

children  
churches  
& daddies

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 underwater, wearing sunglasses in  
 a swimming pool.



# the boss lady's editorial

## Proving the Existence of Jesus

Over the years there have been many debates over Atheism versus Christianity, and, well, since there are so many Christians, atheists are never taken seriously. But I only heard about a story after it was destroyed in Italian courts, but revived with the European Union while I was traveling through northern European countries (traveling to Finland, Sweden and Denmark at the time).

Now, I only heard bits and pieces from Europe's CNN, so i'll fill in the banks for you here if you haven't heard this story before...

Luigi Cascioli (72 years old Italian who is often referred to as a life-long atheist) had written a book in 2002 titled "The Fable of Christ," and after trying to stop people from the Church from using the notion of Jesus to get money from parishioners, sued an Italian Catholic priest (father Enrico Righi). World Views explained (on July 26, 2006) that Luigi Cascioli, in suing the priest, charged that the priest had violated Italy's laws against deceit and impersonation by perpetuating "the myth" of the existence of Jesus Christ, is reporting on his website (<http://www.luigicascioli.it/>). CNN even reported that Luigi Cascioli says he chose Father Righi because the law prevents him from suing the Pope, who is a head of state, since Vatican City, a small district in Rome, is technically a country in an of itself. The point is, Catholicism has used the notion of Jesus, which has never been proven to exist, to get money from it's members, which is illegal under the Italian law.

Interesting case, but consider the fact that Luigi is trying to sue a priest in probably the most Christian area — in Italy. Not surprisingly, the Italian courts rejected his case. Well, okay, Italy has a vested interest in not ruffling the Catholic church's feathers (though I wonder if that is something the courts are allowed to decide). But CNN also later reported that the European Court of Human Rights has agreed to consider hearing his case, and Luigi Cascioli's own web site states that the European Court of Human Rights has accepted





his appeal of the case.

Rationalisinternational.net even outlined the story: “Luigi Cascioli argues that there is no independent and reliable proof whatsoever for Jesus’ historical existence and accuses the Roman Catholic Church of

deceiving people with the Fable of Christ since 2000 years for financial gains. Cascioli’s point man for the church position is his old schoolmate Father Enrico Righi (76), parish priest from Viterbo, Italy, whom he accused three years ago of committing two criminal offenses. By reasserting the church’s claim of Jesus’ historical existence explicitly in a parish newsletter, Righi “abused public credulity” and “impersonated” some historic figure as Jesus Christ, both punishable according to the Italian Penal Code.”

I even read comments on <http://www.slumdance.com/> that brought up the video I saw on CNN... “The Christ Myth theory is going to take a huge leap in public awareness when Luigi Cascioli's lawsuit against the Catholic Church goes before the European Court of Human Rights...” because of “This CNN video story on plaintiff Cascioli ”

I listened to this news on CNN’s European channel while traveling, and I was fascinated with the news — are they actually going to expect this priest to prove the existence of Jesus? So I searched everywhere on line for news of the progress of when this case might go to trial, and I’ve heard nothing. All I’ve heard are people’s comments on the validity of Luigi’s claims...

Ann Thomas in Seattle stated that “You prove Jesus exist through FAITH” (please, someone teach this poor child that faith is *not* proof, that when there's no proof you resort to faith... wait, an anonymous responder

to this story in Bethlehem PA said “don’t tell me something is fact when there is no proof. Faith does not equal proof.” Wow, i’m not the only one... Thanks.). Then Brian S, Keene of New Hampshire stated “My faith in Christ is based on rock-solid historical evidence of the caliber that well-exceeds the proofs we have of many historical figures and events that we take for granted,” but then only used non-proven documents (like when V. Zifka of Sumner, WA noted by saying “Since the four gospels of the New Testament were written by individuals who never knew Christ, and were voted upon by commit-



tee as in the case of the rest of the Bible’s chapters, they are by definition hearsay.”). Jim Lindsay in Los Angeles, CA said “The fact that billions of people believe in Jesus is a significant piece of evidence in proving Jesus existed” (no, that’s not proof, as Steven Colbert even said on *The Colbert Report*, that with things like Wikipedia on line, anything can become “fact” is enough people claim it to be true and no one contests it). C. Sellman of Oakland, CA even stated Scriptures as his reasoning that Jesus exists — that the world is “perfectly balanced” (not quite right, and the Universe is *far* from “balanced,” but thanks to nature and the laws of physics —not the Scriptures — there is some order to the world).

After hearing all of these opinions (usually from offended Christians), it was nice to see that Malcolm LeFever in Minneapolis, MN brought up the book “The Jesus Mysteries” by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy. We went though this book ourselves, and these authors searched religiously (that’s not meant as a pun) for any evidence of the existence of Jesus. For example, they even looked into the Roman records of executions (because those Roman did keep records of every criminal they “processed”). After searching, they found no hard evidence that Jesus of Nazareth was ever crucified.

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But in January of this year, when Luigi Cascioli was stopped by the Italian courts for the last time, “The point is not to establish whether Jesus existed or not, but if there is a question of possible fraud,” said Cascioli’s attorney, Mauro Fonzo, to reporters, according to the Associated Press. Because WorldNetDaily.com noted in January that there is little chance of success in the home of the Roman Catholic Church, Luigi Cascioli and his team were able to use this angle to get the case head on appeal by the European Court of Human Rights — and although I look at the European Court of Human Rights’ web site

(<http://www.echr.coe.int/echr>), I never found Luigi Cascioli listed in the calendar of any upcoming trials in 2006. Well, maybe it’s coming in time, and maybe his case will be heard after all.



*Janet Kuypers*®  
Janet Kuypers  
Editor in Chief



## The Middle East Situation: A Real Shame

guest commentary by C Ra McGuirt

Just a few thoughts about the current situation...

This latest brouhaha in the “Holy Land” is saddening and stupid beyond belief. I’m a Friend of the Tribe, but to see little Palestinian kids weeping as Mommy and Daddy’s bodies get carried out of their “measured-response-bombed” homes brings to mind that phrase I used to hear in Yiddish from an ex-GF’s mom, which I have forgotten in Yiddish but remember in English: “It’s a shame for the Jews.” All of these deaths and maiming and trauma over the idiotic vanity of both Palestine / Hamas and the current Israeli administration, all over ONE GUY, and of course, over the “Israel must be wiped off the face of the earth!” attitude of Hamas, sickens and dismays me.

I am even getting anti-extreme-Zionist essay links from friends who are otherwise very tolerant and nowhere near anti-Semitic. Israel is in the position of the “Good Guy Superhero” (or maybe more like the “Barely Held In Check Good Guy” like the angry warrior-hero Wolverine), expected by the world at large to just give up more and more and more, and play fair with its enemies, and not to kill or be brutal or intolerant, while its enemies have no such compunctions.

I see that Syria is starting to rattle its sabers, along with Iran. If it comes down to it, even if the current Israeli administration is wrong on some levels of its strategy, Israel has a right to exist, and I am coming down on her side. Canadians and Europeans do not look at Israel as the automatic “Good Guy” like most Americans do, so I have had some mild disagreements with my Canuck wife. She considers Israel to be JUST SLIGHTLY better than its many enemies, though of course, she hates places like Syria, Iran, Kuwait, Egypt, and other countries which treat women as less than dogs.

It’s all very sad and stupid, as I said. If the people of that region could set aside their idiotic religious hatreds, they could create a paradise, both economically and quality-of-life-wise.

But I am just some old guy with no political power, who keeps trying to find out the “real” truth, as if knowing it would do me any good. I can’t change this situation. But as the poet Bukowski said in the 60s, “When you’re a writer and you march in the street and leave your typewriter, you leave your machine gun, and the rats come pouring through.”

My typewriter, my metaphorical Uzi, has long been replaced by a computer, but writing is all I can do. I am not really trying to change any minds here, just to set out some food for thought. Nosh on it if you will...

Respectfully,

C Ra

“This morning, after writing the above, I heard on Canadian news that 7 Canadians of Lebanese extraction who were visiting their homeland were killed by “measured bombing” from Israel. I have yet to hear the Israeli Ambassador to Canada apologise for this ‘collateral damage’...”



## THAT AND THOSE?

“Pardon me while I take you away from your everyday cares and woes and concentrate your attention on a heretofore unconcentrated upon topic: That and Those. Why is “Those” the plural of “That”?? If anything shouldn’t it be “Thats”?? Ok so that does sound stupid. Hey look, I used “that” in a different sense from what we were discussing. Obviously, “That” must get the axe. Those we’ll keep around How about we ditch “That” when referring to some close at hand thing and instead use some form of “Those”? A quite reasonable suggestion I would think. But what form would that word take you ask? I humbly suggest “Thoose” will henceforth be the singular form of “Those”. Thoose! It’s fun to say, and by jove it just makes good sense. Thoose even gives people an option in pronunciation: those rhyming with “loose” or those rhyming with “lose”. I envision the jet set getting in on the action, perhaps trying to gentrify it some by giving the “th-” a soft “thing” like pronunciation and the “-oose” the loose treatment, ending up as some euro-conscious Zeus-sounding affair.

Switching to Thoose will be good for the economy as well--boosting book sales as people will have to buy new dictionaries and English teachers will have to get re-certified (or in Alabama, just plain certified). Songwriters will have a whole new world of rhyming opened up to them. Bob Dylan will come out of retirement. Granted, he’s not technically in retirement, but when your last nine albums have blown glass, it’s time to stop writing songs and start rethinking your career. Car sales, perhaps?

Regardless, I see a bright future for the language-revision economy. This is no bubble economy either--no, no, no. There’s plenty of room for growth. Consider all the many and awkward adverbs that abound in our sludge of a language (also known as Ameringlish) and take heart. There’s “Very” and rarely a “Veriest”, but when if ever have you seen a “Verier”? Verily, I say never.

I’ll leave the nuts and bolts of this expansion to the more intrepid readers out there, but mark my bits: there’s promise in this mission. Real promise. Thoose is all there is to thoose. If you \*are\* one of those intrepid souls, please send your contributions for the rewrite of our pathetic excuse for a mishmash of a language to me via cc&d magazine...

poetry  
the passionate stuff

## The Homeless Man

Eric Obame

He walks back and forth  
The homeless man  
Looking for a helping hand  
Just a few dollars or some change  
To get him through another day  
I see him begging in the rain  
In freezing cold  
On the hottest days  
Holding that sign saying Vietnam Veteran  
Please give  
Thank you for your help  
Another homeless man two blocks down  
Holds a different sign  
His is more direct  
Give to the less fortunate  
And two blocks further, another one walks the line  
Whenever the light turns red  
There seems to be teamwork in their begging  
But the reaction of drivers repeats itself  
Windows go down  
And hands come out  
With a dollar or some change  
The homeless man will be here tomorrow  
He will never go away  
Unless he dies  
But then another will take his place  
He has found his street the homeless man  
He has no ambition to change



art by Eric  
Bonholtzer



# My Indian In-laws

Belinda Subraman

I remember India:  
palm trees, monkey families,  
fresh lime juice in the streets,  
the sensual inundation  
of sights and smells  
and excess in everything.  
I was exotic and believable there.

I was walking through dirt  
in my sari,  
to temples of the deities  
following the lead  
of my Indian in-laws.

I was scooping up fire with my hands,  
glancing at idols that held no meaning for me,  
being marked by the ash.

They smiled at the Western woman,  
acting religious, knowing  
it was my way of showing respect.  
It was an adventure for me  
but an arm around their culture for them.  
To me it was living a dream  
I knew I could wake up from.  
To them it was the willingness  
to be Indian that pleased.  
We were holding hands  
across a cultural cosmos,  
knowing there were no differences  
hearts could not soothe.  
They accepted me  
as I accepted them,  
baffled but in love  
with our wedded mystery.



Fingerprints Left  
Behind, art by  
Aaron Wilder

after 22 years

a haiku by Rose E. Grier

Mortar and pestle  
Grinding the night away, yeah  
We are getting old

# LOST LUGGAGE

T. Allen Culpepper

The airline lost my luggage.  
“Last seen in a city beginning with M”—  
That’s as specific as the agent could be.  
Only one bag, a twenty-year-old brown vinyl one,  
Long past its prime and not worth much anymore;  
The contents nothing especially valuable;  
It was crammed full of T-shirts and shorts and socks:  
Things I’ll miss for the inconvenience of having to replace.

A city beginning with M—  
Probably somewhere dull, cold, or deep in a red state: Montgomery,  
Minneapolis, Monroe . . .  
But maybe somewhere more exotic—  
Munich, Montevideo, or Milano, perhaps;  
I think my T-shirts could be happy there,  
Wrapping themselves around some Italian boy,  
Soaking up sun in Piazza Duomo,  
Or a splash of red wine at a late-evening meal,  
Or who knows what later on.

But I stray from my point:  
A suitcase full of T-shirts, underwear, socks—mundane trappings of quotidian  
life.  
Why THAT piece of luggage,  
containing nothing more troubling than a stubborn coffee stain  
Or frayed collar or worn-out elastic?  
Why couldn’t it have been my emotional baggage?  
Why doesn’t IT ever get left behind in some city beginning with M?  
The chaff of childhood,  
Abominations of adolescence,  
Embarrassing indiscretions of adulthood—  
Inseparable and inseverable—  
Never misloaded or mislabeled  
Or accepted by strangers in airports . . .  
THAT baggage always finds me,  
though I’ve never filed a claim.

# JUST ANOTHER DAY IN THE TERROR BUSINESS

Copyright Roger N. Taber 2006

Thinking a song, can't quite recall  
how it goes;  
no care in the world, except having  
overstayed the visa

Good job, future, youth, making all  
the right moves;  
station, steps, barrier, platform, train,  
in everyday sequence

Suddenly, yells, gunshots ringing out,  
bodies piling up...  
(too late, excuses at press conferences,  
conditional apology)

We can but learn by our mistakes, let  
live or die...  
(ascribed to Methuselah, perfect model  
for a Met police chief?)

Small change, a family's grief in global  
economics, mapped out  
by politicians, invested in by religions,  
dolled out by arms dealers

Media sponsored gravy train, stopped  
dead in its tracks...  
whenever the buck found stopped on its  
own doorstep



Camel in Mali, photographed  
by Kenneth DiMaggio

## Annihilation

Michael Ray Monson

Catacombs merging together  
Catastrophic dependence  
Without praise

Locked in my grave,  
Laid to rest,  
And lacking peace

Sordid surroundings,  
Glance around

Streets hazardous  
Untamed and treacherous  
Possessive relations  
What a mess!

Sedate me  
Maim me  
Twist me up  
Spit me out

You have slaughtered me!

# 21st Century Cinderella

Nathan Jeffries

I saw Cinderella on Friday  
a mousy five foot six  
with dirty purple swollen  
fingernails and cracked  
peeled dried slug lips  
hidden by abandoned cob  
web bangs.

“Beautiful if it wasn’t for  
the years of indentured  
servitude” another in  
line ventured to me.

For the abolition of the monarchy  
had left her with no prince to  
carry her and the mice and the fairy  
godmother off to their  
Los Angeles Happy Everafter

Instead GE bought the  
rights to her and the farm  
where she grew a body  
covered in yellow-brown  
calluses

While catering a field of  
carriage pumpkins who

are rented by prom night  
teens so that they don’t leave  
cum stains on the upholstery  
of their parents’ minivans.

---

Light and Lamp

Jane Stuart

Silver rain drops shine -  
droplets fall across paper  
moonlit window panes

---

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WHAT WE LEARN  
FROM THE MOVIES  
Volume II: Back  
to the Future

Jesse Rosen

In 2006,  
a Delorean sits,

the rims bent,  
the wheels airless,

the Flux Capacitor:  
an ashtray full of ashes.

# FROM CRUCIALTY TO CASUALTY

Aaron Wilder

It's been 114 days since we killed you.  
I wake up here without you and drink my crude cocktail  
of grief, self-pity, and guilt to intoxication.  
Everything gets so blurry,  
except the word "MURDERER" tattooed across my forehead.  
I let myself believe that I was the saint and you were the sinner,  
exorcising your demons by injecting you with poison.  
I held you down on that slab with the puss and the blood smeared in your hair,  
tainting my hands with what will never wash away.  
You stared as you struggled and screamed into the eyes of your Brutus  
as I stared back into yours, my only crucialty.  
You left me here all alone with your tongue hanging out, legs flailing, and  
your eyes ghastly agape.  
The poison was fast.  
I clutched your still-warm body in disbelief.  
Your warmth was waning,  
but it seemed warmer than what used to be a furnace inside me.  
Ice to ice, I cowered over you to steal the last bit of fire your carcass  
harbored  
to transplant it into my own.  
It was too late.  
Your death was as cold as my life.  
My life is the iceberg that sunk you  
and now there are more than oceans between us.  
Your icy voice haunts this tundra existence.  
There is no reason you should ever find it within your cremated love to  
forgive me  
and I don't blame you.  
There is no one else to blame but me,  
the brother that slaughtered you.  
I was the one you trusted,  
the one self-condemned and selfish.  
There's nothing else that's real inside.  
You took it all away with you.  
And now there's nothing I can do to bring me back to life.  
Resucitation requires a pulse, a breath, or, at the very least, a soul.

## Cries for Help

Matt Finney

I've  
Sent  
Out four  
Birds this  
Week with  
"Help me"  
Written on the  
Inside  
Of their  
Wings  
But they all came back  
With  
"Return to sender"  
As a reply  
And to think  
I was counting on this world for  
Something.

---

## She Hides

James Gapinski

in the corner,  
gripping her knees  
between her arms.

The slow drip  
of coolant to the left.  
The heavy sigh  
of a man's breath to the right.

## Oil & Vinegar

Sandy Hiss

You wonder  
how opposites attract

I say  
we are oil and vinegar  
each a separate entity  
liquid  
arrogant  
proud  
of what each has to offer  
a bowl of salad  
topped with croutons  
bacon bits

Until one day  
we are poured together  
shaken  
rocked  
our zesty opinions  
beliefs  
blended into one

The differences still obvious  
but now we share  
our thoughts  
ideologies  
idiosyncrasies  
onions  
and Serrano chilies

Mixed baby greens  
celebrate  
our union  
throwing confetti of parmesan  
and shredded carrots

A perfect compliment  
to the main course



# Immature

## Je'free

Kick off our boots here;  
But here, where we lay our hats,  
isn't necessarily home,  
for we take 1 step up the stairs,  
then take 2 steps down,  
each time we speak in riddles  
like tangled threads crawling our heads

Lately, I touch you, and you shy away  
like a snail into its shell,  
inept to let your armor fall down  
in a pile at your feet  
Where will you hide next  
when your mask is gone?

You blur & stir truth & lies,  
as I'm blinded by 50 thousand tears,  
needing you to kill the pain  
like a tourniquet

We have become stones  
in each other's shoe,  
unabling us to cradle one another  
when unfixed hinges give in,  
and walls tumble down

Why can I not melt in you arms,  
and vanish as the night falls anymore?  
You can not even look in my eyes  
like open doors down to my core,  
unlike before



Epoch, at by  
Adriana DeCastro

Maybe, I should see you  
when you turn 40,  
when our broken wings & halos  
have repaired from this blizzard,  
and the hole in your pocket is sewn,  
enabling you not to drop,  
but keep, the love I give

# Empire of the Golden Arch

## Rangzen Shanti

Slaves of the empire, running in designer shoes  
Jumping into jacked up cars, cool according to commercials  
Ready to drink the Miller beer  
Which they have seen on a billion billboards  
Listening to pop music through the glory of mp3s  
Falling in love with corporate-created cool  
Rather than the boundless beauty music offers  
Dulled into an apathy and a quick consumerist fix

Impatient poets, sitting in smoky cafés  
Surrounded by the tightening terror's noose  
Conform conform conform  
A voice which appears in every American scene  
At first a whisper, but as peers approach  
It grows and Grows and GROWS  
To a monsterring behemoth:  
    If you want friends, conform  
    If you want money, conform  
    If you want success, conform  
    If you want sex and tits and ass, conform

help

A bohemian revolution is brewing  
Fought not in the Bastille or Red Square  
But in the eternal Concord of the sacred soul  
A battle against everything we've been taught  
Against the essence of what we're told we are  
A revolution which begins and ends with each of us  
A revolution against American culture  
To stop corporations  
Fueled by an endless supply of wealth  
Stolen from the stomachs of Latinas and Southeast Asians

American culture, Bah!  
When I hear that vile phrase I want to break the first precept  
And slit its bulky throat  
Let loose the blood they leech from the rest of the world  
    *-Milwaukee, late winter, 2006*

## Sex and Sandwiches     Steve DeMoss

“sex is like a sandwich you haven’t had in a long time,”  
he told us, my friends and our pre-pubescent minds  
to run wild with the first thoughts of sexual occurrences.  
“you don’t realize how much you’ve missed it  
and forget how good it really tastes.”  
The body is a strange place,  
girls, the infinite possibility as was our age and spirit.  
Our lesson had been learned, the door was open  
and soon in years to come we found our goal in life  
was as any other young man:  
to encounter the long lost sandwich  
in which we once tasted.

---

## Fresh Air: Twenty-First Century Edition

Michael Ceraolo

After months as an observer at The Internet Poetry Society  
I finally typed in to say  
Why do you all use the three-beat line and write  
in a pseudo-confessional mode on subjects of pseudo-significance?  
Why do you talk of your engagement with language,  
confusing the use of the tool with the finished product;  
don’t you realize that using your tool is masturbation  
and that no one wants to see your verbal jism all over the page?  
Have you not heard that lame rhyme is dead?  
Have any of you ever worked a real job,  
or have all of you done nothing but teach?  
Can you train your gaze any place other than your navel?

And

I was told I wasn’t very nice,  
in a manner that put me greatly to shame  
and ignored all the things I brought up  
Hell hath no fury like mediocrity scorned

## The Heroes of 9/11

Elise W.

My throat burns  
As I suck smoke-filled air  
Into my tired lungs.  
My feet are as heavy as lead bricks  
Dragging along beneath me.  
But I turn around  
Back inside to save one more life.  
My heart plummets  
As I witness the scene before me.  
I know I cannot save everyone  
But duty and compassion require me to try.  
Later they will call me a hero,  
But as I stand in the cold September sun,  
I do not feel like a hero.  
I am numb to everything but exhaustion.  
Only, perhaps I feel some pride  
As I strive to save one more life of one more  
Daughter or son.  
I know there are many more daughters and sons  
That I cannot save.  
But maybe one can make a difference  
In the minds of their families  
And the world.



Cemetery Pine, art by  
Cheryl Townsend



September 11, 2001

Janet Kuypers

i remember my husband  
getting ready for work  
and i walked to the tv in the den  
and i thought he was watching a movie

he said,  
i don't think this is a movie

i think the world trade center  
has seen struck

and we stared at the television  
and watched the second tower hit

and watched the towers collapse

i can't even remember  
if my husband went to work that day  
as i just stared at the tv

it took two days to get through  
to everyone

my friend and one brother-in-law  
rescheduled Pentagon meetings  
and we tried to call his sister  
in somerset pennsylvania  
our nephew heard news reports  
say this if flight ninety-three  
landed thirty seconds later  
the plane would have hit his school  
my husband's brother in new jersey  
was supposed to be  
in the world trade centers  
for meetings that day  
but you see, he decided  
not to go to the meeting

lucky him

and i remember watching the tv  
like i was some sort of zombie  
thinking this was bigger than  
Pearl Harbor

i had to do something  
maybe i could go there  
i'd traveled around  
the country by car before  
i could drive this  
maybe i could stay  
with my husband's brother  
and train into manhattan

my husband couldn't go,  
he had to go to work  
so i took off on my own,  
paid the tolls on i eighty  
even forgot my camera  
got to his brother's place  
after one in the morning

he told me what train to take,  
but said half of the train lines  
have to be closed

so i trained as far as I could  
and found out I had to walk nine miles  
to get to ground zero

and i thought,  
i walked seven miles to work  
that's no problem  
and hour and a half  
i can do that

i thought i could buy an  
instant camera  
at some tacky shop  
on my walk to ground zero  
and maybe i could buy a film canister  
so i could collect some of the remains  
because someone gave me ashes  
from the mount saint helen's eruption  
and i thought,  
i lived through this  
i should bring something back with me  
i should  
i should something  
but every store was closed  
when i tried to walk  
anywhere in the city  
and everything was congested  
businesses seem closed,  
but you still couldn't go anywhere

so three hours later  
i got to ground zero  
i was wearing gym shoes and jeans  
had a bottle of sealed water  
in my back pack purse  
and wanted to get in to try to help  
i don't know,  
to shovel things out of the way,  
something

but no one had maps  
of where everything was  
there were so many people there  
trying to help  
that they told me  
that the best way i could help  
was to just clear the way  
so people could do their jobs

and i just stepped back,  
unable to do anything,  
unable to collect anything,  
unable to photograph anything,  
only able to stare,  
like i was watching it on my tv

###

i used only lowercase writing this  
even when i said "i"

i'm only lowercase  
because i'm nothing

when i watched the news  
on that first day  
they showed people  
jumping out the windows  
these silhouettes of people  
looked like floating paper  
in a ticker tape parade  
in all the debris floating around  
i had to keep telling myself,  
"these are people"

and when i looked around  
at all of the remains  
from these towering office buildings  
i thought of the dust  
i was breathing in  
i thought  
i'm breathing in drywall  
i'm breathing in paperwork  
i'm breathing in people

so yes, i'm only lowercase  
because i'm nothing



## seatbeltbag

By Michael Swanson

every day we chew on words  
before they fall out of our mouths,

& stroll through chain boutiques-  
& purchase those handbags made with recycled seatbelts;  
they cost ninety, maybe a hundred dollars

I feel like your diamond earrings look irradiated;  
& don't you think that dress is a bit overstated?

## A LOST CAUSE

By Belle Mahoney

Empty sidewalk  
Empty charcoal street  
Windblown ruby slipper trees  
A sign post refusing to talk

Orange sky  
Crispy creamy cloudlessness  
Aching dream of music at rest  
A love so blatantly lost to the butterflies

I crouch and sniff the rain stained pavement  
Clutching the etching acids in my fingers  
Ground is rough and cold and night is eager  
So standing I step over cracks to look for where my craving went

Even the grass is curdled and brown  
Chimney stacks emit the only lasting forms  
I reach in an attempt to touch the absence of warmth  
And finally collapse in a heap on the sordid ground

# School Fire, 1947

Tom Feulner

Children in the schoolyard tossing  
torches of the Iliad, Paradise Lost,  
A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Pages of a book burn one by one  
like lips curling back in horror, the smile  
of some sinister and final being.

Sister Rosemary must have been smoking  
in the library again, but she didn't make it  
to heaven in a blaze of books because

there is no heaven. And cigarettes  
don't burn down libraries,  
naughty, sinful children do.

## Night Visions

Valorie Mall

My dreams,  
like enormous specters,  
rise to haunt me.

I am torn,  
at their mercy,  
alone.

hollow cheeked children,  
scarred,  
starved.

barbed wire,  
fangs,  
clubs.

A scream escapes,  
Still I am alone.

# You see, there just isn't enough kindness

Stanley M Noah

in the world.

Unrelenting  
the cherry blossoms settled in  
our path, richly blown. Mount  
Fuji is now a peaceful pyramid.

Redundant  
are the seasons. And nights fall  
against the rising sun. Landscapes  
are full of life with millions of

burial grounds.

We follow maps made of musical  
butterflies with yellow notes and  
drums; and we jump from cliffs like

salmon swimming.

In abstract plazas you find yourself  
in a crowd. It has one personality,  
oblivious as a leader without an

audience.

Deafening are our generations like  
rows of rice we grow. We sweat  
in silence. A bowl of soup is the

message

of calmness you try to hold but burns  
like an old haunted rose. You  
see, we are just fumlbers.



## A house

Jacob Alves

Sitting on the front porch  
on the forth of July  
smoking a cigarette  
and watching the fire works  
from a distance,  
I realize how much of a  
house this is  
instead of a  
home.



# DFA to LAX

Jeffrey Yabut

It was a stormy January  
at the Dallas FortWorth Airport  
All I had was my luggage,  
and my laptop of jinx  
(That's why I much prefer my PC)

Indeed, alas!  
My flight to LA was canceled  
I had to be re-booked quick;  
as I urgently needed to discuss  
my material with an Editor  
who never favored my work  
that much

The Northwest Airline ticket lady,  
who reminded me of my  
Supermodel-English teacher,  
Ms. Flores, kept asking:  
"So, you're a poet.  
What poems do you write about?"

I suppressed my impatience,  
growing like hot air  
in an expanding balloon;  
ignoring her question, and asked:  
"Will I catch the next plane to LA?"

Eventually, I got booked  
with another 2 hours to burn;  
so I went to Starbucks-  
people watching, and  
seeing them as someone else,

like the odd couple who looked like  
a Sunset Blvd. hooker,  
married to a Catholic Priest



Then, there was this French lady  
who appeared like the Doctor I knew,  
who screwed her husband's  
best friend

30 minutes gone by,  
I was watching a boxing match  
via satellite, on TV

The boxers reminded me of  
poetry readers struggling  
in this battle of life;  
or the famous poets  
who barely got away  
with their mediocrity

Suddenly, I got tired of  
seeing people for what they're not  
All I could think of is-  
if my neighbor has fed  
my cat, my cat, my cat;  
And probably,  
how much traffic there'd be  
in downtown LA  
once I get home again

“Y”

Robert Wilson

Americana is inducing stupidity  
It's 2006 and the planet is committing suicide  
This generation is swallowing it's own pills  
Overdosing on the medicine it has produced

We act upon our comotose conscience  
Thinking with only our rotting genitals  
And with much sex, we can learn about life  
Over and over and over again

The television is implanted in our brains  
A socialist tool for the weak minded  
It tells us what to do, wear, say, and listen to  
Like a big electronic Stalin we never had

Music has destroyed our sense of self  
Manipulating minds into a whirlwind of feces  
MTV guides us into an early grave  
Only to awaken us again as zombies

Political correctness kills the 1st amendment  
A battle brought on by the overly sensitive and weak  
When our right to comedy and speech dies  
This country, and world, will follow

Jesus Christ has been born again  
By the age of 18, he had 5 bastard children  
A feigned cased of ADD, and monthly welfare  
The second coming has been cancelled

# EVERY DAY WE RAPE EACH OTHER

Mel Waldman

Every day we rape each other with silent penetration, destroying sacred landscapes of the soul, digging deep into private areas of trust and hope, every day we rape;

Every day we rape each other with unconscious intention, excavating secret soil, exposing our hidden gardens and ancient temples, crushing beauty, creating darkness/evil with force, ignorance is no excuse, every day we rape;

Every day we rape each other with innocent intrusions, ejaculating covert words of hatred and prejudice, hidden inside paradoxical lines of love and peace, every day we rape;

Every day we rape each other with volcanic eruptions, evoking terror and despair, with overt explosions of rage and hatred, and two armies of soldiers at war-the first one shrieking words of violence-rushing across a labyrinth of tortuous, twisted language, torturing everyone in the line of fire with a fusillade of name calling and soul-murder, especially those we love,

and the second army, unfulfilled by killer-words, rushing forth with earthly weapons that maim and mutilate and maliciously kill, every day we rape;

Every day we rape each other with passionate revelations, madness and chaos, and hidden commandments of conformity and coercion, until we are fully brainwashed, oblivious of who we truly were, and after an invisible metamorphosis, we believe that violence is love, every day we rape, every day we die, resurrected tomorrow in Hell, where we look in the mirror and remember that we too were raped long ago, left to roam

through a soulless wilderness, reliving yesterday's hell again and again, always searching for the exit and a transient moment of peace, every day we are raped.



prose  
the meat and potatoes stuff

THE CONVENT Mel Waldman

ACT 1, SCENE 1

The analyst sits on a black leather chair (downstage center) behind and left of a white psychoanalytic couch. (The analyst, chair, and couch face the audience.) He is alone in his private office. A few minutes ago, the patient for this hour cancelled. And his former colleague's lover called to tell him his old buddy committed suicide. The next patient is due in 50 minutes.

CHARACTERS:

The Analyst: A

A The Convent was infested with evil spirits. There should have been an exorcism. Jack and I knew this. But there wasn't. So I left before it killed me. Jack stayed behind. He wanted to save lives. I wanted to save my own. The day I left, I got ill. The palpitations began. Thought I was in heart attack country. I wasn't. Just free. Until I got the call. It's quite simple. My former colleague and dear friend- Dr. Jack Kellerman-committed suicide. Anne, his live-in lover, just called and told me. Apparently, Jack's patient overdosed a few days ago. Didn't die. Son-of-a-bitch is still alive. Gonna make a full recovery. Yet Jack blamed himself. So deeply hurt that... It's simple. It makes no sense. There must be more. Of course, it's the Convent! Yeah. You see, the Clinic exists inside a very old building-used to be a convent. Jesus! What happened there-before we arrived? And after? I must confess! One by one, we died! Why? I'm a shrink! Not an exorcist! So I left. (The analyst becomes very agitated and disoriented. He sails into a seizure or... His heart pounds rapidly. His chest...!) Forgive me! Forgive me, Jack! Forgive me! The Convent! The freakin' Convent! Forgive me, Jack! Should have forced you to leave too. It's fuckin' evil! You hear me, Jack? I must confess! I killed you! I fuckin' killed you! (The analyst whirls around and around and collapses on the couch. Blackout!)

CURTAIN

ACT 1, SCENE 2

A few seconds later, the curtain rises rapidly. The analyst leaps off the couch, whirls and twirls and stops suddenly. He gazes at the audience:

A     Guilt sucks! Death sucks too! Resurrection! Hallelujah! I'm alive! Just kiddin', Jack. Didn't kill you. The Convent did. Life's my thing. My only thing. Goodbye! (He turns around and walks off-stage.)

CURTAIN



In And Out Of Siege, art by Aaron Wilder

They lived in an old country house in upstate New York, the perfect family of five. Dante was a young, blond detective standing six-feet-six, married to Maria, only five feet tall, long jet-black hair flowing down her small torso. They had two sons and one daughter ages 3, 5, and 8, named John, Michael, and Elizabeth. John and Michael had his azure eyes. Elizabeth had her mother's dark brown eyes.

Every night he hid his guns in the attic, on the top shelf of the creaky closet, in the dark crevices. All his guns were there, including his throw-away. The children were never allowed in the attic. And if they entered surreptitiously, they were too small to reach the inaccessible weapons. The old country house was a safe place for Dante's family.

But one day in June 2006, Dante vanished after leaving the police station, wearing his gun and his throw-away hidden on his body. It was the first Tuesday of the month. And it was Elizabeth's birthday. But he never made it home.

After a few days passed, Maria filed a missing persons report.

A week later, in the middle of the night, he returned, reeking of liquor, and suffering from amnesia. The week that had passed was dead-a corpse of emptiness lying in a black coffin abandoned in a wasteland he could not find. He was dead too-for it seemed his soul had been sucked out of his being by evil spirits.

Before climbing the stairs, he made the sign of the cross. Then his mind went blank again, drifting off to a soulless wilderness.

He visited Maria first, followed by Elizabeth, and then the boys. The explosions were rapid and relentless-fierce, furious, and final, occurring in less than a minute as he rushed from room to room with absolute madness and intoxication.

Afterwards, he staggered down the stairs, drifted into the kitchen and drank Scotch. A lot of Scotch.

Lost in his wasteland of alcoholism, his depraved mind believed his daughter Elizabeth, still alive in his bleak desert, was the devil. Her birthday was on June 6, 2006. And although he never saw the 3-6's on her body, he knew they were there. For one drunken night, he found them on Maria's body-or so he thought. Maria was the devil! And she gave birth to Elizabeth, Michael, and John. So they were the devil too.

This alcoholic wasteland was Dante's Inferno. And he was burning in Hell. His mind and body were on fire. There was no escape, until he pulled the trigger, eating his gun and releasing himself from the devil named SCOTCH and the horrific images of his beloved family.

## Wishing by Pat Dixon

Moira Cavendish stared into her bathroom mirror, half aware that the fluorescent bulbs on either side were washing out her color.

A seventy-two-year-old woman stared back at her, appraising her face—its wrinkles, its thin mixture of curly white and black hairs, its tired eyes, its turned down mouth with half a dozen scattered whiskers below it on her chin.

“I wish my mother were dead,” Moira whispered. “I wish—I wish—I wish . . .”

Clearing her throat with two little coughs, Moira sat on the side of the bathtub, her cell phone in her left hand, and carefully pressed the number of the New Jersey senior living facility that she called every morning around 9:30 a.m.

“Hello?” said a shaky, cracking voice. “Who is it?”

“Hello, Mother!” said Moira in a loud, cheery voice. “It’s me—Moira—your daughter!”

“I’m almost ready to start gettin’ myself up,” her mother replied. “What’s new—with you?”

“I’ve got my tickets, Mother! I’ll be down from Boston next Tuesday to spend your birthday with you—for a whole week! We’ll call it your birth-week!”

“My birthday is coming up? When is that?”

“Next Thursday, Mother! You’ll be ninety-five! How do you feel today?”

“How do I feel? How should I feel? I feel tired—and wor’ out. You would too!”

“But no worse than—yesterday? Some days I feel pretty tired myself, Mother. I guess that’s just—just life, hunh?”

“I—I’m havin’ my hair done at two o’clock today, so I better get started soon, gettin’ myself up.”

“Are you sure, Mother? You said yesterday that you were havin’ your hair done.”

There was a long pause, during which Moira counted to fifteen.

“Mother, do you want me to phone the hairdresser for you to check?”

“No—I’ve got it written down—some place.”

“I’ll be happy to phone. Why don’t I call you back in an hour or so to check if you’ve found where you wrote it down?”

After a seven-second pause, her mother replied, “That would be nice. We could talk again. What are you doing today?”

“Well—I’m going to the grocery market—an’ the shoe store—an’ the vet’s to get some more prescription cat food for Tessy, our ol’ cat—an’ prob-

ably go to the bank. An' I'll make some nice chicken soup for lunch—an' get some salmon ready to have for supper. An' I'll scoop out the cat pan a couple more times—an' do a load of laundry—maybe two loads—an' a bit o' work for the church."

"Sounds like a pretty full day. How is—how is—how is—how is—your husband?"

"Floyd's fine, Mother. He's out in the yard now, out havin' a bit of a smoke, I think, but he sends his love to you, too, Mother."

"Well—I send my love back at him. I've always liked—I've always liked—your husband. Tell him I send my love."

"I will, Mother! We both love you, too!"

"An' love to your kitty—an' to you, too—daughter."

"I'll talk to you later today, Mother. Bye for now! Love you!"

"Bye—love you."

After rinsing her face, Moira stood next to the back door watching Floyd have his fifth or sixth cigarette.

When he had sucked it down to its filter, he flicked the filter into the high grass of the back lawn and turned to see her.

"Hey, Moira. How's your mum? Any worse? Any better?"

"Just the same ol' stuff, Floyd. I'll be givin' her hairdresser a bit of a call in a couple o' minutes and then callin' Mum again t' straighten out what she's doin' today—or is not doin'."

"Sheesh, Moira. Couldn't you just let it ride f' once? So your mum misses some dang appointment—or shows up without one—what's the big whup? Am I workin' for the phone company? D' you know what these calls cost us? Every dang day?"

"D' you know what it'd cost to move her up here? Or move her in with us? Or hire a 'girl' t' spend eight hours a day with her?"

He lit another cigarette, deeply inhaled, and slowly blew the smoke upwards.

"You usin' the car t'day?" he asked.

"I've got my errands. An' I've got work at St. Michael's Thrift Shop later today. Why?"

"I noticed we're running low on Bud. Three or four more cases would be very greatly appreciated, if you'd be so good. Ask 'em t' set the cases into the car for you. I don't want you liftin' 'em with your—your bad back an' shoulder. I can lift 'em into the house when you get home."

"An' what are your plans t'day?"

"Oh, I thought I'd just—I was thinkin' I'd just slack off a bit t'day. Maybe watch the ball game on the TV this afternoon. Maybe have one or two o' the neighbor fellas in, if they're free. Ol' Dennis was feelin' poorly Sunday, an' watchin' a ball game just might be the ticket to improve his spirits."

“That an’ havin’ three or four of our beers?”

Floyd studied the cigarette in his hand, took a final drag off it, and flicked it in the direction of over seven thousand other cellulose filters that gave their backyard the appearance, on moonlit nights, of a reflection of the starry sky.

“I don’t think there’s any call to be snippy an’ pickin’ on poor Dennis, now. We happen to be a little better off than Dennis is, an’ I think it behooves the likes of us t’ do what we can. If Dennis was better off, I’m certain he’d be keepin’ up more than his end o’ things.”

“An’ Bobby? An’ Ralph? An’ Simon? An’ some others who shall be nameless?”

“Now, now, Moira, we can’t be responsible for the global problems of the world, can we? But we can try to make things a bit better for them as is local, if it’s within our powers an’ means t’ do so. It’s just the Christian-like thing to do, say I.”

Moira, her arms hanging at her sides, clenched her right fist and then her left, wincing as her finger joints pained her.

“I’m going to make that little call down to Mum’s hairdresser now,” she said. “My mum—an’ all her problems—is my responsibility—for now at least.”

Floyd shrugged and lit another cigarette.

In the bathroom again, Moira pressed the phone number for her mother’s hairdresser.

“I wish,” she repeated softly, “—I wish my mother were—dead. An’ then I wish—an’ then—an’ then I’ll finally be free—finally—just—t’ go in peace—myself.”

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## Numb by Melissa Davis

Jamie stood at the counter oblivious to her world. The customers came and went, never making a permitted impression on her. Large popcorn, small nacho; they all wanted the same.

In her mind dark thoughts painted with pain and longing kept her immune to anything anyone would say. She watched their mouths move, not caring for the words. Interesting is all she would think as she watched their lips push out and then pull back.

Weird. Her brows frowned. Do mine do that? She wanted to see, but she was already considered strange. Best for her not to do anything to make her co-workers think she was crazy.



Her body felt numb as she waited for the beat of her heart. It didn't come. I'm already dead, she mentally sighed, secure in the truth of the words. Standing in her spot she hid within herself, not wanting much but for the pain to end. The sky softened to velvet and she finally got to go.

But where? she wondered as she walked to her car. Keys in hand she honestly didn't know. Her stuff was scattered. She had no place to call home. Her men used her and her family smiled as they let her go.

I don't want to be here, she realized as the houses went by her window. It was all fake. The world was fake. None of it mattered except for the life in the trees and the blood in the veins. But even that would pass. Her flesh felt cold.

She parked in her parents' driveway. Inside her mother slept, like always. She had given up on the world long ago, but not before it stole the strength she needed to finish the job. Jamie had the strength. She knew this world was bullshit. Filled with nothing more than lies and tears, and at nineteen she had seen more than her share of both.

She smiled at her cats as she walked to her room. She wanted to touch them, feel their soft fur one last time. But she wouldn't. Her fingers were numb like the rest of her. The thought of not being able to feel the few little beings who truly loved her was almost too much for her to take, so she decided not to think about it.

In her room, beneath her pillow, laid her savior. She had thought about this night for days, mentally preparing for the quick sting ahead. She didn't believe she would really do it. But after witnessing the mindless use of her body by others, and the neglect of her heart and mind she knew she couldn't stay in a world so cold. It was her choice, and she was making it.

One last shower and one last change, she was ready. The cold steel didn't penetrate the lonely cape she had wrapped around herself years ago. The red was beautiful against her creamy skin. A slight smile crossed her lips as she laid down to rest. Her soul was tired. The relaxing, forgiving music that was sleep filled her.

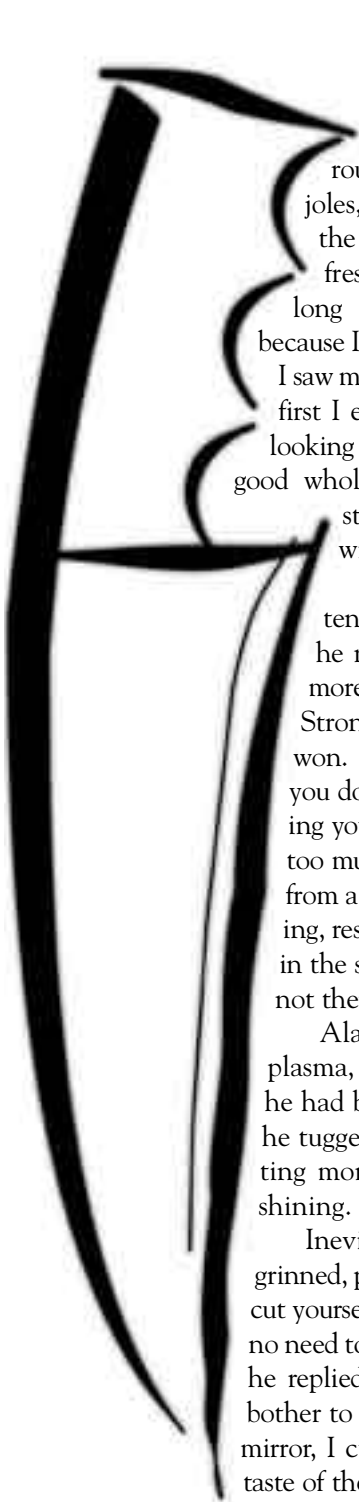
How much as she suffered at others' hands? How many fights had she gone through that weren't her own? Too many, too much. This was her own. It was her choice and her doing. She left no note to explain. Why should she? No one had ever explained to her.

The beautiful music filling her soothed her mind as it healed her wounds. Yes, she had made the right choice. She was sure of it as she faded into the blackness filling her.

The blood soaking into her bed and sheets never bothered her as she mentally whispered her final goodbye to the world. The world that didn't care for the ones that lived in it. It couldn't, and if it couldn't then how could we?

# THE CUTTER

by A. McIntyre



There he was again, and it was always the same routine. I watched in the mirror, eating the beef, the frijoles, the tortillas and salsa, while he cut his stomach with the machete. The thin lines in his dark flesh ran with fresh bright blood onto white dungarees. I watched for a long time, interested, my appetite no longer affected because I witnessed this every night. It had been months now. I saw myself in the new customers, how it was the night when first I encountered him. I saw the disbelief, the horror as, looking up from the plates of food, food they were enjoying, good wholesome delicious food, they were confronted by a strange bright eyed bleeding man. Cutting himself with a machete. For money. Or was it something else?

I grinned, sipping my beer. They became pale, tense, trying to ignore him, hoping he would go away, but he never left until they paid. He just cut himself a bit more, waiting. He knew they would eventually succumb. Strong willed, some tried to outlast him. But he always won. The blood flowed, it was all too much. What could you do? Your girlfriend was there, your wife, you were eating your meal, it wasn't supposed to be like that. It was all too much. The coins fell onto the table, angrily rummaged from a pocket. Maybe even a note. Thus he worked his living, restaurant to restaurant, table to table, night after night, in the small provincial town. The waiters pretended he was not there. After all, what can you do with a man like that?

Alarmingly, sometimes the blood ceased to flow. Only plasma, exuding sticky gold like oil. Now and then, when he had been at it for too long. His muscular torso rippling, he tugged and pulled at the lacerations, opening them, cutting more, rubbing the wounds until they bled. His eyes shining. He made a good wage.

Inevitably, he came to my table. He knew me by now. I grinned, pointing. He smiled. I gave him a 200 peso bill, Don't cut yourself for me, my friend. After all, it was a hell of a show, no need to do any more. May God grant you all that you desire, he replied firmly, moving towards the next table. I did not bother to watch. I knew the routine. Observing myself in the mirror, I cut into the beef, adding a little salsa. I savored the taste of the blood, the meat softening in my mouth.

part four of  
**THE DRIVE**  
Kenneth DiMaggio



But down below was a landscape that a painter like Edward Hopper would appreciate. Fortunately, there was still a lot of the old industrial city left; homog-

enization in the form of strip malls and condo-plexes had only recently begun to bulldoze their presence, but most of the hilly streets were lined with big, wide, flat roofed clapboard shingled, three story houses. For each floor of them, there was a different color—one that did not contrast too much with the color above or below. One story might be green; the next one a pale lime, the top floor white. Each floor also had a porch with thick baseball bat shaped banisters —though most of the porches were empty. They did not have the lawn chairs and stuffy broken couches on them as they did when I was a kid, and when my grandmother was still alive and owned one of these three family tenements. Another quirk that they had were heavy mahogany doors with tall oval glass curtained windows; doors that reminded me of old haunted funeral homes. When I was a paperboy, I was always a bit afraid to ring the doorbells to such houses in order to collect money for the newspaper. I always imagined that a skeleton or ghoul was about to pull back just a slip of that curtain to see who was at the front door! Unfortunately, no ghosts ever came to greet me, only stooped, potato skinned old people who took forever digging butter colored bony fingers into a purse in order to pull out the right amount of pennies, nickels, and odd dime to pay me.

Some of the other blue collar institutions that held up this community were still there, liked the Roman Catholic church; this one named after some Slavic saint or martyr whose name I could never pronounce. Like the church I was looking at now. It had a girth similar to the clapboard houses and factories. It was a short and wide and brick A-framed; no fancy spires for St. Stashu's. What this church did have were long wide steps. For the kids in the neighborhood back then, the steps were a cool place to hang out. If you were ballsy enough, you would light up a cigarette and smoke it in front of what was for you the whole damn world. For the most part, that included the priest and the cops: they were the ones always coming by to tell ya to "Beat it before you get arrested for loit'ring." Recently, the steps have become a marketplace for dealers at nights. Each morning leaves a dew of crack vials on these steps.

There was hardly any other life that walked up that concrete. There had not been a marriage at St. Stashu's for at least a generation; as for funerals, even they were becoming scarce. The last generation to faithfully attend church were just about depleted. St. Stashu's should have been closed yesterday. What few, frail,

veiled old women who still came during the day to pray, had less time to live than the number of beads on their rosaries.

The few brick turreted and cylinder'd factories should have also been knocked down a decade ago. Because they were not, is why the acid of Time started doing its job. Some of the bricks were loose and crumbling, and sections of a factory wall were now a buckled, uneven surface. Picture a pile of unevenly stacked shoe boxes. Most of these factories' dark copper colored windows had been smashed: even the graffiti was faded and archaic. "Iron Butter..." was one of the tags you could make out. Iron Butterfly. A hard rock 60s group that had one great song: "In a Gadda- Da Vida," before being sent to the scrap music metal heap. In the corner, a tin sign with an inverted pyramid of three small black upside down triangles against a yellow circle: the symbol for a fallout shelter. When the Russians dropped their atom bomb on this city, we would all run for safety to this factory basement. The only thing permanent—at least in the plant I was focusing on—was a black iron gate hinged before a bricked up arch doorway. The metal or wood "For Lease" sign placed across the bars now just said: "For". The last word that would ever come from this structure. This factory would either fall completely down, someone would finally knock it down, or some kids would burn it down. Until then, it would just have to be a structure without any purpose.

At least I was not the only one driving a ten or more year old car that was about to fall apart. There was an over due mothballed fleet of such vehicles in this city. And from the top of Holy Land, you saw how they lined the streets like a tin, broken, old toy train. Even when they were no longer running, their owners still hung on to them, placing these tireless corroded hulks on cinder blocks in the backyard or behind a rotting shingle-less garage. How could their owners part with such craft? These old V-8 cars were more than just a means to get from Mall A to Mall B: these old cars were the pride of the country in the same way the old sailing ships were the pride of the British navy. How it must have hurt the old sailors who saw their ship being towed out to sea by the new practical steam ship, and once out to sea, the four masted warrior would be burned—just like the English painter Turner depicted it, but in this small city, it was hard for the old sailors to scuttle their no longer sea worthy grand vessels.

Let old retired Stashu hang on to his Pontiac Catalina or Buick Regal for as long as he wants: the post modern had already come to this city that was still wrestling with the modern. And the post modern came in these orange and white windowless and probably bomb proof and time proof, public self storage units. There was now a honeycomb-like labyrinth made up of them: a maze that began to intersect through this city. Why the need for so many of these spaces? Today, things were supposed to be obsolescent: if you were not "hip" to the new model, then you fell behind, became stuck; started to rot, like this old city. The answer to this post-modern puzzle might be better found in the horror that was discovered in one of these plastic boxes. Long after the lease on one expired, the manager opened it up. He discovered the bagged remains of several dismembered bodies that were never identified. Neither were the police ever able to trace the owner; who used a fictitious

name along with credentials that could never be traced. No one seemed scared though about a serial killer being loose in Rustville. What need to feel danger “lurking” in these streets? You could have lived right next door to the space where this gruesome butchery was going on. But because you could not see it, or even smell it—and because the terror taking place was safely sealed within its own world, well then, you might as well have been living at the other end of the continent from this plastic box where human beings were becoming anonymous dismemberment.

I disdainfully shook my head.

Yes, it was my city, and I thought I knew it, just like I also thought it was mine to dispose of. Yet in spite of such smugness and arrogance, I also knew that I was the one being disposed of, and if so, I should count myself lucky.

The truth? I was not so much disposed of as I was, well, someone who could not let go—I wanted to embrace everything!

But most of what was now everything, was in decay. And that is why most of what I held and tried to bring to my soul was broken glass, rubble, rusted twisted steel...no longer blinking and left behind words or images that would always seem dead.

“A penny for your thoughts?” I heard her say.

“That’s still too much,” I said.

“Well, you could give them away,” she said, “the same way that you do with your poetry that you photocopy onto small stapled books.”

“Thanks for reminding me,” I said.

“Hey, the best stuff in life is either stolen or free,” she said. “And I bet you that church is.”

“What church?” I asked.

She pointed to a church, but different from the one I had been previously looking at.

“That one over there,” she said, pointing to the left of her.

The church she pointed at was gray, and had two flat-topped towers on both sides of a wide peaked front. Sort of like a cathedral but smaller. So what was the big deal? It was just one more church attended by a few, bony, black veiled old immigrant ladies.

She giggled.

“You don’t recognize it, do you,” she said.

“Actually, I do,” I said. “It’s where I made my First Communion, which is why I prefer to forget it.”

“That church where you made your First Communion,” she said with a trace of haughtiness, “I learned about in my Art History class.”

I turned to her and raised an eyebrow.

“That church is a replica of Notre Dame—the big medieval cathedral in Paris.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know what you’re talking about.”

Well, sort of. I knew about the cathedral from Victor Hugo’s novel—well, actually, from the cartoon movie made about the novel.

But now that I had seen the movie, I am definitely going to read the book.

“You’ve not been to Paris?”

“I don’t think my car will make it that far,” is how I gently explained my ‘challenged traveling experiences.’

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she said with embarrassment. “I just thought that since you were a writer and all, you—“

She stopped herself from “stepping” into more embarrassment. It was kind of cute and refreshing to see that things had not changed when I was a Freshman, and being a drinking, Paris-based writer like Hemingway is a cliché I would not mind living—at least the latter part. The drinking, well, a beer or two a day would be good enough. No need to do anymore, and I am sure Paris would be great (after all, it was where some of the greatest writers ever deteriorated in, like Rimbaud and Baudelaire, and that literary serial killer, Lautreamont). But I would be happy just to have a futon or a couch in New York.

“If I’ve been there, it’s only because of a school trip,” she tried to explain.

“That’s okay, you don’t have to apologize,” I said.

“For me, the best part of that city was, well...”

She giggled.

“Sort of what you have right here. A big hill where you could see the whole city. Only there, there’s a big fat basilica called Sacre Couer, or Sacred Heart.”

“And on top of this hill here is a work of art called Holy Land,” I said

She nodded in agreement.

“But Paris didn’t have anything like that old train yard,” she said.

I looked in the direction she was pointing. This yard was at the edge of town; in a shallow crater about half a mile wide, were a dozen or so bronze or rancid yellow freight cars. Some of them were sinking into the ground, some of them were standing crooked. At one end were two or three yellow cabooses; at the other end, two old red Pullman passenger cars that looked like a slice of an art deco skyscraper turned sideways and put on wheels. Part of this crater was surrounded by a half dead, leafless forest.

The other side was a small complex of several small, factory-like buildings.

“That’s not a railroad station,” I said. “That’s a scrap yard.”

“Oh,” she said, and in a tone of disappointment.

“But we can go there too,” I said, trying to be hopeful. “I’ve still got a few hours.”

“And then you become sober?” The Young Artist said.

“Funny,” I said, “but it’s because I ain’t drunk—I mean wild, screaming, dangerous drunk, that I’ve got to leave here. People on this toxic surface drink to live. But I want to drink for a reason, that at the very least, has no purpose whatever.”

She slowly nodded, as if she was being careful not to break the delusion of a mad man. Oh well, I would not harm her or snap in any way. I might insult her though. Go ahead. Push my buttons, and I’ll call you a Republican.

“Sounds like a plan,” she said. She mockingly rolled her eyes—there was a sign of playfulness in her mockery.

I smiled and in that smile, owned up to all the holes in the boat with which I was about leave land.

"It's more than a plan," I said. "It's a vision. I'm going to New York City, where my friend has a loft above a drag queen bar in the East Village. And in this loft, there is at least one futon that is not broken. And if there isn't, there's a couch that I can sleep on."

She slowly shook her head.

"I don't know," she said. "Sounds like a 'drink-to-live' situation to me."

"It is not," I quickly explained. "It's an urgent need to create and perform because every other week this loft becomes a performing space called 'Café Nico'."

"Café Nico?"

"Yeah, named after this dead, fucked up junkie singer—and during some of these readings and performances—damn—you don't need to drink or smoke anything with the way a poet or performer can suddenly make the room feel as if it had been sprinkled with midsummer's night dust."

"As in Shakespeare?" she asked, a bit confused.

"As in Puck—and all those animals and creatures in a dream within the dream—as in the imagination of a great artist called Shakespeare. But don't worry. I'm also practical. Within a couple of days of living on my friend's futon—"

"Or couch," she interrupted.

"Let's think positive here. Yes, after a couple of days, I'm going to go out and get a serious temp job as a waiter or word processor while I write about my own dreams under the influence or I mean inspiration of midsummer night's dust. So whattiya think. Sound like a plan?"

She slightly "frowned" up her lips as if to say, maybe, maybe not, and then asked:

"What's 'midsummer night's dust'?"

"I don't know," I replied, because I had not thought of it before, but now that I had: "It's whatever poison or sweetness inspires you. For me, part of it are things like Holy Land."

"What about your car?" she asked. "You think it will make it to New York City?"

My front teeth made a quick bite of my lower lip.

"This car is still tough and has some bite, and things that are tough and have bite will at least make it to The Bronx. What about you? I know you're tough, and if you don't bite—well, the way you're looking at me, you probably do. A-Hem!"

I quickly cleared my throat as a way to underscore the frown that was starting to burn across her face. Hey, it's not often you can make a nice playful dig at a vampire.

"But you must have some of that midsummer's night's dust," I continued. "Don't tell me you don't have any of that mid-summer night's dust—all that frolicking stuff. I know you do. But have you got any impractical dreams?"

She nervously giggled and said in a slightly apologetic tone:

"I wouldn't call what you're doing impractical, but—I don't know. Maybe I want to teach—don't laugh—but to little kids—but not—with coffins."

"You would not teach them how to make little coffins?"

"No!" she said, looking at me as if I was crazy, and then added:

“I don’t know—who knows—as it is, I’m missing class!”

“Don’t blame me,” I quickly said.

“But—now that I’ve gotten to see some of Holy Land, I’d like to build my own—well, maybe not Holy Land—but some crazy little world like this where people can come to and just, well, until we can come up with a better world.”

“Personally, I don’t think that’s a bad idea. And maybe I should write a book like that,” I said. “Or better yet, I write the book version of your sculpture land—or whatever it is you’re going to sculpt.”

“Hm—I like that. But what kind of world is this going to be?”

“Hmmm, that’s a lot to think about without having breakfast. I at least need a cup of coffee before I think about creating anything on an epic scale.”

Her mouth began to make an uneasy squish.

“I don’t know,” she uneasily said. “It all depends what breakfast is. For one thing, I’ve a vegan.”

Great, I thought to myself. A vegan vampire. I would love to bite you on the neck, but I am afraid if I do, it will mean that that I am eating meat. And I can’t do that, because I am a vegan. No wonder nobody could get a bona-fide evil pagan bonfire going. Ahh, don’t be so hard on her, just because her plans don’t include a couch—I mean, a futon like yours. Maybe she had the realistic idea. Forget vampires and lofts and for that matter, religion, politics, and all that other junk. At least in the way those things have always been. Create your own world and if possible, make it out of the junk. If I was convinced of anything (yet without still being able to fully articulate it) a world built on material that has been already been thrown away, was a world that was going to have more durability than the one most people on that interstate were guzzling their lives in such a hurry to get .

But first we had to get out of Holy Land and the neighborhood it was in.

Well, she would make it to the car. I felt confident about making a quarter mile walk to a destination without any coffee. My worry was the car itself: would it be able to go? Not just down this small mountain, but to the diner, a few other stops, and eventually New York City. In addition to all that, my vehicle had a new mission: it would be a craft used to help discover materials for a still un-defined art project.

The Young Artist was ready to embark. She was also intrigued by my car.

“Ut-uh,” I said to her. For as soon as we had gotten to the car, she smiled and even made a happy ‘squeak’ as she saw what potential treasures my car might yield. She frowned, but I still did not give in. My mess still had a method to it and I would have to know a woman for more than twenty minutes before she has the right to clean up that mess. Nevertheless, after she had settled into the front seat, she leaned over it and began rummaging through the back.

“You’re not using anything in my car as material for your art project.”

“Oh, come on,” she said.

“Because for one thing, my unfinished novel is back there, and that’s not junk—at least not yet.”

“Then why do all the pages have all this different writing—and none of the pages seem to be in order.”



“That’s because—“

I started the car and gave the pedal a heavy throttle—more to keep myself from hearing me swear than her.

“Everyone who hops on board decides to do a little editing or adding to the great American failure in progress.”

It was too late. She was already reading and was soon scribbling with a pencil she plucked from who knows where.

—well, she seemed intensely drawn in to whatever she was reading—or writing.

It was the latter from the way her pencil started furiously moving and then suddenly stopped. And then started. It was hard to tell while I was driving; hard to tell if she now had a small smile of embarrassment or delinquent delight; probably the latter; or that is what I hoped. At least for this manuscript. Who cared if it never had an obvious plagiarist’s chance of ever becoming the Great American Novel? If my literary chaos, degeneration, and forgery served as a narrative that invited vandalism, well then hell, I had accomplished something in the arts after all. Maybe it would inspire others to go and vandalize even better books than mine. Why not. They are all dead: books died a long time ago. The only difference is that the ones that are big, ugly, and INTIMIDATING monuments make everyone afraid to say Boo! Everyone walks lightly around the great classic or the popular book of the microsecond sold to you as a classic on the talk show. But as soon as someone pops open the laptop, so much for the great obelisk known as *The Book*.

The young artist had the right idea about vandalizing my manuscript (at least that is what I hoped she was doing). It is pretty hard to graffiti a work in progress that everybody....Who knows? Eventually such a mess might become a great work of ruins; sort of like Holy Land.

I don’t know if she was vandalizing my book, but it did seem inspiring. Whatever she and anybody else did to my five hundred plus pages in the back seat could only help it.

The same way the rust, decay, graffiti, and discarded syringes helped the Williamsburg Bridge connecting the lower part of Manhattan become a great piece of post industrial art.

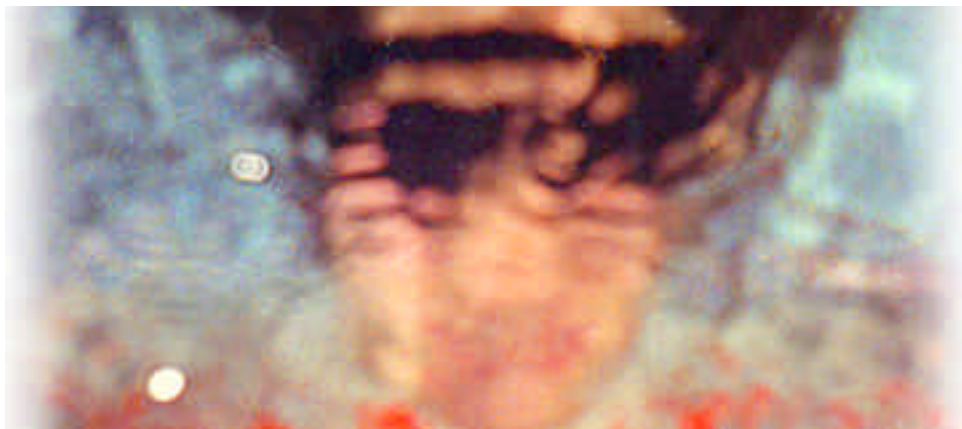
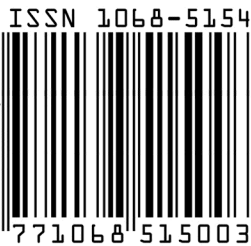
But how could such a brilliant and adventurous mind like hers be in awe of Notre Dame cathedral? Well, there was still the rest of the morning to put some “bad” into her good taste.

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# children churches & daddies



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