that the soccer fields we saw while traveling in Italy had concrete walls and THEN the stands, and there would be a fence around the field

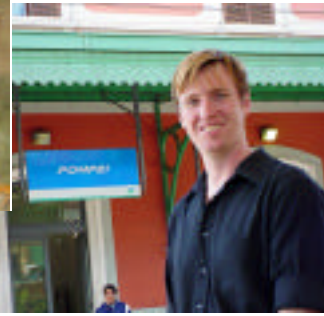
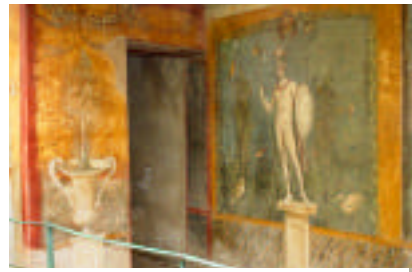
with barbed wire along the tops of the fences.

You think we have violent sports in America; you can't compare it to Europe's audience participation...

We got off the train in Napoli (Naples, to us stupid Americans), and ... it was a very dirty town.

No place took credit cards; nobody spoke English, and it's hard to guess what people are saying when we only know a little Spanish (which is only somewhat similar to Italian). We tried pizza in Napoli, and it tasted like soggy cardboard. Street vendors had tables selling crap like belts, kitchen supplies, cell phones and sunglasses. Useless stuff on the streets in a useless town.

And as soon as we got on the train to leave, it got sunny. I wouldn't expect less.



Once we got to Pompeii, John also saw a family of 4 on a scooter while we were there, so this was another chance to see how scooters were very common versus cars in this part of Europe.

We spent the entire day, after walking through town, to get to the Pompeii ruins. There is a complete area of resurrected land from the ruins of this ancient city covered by ashes during the eruption of Vesuvius in the year 79 AD. It was an exhaustive tour of buildings, where we could see kitchens, eating areas and bedrooms.



We then went to Cicely to see Agrigento, for sites where Greek Ruins were preserved, and we spent hours in the sun walking around, taking pictures of anything. There were buildings, columns and remains; we walked every-

where twice, to make sure we saw everything.

One thing John noticed while we were traveling in Italy - he said that it's a dirty country. John saw one guy spit on the floor inside in the train station, and the both of us even saw a girl throw her trash out the open bus door on one of its stops as we were going to the Greek ruins.

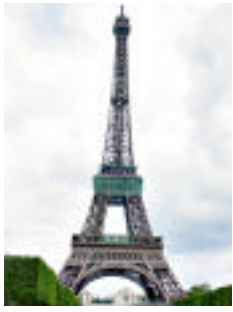
We were learning how to get around once we got to Rome.

Every sidewalk in Rome was made of 3 to 4 inch bricks with no grout between the bricks, so the were very uneven.

There were no street signs anywhere near the train station, so we didn't know where to go. But we made our way around, and it was cool to walk around the Colosseum and see all the gorgeous architecture.



I had this mortal fear of everyone hating us in France. I know, I know, the French sell Americans crap at insanely inflated price (who started the preposterous idea of selling water, other than the French company Evian?), but I think most Frenchmen think Americans are classless and tacky. Well, we may be classless and tacky, but I just get this feeling that everyone in Europe is going to hate Americans because of the war. President Bush said Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, but there's never been proof. France and Germany were the two countries who protested America's decisions, and I fear they'll hate us in France because we go to their country to see the Eiffel Tower.



We told some Texans who were visiting that we were going to go to Paris, and I told them my fears. Megan there told us to speak with an English accent and be British. John couldn't pull off being British, so I thought we could be Canadian, I could pull off that accent with no problem, eh... Then it occurred to me that half of Canada speaks French, so I'd be screwed with that too...

Honestly, I am interested in seeing the Eiffel Tower, and we have interest in seeing the Louvre and the Notre Dame Cathedral.

We hoped that Parisians would also know English, so I hoped we wouldn't have a problem. We practiced assorted phrases in French, but I was still more interested in taking pictures when we got there. I even tried to take pictures *while* I was in the taxi. I think that for a while I was sticking my head out the window to take photographs, like some sort of dog with their tongue hanging out, maybe like one of the billions of little dogs I saw people walk around with in Europe. Once when the taxi driver heard me saying I thought a building was beautiful, he even pulled over so I could take a photo of it. So, I guess Parisians do know English, and people were nice to us (even though I was paying him for a taxi ride).

We took photographs of the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, The Louvre, and a ton of other gorgeous buildings. It was also helpful to listen for the bell ringing of bicycles, or horns of scooters, which don't seem to care sometimes if they use the street or the sidewalk. People also drove maniacally on the road too (even though it wasn't as bad as in Italy).

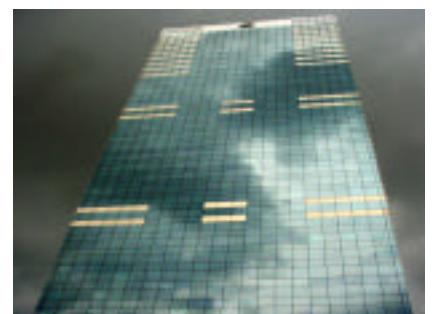
So... the architecture was gorgeous, and Parisians weren't rude to us...

Then we took the train to Bruxelles in Belgium. But they even served cocktails for the one hour twenty minute train ride. The chairs were even comfy - there's a writing table attached to the seat, like an airplane, there are foot rests, but everything is larger and more comfortable than a plane. I mean, you even got a face towel for cleaning up.

The diversity in the architecture was really intriguing, and John said he was so surprised by my love of architecture. My family has been in construction for almost a century, and my brother is an architect, and I'm a dutch girl; the countries I came from were known for their excellent architecture, and the some of the greatest architects in history came from here.

After taking pictures and seeing sights in Belgium, we had to take a train to Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

A woman on the train came around with meals, and a fish plate with kale in a Jello mold (gelatin has animal products in it too) was put in front of me. I'm a vegetarian, so I asked if there was anything vegetarian, and she this was their vegetarian meal. So I don't eat because people don't know the definition of vegetarian.





Hell, I thought, if people go there for assorted drugs, maybe Amsterdam is a place we should at least see..

Saw that Anne Frank's house and Museum were there, where Anne and her family hid from the German occupation forces.



Amsterdam is *not* open late. There aren't many people out at all. I know, I know, I know, they have legal drugs there. They say Marijuana is legal and 'Magic Mushrooms' are considered a "soft drug" (I

didn't know powerful hallucinogenic drugs were considered 'soft drugs,' but what the Hell, I guess that's the beauty of a monarchy or socialism), but you get Marijuana in coffee shops, but we didn't want coffee. We ordered drinks at a bar, and we *then* found out that that only accepted cash. One round of drinks cost over



27 Euros (over 40 American dollars). This pissed me off, we had to find a place that accepted credit cards, and the only place was a Mexican restaurant that wanted us to eat food; we ordered soup so we could drink a half liter of Heineken.

So what does that mean for the night for me? It means that I didn't see any pot on any menus, I didn't see anyone smoking pot, I didn't see anyone offering it, I saw nothing. I paid almost 50 American dollars for two rounds of drinks and soup.

We did go to the Anne Frank House - it was really cool to be in the house she hid in and see films and artifacts in English as well as in Dutch.

Okay, I'm not into the drugs. But At least I saw the place...



Not even big enough on most maps of Europe to contain the letters of its name,

Lilliputian Luxembourg makes up in style what it lacks in size. On this train we stopped in Maastricht in the Netherlands on our way to Liege before we reached Luxembourg.

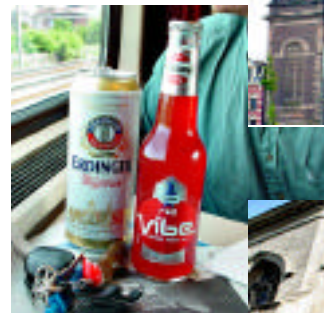


But a night in Luxembourg was better than a night in Amsterdam. We ended up at a good happy-days-styled bar, and the owner bought drinks for everyone that night too. The bar prices were better, there were more people, and the atmosphere was better than our experience in Amsterdam.

John corrected me and said that actually, Amsterdam sucked. I wore shorts for the first time on the trip. Now, we've tried to



fit in when traveling, but I never knew that "shorts" were an American thing; women only revealed their legs by wearing skirts. So I was the only one wearing shorts, and all the guys grinned looking at my legs, and all the women wouldn't even look at me. Oh, yeah, and John didn't understand how I could feel awkward there because I was being gawked at.





We passed a bunch of towns in France before we got to Zurich, Switzerland, but after a while the scenery started to look the same, like we were driving through the Midwest United States. It started to look like driving from Ohio, to Indiana, to Iowa. You do this for a while, and it starts to look like the



same hills, same foliage... Same expanse, looking for something new.

After sightseeing, we took a 6 hour night train from Zurich in Switzerland with sleeper beds. John woke me at 3:45 in the morning (8:45 in the evening Chicago time) so

we could get off the train.

Even though we were exhausted, I photographed more buildings in Salzburg. We even climbed to the top of a hill and photographed the outside of a castle.

The flight to Frankfurt was short, so we saw what we could in our last stop. I was still amazed at the beauty in the ancient architecture, and there was so much forest when you looked at the landscape from above. Towns look like they took up about



one quarter of all the land. Trees were packed everywhere.

Even though I was really tired, I was too wired to sleep on the flight back home.



venture to the unknown



I've always loved the idea of being in outer space, so when my chance came to be a part of a crew to explore a foreign land to do what no man has done before I

I jumped at the chance

People ask me what it's like to be in space, see a new planet.

it's hard to explain all of the details, there are so many you forget, like when you see the sun in the sky, you even see Earth in the distance, it is still dark where you are.

the Earth's atmosphere makes the sun's light omnidirectional but here the sky is black too, even during daylight.

Without the Earth's atmosphere

the stars are always out, there are so many stars in the sky, so many asteroids, you can even see the dust in the air.

The Earth's atmosphere is insulation that stops us from seeing all in the universe.

They create gravity in parts of the space stations to help people acclimate themselves

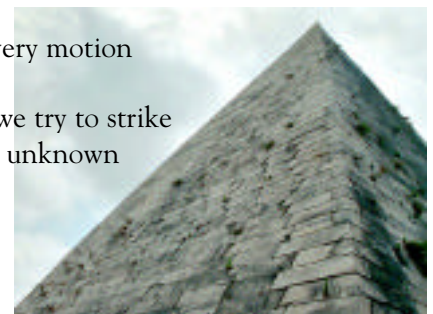
but in some stations you have to always hold your equipment

because it can float away

and when we go for mission walks

every step disturbs the land dust and dirt explodes with every motion

it's a fragile, delicate balance we try to strike when we venture out into the unknown





philosophy monthly

Child Molesters & the Government: **Child Molesters & the Government:** *Big Brother is Watching* **Big Brother is Watching**

I was listening to the radio the other night - talk radio (it keeps me awake when I have to drive a long distance during the night). It keeps me awake, usually because there's enough there to get me so angry that I actually want to yell back at the radio.

Honestly, I actually once heard someone call in and say it was their constitutional right to food, that the government had to give them food if they didn't get it themselves (tell me where in the Constitution does it say that citizens of the United States of America have the inalienable right to "life, liberty and blocks of cheese"). Last time I checked, The Pursuit of Happiness meant that you have the ability to do what you need to in order to acquire the things you need, such as food, not that the government has a responsibility to feed you.

So anyway, I was listening to the radio, and the discussion on this particular evening was about child molesters. Doctors and other experts has pretty much agreed that they are incurable, that castration doesn't stop their urges to hurt children, because it is a power struggle more than a sexual venting. So the question arose: should people living within a community where a child molester is going to move into be notified that this person was convicted of molesting children?

A similar story arose after a convicted rapist abducted and killed a neighborhood child after he was released from prison and "started anew." The neighborhood was in an outrage; if they knew this man was a rapist, they said, they would have been more protective of their children.

So the question going over the air waves on this particular night was whether or not it was right to notify people of the acts you've been convicted of in the past.

People were talking about the heinousness of these crimes, how these child molesters should be killed, etc.

- some also brought up the fact that the information about these people is already on public record - the only thing this law would be doing is informing people about the child-molesting history of such-and-such, instead of making individuals search out this information for themselves, which they would undoubtedly never get around to.

But first of all, it is not the role of our government to intervene with every aspect of our lives. The government is not supposed to protect "society." As the closest thing to a capitalist society on this planet, "society" is made up a a group if individuals, and the government should work for the individual. Currently, any individual has the right to find out information about a person (this kind of falls into that "pursuit of happiness" thing), but we should not expect the government to hand it to us on a silver platter.

If a potential law does not apply in all situations, it is not a good law. So let's apply this idea to other crimes: if you move into a new neighborhood, should all you new neighbors know that you shoplifted when you were nineteen? I don't think so - all it will produce are negative effects.

People should be more responsible for themselves instead of asking the government to help them out more, then get angry when the government gets out of control and continually hies your taxes to support the massive network of laws created on whims such as this one.

Furthermore, If this law went into effect for molesters already in prison, they would be in essence receiving two separate sentences at two separate times for a crime they were tried for once. That goes against everything this country was founded on. If they need a greater sentence, give it to them when they are sentenced.

Letter on Religion

Thank you for writing to me about how you felt about your religion. You wanted a response - and I wanted to tell you the things I'm about to over the phone so you could actually hear my voice - I wanted you to know how honest, sincere and open I'm being in what I say. How much I believe in what I'm saying. We never seem to get the chance to discuss this, and when we are on the phone, it does seem a little difficult to say, "hey, let's change the subject to our differing religious beliefs."

So, so you don't think I was avoiding the questions, I'll answer them now, point-by-point, from your previous letter.

You first ask me what I think happens to us when we die. You believe one of two things happens - you're either saved by Jesus Christ and spend eternity in heaven with God, or you spend eternity separated from God.

Whoa, I think I've got to cover some other ground about me before I even respond to that one. Okay, here goes: I'm a very rational person by nature (you may not think so by some of the stupid things I've done in the past, but I've grown up, as have you, and I'll get into all that later). There is no proof that a God exists - that is inherent and necessary in religion, abandoning reason and having faith that a God exists. And for every situation where a religious person refers to God's influence, I can give at least three other possibilities that are more grounded in reason - reality - than theirs. The concept of a God doesn't make sense to me when there are so many other, more rational, possibilities. Something has to be proven to me in order for me to believe it.

Or at least be provable.

Morals taught by religion and the notion of a God are not usually bad, in fact, they are often quite redeeming in society - not killing people, being monogamous, being kind to others - but those are morals, virtues, values, which by definition are not based on religion. One can learn good values, morals without a God or religion. It's just that most people, as I see it, cannot see a consequence to being "good" unless the consequence is a God. I see consequences in doing good, for myself as well as others, and that is why I choose to be a good, kind, successful person.

Okay, I think that starts to cover the basics, so now I can go back to your letter...

You believe there are two possibilities for you when you die. Since I don't believe in a God, I believe one thing happens - you die (worm food, to be rude). That I believe is the other major reason why religion and this notion of God has existed for so long - because people are afraid to face death - people really don't want to believe that death is an end for them. Well, it is an end

- for their body, for their personality - of course, their matter and energy go on to exist in new forms after their death, but when you die, you die. That's what I believe. Your memory can last in others, you can have an effect on other people's lives after your death, but when you die, you simply cease to exist.

Then you say that you want me to be in heaven with you. Thank you, I really thought that was very sweet. If there was a heaven, I'd want to be there with you, too. If there was a heaven, I would hope that your God would look at the life I've lead and think I'm a good person and give me the chance to be a part of his Kingdom after my death. After I've seen his existence. If your God was unwilling to give me that chance, then I don't think I'd like your God.

Then you refer to sharing the joy of heaven with me, and the joy of being with the Lord. There's another joy I experience, not related to a God, which I don't think you realize. I'll explain in a moment.

Yes, you've always claimed to be a Christian, and sometimes you haven't led a very Christ-like life. Most people are that way, and it bothers me that people claim to have beliefs but don't live by them. They're not really beliefs then, and all these people are lacking a belief system that they understand. The fact that you've decided to actually pay attention to the beliefs you claimed to have before is an admirable thing. Personally, I think you're going in the wrong direction, because I think the structure your beliefs depend on - Christianity - is a falsehood, but at least you've decided to live by the beliefs you've claimed for so long.

You write that since your decision to grow in the Lord, you haven't felt like running away and trying to fill an emptiness in your life with alcohol or sex. That's good - we all have to come to that point at some time in our lives in order to adhere to a value system. I think I've come to that point as well, but by a different means.

Then you ask me: which is better, being a super-intellectual who doesn't believe in God and has an emptiness in their life, or being the person who has Christ in their life filling that void?

Wow. There are a two things I'd like to say about that last sentence. First, it's funny how a super-intellectual doesn't believe in God, but apparently you can't be a super-intellectual and believe in God (well, that's true, but I didn't think you'd write it). Second, you forgot my category - being a super-intellectual who doesn't believe in God and has no emptiness in their life. I fill my own void. I am whole.

You see similarities between us, and you say that in my searches for the right party or the right man I was

looking for Jesus. Well, in the past I suppose I was searching for something else when I was looking for the right party or the right man, but I found it. Myself. I've discovered that I'm an intelligent, powerful, beautiful, dedicated, driven woman who can do whatever I set my mind to. I've discovered that when I use the best tools I have - my mind - I can succeed in making myself happy, in accomplishing my goals. And you know, knowing that about myself, believing in my abilities as a person - gives me the drive to do what I want and need with my life, and makes me truly happy, deep-down happy. It gives me what you call joy.

And it gives me even a greater joy knowing that it is my mind - my mind, my abilities, my power, not some God's - that makes my life complete. I have complete dominion over my life. I'm the one I answer to.

I can have a bad day or I can have a good day. Something wrong can happen to me or my circumstances. But I know who I am and I know what I'm capable of, and I have no regrets, and I know that I'll make it though anything I choose to tackle. I'll make it through what I choose to tackle, not what your God helps me through. And knowing that I'm a complete human being gives me great joy.

You write that God has helped you in your dealings with considering your mortality. I'm sure it has - when your world doesn't make sense, when you're faced with your own mortality, it's a great comfort to make sense of it all. That's often a course of action for many people who have to deal with their own mortality, when they don't feel they are strong enough to depend on themselves.

People I know in AIDS groups, for example, say that's one of the common routes for people who find out they have AIDS. That's one of the steps most sufferers of traumatic events go through. That's what victim-blaming is in cases of rape - it makes no sense that a man did this to a woman, but if it is the woman's fault, the woman could know what she did wrong - correct the actions of the woman, and the woman is safe from rape - but it's just not true. This is what other people do with God when they have different problems; this is what you've done with your God. God was your answer to all of your questions - not the right answer, in my opinion, but an answer when you could find nothing else.

You say that God is using your situation to help others. No, you're using your situation to help others. It's that simple.

You feel that your church is a place for activism. Your church rejects homosexuality. Your church doesn't believe women are on equal footing with men. The Bible says so. Activism within the church could mean the sharing of values and morals and good beliefs, but I fear that activism within the church would mean the spread of narrow-minded ideas such as homophobia and sexism.

Then you share a few verses with me. The first is John 3:16 (He gave His only son...). You then say "That's unconditional love. God loves me and you no matter what we say

or do. I think that's wonderful."

I don't think that's wonderful. It makes no sense to give unconditional love. If love is unconditional, then there is no value in it. If you love something or someone whether that something or someone is good or bad, you love something or someone whether you want to or not, then it is not earned, it is not chosen, and it is not a value and it possesses no worth. Value is a standard to be judged by; worth is defined as deserving of or meriting. To me, love is a standard that people earn and therefore deserve, and that is what makes it valuable to me.

You say you can't believe you lived as long as you did without believing these words. "Yes, it means you don't get the credit for the things you've done, but at the same time, you realize the Lord has a hand in it," you write. But God didn't have a hand in it, Gods have been created by people throughout the ages to answer the unanswerable. People created rain gods when they didn't understand the weather. People created gods for harvests when they didn't know if they could sustain themselves, when they didn't have the knowledge to harvest successfully. People created gods that reflected the stars and planets when they didn't understand the universe beyond the world. People created a God to explain how the world began, how to live well, and what will happen after our lives end. All these gods reflected the image of man and earth. But they were all created.

God doesn't have a hand in what you do, you do, and you should thus take responsibility - and credit - for what you do.

"Yes, bad things still happen, but you know that God will see you through them," you write. Yes. bad things still happen, but you know that you will see you through them, you, not your God.

And that brings us to the difference between happiness and joy. Happiness comes and goes. Joy is forever. I even have times that aren't happy, but I never lose Joy or Hope.

You wrote that sentence, and you wrote it about your God. I could have written that sentence, but it would have been about me.

You really want me to experience the same joy you have. I think I do. And my joy comes from within. You can't find joy from within, so you find it in your God.

Then you write: "Now let's say I'm wrong. When you die, you're just dead and there's nothing else. Well I'm still happy trusting in God and I won't have lost anything."

The thing is, if there is no God, you have lost - you've lost your life. You've spent your life living for something that wasn't real, that didn't exist. You've spent your life relying on something other than yourself. You've spent your life under false assumptions, not to your full potential, doing what you were not meant to do as a human being. You've wasted your life. And to someone who doesn't believe in a God, your life, this lifetime, is all you have, so you've lost everything.

“But if I’m right, wouldn’t you like to be with me in heaven?”

As I wrote before, if there was a heaven, I would hope that your God would look at the life I’ve lead and think I’m a good person and give me the chance to be a part of his Kingdom after my death. If I saw a God, if he was shown to me after I died, I think I would be on my knees praising (I mean, you’d have to respect the guy if he really did everything religion claims). If your God was unwilling to give me that chance, then I don’t think I like your God. Besides, that wouldn’t be a God that loves me unconditionally.

I don’t think you’re some brainwashed right-wing preacher, as you write. I do think you have intelligence. I also think you’re scared. I think most of us, most people our own age, still feel as invincible as we did when we were too young to understand death, and none of us are really ever ready to face our own mortality.

I wish I could help you with your fears. I don’t know the right words to say, but I know that the answers are within you, and you just have to look for them.

I have thought about this, I wouldn’t just cast aside what you say (I think this letter is evidence to that...). But I’ve thought about this for years; you’d have to do that in order to have a cohesive value system.

And I don’t think this because I think the world is cruel and evil. In fact, I think there is the opportunity for great happiness and joy in life, for great achievements, and for great minds to prosper. But for great minds to prosper, they have to follow reason. Faith may be acceptable for hunches about unimportant day-to-day events, but not with your life.

I know you won’t read this and agree with me, I’m just hoping you understand me and not worry about me (I get the impression that you do - that you think I have a void in my life and it is only filled with depression, and that’s simply not true). As we grow up, grow old, mature and gain knowledge, we have to come up with a comprehensive value system in order to make our lives complete. I think I’ve done a pretty good job for myself; I’m sure there’s a lot more learning I have to do in my lifetime, but I think I’m on the right track. I hope you are, too.

The Christian Coalition & The Religious Right

Because of the religious ties the Christian Coalition has with the republican party, the platform in American conservative politics - particularly when it comes to life-and-death decisions - is riddled with oxymorons and philosophical fallacies.

Not that there are not discrepancies with the theories with the democratic party, but the liberal party - and leftism in general - though nonsensical to some, is at least consistent with its views. The involvement of the morals of Christianity in the conservative party are what give the republican platform the additional inconsistencies.

For instance, the Christian Coalition - and Christianity in general - is supposed to take the stance that all life is sacred, that no one has the right to take a life except for Christ. Hence the pro-life movement becoming a primary political issue. However, the republican party - supported by the Christian Coalition - also is in favor of the death penalty.

Now, I personally can see the reason for an argument on the issue of abortion (though I do not see the reason for the intensity of the debate politically when it is not a political issue, but a philosophical one; besides, there are many other political issues that have to be taken care of that are neglected). People can argue that the rights of a woman are infringed upon; people can say that a fetus is not a viable human being (while others can argue the opposite). However, there is pretty much no argument that a prisoner - a person convicted of a crime in the United States - is in fact a viable human being. I would think that it would follow (with the logic of Christianity) that that life - the life of the prisoner, the person who committed whatever crime our judicial system found them guilty of - is just as viable a life as that of an unborn fetus. It would also follow that since Christians cannot (under their own code of ethics) be the ones to decide who lives and who dies, only Christ can, they cannot give the government or the judicial system the right to decide who can die.

Yet this is the stance the republican party as a whole, which is backed by the Christian Coalition.

This scenario also applies to the government’s ability to call a draft and declare a war on another country. A Christian cannot claim allegiance to an organization or a government (according to their doctrines) that commands them to go against their religious codes. A Christian under no circumstances is able (according to the New Testament) to kill another person - even if they have been commanded to do so by another person, organization or government. Yet many people that volunteer for duty with any one of the branches of America’s Armed Forces (and are not merely drafted and forced to go) are Christians, and see no problem with following orders to kill someone else. Even if a Christian was drafted, they should, according to their beliefs, peacefully protest and refuse to go into battle. If that required leaving the country, that should be done, because a Christian’s allegiance to their country is less important than their allegiance to their God. This reasoning would be the only line of action that would be in accordance with their beliefs.

Diversity, Political Correctness, Political Correctness, and Creativity And Creativity

Are we looking for Diversity or Political Correctness?

Okay, let's get the basics down first. I'm white. Big strike against me, from a world-culture perspective, because I must be an oppressor. But I'm a writer, which probably isn't hurdling me into the upper class, and I'm a woman, which has it's own set of relatively heavy baggage to carry around.

But I've always looked at myself as a writer, not a female writer. I've always judged myself, and hoped others would judge me, on the basis of my creative ability as a writer, not on the color of my skin or whether I had big breasts or which sex I was more attracted to.

But in working extensively in the north side poetry scene in the past six months, I've noticed the issue of diversity brought up in a few different forms. They can be pigeon-holed into three catch-phrase categories: Working Too Hard to be Politically Correct, Crossing Over into Another Culture, and Using your Diversity to Your Creative Advantage.

Working Too Hard to be Politically Correct

I was working with a group of writers touring the nation this winter. In choosing who should be part of this tour, we had decided upon myself and four men - all white. And then some of the other members of the group started asking - is this group not diverse enough? We're all straight - maybe we need gay and lesbian representation. There's only one woman so far - do we need more? Should we be looking for African Americans to fill out this group?

And you see, these were questions I had never thought of before. I mean, I never thought of watching someone because they were gay or straight, or white or black, or male or female. Okay, maybe female, a bit. But it never stopped me from looking for talent across different ethnic, cultural or sexual lines. And I never thought that a group of people going on tour needed to fill quotas in order to be politically correct. I mean, can you imagine a heavy metal band going on tour saying, "Maybe we should bring a rap group and a Christian folk band with us?"

The thing that might make this group work well together is the fact that we may have have somewhat similar cultural backgrounds. Our work can tie in better together. It may actually seem like a cohesive show; in setting up a show the first priority should be to make the show as a whole the best it can be, not to make sure every skin color is covered in the readers. Not that we shouldn't have other backgrounds in the tour. But maybe looking for the best talent is the better way to go, and if the first people that become part of the group have similar stories to tell, well then, maybe that would work to our advantage.

Crossing Over into Another Culture

Primarily, I attend opens mikes on the north side, such as Joy Blue, Lilly's, Estelle's, Red Lion, even sometimes Weeds. Once I was invited to attend the afro-centric Lit X's Saturday night open mike. I noticed a few things:

1. It was in a darkened basement in the back half of a book store. I felt like I needed a secret password and handshake to get in.

2. There was a \$3 cover. I wasn't aware of this until I got to the door; I usually never patronize places that make you pay to entertain the crowd, or expect cheap poets to actually pay money just to sit in a room for a while. They can do that at home for free.

3. As I walked in, I almost tripped over light cords running all over the floor; the stage consisted of a well-lit corner of a small unfinished basement room. Oh, and the fold-out chairs were filled to capacity (which goes to show that atmosphere isn't everything). I had to stand in the back.

4. Everyone was holding either an incense stick or a clove cigarette. Versus a beer and a Marlboro Red, which is what I'm more used to seeing.

Beyond that, there were very good readings, it was a fascinating experience, and I'm glad I went. There's obviously a demand for poetry readings and open mikes that appeal to different cultures; it was nice to have a showcase of it in one night, at one open mike. I just wish that for their benefit, they had a nicer place to read.

It's not something I would go to regularly. I must admit, I felt a bit out of my element. Not because they made me feel that way; the people I talked to were glad everyone was there and everyone was very nice, as well as very talented. No, I felt out of my element solely because this experience was something I'm not used to. To submerge one person with one culture into another culture might be overkill. But to get just a taste of it is always a treat. That is great, to experience something different, even if only once in a while.

Using your Diversity to Your Creative Advantage

As I said, I'm a writer, and I'm female, but I never thought of myself as a "female writer." But I'm sure that men listen to my work and think of me as a "female writer," even if that decision is based solely on my own writing. I write about rape and domestic violence. I write about flirting with men. I write about being a woman.

In other words, I write about the things I know. That's natural; your best work is going to be on the things you've done the most research on. And a writer's entire life is research for poetry.

And yes, I've written both about the joys of being female and the oppression I feel in a patriarchal society. But is that what exploring diversity is all about?

A friend of mine, a talented writer that I had talked to a few times before I heard him read, read a poem in front of me on stage about growing up in a biracial family, about all the taunts and jeers and stares he gets, about how he didn't know how to behave when he walked down the street. About how people thought of him, about how they judged him before knowing him.

And I've written about that when it comes to women many times.

And then I thought, but I never thought about the color of his skin before he brought it up on stage.

I noticed after that first reading that over half of the work he read on stage in my presence was about this experience, about living half-black in a white world.

I recently told him, I said, "You know, just so you know, I never thought about the color of your skin until you brought it up in your writing."

And he looked at me, a bit surprised, and then he finally said something to the effect of, "But that's my hook."

I think he was pleased that someone looked at him as a human being, but at the same time, we all assume we're all so different. And what if we're not?

Yes, you write about what you know. But you can learn more about what you think you know as well as what you don't know, just by listening to the stories other people in the Chicago poetry scene have to say. The voices are out there, voices on how they think they're perceived, and about how they perceive the world.

The important thing is not to worry too much about getting the right amount of cultural diversity, but just to open up your mind and listen.

When Credibility **When Credibility** *Doesn't Matter* **Doesn't Matter**

There's a fine line between what the media says is good and what the public says is good. This much I have discovered with the whole Clinton "scandal".

I have made a point to stop listening to the reports on how Clinton is doing, what the media thinks the people think about Clinton, you name it. I did go through an article recently, though, and it started aggravating me right at the first sentence. As the editorial letter says, "President Clinton has lied and lied and lied some more..." I was already intrigued.

Granted, that was the first line of the story.

But I think we as Americans know that the average politician lies a lot anyway, to their family, to the other politicians, to their represented people. The only thing that is novel about this story, versus stories of other presidents, is that there is more media in the President's face, and more avenues than there have ever been, to tell the public about the President's wrongdoing.

I think the majority of people I have talked to agree that this whole Clinton thing is pointless. The people don't seem to care so much about wither or not the president bedded someone. Or didn't. Or lied about it. You get the point. I think people get that Clinton has a private side; Clinton is just subject to a more volatile pressure from groups that want to expose him.

I don't think that Clinton is going to make our country go down the tubes with a pending possibility of an impeachment. And I don't think that Clinton will make love to any stranger he can, whether or not he is the President of the United States. What I can think is there there has to be a fine line for what we as people can tolerate from the people we voted into office. We all have to make that judgement every day, it is just that now we have to do it when we learn more information. So we have been making these kinds of judgements for years; it won't be too hard to do that again.

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