

v167

December '06



children  
*churches*  
& daddies

# table of contents

## The Boss Lady's Editorial

Putting Up Walls Is Never The Solution .....	2
The Columbine Connection & a Love Affair With Violence .....	4

## News You Can Use

Saudi Arabia: Banning Cats & Dogs? .....	7
---	---

## Poetry (the passionate stuff)

Mel Waldman .....	8
David Matson <i>art</i> .....	8
Valorie Mall .....	9
Alex Dimitrov .....	10
Cheryl Townsend <i>art</i> .....	10
Christopher Barnes .....	10
John Grey .....	11
Grace Connolly .....	12
Josh Rahn .....	13
Bill DeArmond .....	13
Eric Bonholtzer <i>art</i> .....	14
Michael Ceraolo .....	14
Roger N. Taber.....	15
Donna Hunt .....	15
Edward Micahel O'durr Supranowicz <i>art</i> .....	16
Edward G. Lynch .....	16

## Prose (the meat & potatoes stuff)

Pat Dixon .....	17
Mel Waldman .....	22
Vince Stamey .....	23
Bill DeArmond .....	24
<i>art</i> donated by C Ra McGuirt .....	33
Kenneth DiMaggio .....	33
Nick Brazinsky <i>art</i> .....	40

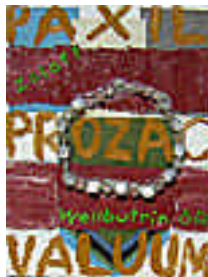
## Scars Art

2-7, 9 (clockwise: Marty jumping off beach ball at a pool, Lisa underwater, Joel in a innertube at a pool, Lisa on a pier in Naples, men from the Plush Horse on a raft in a pool), . Cover art is of Miami palm trees.

*from Timothy Lynch, policy director at the CATO Institute, on the Patriot Act:*

“If the president were to go on TV and say things like, ‘We need National I.D. cards, we need to do away with search warrants and we need to have a greater role for the CIA in the homeland,’ most Americans would be like, ‘Whoa. Is this all really necessary?’ Most Americans don’t appreciate yet how the Bill of rights has been eroded.”

You Took  
My Life  
Lightly,  
art by  
Aaron  
Wilder



the boss lady's editorial

# Putting Up Walls Is Never the Solution

So we've been hearing on the news lately about how Republicans are voting to put up a wall along our southern border. For the second time, the House approved a 700-mile border fence, you know, because it's stretching our guard thin, trying to monitor the southern borders. They say it's to so illegal immigration from Mexico, but they underline every comment about this topic with comments about protecting our borders from terrorists entering our country.



Now, they haven't figured out how to pay for this wall, they've just voted that we need it. Maybe it would end up being cheaper than hiring people to monitor those borders, but still... We don't need to worry about the cost of anything here, we're worried about making us *safe*, right? Isn't that President Bush's premise about giving up some of our fundamental rights in this country just to make us feel temporarily safe?

When I was hearing about this plan, all I could think was that it seemed just like what China did, when one town wanted to protect itself so it created a wall, then another town did the same, eventually being strung to the Great Wall of China — which I think is the only man-made structure visible from outer space. But then, when I think of that, it makes me think of the *South Park* episode where the mayor asked the Chinese guy who runs the City Wok restaurant (which the Chinese man always pronounces as “shitty Wok”) to build a wall around *South Park* — and as soon as he finished building the wall, Mongolians on horseback kept coming along, trying to break down his wall. And I don't want to philosophize about *South Park*, but the point of that





episode was that putting up walls didn't make the town better, and the notion of feeling safe was utterly useless.

But maybe something *can* be learned from a cartoon show like this. If we're worried about illegal immigration from Mexico, maybe we should learn to better deal with (and kick out of the country) already exist-

ing illegal immigrants (granted, our costs for basic produce from southern states might go up, but that's the price we say we're willing to claim for having our country be immigrant free, right?). Maybe video cameras at a guard station for physically watching a larger area would work if you want to protect the southern border, where someone checking cameras could contact one helicopter (because of large areas being monitored by one person with many screens) or truck to stop anyone who is witnessed on video crossing the border illegally.

Or maybe the screening process for immigration to the United States could be made a little easier — I mean, this country was founded on a bunch of immigrants, but when they legally came to this country, they worked to be Americans, and they didn't continue to adore and pledge allegiance to the country they deserted for a better life in America.



And for some reason, I don't think the effort to build walls along the southern border really has anything to do with stopping terrorists from entering this country. You know, since most terrorists were legally in this country to begin with. That, and it's proba-

bly easier to sneak in from Canada, if they really wanted to try. It's just a shame when one political party tries to push a point so hard, that it ends up pushing the wrong way, for the wrong reasons. They only make a bigger mess of our country, while they keep telling themselves they're doing what's best.



editor's photo at the Great Wall of China

*Janet Kuypers*®  
Janet Kuypers  
Editor in Chief

# The Columbine Connection

## And a love affair with violence

### Part one: Video Games and Murderers

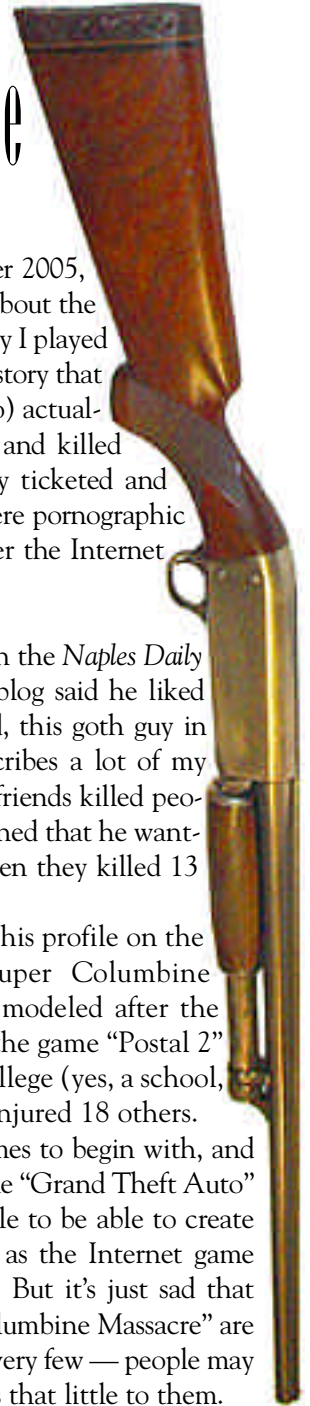
This touches on a past editorial (v155, December 2005, called “video games, violence, porn & death”) I did about the changes in video games over the years (back in the day I played Ms. Pac Man, or maybe Tetris), where I brought up a story that someone (who really liked playing Grand Theft Auto) actually mimicked one of the scenes in the video game and killed police officers in the station after he was previously ticketed and brought in to the station. I mentioned that there were pornographic scenes that were hidden from the public, but all over the Internet were the pass codes to get to those scenes.

And this is a video game that teens play.

But anyway, I only mention this because I read in the *Naples Daily News* today an AP article titled “Gunman said in blog said he liked playing game about Columbine shootings.” Granted, this goth guy in Montreal was a loner who wore dark clothes (describes a lot of my friends I remember from my youth, but none of my friends killed people), but this Kimveer Gill, in his blogs, even mentioned that he wanted to do this, just like when Klebold and Harris when they killed 13 people at the Columbine massacre.

Gill, who loved guns (yeah, you can check out his profile on the site [vampirefreaks.com](http://vampirefreaks.com)), played the game “Super Columbine Massacre,” yes, there’s actually an Internet game modeled after the 1999 Colorado high school shooting. He said that the game “Postal 2” was “too childish,” and decided to go to Dawson College (yes, a school, like Columbine), where he killed one person and injured 18 others.

Now, I’ve talked about the insanity in these games to begin with, and yes, I’ve mentioned that a lot of people play games like “Grand Theft Auto” that aren’t murderers. And yes, the freedom of people to be able to create games like this (even games as tasteless and tacky as the Internet game “Super Columbine Massacre”) should be preserved. But it’s just sad that someone out there thinks that games like “Super Columbine Massacre” are good for people, and it’s a shame that some — albeit very few — people may want to play out these games, because real life means that little to them.



## Part two: Emulating Murderous Heroes

I thought my writing my little piece about someone loving a Columbine Internet video game would be enough for this, but in less than a week after I read about that Canada shooting did I see this AP article, where teens were suspected in a school shooting plot, in part because they were obsessed with the 1999 mass killing at Columbine.

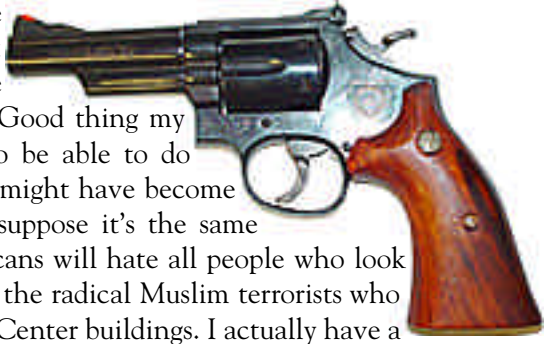
This story can from our own country, actually, in Green Bay Wisconsin, where two 17 year olds (Cornell and Sturtz were these kid's last names) were stopped after a concerned student actually went to an associate principal of Green Bay West High School, to talk about these two boys. When police checked, Cornell and Sturtz had 20 "crudely made" homemade bombs, as well as 9 rifles and shotguns, a handgun, knives and ammunition. They even had camouflage clothes, gas masks and two-way radios — and mannequin heads that had been previously used for target practice. The reports said Sturtz was "obsessed with pain and death," and he just lost an Internet relationship with a girl. Police captain Lisa Sturr said, "Sturtz was very upset about this and became extremely enraged and (recently) talked of soon attacking the school like Columbine."

Well, a good thing this was stopped in advance, but one thing about this AP article I thought was funny is that they gave a lot of detail about the anger and rage of Sturtz, but this is what they said about Cornell: "Cornell has been described as being depressed over the last couple of years and hating school, according to Sterr." Now, I remember my high school days, and I was pretty damn depressed to have to deal with my parents, and yes, pretty much every child hates school, so I wondered if this Cornell guy was something more like Sturtz' lackey who would follow blindly, but I don't know. Then by the last sentence of this AP article by Robert Imire, they reported that another 17 year-old student, Felicia LaPere "said Sturts had a darker side and was into goth culture." I only bring this up, because



not only was Mr. Gill in Montreal was described as "goth" (wow, there really must be a connection with being "goth" and being a killer, then), and because my husband, when looking at what music I listened to in high school and hoe I always wanted to wear black (my mom, bless her heart, wouldn't let me, so I brought black clothes in my backpack and changed once I got to school) said that for all intents and purposes, even though we didn't have the name "goth" to cling to, I was in part a goth kid.

It's funny, how people can make assumptions that "goth" kids are more inclined to be murderers. Good thing my parents made me afraid to be able to do anything on my own, or I might have become a murderer myself. But I suppose it's the same way more ignorant Americans will hate all people who look middle-eastern, because of the radical Muslim terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center buildings. I actually have a friend who converted so he could be a Muslim, and he is the most caring, nonviolent friend I have.



So much for stereotypes.

So Hell, I'm the boss lady and this is my editorial, so I'm supposed to have a neat wrap-up ending opinion about all of this now. This originally started off as a commentary about video games and American Culture, but it morphed into a love affair with Columbine. Well, I can tell you first off that you shouldn't make assumptions that "goth" kids are planning to kill anyone (just like how all Muslims aren't terrorists, silly). And, according to that first editorial about a Canada shooting, you can't assume that a video game is what drives people to kill. Evidence of that can be found in the second part of this editorial, some people just have sick ideas all on their own, without the help of a video game egging them on. And maybe yeah, maybe these video games do egg on the one who are already so violently inclined, but keel in mind that there are a lot more people who play these albeit sick games who don't kill people. So maybe is people have a problem with these games



(by trying to blame them for the behaviors of murderers who have played them), should look at ways to change the attitude of people who find games like this valuable in the first place.

*Janet Kuypers*®

Janet Kuypers  
Editor in Chief

## Saudi Arabia: Banning Cats and Dogs?

Based on an AP report by Donna Abu-Nasr,  
relayed by the editor of cc&d

This is kind of cool, I get to report on a story I read and want to share with you. I read an AP article in the *Naples Daily News* on 09/09/06 that in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, the religious police (the Muttawa) now have additional bans to worry about. Normally they're worrying about making sure women are appropriately covered, making sure unmarried men and women do not mix in the streets, and making sure men regularly attend Mosque prayers religiously, but now a new ban is in place: a ban on the sale of cats and dogs.

You see, the Muttawa are given leeway "to enforce any laws they deem necessary to uphold social order," and so they decided to ban the same of cats and dogs because young people have been purchasing their pets and "parading them in public" (which Donna Abu-Nasr describes now as a "fashion statement," and these pet owners are now using their pets as a "status symbol").

Keeping pets is not historically common, but in the past people have kept dogs for hunting and guarding.

Now, apparently conservative Muslims don't think dogs are good (the AP article said "Muslims despise dogs as unclean"). But the cat ban confuses people, because (well, other than my personal opinion that they're adorable and don't clobber all over you like a dog would...) the Islamic tradition says that Prophet Muhammad loved cats — and I quote Donna Abu-Nasr, Muhammad "even let a cat drink from his absolutions water before washing himself for prayer."

Now, according to reports, no one knows if the Muttawa planned to confiscate purchased pets, is people who already owned dogs and cats would still be allowed to walk in public with their pets ("What's the point of dragging a dog behind you?" Aleetha al-Jihani wrote in a letter to Al-Madina newspaper. This is blind emulation of the infidels"). And since pet stores can't sell cats and dogs, no one knows if this means that pet owners could sell puppies or kittens born from their pets.

And if things like terrorism and unemployment are so common in the area, you have to wonder why they are watching over little details from Western civilization — when they already have things like "fast food, shorts, jeans and pop music that have become more common" in the area.

Iran's Shiite clerics even have religious police who harass people who go outside with their dogs. And yeah, it confuses me — as well as a lot of other people — that the ban for cats also exists, "since there's no scorn for them as there is for dogs in Islamic traditions."





## MY NAME'S KAFKA

Mel Waldman

My name's Kafka and I'm on trial for secret crimes never revealed to me. Yet how can I be a criminal if no crime's been committed? Of course, you claim I'm in denial, as I sit in a dark rectangular cell and contemplate the total chaos of the universe, especially the haphazard existence of human beings. Still in the labyrinth of my mind, I hear the distant sounds of a majestic Stradivarius, and the plucking of random strings producing the sweet harmony of chance.

And although you say I'm guilty of an unknown heinous crime, condemning me to life imprisonment, being Kafka, I dream of metamorphosis, and when I listen to the sacred sounds of violins, I fly through prison bars, and far away, vanishing in the turquoise sky, grotesque being that I am, I am also beautiful, like the invisible strings of beauty flowing gently through the fabric of the universe, secretly embracing, rushing slowly to the Void.



The Claw,  
art by  
David  
Matson



# Grace Filled Movement

Valorie Mall

The cool water slides smoothly over my body.  
I glide as gracefully through the fluid,  
As I move clumsily through the air  
When I am on solid ground.

Water gives me limp free movement.  
I feel poised and beautiful.  
My arms move in perfect rhythm.  
Legs kicking to match their pace.  
I float gently in a liquid cradle.

Right now I savor the beautiful sensation,  
Of painless movement and joyful expression.  
I roll, spin, and somersault,  
Impossible movement on solid land,  
But here within my watery kingdom,  
I am free to move as I please.



# Madonna and Child

Alex Dimitrov

Friday night service on Christopher Street,  
medallion mass and observance of  
virgins lighting cigarettes.

Our saints slut back stares down the disco  
where rent and trade swap for  
the dosage they've lost.

Now only the mother of God can forgive them.

Her record spins twice  
and they're fed full fed up.  
All the pain they must mock to feel better.

And I don't care if his face gives out  
before you call my name.  
I'm down on my knees,

I know you'll take me there.



Open Door,  
art by Cheryl  
Townsend

# A Mindless Silence Is Pictureless

Christopher Barnes, UK

A fish circles  
Fathoms down  
Unable to see  
Anything but the blackness  
Of its own imagination.

# THE FALL OF MAN AND ITS EFFECT ON RELATIONSHIPS

John Grey

I'm watching the fall of man closely.  
I wonder why we don't just go all the way,  
develop claws and fangs, really become beasts.  
We're sedate and calm and well-mannered  
despite the treachery of our birthright.  
You can't tell that we disobeyed orders  
right from the beginning when we open  
the door for you or arrive grinning and  
sweet with chocolates and flowers.  
When I hear wolves howl at night from deep  
in the forest, I ask myself, if I'm a descendent  
of Cain, why aren't I howling from in here?  
Why isn't it the wolves who feel the  
hair rising on the back of the head,  
who shudder and pale at the piercing sound?  
And why, when the women abandon me do I  
feel betrayed when surely I must be deceitful and  
dangerous and undeserving of that  
caring and affection in the first place?  
Many's the time, I've sat here alone,  
pondered all the duplicity and  
selfishness and cruelty of man  
through the ages and felt it lead  
eventually to me. Still, I offer myself  
to the next one in my life to give  
content and shape to the murders, to the lies.  
We walk hand and hand through the park  
in moonlight as if that's the only journey.

# The world

by Grace Connolly

I don't really have a word to express the malady I'm feeling. From the looks of it,  
I'm reeling. Reeling nothing in, retching out my lungs. I'm so high strung and burned out  
Everything is small I want to shout and I cant please anyone.  
Yoga is so small, my problems, my meals, and any and all conversation.  
There is a certain participation factor required.

I don't find the need to be talking through another expired birthday.  
Yet I continue.

There is a man who runs my yoga class-his meditations make me sad. He talks about all of the lack.  
Giving everyone flack as they walk out of the subway. Petitions 3 blocks above St. Marks. Hamburgers being consumed, 3 blocks above, below, and on.

Postcards outside the john outside of the john in the really cheap falafel place. This city is pretty much only postcards, each of them could be pretty much the most successful match I'll ever meet.

Sick.

The yoga mat smells like feet. The only thing this hedonist is dripping is some wine out of the glass. Sweat  
All over the yoga mat. All over sheets. Words, all over the streets, into the ears of no one I really care about.

I'm twenty three. I have no clout. I'm not on the page I was thought to be assuming. I want to be mechanical. I want to be soft.

Zooming in, I'd like to be taking off. To Ethiopia , the beach, the water on the sand...

The world is very much out of hand.

# REVOLUTION

I murdered your tongue.  
I tossed your words in the sea.  
I carved out your tears  
and filled the hollow spaces with raw meat.  
I blistered your earth  
with my scalding teeth.  
Josh Rahn Seven times Seven I dragged your infant bones  
around the perimeter of dead men.  
For You: I pulled fish from the air and tore at them with steel.  
I tore open a star and removed myself inside.  
I carried away an atmosphere and left our world gasping.

---

## The Quiet

Bill DeArmond

There is a quiet here  
A stillness more pervasive than the grave  
A haunting vacuum created by  
    the sighs of those who have known  
        loss  
            abuse  
                ridicule  
                    injustice  
                        loneliness

It is the silent emptiness  
    of lives whose dreams were let slip by  
    of lips on the deathbed that whisper  
        “If only...If only...”

It is the place we all visit  
    time to time  
Life, by its nature, is not without its silences  
It is a place from which some never escape  
    for its pull is often stronger than the will  
    and we slide down its banks  
        without even recognizing  
            that we are moving

Yes, there is an eternal quiet here  
    that lies waiting knowing patient  
    for it has nothing but time



art by Eric  
Bonholtzer

# Space Oddity

Michael Ceraolo

The war of the worlds began with the war of the words  
was back in the twenty-first century;  
a convention of astronomically bureaucratic astronomers,  
a less-than stellar stellar civil service commission  
that took upon itself the responsibility  
of promoting to and demoting from the rank of planet,  
decided to demote Pluto,

and

decided to pass over for promotion three recently-discovered bodies,  
bowing down to the dumbing down of that century-s devolution;  
their main reason seemed to be not to further burden educators  
by having them come up with a new moronic mnemonic  
to remember the proposed new planets,

and

to further ease the brainstrain by removing one thing to remember  
Thus,

it was no surprise  
when a like-minded group of intergalactic bureaucrats  
performed the same prestidigitation as regards Earth,  
the answering volley in today's never-ending war

# CAUGHT ON CCTV

Copyright Roger N. Taber 2006

Men and women, every shape, size, colour,  
on the street

Crowding each other, elbowing a passage,  
nobody apologizing

Man in a suit, pocket picked by a kid about  
fourteen;

Woman in a short skirt, fumbled by a guy  
getting married soon

Children wanting this and that, parents look  
scared to say, 'No!'

Cop on the beat, deciding... no pay packet  
worth the hassle?

Dark faces and lighter stuck in poems about  
racism

Light fingers and darker rewriting bye-laws  
for drug free zones

Dog dashes in front of a car, tyres screaming;  
people cry blue murder

Mutt's okay, runs off, driver didn't even  
stop;  
a few of us make eye contact

People - all shapes, sizes, colours, lips moving;  
street, playing deaf

# FEAR

Donna Hunt

grinds in the teeth  
like sand

a caught breath  
the color of November sky

tickles like kundalini  
the shape of smoke

buzzes like wasps in February  
a swallowtail in the throat

She sleeps with her fear  
familiar as night

Carries it in her pocketbook,  
like rusted dimes

But soon

She'll swallow it  
whole like rattlesnakes



Stoic, art by Edward  
Michael O'durr  
Supranowicz



## Being A Father

Edward G. Lynch

I failed.  
At their births, I came up out of the soil,  
An ivy with nothing to cling to.  
A father should never crawl along the ground

But seem indestructible and tall,  
In a place to which the children return  
With their children.

Then they would understand  
That I had to be still for them,  
Be permanent, as an important memory,

Then try to stand, meaning something  
I never found the words for  
Because my love for them was too deep  
To be completely human.



prose  
the meat and potatoes stuff

## Bunker Mentality

Pat Dixon

Vibrations from the bombs of the Righteous Allies' Coalition dislodged another array of glossy gray flakes of paint from the ceiling. The Leader closed his red-rimmed eyes protectively and held his breath while the flakes rained onto his ruddy tanned neck and into his slightly disheveled graying hair.

Seventeen stories above him, on the surface, his enemies' message was having a demoralizing effect on the inhabitants and the defenders of his capitol. "Shock and Awe" was what the Allies had termed this part of the attack, and its effect had lived up to its name—three of his most loyal generals had surrendered their divisions almost immediately, and six others had radioed the Allies that they would do so too, if only the bombardment would cease.

A buzzer began to sound, and a pale pink light began flashing on the steel panel beside the foot-thick door opposite his desk. The Leader squinted at the light with puzzlement and vague interest, mildly curious about what it might signify.

"Sir, the far end of the east tunnel has been breached by the Allies. They've found the secret entrance near the river and have captured your escape submarine," a uniformed subordinate wearing earphones said hoarsely. "And I have just been informed that a very large team of their Marines has activated one of your railcars. It will reach us within seven minutes—unless we collapse the tunnel."

"Collapse—the tunnel?" said the Leader, squinting at the young man.

"Yes, sir. The tunnel has been prepared with several tons of high explosives which we can activate with—with that yellow button there, sir—next to the red button, sir—the one for destroying the elevator shaft that comes down here—sir."

"Who has a plan? Anybody? What happens if the—the rail—that rail thingy gets here? Anybody?"

"Sir, my information sources have surrendered, sir—and I can only surmise that either a team of Coalition Marines are on their way or else a rail-

car filled with some sort of powerful bomb. In either case, sir, you will be in grave danger if the railcar gets here—sir.”

“And what can we do ’bout that. What’s our defense? We always have a defense.”

“Sir, we need to collapse the east tunnel very quickly—by pushing the yellow button, sir.”

“Yellow—button. Yellow? That doesn’t symbollix cowardiceness, does it?”

“No, sir. It’s just the color for that event. Each event has a different color button—sir.”

“Just so long as it has nothing to do with cowardish—cowardish-ness of any kind. So—what are you waiting for, fella? An ingrated invitation?”

The uniformed subordinate hurried across the glossy gray concrete floor, covering twenty-eight feet in four seconds. He gazed briefly up into his Leader’s eyes to be certain that the order was not being changed, then pressed the button. Three seconds later the room trembled, and a muffled series of distant explosions could be heard through the thick door.

“Sir, I’ve just been informed that your advisors have agreed to surrender in return for having their lives spared. They’ve accepted a deal of life in prison—provided they testify against you—sir.”

“Whoa! Hold on there, fella. I’m not a lawyer,” said the Leader, “not any kind of lawyer—but that would be ‘turning state’s evidence,’ wouldn’t it—and, since I’m head of the state of the Union, they can’t do that. ‘Sides, they’ve taken an oath to be loyal to me, and if they broke that deal, whatever they say wouldn’t count.”

The uniformed subordinate said nothing. He glanced nervously at the Leader’s wife, who was sitting in one of the large leather chairs, humming “Just a Closer Walk with Thee” to herself and clicking the safety of a .45 automatic on and off, on and off.

“I’m receiving word now, sir, that the other three escape tunnels have also been breached by Allied forces. Somebody, sir—somebody must have betrayed their locations to the Coalition. How else—? Sir?”

“What do these other buttons do, fella? Is one of ’em—y’ know—the button?”

“Sir?”

“The button. The button. You know! Is it?”

“Uh—no, sir. No—sir. That button, sir, is—is in your—office—up top—sir.”

“Hmm. I knew that—I did. I was just testin’ you.”

The subordinate glanced at the Leader’s wife again. The Leader looked at her, too, and grinned.

“Always did like that tune,” he said. “So what do these other buttons

do, anyways?”

“The violet one, the dark blue one, and the orange one blow up the other three escape tunnels, sir—which, pardon me, sir, we perhaps ought to do soon—sir.”

“Whoa! An’ why’s that?”

The uniformed subordinate, his mouth slightly agape and a small trace of bewilderment in his eyes, stared at the leader. “Because, sir—because—sir—either the Allies—or their explosives—are probably converging on this very room—even as we speak.”

“Sir!”

“Sir?”

“You forgot to say ‘sir’ at the end of your—whatever it is.”

“Sentence—my sentence, sir?”

“Yup. You forgot.”

“Sorry, sir. It won’t happen again—sir. But—sir—what do you want to do about the other three tunnels—sir?”

The leader squinted at the subordinate for half a minute before speaking.

“What?” he said.

“Sir—the three tunnels that the Allies—or their explosives—coming towards us—through the tunnels—. Sir? Do you want me to blow up those tunnels—sir—so that the Allies or their bombs won’t get you—and the First Lady—sir?”

“Tell me again—in your own words, fella—why is they’re comin’ here anyways.”

“Sir—they claim that they are liberating your people—sir. They claim that you’ve got weapons of mass destruction—sir—and have used them against other sovereign nations—sir. And they claim they will restore the Constitution of our country and rebuild our nation and return its wealth to its people. Sir, about the tunnels—?”

“That’s a crock o’ crap. Crap, crap, crap, crap, crappity crap-crap W-K-R-A-P Cincinnati crap. Ain’t it?”

“Yes, sir. But what, sir, should we do about the three tunnels—sir?”

“Don’t they know about my—my vision, fella?”

“Sir—the tunnels—sir?”

“Pay attention, son! Focus! If I didn’t know you better, I’d think you was jokin’ behind my head about—tunnel vision—or somethin’. That was a joke. Made it myself.”

“Yes, sir. They know about your vision, sir. They are getting closer, sir. Closer, sir, even as we speak—sir. They reject your vision, sir. They are approaching in the tunnels, sir—or their explosive devices are—sir. They will kill or capture you—sir. Dead or alive—and your First Lady, sir. That’s

what they promised our people—sir. And they—.”

“Oh—horse fudge! Be a man, fella. Be a man! How do they—what do they say ’bout my vision? My vision!”

“Sir, they mock it and say you’ve been a urinator, not a defecator—sir.”

“Huh? An’ what’s that s’posed to mean? Huh?”

“Sir, the way it’s been explained to me, sir, is that you—you—you tend to pee on everyone and tell them it’s summer rain—sir—but that you’re full of—full of—stool, sir.”

“Huh! That’s just a lot o’ crap! Bo-vine crap—if you get my drift. I’ve always been a—universalizer—a—an—untie-er! Not a—dividilator—defibrillator—divisifier—dividendilator—whatever. Vision! That’s what I have. That’s what the Lord hath gaveth unto me. An’ He hath spoketh unto me ’bout how to proceedeth. I am-eth His instrumentation. An’ He will provideth in this, my hour of needeth. Damn! Will you just stop antsinn’ aroun’ near them freakin’ colored buttons, fella?”

“Sir—respectfully, sir—the Allies’ Coalition—or their explosives—will be here at any moment—sir! Do you want us to be killed—or captured—sir? Sir?”

“Surely, fella, there is a third choice. So I say, ‘Neither one.’ Right? ‘Neither one’ is what I say.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll just make that so, then, sir—by pushing these three buttons—sir.”

“Whoa! Who’s in charge here, fella? You—nor me? I get to decide things like that. Go ahead—mash down on them buttons.”

“Yes, sir.”

The whole room shook violently, and the lights dimmed for ten seconds. The Leader squinted his eyes protectively as thousand of glossy gray flakes rained down from the ceiling onto the three occupants of the room.

“So, fella—let me reaccess my options. That just took care of three of the escape tunnels?”

“Yes, sir. Three—sir.”

“An’ there was four in all?”

“Yes, sir. Four in all, sir.”

“So now there’re just one left?”

“Sir?”

“Focus, fella. Focus! Three, take away four, leaves one? Right?”

“Sir? No, sir. All four of the tunnels are collapsed now—sir. We blew all four of them, sir. First the east tunnel, then those three. All four—sir. Gone—sir.”

“So nobody’s gonna get in by way of those ways—am I right?”

“That’s correct, sir. Nobody—those ways—sir.”

"I thought so. So how—if at all—can they get in—huh?"

"Sir—there's only the elevator shaft left now—sir."

"An' this red button destructs that—right?"

"Yes, sir. It would be the red button that would do that, sir."

"Thought I didn't 'member details like this—didn't you? Graced under pressure. Always had it—always will. The Lord's Grace graces me."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, the Lord hath just toldeth me to keep them from gettin' in here—them rump-rubbin' heathenish san' monkeys an' all their other butt-covetin' bastardish rape-room rapers! They're not gonna deliver nothin' to me nor the First Lady in our rear loadin' docks—nor you neither, fella. My Lord hath His prohcriptions 'bout that kinda thing. Soooo—bingo!"

Yet once more the room violently trembled. The lights went out totally for thirty-nine seconds and came on, much dimmer than before. Large cracks had appeared in the wall surrounding the elevator door, but mercifully no further flakes of glossy gray paint fell from the ceiling. The leader, his eyes wide and his lips grinning broadly, stared at the ceiling with satisfaction.

"Let's see them monkeys git in here now. Ain't no way—no can do—am I right?"

"Yes, sir," said the subordinate in a hoarse whisper. He cleared his throat, twice. "Yes, sir. No way—in—sir."

"But there is a way out, ain't there?"

"Yes, sir. A way out—sir. Yes, sir."

"So show me—even though I'm not from Missouri. Let's see it."

The subordinate walked over to where the First Lady was seated.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said in a soft voice. "I need to borrow this for just a little mo—mo—moment—ma'am."

He took the pistol from her hand and placed it against his damp forehead.

"Way out—sir. Way out."

The almost deafening blast was intensified by the flat surfaces of the concrete walls, floor, and ceiling. Skull fragments and brain tissue covered the First Lady's hair, face, arms, and clothing. She rubbed her eyes and lips and then spat a couple times to clear her mouth. Then she leaned forward and took her pistol from the subordinate's warm dead hand.

"Sir," said the Leader. "He forgot to say 'sir' at the end of his—whatever."

"His life? But he was a such nice young man, though," said the First Lady. "I really do think he really, really cared 'bout us. Don't you, Archie?"

"O' course, I do! The Lord hath providethed me with many loyal fallovers. Yea, though I walk through the whatever-whatever whatsoever, I shall fear no evil. Never have—never will. Bring 'em on. Right, Edith?"

# MY TRAVELS THROUGH HADES

Mel Waldman

Over the decades, I've heard rumors about therapists. (As I am a therapist, I am particularly curious about these stories.) They say that future therapists become shrinks to solve their own problems. Are these tall tales? Or are they true?

I suggest to you, my curious readers, that some have entered this risky profession because they are compelled and driven by an incomprehensible force within. Indeed, some may be driven by their own traumas, searching desperately for answers. Others like you are probably curious about the human mind and all its mysteries.

Indeed, I believe a cornucopia of causes determines the calling. And it is certainly a calling.

Every day I travel with my patients across dangerous, unexplored territory, not knowing if I will return intact or impaired, alive or dead, sane or insane. Every day I journey into Hades. I trust I will not be traumatized by these daily expeditions.

I will not share with you the personal traumas of my past. If they exist, I will not speculate whether they motivated me to be here, in this desolate room, isolated from the psychologically well, connected to the emotionally sick.

Yet I will share with you that each day, I travel to alien terrain in the private landscape of those who seek my help. And I never know for sure if I will return. Yet this emotional risk taking is what I do.

If I have a soul, it exists to heal others. If I don't, being soulless, I must still create the meaning of my life right now. And I choose to journey through Hell with my patients, fearful and courageous, frightened but thrilled to have the opportunity to make a difference, no matter what, even if it means facing my darkest fears and wishes, as we travel through Hades.

As I cross the River Styx, I gaze into the hypnotic waters and discover the grotesque face of evil-mine-hidden beneath my masks of love and humanity. Inside this eerie reflection floating in the dark river, exposed by the malignant fires surrounding me, is a truth I must face. And if I do, I will return from my phantasmagoric journey. But if I can't face this monster, I will float forever-in an open casket-down the River Styx, a ghost of a ghost, still searching for my way home.

# THE EXECUTION

Vince Stamey

“The Quaker Reform has failed,” said the well-dressed governor, that towering figure of authority, who always seemed sincere. “Isolation,” he said, “brings neither repentance nor salvation; it brings only madness. And that is surely the cruelest punishment of all.”

He was content to make due in his single mind with the cunning of a one-sided truth. Yet the words he uttered were always correct, preferred, chosen to satisfy as many voters as possible and to offend none. It was politics, and he was a player, a good one, ingenious in fact, but only in the way some preachers are scholars: they read one book and think it’s gospel. His book, it happens, was printed at the polls.

“People don’t like to hear it, so we don’t say it, publicly,” he added, “but the goal has changed from saving the prisoner’s soul to breaking his spirit, and, if that fails, we sacrifice them to the collective. It’s clear that deterrence is marginally effective, that recidivism is the rule, and that we must be decisive.”

Like most politicians, he enjoyed the sound of his own voice, and as he filled his ears with that long tongue, it began to sound as if he were trying to convince himself, to sure himself up, while he waited for the last minute call he knew would soon come.

He continued, avoiding the name—that powerful invocation—of the man whose life he would spill, “He was innocent,” said the governor, “except of doing what was best for himself in a culture that told him to do so. Oh, he killed, but that killing, he thought, kept him safe. And now we kill to keep ourselves safe.”

He paused, and said, “Politics, it seems, makes princes of us all in Machiavellian terms. We’ll expose a vein or spin plumes of smoke from the noses of disagreeable men, who, strapped in and out-numbered, killers that they are, could be heroes in the bizarre ring of our culture, given a sword and a fighting chance and crowd to cheer.”

Getting up from his polished desk, he began to pace, saying, “In most respects, we are in complete harmony, he and I. Our only discord comes from our unequal positions, how we’ve maneuvered the tangled mappings of right to power, not at all from our purpose, which is simply relentless and incorrigible self-promotion.

We all have such huge egos, but no idea of ourselve”

The governor’s thoughts trailed off when the phone rang, but he continued to pace. He had always tried to move gracefully, because he knew people were attracted to that quality. But the weight of the moment made him clumsy and slow, as he calculated every step.

That night, there would be no reprieve, no stay, and no grace, but his staff agreed, it was a good and sincere killing, a last and most assured effort to find a place for the failed citizen.



# Snow Princess: A Gnostic Christmas Story, of sorts

Bill DeArmond

“Well, I’ll be damned!”

Harrison Banks slammed the cupboard door so hard it popped back and smacked him in the face.

“Sorry-ass night to be out of tomato sauce when you’re making spaghetti.”

He stopped in the middle of fastening his overshoes, the kind with metal hooks that you can never quite get closed.

“I’ve got some V-8 Juice. I could use that,” he thought. “It would be loose but at least it would be red. But I’m out of spices as well.”

The frigid Colorado wind sucked the breath right out of his lungs as he locked the apartment door.

“Damn hawk!”

It had been one of those winters that started early and stayed late and had already worn out its welcome, and it was only December. The thin layer of hardened snow crunched under his boots. He shuffled his feet along the sidewalk and, for an instant, he was a child again playing snowplow.

He passed windows brightly adorned with holiday lights and occasionally caught a glimpse of decorations and festive gatherings through softly frosted windowpanes.

He was destined for a 24-hour-we-never-close-not-even-on-Christmas-Eve convenience store on Platte Avenue. It was nearly a mile away, a long distance under these conditions, but the only thing open this night. Passing a church, he heard faint sounds of a familiar hymn, but the tune that kept intruding upon his reverie went something like: “Oh, thank heaven for 7-11.”

He cut through Monument Park, so named for its memorial erected to the local war dead. Although he had to break new ground through the freshly fallen snow, the detour would save him nearly two blocks. He began to pick up his pace and stomp his feet with each step, for the cold had begun to filter through his boots and shoes.

Harrison paused near the memorial in the center of the park, a miniature replica of the Washington Monument. Remembering the incident

later, he couldn't recall exactly what it was that made him slow his pace. Perhaps it was a sound. The wind was howling through the trees, spraying tiny ice crystals into his eyes, but under the din he thought he heard the muffled sound of someone crying.

Through the haze, at first he wasn't sure what the apparition was that suddenly appeared before him. The girl was sitting on a wrought-iron bench covered with snow in a far corner of the dimly lit plaza. Though she had her back to him, Harrison could see that she was only wearing a thin wool jacket.

"Miss?"

When she made no response, he ventured closer. In the faint light she appeared young, too young to be out alone on a night like this dressed the way she was.

"Uh...excuse me, Miss."

Her face, though slightly red, was familiar and rather...attractive.

"You talkin' to me?" said the girl in her best Robert DeNiro imitation.

"Well...yes."

"So? Whadaya want?"

"I heard you crying and I..."

"Who says I was cryin'?"

"That's what I thought you were...I mean, it sounded like...and you're dressed..."

"Well, you're wrong, Jack. So why don't you just piss off?"

The vehemence of her words struck Harrison with a force greater than the gale screaming down off of Cheyenne Mountain. It reminded him of the voice in the movie he once saw...the Exorcist. And while he immediately knew better, he turned back to her once again.

"Aren't you cold?"

"Huh?"

"You don't have on a very heavy coat or any gloves so I thought..."

She got up and walked to the monument. Leaning against it with her arms crossed, he could see that she must have been there for quite a while. He really thought he should leave, but couldn't.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to be...I just thought you looked distressed or something."

"I wasn't until you came along."

"Are you waiting for someone?"

"Jesus Christ...Are you trying to pick me up?"

"No...really..."

"Then who in hell cares?"

"You just looked like you were in some kind of trouble."

“I’ll tell you who’s gonna be in trouble. If you don’t leave in two seconds, I’m gonna start screamin’ and you’ll find you ass in...”

“OK...OK...I’m sorry...really I am.”

“So, be sorry somewhere else.”

The incident disturbed him as much as anything had for a long time. Walking away, he glanced back over his shoulder and thought: “Was I wrong to have stopped? To be the Good Samaritan?”

A welcome blast of life-giving warmth greeted Harrison as he pulled open the store’s glass door after two unsuccessful pushes. Suddenly he was gripped by a brief panic. The Weird Encounter of the X-mas Kind with the girl in the park had made him forget the object of his solitary journey.

His eyes rose to meet those of a skinny kid of dubious age who was suffering a case of the creeping uglies. Proudly displayed on his chest was a badge bearing his name and identifying him as the store’s assistant manager, only it was spelled: FRANKIE SENCE, ASS. MAN.

“Appropriate,” Banks chuckled to himself.

Harrison began walking around the store hoping he might remember what he came for if he saw it. “Spices and something else.” Signs everywhere proclaimed: SHOPLIFTERS WILL BE PERSECUTED TO THE FULL EXTENT OF THE LAW. Harrison thought there was something odd about that, but couldn’t put his finger on it. Twice he looked up into a large convex mirror to see Elephant Boy’s eyes watching his every move sure that Harrison Banks was the most dangerous criminal to hit these parts since Peter Pontius took out his perverse revenge on the local pawn shops and liquor stores over a decade ago.

“Do you have any tomato sauce?” He inquired across the empty store, startling the boy so much that he dropped his copy of *Bigguns*.

“Do you *see* any tomato sauce there?” Harrison was startled by how much the boy’s voice sounded like fingernails screeching on a chalkboard.

“No, that’s why I asked.”

“Then we ain’t got any.”

Banks decided on puree over paste in lieu of sauce, and carried the can to the counter.

“Is this all?” asked the boy in a tone that was both inquiring *and* derisive.

“Yes, that’s all I need.”

“That’ll be ninety-eight cents.”

Harrison handed him one of the new gold dollars and told him to keep the change. Frankie looked at the coin as if it were a slug as Harrison pulled twice on a door that said “Push.”

Pausing in his embarrassment, he turned back to the clerk and said: "Merry Christmas."

"Yeah," said the boy, whose case of the uglies had suddenly become terminal. Banks expected him to add "Bah, Humbug!" as he set out once again into the frozen night.

She was still there, tempting him.

Harrison walked past her...stopped for a full minute...and then turned around.

"How old are you, anyway?"

"Twenty-three."

"You look twelve. If I can't get a straight answer out of you, I'm going to have to call the authorities."

"What's it to you, man? What are you stickin' your nose in where it don't belong?"

"Outside of the fact that what you just said doesn't make any sense, I'm concerned about you. Confess what's wrong."

"Nothin's wrong."

"You look like you've been cast out of somewhere."

"No...not exactly."

"Well, you can't stay here. Why don't you let me escort you home?"

"Why would you do that?"

"It would make me feel better. Where do you live?"

"No, I can't go home until...Anyway, nobody there...no room in the inn...so to speak."

"Well, you can't stay here. Look, I only live a few blocks from here..."

"So! You *are* tryin' to pick me up."

"No, it's nothing like that. I was fixing supper but I ran out of some things and I had to go to the store. I was going to invite you...but if you're not interested..."

"Whataya fixin'?"

"Spaghetti."

"Oh, yeah. I ain't never had no guy fix a dinner for me before."

"Well, it's for me, too, but here's your chance. What do you say?"

"You don't use whole tomatoes do you?"

"No."

"I can't stand all the skin and seeds and crap...makes me barf."

"No, I only use..."

"I think my mom uses real tomatoes just to see me puke."

"I always use tomato sauce but tonight all I could find was puree."

How about it?"

"Why not? What have I got to lose? Right?"

"Right. Here let me give you my coat."

"Forget it, Jack. The way you're bundled up, you'd probably freeze your weenie."

"At least it's not too far from here."

"You better not try to pull somethin' on me..."

"Scout's honor."

"Unless I want you to."

"Hey, Jack, what's your name, anyway?"

"It's Harrison Banks."

"What kind of dumbass name is that? Harrison Banks? God, is that ever stupid. I'm just going to call you Jack...just Jack."

"Why?"

"Cause you look like a Jack."

"What's your name?"

"Ally...Ally McBeal."

"That's a nice name."

"Man, what planet are you from? Don't you know the TV show?"

"I don't watch much television. I read."

"Christ, what century are you from?"

He opened his apartment door and ushered the girl in. Leaving the door slightly ajar, he began to unfasten his boots.

"Whatcha doin' there, Jack?"

"I'm taking off my rubbers. I don't want to track snow all over the place."

"Taking off your what?"

"My rubbers."

"Jesus."

"The secret to making spaghetti is in the sauce. Actually, it's not even spaghetti. I prefer angel hair. I don't use onions myself. I don't like them much."

"Me neither. How about mushrooms?"

"What?"

"You eat mushrooms?"

"No, but I usually include a can of chili beans to give the sauce body. You don't mind, do you?"

"Well, this is an awfully small room."

“What are you running away from, Ally?”

“My name’s not Ally and I’m not running *away* from anything.”

“Then what is your name?”

“Robin Quivers.”

“Oh.”

“Hey, Jack. Can I turn on the TV?”

“Sure, and I wish you wouldn’t keep calling me Jack.”

“You don’t expect me to call you *Har-ri-son*, do you?”

“I hope this sauce turns out alright. I’ve never used puree before.”

“Don’t sweat it. You live here alone?”

“Yes...alone.”

“Christ-on-a-crutch!”

“What’s the matter?”

“There’s nothin’ but church junk on every channel.”

“After all, it is Christmas Eve, you know.”

“Yeah...so it is.”

“How’s come?”

“How’s come, what?”

“How’s come you live here alone? Why ain’t ya got a girlfriend or something? You’re not gay are you?”

“You don’t think...”

“It don’t matter none to me. Hey, we’re all God’s chillin’, right?”

“There was a girl once but...I’m just not very lucky when it comes to female friends, OK?”

“Don’t you have some stupid dog or somethin’?”

“Can we just drop this?”

“Really, haven’t you ever had a pet?”

“There was a cat I found once. Actually the thing found me. I’d left the bathroom window open one night and it woke me up. After that I left the window open all the time so it could come and go.”

“What was its name?”

“I called it Boo-Boo.”

“Like Yogi and Boo-Boo?”

“Yeah.”

“Does it still hang around?”

“No.”

“What happened to it?”

“I don’t know. One day I came home from work and it was just gone.”

I kept the window open for several days, but it never came back.”

“That’s too bad. I had a dog once that pulled that same trick but we were glad it took off ‘cause it was always dumpin’ all over the place. You should have locked it in.”

“What?”

“The cat.”

“I couldn’t do that. I took pleasure in the fact that it chose to return each time of its own free will. I couldn’t deny that freedom.”

“You believe in free will, Jack?”

“Certainly, we are free within certain restraints to chose the direction our lives may take.”

“Believe me, Jack. I’ve tried free will and it ain’t all it’s cracked up to be. Give me good old Godly predestination any day so I can just go along for the ride.”

“And look where it’s gotten you tonight.”

“Maybe this was supposed to be. Not for me, but for you.”

“Well, the night’s still young and other cliches.”

“You know, Jack, Boo-Boo probably quit commin’ because you told it your name was Harrison.”

“Them was pretty good eats, Jack...for a guy, that is. My old man can’t cook...my old lady neither for that matter.”

“Is that why you were leaving?”

“Maybe I wasn’t leavin’...maybe I was sent.”

“How old are you, really?”

“Older than I look, Jack.”

“Do you have any family? Brothers and sisters?”

“I had a brother oncest...but he got runned over by a Mister Softee truck. My kid sister’s crazy and we keep her locked in a cellar ‘cause she thinks she’s Joan of Arc.”

“I don’t know when you’re serious and when you’re not.”

“That’s a bitch, ain’t it, Jack? I did have somebody oncest...a long time ago. We was married but nobody believed it.”

“What happened?”

“He died...”

“Hey, Jack! How’s come you’re spending Christmas Eve by yourself?”

“My parents both died before I was twenty. I’ve got a brother near Bethlehem, New York, but we’ve never been very close and he’s got his own family.”

“Don’t ya know anybody here?”

“Not really.”

“How long ya been here?”

“Almost four years.”

“Four years! You mean you’ve been here four years and don’t know nobody? Why don’tcha go to a bar or somethin’?”

“I don’t drink.”

“Then go to some singles dance.”

“I don’t dance, either.”

“Christ, Jack, you’re makin’ your salvation hard on a girl, here. Look, you’re not a bad lookin’ guy in a sort of Urkel kind a way. I know some girls I used ta hang with I can fix ya up.”

“It’s really not necessary to...”

“Only don’t tell them your name is Harrison. Make up somethin’ like Rocky or Fernando or Barney?”

“Barney Banks?”

“Yeah, that sucks, doesn’t it?”

“Is that what you do?”

“What?”

“Ally McBeal? Robin Quivers?”

“I’m called on to be a lot of things to a lot of people.”

“Come on, now, what’s your *real* name.”

“Cameron Diaz. What’s it matter?”

“Funny, you look like a Scout to me.”

“A what? Is that some kinda gay reference?”

Harrison went to the bookshelf and removed a paperback that was well worn with use.

“Here,” he said, handing it to the girl. “Merry Christmas.”

“What’s this?”

“A very special book, at least it is for me.”

“I don’t read much.”

“That’s pretty obvious. But I think you’ll find this one just right for you.”

“What’s it about?”

“It’s about a young girl growing up and facing life.”

“Oh, very subtle, Jack.”

“Well, Ally-Robin-Cameron, we never did talk about your problem, did we?”

“You know what, Jack? It never was about *me*. My troubles were resolved long, long ago.”



“So what’s with the Drama Queen routine? You want to talk about that?”

“Nope, but thanks for asking. What time is it?”

“Goodness, a little after eleven.”

“You know what I’d like to do?”

“What?”

“Allow you to escort me home.”

A light snow was falling as they emerged from the apartment, the woman dressed in one of Harrison’s old army jackets.

“Hey, Jack! You forgot your ‘rubbers’!”

“To Hell with them.”

They stopped at the edge of the park and an impromptu snowball fight erupted. An innocent police cruiser happened by, the only vehicle that would venture out on this night. Harrison “Dirty Harry” Banks lofted a perfect slushball that landed square in the middle of the back window. The two fugitives were off running into the dark regions of the park before the car could turn around.

They stopped at the monument where it all began just a few hours earlier.

“Well, Jack, this is as far as you go.”

“Why?”

“It’s not necessary that you know where I live. You’ll know where to look for me.”

She started to remove the jacket but he stopped her.

“Why don’t you keep it?”

“I’ll return it to you some day.”

“Promise?”

“Hope to die. Come spring...this April...leave your bathroom window open and I’ll really give you a surprise.”

“God forbid!”

“Things you love without regard for return always come back, Jack. Kindness is the purest gift.”

“Well...”

“And thanks for the book. I’ve got a present for you, too. The Gospel of Thomas 48, verses 20 to 25.”

“That’s a book in the Bible? I never heard of it.”

“You’re on the Internet, Jack. Be creative...look it up.”

“Sure...well...I guess I’d better be going.”

“What did I just tell you?”

“Thomas 48: 20 to 25. I’ll remember it.”

“Yeah...well...listen, Jack...you fix a mean spaghetti.”

“Thanks.”

He started to turn away.

“When you get home, be sure to put your shoes over the heater so they can dry out.”

“I’ll do that.”

“But don’t let them dry so much they crack.”

“No...I won’t.”

“Well...I’d better go. I’m getting cold.”

“Yeah...me too...well...goodbye.”

He started to leave but she stopped him.

“Harrison?”

“Yeah?”

She rushed up and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

“You’re going to be all right now. You’ve seen what’s inside you and it will save you.”

“Sure...well...see you around kid.”

Take care of yourself...hear?”

“I will.”

He was halfway to the park gate when she called to him.

“And Harrison?”

“Yeah?” he tossed back over his shoulder.

“My name’s Mary...but my friends call me Maggie.”

He turned to say something but she was gone. He imagined this princess dancing through the snow.

Back home Harrison entered “Gospel of Thomas” on a search engine and got what he needed on the first site.

“Well, I’ll be damned,” Harrison said, although he knew just the opposite was true.

He downloaded the entire text from the Nag Hammadi for future reference, highlighting Mary’s gift:

*They said to him, “Tell us who you are so that we may believe in you.” He said to them, “You read the face of the sky and of the earth, but you have not recognized the one who is before you, and you do not read this moment.”*

Harrison knew that tonight was no accident and a solitary tear of joy rolled down the cheek she had blessed.

In the distance he could hear the sound of church bells.

It was Christmas Day.

part eight (the December 2006

installment) of

# THE DRIVE

Kenneth DiMaggio

Until then, well, there is so much great music to listen to! Hell, when you have great music to listen to, do you really need much of anything else? (A-hem, black coffee and rice pudding). Okay, but along with all that, along with a feisty young artist to drink and dine with, the music seems mighty fine, and this little table top juke box seemed to have the masterpieces of early Pop music. Paul Anka—"We Sing in the Sunshine." The Ronettes: "Be my Baby"; there was even "Danke Schoen" by Wayne Newton—recorded when he was something like fifteen and sounded more like a girl. And of course, Sinatra, Sinatra, Sinatra, (you can never have enough of Sinatra) and also Nat King Cole. You can never have enough of him, either

"Wait a minute—wait a minute—" I excitedly started to say as I made an important discovery.

"Excuse me," The Young Artist said with some irritation. "But I have some choices to make too!"

"Yeah, I heard you," I said, grunting.

"The Beatles," she said.

"Ugh," I said.

She put down her coffee cup, plunked her spoon into her half finished bowl of rice pudding and said:

"What's wrong with The Beatles?"

"Nothing," I said. I began to play with my half finished rice pudding by slowing stirring my spoon in it.

"But, 'Please, Please Me,'" I said; for that was the selection on this juke box. " 'Last night I said these words to my girl,' " I lamely sang.

"Oh-kay..." she said with patronizing patience. "How do you feel about, 'Sympathy for the Devil' by The Rolling Stones?"

"That's on here? That's one of my favorite songs!"

She smirked and then said:

"I figured it would."

"Okay, you're so smart," I said, "let's see if you can guess what the greatest love song is, because this machine has it!"

She was about to speak, but then stopped. The greatest love song? That's not easy, but there is the all time great love song just the same, and this machine had it.

"Um—'Something' by The Beatles," she quickly said, her mind still on the Fab Four.



two images donated by C Ra McGuirt



“Okay, not bad,” I said. “It’s one of the better love songs, and certainly George Harrison’s best.”

“Well, I was just warming up,” she quickly said. “But I know what it is—well, I know the artist. I’ll get the song in a moment, but the artist is Whitney Huston.”

“Ha?” as I tried to think, only coming up with ‘I’m Every Woman.’

“I mean, Roberta Flack.”

“You mean the song that the Fugees did?”

“That’s up there too, but not the greatest—the greatest love song is by Billie Holiday!”

“Excuse me—maybe the greatest heart break song—but the greatest love song—of all time—is by Nat King Cole.”

“Natalie Cole?” she asked, if not hearing what I said.

“That’s his daughter,” I said.

“I knew that!” she quickly said.

“She sings some good stuff too,” I said. “Though I don’t know off hand—but her father—I don’t know much of his stuff either. But this one song he sings—watch.”

I took a quarter out of my pocket.

“Because when he sings it—“ I tried to explain. The Young Artist stirred her spoon into her still unfinished bowl of rice pudding, Then she pushed it aside, rested her chin on both hands, and looked directly at me. Go ahead and explain, she seemed to say, at what I now found so hard to explain.

“A-a-nd, as he says it, it’s going to be forever.”

She began to squint, not quite understanding me. But also thinking that I just might not...know what the greatest love song was.

“I mean,” I said as I looked down, “love is going to be forever—when you finally fall in love with that—well, the title is, ‘When I Fall in Love.’

But as soon as he sings ‘It will be forever—’

I’ve never seen more cruelty in a smile Why not? The more I tried to explain, the more I embarrassed myself.

There was only one thing to do. Look right up at her and tell her why the greatest love song, was the greatest love song.

I plunked my spoon into my now finished bowl of rice pudding, moved it to the side, and said:

“Because when you fall in love,” I paused, struggling to suppress a smile of embarrassment, “it will be forever.”

And the last I spoke in almost a whisper.

“Watch,” I now whispered.

My hand with the quarter slowly moved to the juke box . I paused for a moment with the coin before the slot, and then I slipped it in. The quarter went in with a soft “Click” and then ended as a raspy sigh. I pushed the buttons corresponding to the selection, and as soon as I did, I withdrew my hands, folded them, looked down and to my left. The ten or so seconds it took for the song to begin playing, seemed to take about ten minutes; an eternity, when one minute made me feel sweaty, nervous, excited, embarrassed.

And then the song began, starting with the violins? Or what was a rich lush string section that would introduce Nat’s honey coated voice; that gentle, reassuring , “When I fall in love...it will be forever...” And what made it even more sincere was that when the song put that reassurance in a “restless” world. Restless, ha? If that’s not an understatement; if that part

of the song did not always leave the wax grooves and grab me. But when he then mentioned, “Moonlight’s kisses,” well, I tried not to, but I still softly laughed just the same; a laugh that never seemed embarrassing when I listened to that song by myself—which was when I stole a look up, and saw that The Young Artist had slightly turned her face. She was no longer looking at me, and even though she appeared to be looking out of the window, oh, she was looking at something rich and recently discovered within!

Oh...before she could discover anymore, and before I could see this discovery breathe across her cheeks, blossom another shade of color in her eyes, the strings returned the same theme they began the song with; only now, the theme had a delicate, dying, fade.

And then that awkward pause—during which confusion, panic, regret, delight? Set in as I thought about the song I just played—was it just part of our artistic journey together, did she think it was something more—did I? I *liked* her—but did I *like* her? I mean it was just a hazy border—or a border melting away, for when a guy sees a woman as being less of a comrade, an acquaintance, a friend, and more—

“I’ll be right back,” The Young Artist said as she swiftly got up. She must have sensed what was going on. Women have a smell for that kind of thing; better than men: or men just have a lousy time of concealing it, and I had better stop thinking about that stuff because she just giggled. And it turned out to be for another reason as well.

“Here,” she said as she dug into her bag. “You can play with my Bad Girl while I’m gone.”

“Your what?”

“My Bad Girl,” she said. She put a three or four inch tall plastic figure of a snarling, red-spike haired punk girl down on the table.

“A friend got her for me in London,” she explained. “Just be careful. Sometimes she takes out her safety pins from her cheeks and sticks them into the people who play too rough with her.”

My thumb and forefinger that held the figure, froze. A moment, and then my hand created a gentle pocket that would not “squeeze” the figure. The Young Artist smiled, made what sounded like a little snicker and then turned her head with enough of a sweep to bounce her long black hair, and then walked off to I presume the Ladies room. Her exit was grand, if not showing a little bit of triumph, for her walk was swift and proud enough to rustle her scarves. I now noticed a chartreuse silk scarf that she was adjusting, so that one side would be unequal-ly long, and get more prominence when it rustled behind her. I smiled, and put down the snarling, plastic punk before me on the table and said to her in a low voice:

“What do you think?” I said.

“Grrr, grrr,” I said for the plastic punkette.

“Yeah, well, give it time,” I said to the piece of snarling plastic. Someday, you’ll discover a great singer like Nat King Cole and maybe a great writer like Hemingway. (In spite of the way you may have been “misled” about him in high school). Certainly, a great poet like Emily Dickinson. You have to discover Emily. I don’t know if you will discover these artists in a cheap diner with a jukebox, but with luck, you will discover a great diner, and the great juke box may not be in the great diner, but it is just as important that you discover a great juke box. Because it is important to hear the great songs; still the under appreciated, underrated great art form of today.

And one of the things that great songs do better than other art forms, is show us that painful but inevitable silence that must always come when the record stops playing. It was

that . . .silence that now spread like a blanket of ether in this diner . Life in this diner had come to a late afternoon pause. There was little if any movement: the frizzy haired Greek owner ringing up the register, the waitress swooping up an empty silverware tray, the spinning coin or two thrown by a customer up at the counter as a tip, came to a quick end. The diner was now emptied out of the last customer. The owner and the waitress had finished their duties and could now sink into their private epiphanies; re-knit a few fragments of thoughts; try to find a face that could be framed with a name. What would there be for us to take, when we left the diner?

“I’m back.”

The Young Artist was already half way sliding into the booth when she announced her return.

“Did Bad Girl treat you alright?”

I gently “tapped” my index finger on the plastic figure as if it were a vibrant, flickering flame.

“Bad Girl is hot!” I exclaimed.

“Well, you can’t have her,” the Young Artist said as she swooped the figure away. “Now are we going to that church?”

“After I go to the bathroom,” I said, getting up.

“Wait—what are you going to leave me?”

“All my G.I. Joes are at home,” I said. “They’re the only plastic dolls I have—unless you want to count a couple of plastic dinosaurs on my car’s dashboard.”

“Ut-uh,” she said. “You have to leave me something from what you have on you.”

“Ohhh, fuck . . .” I softly said. I began to dig through my pockets, coming up with only lint, small change: and what I hoped was half of a smoked joint.

She still gave me a look that was not going to let me by until I put something of mine down on the table. So I reached for the inevitable—my wallet, for which she frowned, yeah, boring. I know I can give you my license, my credit card, (well, I’m not giving you that—even though it has a—I’m not going to tell you how small the credit limit is.)

But ahhh, there is something that she would never expect. I took from the inner sleeve of my wallet a matchbook size, folded over piece of cardboard. On one side was a medieval-looking knight on a horse. The horse was kicking up its legs: the knight held a lance triumphantly thrust up. Beneath the horse’s kicking hooves was a semi-curved, belly up, body of a slain dragon.

On the other side of this card was a red cross and a bunch of Arabic lettering. As you folded over the card, there was a taped over, heart-shaped piece of . . .well, I never found out exactly what it was; the Egyptian Copt who gave it to me, was never able to say what this tiny heart was made of.

“Here,” I said, handing her the card. “Be a little careful. There is this little taped up heart inside.”

“Ha” the Young Artist said, and then laughed.

“Well, it’s not a real heart, but that is what it is supposed to represent.”

The Young Artist gently took the card, examined it, and then opened it up like a small book.

“The writing looks—Arabic—“ she started to say.

“I got it from this Egyptian Copt,” I said.

“They’re like the Christians there, right?”

“Yeah, but they also have this custom where the guys tattoo their hands so they can rec-

ognize each other, just like this particular guy had who was one of the slaves on the same temp crew I was on; some warehouse in the industrial gulag. And when I saw his tattoo, I thought, this guy must be in some kind of neat metal band.”

We both laughed.

“Yeah, well, I don’t know what the guy thought about Marilyn Manson but the way so many Americans must ignore foreign people and immigrants. This guy told me his entire life story; how he was here working to send money back to his family and all that. When it came time to break for lunch, and all he had was a cucumber—I swear to God, a cucumber! Well, I bought him lunch.”

I pointed in playful warning and said:

“And you’re not paying for lunch; you hear?”

She quickly nodded, mockingly saluted, and then said:

“Yes sir, Mr. Man.”

“And so by way of thanks, he gave me this—I guess it’s a medallion and the guy on the horse is supposed to be St. George and that tiny lizard on the ground is supposed to be the dragon, and that copper-colored looking piece of smudge that looks like a squashed head of a kitchen match stick, is supposed to be a heart.”

“You have a nice way of putting it.”

“Yeah, well...I consider it to be good luck. I hardly ever take it out of my wallet, and with some of the people I know...”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be careful,” she said. “and not that you might have forgotten, but I appreciate things like cathedrals, hint hint?”

“Yeah, I’m going to take you that church, but just remember, I’m paying for the lunch.”

“Then I’m paying for the dessert,” she said.

“Fine,” I said as I left for the bathroom and about half way there, I sensed her smiling at me. A glance behind showed that she was. What the hell would you expect from somebody who goes “frolicking?”

Still, something about that smile, and before I stepped into the men’s room, I took another look: she seemed to be expecting me, that is why the immediate reassuring nod and hand that waived me to “Go ahead, go ahead, I’ll hold down the fort while you’re gone.”

When I turned back around—

—I found myself briefly lost; in what seemed a fog. I soon discovered it was steam, coming from the little red dishwashing shack; a few seconds, a few puffs of vapor vanish, and that is when I see a fragment of a light bronze and oil black eyes—eyes that are much too rich for this dismal swampy atmosphere—eyes looking directly at me. Then “sizing” me up. Then accusing me. When my eyes popped with confusion, with some fear, his eyes darted down—had you been spying on us from this greasy purgatory? Or maybe it was envy, perhaps anger, or it was just taking in people who perhaps seldom made it to your shack.

The dishwasher turned on the industrial sink hose at full blast. He must have also aimed it a steel basin filled with soapsuds. Within a few seconds, he disappeared within a full cloud of steam. I gave the bathroom door a gentle kick. As I stepped inside the rest room, I tried not to think of what it must be like having no sense of escape.

Inside, I must have pissed up a river, or enough to wear down half of the white urinal puck, well, at least they keep this place clean. I checked for a condom machine—what the hell. There was a female back there waiting for me, and even though I probably had a few

condoms in the car...hell...nothing was probably safe in my car. Most of all, I hoped that applied to my novel. I did feel guilty preparing for sex with a girl who seemed sweet and friendly and who I just met. But hey, that's just the way guys are, and damn, there was no condom machine. Just the same. I made it a point to wash my hands. What the hell. If it was a bunch of guy friends out there waiting for me, no. But a smart young lady, definitely.

When I got to the table she was already standing. The table had been cleared off.

"Here's your medallion," she said, handing it back to me. "Thanks a lot."

"No problem," I said. I put it back in my wallet. "But where's the check."

"I already took care of it," she said.

"Didn't I say that I would?"

"And didn't I say that I would pay for dessert?" she said. "Well, what did we just have?"

Or is it that you just weren't *listening* to me."

"Oh Christ," I mumbled.

"What was that?" she said.

"Come on, we gotta find that church."

I knew what she wanted; just the same, it seemed a bit embarrassing for an anarchist with a dark side, (or trying to get one) to go looking for a "church." Well, you had to look for the positives. Being that this would be an old parish Catholic church it would have at least one or two grotesque saints, if not a life size crucifix with a life size mutilated Christ nailed to it. We might even luck out with some good paintings on the ceiling, or some bloody images in the stained glass windows. It was such images, paintings, and statues that kept me partially awake when I had to go to church. One statue that always spooked me but kept my eyes riveted on it was a saint with these tentacle like sores. Attached to him was this faithful barking dog. The saint held several round loaves of bread. Whoever this holy man was, he probably walked through the valley of death. Yeah, you may walk through the valley of death, but I would rather walk through that valley than go through the infectious jungles that wasted half of this saint's body.

The most startling image though, was in a stained glass window. It was nearly lost in one of the big arched windows of this church. This particular window depicted a crucifixion image; however, the entire frame was splattered with a halo made out of Christ's blood. There must have been hundreds of individual tear-shaped pieces of glass radiating around Christ's body, and when by chance the sun blazed on some Sunday mornings when I was at mass, that stained glass window of blood became a bright red sun or blossoming petal. These purple pieces of glass seemed to absorb more light than its fragile material was capable of sustaining. That is why after a few minutes of such illumination, it seemed as if this flower was about to catch fire, or possibly explode. It did neither; it just continued to sustain brilliance that its weak surface did not seem capable of sustaining. And it only released this brilliance once its sun stopped giving it. The Young Artist wanted to see a small replica of Notre Dame, but ahhh, I was going to show her more.

But I would see if she would discover this window for herself. That all depended on the sun, and right now, it seemed to be hiding behind a veil of haze.

Was it a permanent veil, or perhaps just the aura of a half dead organism seeping through its rotted body? Main street and thereabouts—half dead, yes, but still forced to cling like a nursing home resident hooked up to the oxygen tank. That is what the afternoon sky here was like. (Sometimes you could even see the "oxygen" tank in the tea-ket-



tle shaped, steel plated boilers or pipes on top of the nearby old factories.) The copper brick store fronts that lined the main drag were like a ward of wheelchair bound residents. These were businesses whose only sense of growth depended on this city's decline. These small stores had few customers, and what customers they did have, were from the generation that grew up with these stores, and the last duties of these shops were to die with their customers. Stores like the one that sold yarn—the word itself made you open up your ears. It was a product and name that also seemed in danger of disappearing. Who knitted? The last time I saw a pair of knitting needles, they were used as a killer's weapons in a re run of some film noir movie. Nearby was the smoke shop and it too was ready to disappear as a small town institution in the era of the convenience store. The smoke shop sort of served the purpose of a convenience store before there 7-11s—though minus a lot of “the sundries, notions, and novelties.” The smoke shop had a hundred times more tobacco and newspapers than your Seven Eleven (and a hundred times less food). The smoke shop also had another purpose that could not be replaced. Every smoke shop was a front for a bookie joint, and every smoke shop owner was a book maker. This everybody knew, and this was part of the social fabric of a factory town Main Street. That is why the cops never closed down the smoke shops. A few stores down from the smoke shop was the state run Off Track Betting parlor—a near fluorescent lit vacuum of a space filled with men in their fifties and up—gouty, barrel gutted men trying to palm read their futures in scratch sheets which detailed the players of the day's race. Regardless of who few won, the day always ended with dozens of these racing sheets littering the sidewalk in front of the OTB.

And where there is vice there must be virtue.

“Look—your church,” I said to The Young Artist.

She smiled, and ah, it was still not the one she wanted to see. Perhaps when she had begun to appreciate the paintings of Grant Wood or Thomas Hart Benton, for this church was an old store front. This “Iglesia Pentacostal” danced to and praised the Holy Spirit in Spanish. Next to the anonymous public storage spaces, and the convenience stores, the ethnically congregated store front churches were this town's number three growth industry. If it were not for the Lord, lottery tickets, and individually sealed plastic vacuum units that sometimes contained the contents of a college student's between semesters dorm room (or the remains of a serial killer's victim) this city would be dead.

see **THE DRIVE** as a  
series in issues of  
**cc&d** magazine.



Test Drive, art by Nick Brazinsky



# children churches & daddies

ISSN 1068-5154



v167  
December '06



the unreligious, non-family oriented literary and art magazine

---

<b>Produced By</b>	Scars Publications and Design
<b>Editorial Offices</b>	Children, Churches and Daddies; Scars Publications and Design 829 Brian Court, Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA
<b>Internet</b>	ccandd96@scars.tv ▶ <a href="http://scars.tv">http://scars.tv</a>

---

**Publishers/Designers Of**  
Children, Churches and Daddies magazine; cc+d Ezines; Scars Internet Radio (SIR); The Burning mini poem books; God Eyes mini poem books; The Poetry Wall Calendar; The Poetry Box; The Poetry Sampler; Mom's Favorite Vase Newsletters; Reverberate Music Magazine; Down In The Dirt magazine; Freedom and Strength Press forum; assorted chapbooks and books; music, poetry compact discs; live performances of songs and readings

---

**Sponsors Of**  
past editions; Poetry Chapbook Contest; Poetry Book Contest; Prose Chapbook Contest; Prose Book Contest; Poetry Calendar Contest; Editor's Choice Award (writing and web sites); Collection Volumes

---

- **Children, Churches and Daddies** (founded 1993) has been written and researched by political groups and writers from the United States, Canada, Australia, Belgium, England, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Malta, Norway, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey (as well as input from both Japan and Slovenia). Regular features provide coverage of environmental, political and social issues (via news and philosophy) as well as fiction and poetry, and act as an information and education source. **Children, Churches and Daddies** is the leading magazine for this combination of information, education and entertainment.
- **Children, Churches and Daddies** (ISSN 1068-5154) is published monthly by **Scars Publications and Design**, attn: Janet Kuypers. Contact us via snail-mail or e-mail ([ccandd96@scars.tv](mailto:ccandd96@scars.tv)) for subscription rates or prices for annual collection books.
- To contributors: No racist, sexist or blatantly homophobic material. No originals; if mailed, include SASE & bio. Work sent on disks or through e-mail preferred. Previously published work accepted. Authors always retain rights to their own work. All magazine rights reserved. Reproduction of cc&d without publisher permission is forbidden. Copyright © 1993-2006 **Scars Publications and Design, Children, Churches and Daddies**, Janet Kuypers. U.S. Government copyright © 2004 Janet Kuypers on the logos for **Children, Churches and Daddies** and **Scars Publications**. All rights of pieces for written pieces and artwork remain with their authors.