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children
churches
& daddies

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5 (editor photo taken in St. Petersburg, Russia), 12 (a flag carried during the Marine Corps retirement ceremony for Master Sergeant Dave Johnson 08/27/04, and portrait of Brad behind bars, 14 (tree branches), 33-34 (giant tortoises at the Highlands on Santa Cruz Island in the Galapagos Islands 12/27/07), 34 (a monkey, a lion and a leopard from Brooklyn Zoo 05/30/05), plus editor photos with dead fish bones. Cover art of tree bark, photographed in Naples, Florida.

"There is no creative impetus in the absense of discontent"

— the thoughts of Deepak
Chopra, as explained on the
Colbert Report 12/19/06

The Mind of John

Janet Kuypers

humans are the only animals
that have thought
that's why we have gods

the boss lady's editorial

Staying In or Pulling Out

No, this editorial isn't about sex, it's about the quote-unquote never actually declared war by Congress War in Iraq. C Ra McGuirt (of Penny Dreadful Press) just passed around emails to his group of friends about the Iraq war, and I wrote an insanely long paragraph in response. (Keep in mind that this was an email response, and I was just babbling with some stream-of-consciousness email blather here...)

Because you see, this is the funniest thing, C Ra McGuirt and I have been writing back and forth a lot recently (I've been working on a book release of his right now, actually), and we have been writing these long drawn-out emails to each other talking about everything from abortion rights to the legalization of drugs, to the Iraq war, to infidelity in married couples (I tell you, they're long daily emails). And when I started writing what little I had to say about the current state of the Iraq War, I rambled on and on, and brought up a lot of points that I think might need discussing:

Just watched Bush's last State of the Union address last night.

In my opinion, I think it was a bad idea to go to Iraq in the first place, Saddam Hussein might have been a bad guy, but a part of me still didn't understand why we didn't just kill him in the Gulf War in 1990 (my husband told me we couldn't, because we were there on a UN mission and could not harm him because of the terms of engagement and because Saddam Hussein was the leader of a nation). I knew back on '03 that Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks, and the Americans really WERE out for Bin Laden's blood, but I saw no connection between Iraq and Bin Laden, so I thought it was a bad idea to divert us to Iraq. (That part of this paragraph is about as far left I get on the political scale). But now that we've been there screwing up the country so much, we MAY have stopped terrorists from being there (which is good), but if we just altogether pick up and leave right now I'm confident that any terrorist groups would just come right back in and settle in very comfortably (you know, to set up shop, so to speak). I think that although in general I love the sensibilities of Ron Paul (used to be a Libertarian, but switched over to being a



Republican, and I think it was so he would have a better chance of being elected to any office in government), I think Ron Paul's idea of pulling our troops out altogether immediately is a bad idea. I mean, we kept forces in Germany and Korea for I don't know how long (there may still be residual forces kept there, although pushed to a minimum because of Carter). And although Germany wasn't going to bounce back and attack America years after WWII, we still have an Air Force base and an Army

base in Germany. So although it might not have been a good idea for us to be in Iraq, on many levels we totally screwed the country up, and now we have to clean it up so it doesn't become worse than when we entered it (at least for our own security reasons).

So then I thought, this dates me, saying I just watched the State of the Union address last night, when the State of the Union was January 28th of 2008, but in listening to all of the people (in January) still trying to take a hold of their party's nomination for the 2008 Presidential election (when this prints in cc&d, remember that in the beginning of 2008 the Democratic front runners were Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards before Edwards backed out of the election 01/31 and the Republican front runners were Mitt Romney, John McCain, Mike Huckabee, and trailing behind them was ex-New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani who pulled out of the campaign after the Florida Primaries, and Ron Paul — the Libertarian-come-Republication that a lot of people latched onto right away...). And all of these people (with their plethora or problems) have an opinion about the war, and every Democrat wants to pull us out of Iraq. (Granted, the Republicans want us to stay in Iraq to "finish the job," but knowing what *some* of the Republican contenders have recently said, their position on Iraq actually isn't the real reason we should not elect them).

And then I thought, hey, I am not going to write another editorial about this, because I have already written too many editorials about the Iraq war. But then I looked back, and I think I may have only written about Iraq two or three times, and that was back in 2004. So what the Hell, it's been 4 years, and I won't talk about the same things. It's still on everyone's minds (other than the economy), and we've been there longer than we have been in WWII, so why not?

So, as I said in my insanely long email paragraph, I had just listened to the State of the Union address (the final one from President George W. Bush, which Democrats complained was just a rehashing of items he mentioned in many previous State of the Union address: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/wh/rem/99783.htm>), and listening to him (a man I don't particularly support) you still totally got revved up with everything he was saying in his speech. Yes, he *is* bringing some back — one Army brigade combat team and one Marine Expeditionary Unit have already permanently returned to the States, and in the coming months will pull 4 more brigades and 2 more battalions will return (permanently) if things continue to go well, which means more than 20,000 men will be home. (Granted, 24-hour news reporters were lip reading Madam Speaker Nancy Pelosi behind him, guessing that she was saying “not enough” while applauding with everyone.) But President Bush *did* go on about how the additional troops have been helping to quell any violence in Iraq, and that the troop surge seemed to be going well.

I mean, listen to the man. Things are working there.

So maybe this rate of pulling troops is a good speed to keep our country more secure (trust me, I don't like the idea of having to keep forces in a country for longer than needed, but if there is a need to stop terrorists from creating a haven when they can work toward attacking us in a country we helped to originally destroy, it might be in our best defensive interests to do it).

Okay, okay, let me check out the opposing opinions on this. I mean, I think I've got a pretty sound argument, but let me make sure I'm not missing anything.

Okay, I started searching and found one reason why people think our troops should be pulled from Iraq. From an editorial by Christopher Dols in the Badger Herald called “Troops should pull out of Iraq, now” (http://badgerherald.com/oped/2004/09/30/troops_should_pull_o.php), he makes the argument that our troops are there to “give” the Iraqis democracy (with the help of 140,000 American gunned troops, of course). But the premise of starting this type of government should be that the *people* of the country are starting the government. “Self-determination is a pretty well defined term. This understanding of sovereignty undermines every argument for establishing democracy in Iraq through military occupation. (Our forces) cannot uphold Iraqi democracy, no matter how polite they are.”

Good point. And oftentimes we have seen that when we have forced a political system down someone's throat, they may choose someone as a leader that won't be our ally.

Well, that's what we get.

Okay, then I found an article by Raed Jarrar and Joshua Holland for AlterNet (<http://www.alternet.org/waroniraq/64429/>) called "Only a U.S. Withdrawal Will Stop Al Qaeda in Iraq."

Aha. *This* was what I was looking for.

They started by talking over the phone with "Qasim Al-jumaili, a former member of Falluja's City Council, who was confident that his local militias would eliminate Al Qaeda in Iraq from Fallujah if U.S. forces were to withdraw. "The U.S. presence is making our work harder," he said.'"

"Al Jumaili was confident that Iraqis wouldn't tolerate Al Qaeda in Iraq's presence in an independent Iraq. "If the U.S. was to pull out from Iraq and let Iraqis have a national government instead of the puppet one now,

Iraqis with their government and tribal leaders would quickly eliminate Al Qaeda from all Iraq," he said."

Hmm. Well, *that's* a different spin on things.

So is the answer removing everyone and hoping Iraq will fend the terrorists off themselves? Or should we take out time in pulling out, the way President Bush has been suggesting, just to make sure there is no chance for a terrorist takeover?



Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief



Police Museum Billboard, Florida, art by Peter Bates

Hey Man

Julia O'Donovan

Hey man
Good to see you again
I think about you a lot
This time of year

You were a smart dog
to leave when you did
And I keep saying
One day I'll get out too

Congratulations too
I hear it's been
Two years in June
Who would have thought?

We always said
We'd be the last
To tie ourselves down
I hear she's done you good

And you're looking good
Barely notice the scar
And I'll never know
How we got out alive

Yeah, Fran's still
Bangin' that bowler
But he still won't bring her home
Because of Religion

So they're still putting the seats
Down in her car
She'll never know romance
She's too afraid

Funny thinking about it
You know she left Eddie
When he threatened her freedom
But he wanted her with him

Now she clings
To a guy
Who doesn't respect her
And never will

No she still won't
Talk to me
But I know
She's not over it yet

I know because
I know she misses
Someone who cares
And she knows I still do

All that I could have been
Is all that I should have been
Man you know,
I still think that everyday

Sometimes I wonder
Did I let it all pass by?
I really wonder
Will I get out of here alive

Sorry man
I know you moved on
Never expecting
To come back again

Well have a drink of this
Before you go
Was good to see you
Take care, Man

untitled

Michael Levy.

In the sperm
saint or sinner
out for a swim

**When
Things
Were
Good**David
Thompson

I am Eris
 I am the last
 I am unknown
 I am denied
 I am the eleventh
 I am round
 I have a daughter, Dysnomia
 Still I am denied
 I live outside
 Past Neptune, Uranus, Pluto, and the Kuiper Belt
 I am the border
 I am the last
 Labeled a dwarf planet to keep me out of the family
 Along with Pluto, and our middle sister Ceres
 I am Eris
 I am the last
 Still unknown for I am denied

We've been going there for years
 after our games on winter Friday nights.
 The owner's name is Sheila and she sits
 with us as we work our way through
 a burger and a few bottles of Stroh's.
 Her son Donny is the bartender.
 He looks just like her, always wears
 the same Red Wings jersey, moves
 a little slowly. Every week she tells us
 business isn't what it used to be, blames it
 on the economy. People out of work, she says
 as she stubs out another cigarette, houses for sale
 everywhere. I should have sold this dump years ago
 when things were good and moved to Florida
 like everybody else. We nod and sigh with her,
 grab another handful of fries. When we put on
 our coats, she gives us promotional calendars
 for the bar, color photos of golf courses down South
 for every month. I throw mine on the backseat of my car
 right next to the other ones that have been lying there for weeks.

Not Enough Totos To Go Around

Chris Volkay

Dorothy
Tinman
Scarecrow
Lion

All trembling down
hall to meet the
great and powerful Oz.
Shaking,
weak,
unworthy.
Great balls of
yellow and red
fire explode before their
eyes like universes being born.

Toto jumps out of
Dorothy's arms
pulls back the curtain
exposing Oz as a
big fat
fraud

We inch down the aisles
through the pews
feeling weak,
Trembly,
unworthy.
The sun stains our faces yellow and red
through the ornate
windows that entomb us.

Carrying miters, they appear
from behind the curtains,
the shaking begins.
There just aren't enough
Totos to go round.

A Leash that Chokes

Joshua Copeland

If you want it that bad
then do it, parade the floats
down main street towards the
drop off, leap into the vortex
of inked stardom, gut the choir, knot the
rope and leap off the Petronios'
sycamore. You and your
dull whining...
Come on,
you want it, the
yank
and
snap
of your neck,
the lick
of the fire alive.

“My parents don’t gimme me no room!”

Why delay? So you’re just going
to ponder and stutter and teeter? Suicide Hotline
is an oxymoron. Those hell bent on offing themselves
don’t ask for help. So go, and leave us to
mouth fulls of dinnertime conversation
and Steve Handler’s keggers. The wind seethes
through the branches of the Petronios’ tree, waiting for
your corpse to pendulum back and forth, your hopes
finally mum. Mrs. Petronio won’t mind.
You can do it. I have faith in the number of lives
lost
to sloth. They don’t wear skin
above the clouds, you know. Just yellow, gauzy ether,
brooks that pop a sunny sparkle,
and gaudy jellyfish floating
on the breeze.

You're not one of us anyway. You bitch that
you were drawn incompletely, the horizontal sum of things
too spaced apart: lines stretched too taut, some diagonals
lacking, a jigsaw puzzle half-heartedly
put together, gaps where
teeth should be...Complain to Him, collapse to
your knees at His throne, you're about as big
as His speckled and glittery
toenails.

Eternal Plan

Charlie Bryant

Had our trip to the Middle East been planned,
a well worn, patriotic blanket would have been included.
Her hands tied to mine,
we are one, bound.
Waves of emotion can not explain the crash.
To each, an end is sure,
yet who fears the unexpected?
The cold chills, her wet hand in mine.
We must die; if so, as one.

Stand!
No longer bound, still one.
Seductively soft, the movement of quiet desperation.
The sword is raised. We embrace.
Eye to Eye. Her hand in mine,
on a well worn quilt, we share a kiss.
then darkness.

For those who plan much better,
as we go to the new plane.
Memento Mori.
The quilt I should include,
is yours.

The Irony of Freedom

Adrian English

Imagine a world where safety is an illusion,
Relative to your strength.
But you're only as strong as I think you are.
Imagine a world where everyone is a threat until to get to know them.
Then you become buddies and now he's a bigger threat.
Imagine a world where the bad guys always win,
The good guys get beat up, stolen from, and killed.
Imagine a world where you have no identity and your every move is scrutinized.
You wake up and return to reality.
Aren't you glad prison ain't like that?



Unridden, image by
Cheryl Townsend

Junior's Favorite Chocolate Cake

Kelley Jean White MD

we thought women did nothing
they didn't work like fathers did

a coconut cake with white snowflake icing
wasn't work, nor hot-crossed buns
with drizzled sugar and dry flower dusting
nor a roast basted in the oven
six hours, lemon meringue pie,
three other desserts

my mother squeezed fresh orange juice
for my father each morning
while he was lying in bed

he had work to do
she had nothing

all day to clean house
his mother's tea waiting
in a thin china cup

**(and you could
hold me)**

Janet Kuypers

for the first time in my life
there is someone there for me
with open arms
and for once
i could curl up
like a little child
in the fetal position
and you could hold me

I Carry You

Aurora Elizabeth Blackwell

I carry you around
In my pocket
Right next to my leg
Brushing and colliding
With every step
I carry you
Because you carried me
All you had was love to offer
And that's not always enough
But you are a reminder
Of the love I carry around
Day to day weighing me down
Stopping me in my tracks
Stealing the breath within me
Because I carry you
Yeah, I carry you around
Love, life and all that you were
Brushing and colliding with me
I carry you like an appendage
Dragging along side me
Breaking up the fluidity of my step
And the stride in progress
Making it hard for it all to fall in place
Because I carry you
Yeah, I carry you around
All you had was love to give
And that's not nearly enough
But you remind me
Of the love I carry around

The Red Oaks of Clarion Hill

Kenneth W. Anderson, Jr.

She was buried next to her husband
above the white church on Clarion hill.
A line of old red oaks
quietly points the
way.

Like her husband
her grey face looks upward
and her lip's last breath
speaks kindly of her departed
soul.

Several had braved
the morning cold and broken rain
to give respect,
to pray,
and place lilies on her
grave.

Not wanting to disturb the mourners above,
my feet hurriedly walked past
stepping on every even
crack.

And in between my gait
my eyes looked down
upon the fallen leaves
resting along
the narrow path.

Giant red leaves
glistening in the sun,
their weathered hands spread wide,
their faces pressed hard by dew,
staining the cut grey stones
and the bottom of my
shoes.



Twisted Trees

photographed in Wyoming by
Brian Hosey

I MADE A BOI BLUSH!

(Custom Bumpersticker Seen On a Red Ford F-150)

C Ra McGuirt Friday, March 7, 2008

I made a boi blush. Yes, it was online
But making a boi blush
Is good work for a straight guy
Who's not pretending
To be more than a Dom bear
Up on a mountain
I know most folks just wouldn't care

I made a boi blush (You spell that B-O-I)
Because they don't know bois
Are girls who don't like guys
But do like dressing up
And acting the urchin
With leather jackets
And Dr. Martens.

"We're always attracted
To what we can't have,"
I told this sweet boi
And at first, she got mad:
"You made me blush, Sir,
And blushing's so girly!"
Then we both laughed hard
And I made a couch appear

In our tasteful cyberspace
This boi sat her astounding
Brit bottom on my bearish knee
And told me "Sometimes,
I act the Gay Boi;
All genders, that's me
And my friends...how comfy
To snuggle on this couch
With such a perceptive man...
Oops! There's my girlfriend!
I have to run! Write when you can!"

I sat there smiling
At my computer
I thought I'd done most everything
That can be on sin sites
But this was a new one
So I signed out for the night
And plan to order
A bumpersticker:

I MADE A BOI BLUSH!



Lake Michigan, photography
by Christine Sorich

Reading the Journal of a Crazy Lady

Fredrick Zydek

Entry # 25

When my uncle came home from the war he told me they killed every German big enough to die. It scared me. I thought about the baker and his family who lived two houses down from us. They were German. Would my uncle have killed

them if they lived in Berlin instead of our little town in the Cascade foothills. Did he shoot civilians? How small did they have to be before they were no longer big enough to be killed? Did he shoot children? Babies? I thought about it every day. When

they told us the Germans killed everyone big enough to die too, it made me sad. Soon I put away my war toys, including the fake Luger pistol I got for Christmas the year before Normandy. Eventually I stopped playing cowboys and Indians too. The idea

of killing anyone big enough to die was now my worst nightmare. I played my last cop and robber game when I thought about how innocent people, even kids, are often in the banks I started playing alone a lot that summer. I climbed trees, hiked the woods

and creeks on either end of town. I read books. I took up music, thought about becoming a jazz vocalist or actor. But not until just now did it dawn on me that to this day I worry that my uncle was a murderer even though dressed as a soldier.

To-Do List

C.B. Anderson

Wake up slow-like
Boil coffee, burn toast
Clear last night snack bags off couch –
wait coffee kick in
Change underwear unless frgt do
laundry (ystrdys list)
Feed cat
Feed cat to neighbor's dog
if pissed on rug again
Read mail, write letter to landlord
Toss ystrdys unread mail
Frgt letter
Shop
No – first make shopping list
No – corner store open late –
shop later, frgt shopping list
Don't frgt beer –
Jim Beam still half bottle
Find tv remote between cushions –
pray for game
Stay up late drinking
Fall asleep on couch
Wake up 5am, piss –
check make sure done list
Crawl to bed

Image donated by

C Ra McGuirt



Act Of Contrition

Kevin Michael Wehle

Time stands still;
Yet there is movement all around
Save us from stagnation
Deliver us from evil
Tempers flare
Mediocrity rules
Purity lost to
The bleakness of nothing
Backstabbing for the
Sake of the Devil's affections
Which is never what it seems
Lost in hostility
The flames grow higher
Eternal youth
Being the masters right hand man
Everlasting life
Comes at two high a price
The dissidents chose freedom

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

Art For Art's Sake, Money For God's Sake

A. McIntyre

VE Day, 1945. I think it was Jimmy's idea to go to Maxim's. We were in Paris, we were Americans, we'd liberated Europe. Victory was ours. C'mon, let's go live it up, he said, We deserve it. So we went, twelve of us. We'd all been in the front line at some point covering stories, we were alive, we needed to celebrate. There was a rumor Hemingway might show. I was pretty new so I just followed, I was very keen to meet Hemingway. The rest of them were a bunch of hacks I didn't recognize, and a couple of art critics.

So we were getting into the meal, everyone talking at once. I started with escargots, then roast duck. The bottles kept coming. Soon we were all drunk, and people started telling jokes. Hey listen to this one, yelled Jimmy, Which artist has dirty fingers? Why don't you shut it, someone yelled back, You've got a big mouth Jimbo. Everyone jocular, no malice. No seriously, slurred Jimmy, Which artist has dirty fingers? No-one was listening, so Jimmy stood up and yelled, Picasso. There was a moment's silence, then we were on the floor, like it was the funniest thing we'd ever heard.

The meal went on like this for about three hours, by which time everyone had put away at least two bottles of wine. We were toasting dead colleagues, singing songs. A couple of guys had fallen asleep. I was sitting back nursing a glass of cognac smoking a big Havana thinking of the good life, the war over, and we could go home. New era, new world. It was hard to believe.

Someone called for the check. The head waiter arrived, very correct, very respectful. We thanked him. Someone hollered, Vive La France and started singing the Marseillaise, the only one amongst us who knew any proper French, aside from asking for wine or a girl. The check did the rounds, no-one seemed anxious to pull out their wallet. When Jimmy saw it his eyes nearly popped out of his head. He handed it to me without a word. I did the math, recounted, repeated the process, checked the conversion, allowed for zeros. No mistake. \$600. More than my life savings.

I didn't even have two bucks on me. I'm cleaned out, whispered Jimmy. It turned out we had twenty bucks between us. Everyone thought someone else was going to pay, or else it was on the house because we were Americans and we'd won the war.

When the head waiter found out, he was no longer respectful and correct. An argument ensued, negotiations about washing up all night, calling the police. A couple of waiters entered the fray. Things were getting nasty. Then to cap it all one of the waiters made a remark about how this would never have happened when the Germans were there, the Germans always paid on the spot, they behaved better than the Americans. A scuffle started, one of the guys took a swing at the waiter who swung back, other guys trying to break it up, getting into a mix up themselves. Some military police arrived accompanied by two plainclothes officers. Things settled down, everyone straightening their jackets and ties, while we parlayed what to do.

I saw a stocky little guy with dark hair talking to the head waiter. I'd vaguely noticed him, and the broad he was with, no-one else paid them any attention, but they'd been watching us. They were at a table in the far corner, the woman dark and very beautiful like a gypsy. The head waiter listened, nodding, and he gave the little guy a menu. The little guy scribbled something on the card and returned it to the head waiter. The head waiter studied it, then he strolled over to our table, a big smile on his face. Gentlemen, he enunciated, The bill is taken care of, you may now leave. Knowing your predicament, Pablo Picasso has produced a drawing for Maxim's in lieu of your payment. He wishes you his warmest compliments. In the subsequent chaos, I looked at the drawing briefly before it was whisked away.

First I saw eyebrows and a nose, but when I looked a second time I perceived a pair of buttocks and a pen.



Self Portrait, art by Mike Hovancsek

Snap, Crackle, and Hop

(for Ophir)

Pat Dixon

1

“Hammie, how much trouble can a Yank get into visiting Australia?” That’s what Kathleen McDonald, my fiancée, had said when I indicated I had a few reservations about going Down Under on my own to see some of her homeland and, not incidentally, meet “The Parents.”

Katy spoke to me from our couch, where she lay resting—with a full cast on her right leg, a short “walking cast” on her left ankle, a sling to support her sprained left shoulder, and a large gauze pad covering the fifty-odd small stitches in her forehead.

“I’ll be well enough to travel in a week or two, and I’ll meet you at my folks’ place. Because of my injuries, *my* ticket can be changed without any loss, but *yours* would take a \$400 penalty to change—b’cause we’re still just ‘partners’ an’ not yet espoused types.”

I admitted that this was a major consideration, given the fact that we were both grad students who lived on what we made working two part-time jobs each. However, after seven years in Irvine, California, I had a strong aversion to any place that grows eucalyptus trees, and after ten minutes’ worth of research, I had an even stronger aversion to her natal land—which had more poisonous snakes per capita than any other place on earth. The great white sharks and the salt-water crocodiles of Australia did not appeal to me either, but, truth be told, I planned to avoid all contact with the beaches, woods, and swamps Katy was so fond of. And I had told her.

“Hammie,” she said with a sweet smile on her pink lips and in her green eyes, “do you want to ask your mum or dad for the money to change your ticket?”

Since she already knew that my parents had already paid three-fifths of the amount for both our tickets, she already knew that I did not desire to hit them up for any additional amount. Reluctantly and with what I hoped looked like a good-natured smile, I shook my head and said that she was right—as usual.

During the long flight I made copious notes on my laptop for the fifth chapter of my dissertation—“The Mask *behind* the Mask of the Poet’s ‘Second Self’ in La Fontaine’s *Contes et nouvelles en vers*.” And, between naps and trips to the restroom, I read three trashy mystery novels I’d bought at the airport before take-off. The only real unpleasantness had been the hassle during check-in when my passport and driver’s license were being looked at: they seemed to doubt that a young “normal looking” man named Ibrahim Hassan had been born in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A., and they insisted on x-raying my shoes, camera, computer, and person—while three large dogs sniffed me thoroughly. I don’t know for a fact that the pilots, stewards, stewardesses, and the sky marshal were “tipped off” about my ethnicity, but I had a vague impression that, throughout the flight, I was being scrutinized with more *concern* than any of my fellow passengers were. But then I’ve grown accustomed to this kind of attention and have learned to take it, as we say in St. Louis, “in stride.”

When we cleared customs in Sydney, I was pleasantly surprised to experience none of that sort of paranoia. And I met with a similar nonchalance on the part of the people who rented me a new tan SUV. Not a blink or a stammer while they verified I had a current driver's license—just a polite explanation of the insurance options and genuinely friendly responses when I asked for road maps and directions for getting onto the best highway to Sophy Springs, home town of Katy's folks, a fourteen-hour drive away.

"Have a nice stay, Mr. Hass'n," said the cheerful young man as I left their parking lot.

"G'day, mate!" I said over my shoulder.

2

It had seemed like an excellent plan at the time.

After a dinner of truly excellent lamb in the restaurant of a small hotel where I had taken a room, I told the desk clerk my destination, said I planned to get an early start, and asked him what sights of special interest might be ahead of me on the highway. He thought for about twenty seconds and then named several, indicating that almost everyone who had the time should make a little detour to visit a small beryl mine where uncut gemstones could be bought for amazingly low prices—and, yes, they *did* accept my type of credit card. It would be about five miles off the main highway, but, thought I, it would make a nice little gift, perhaps, for Mrs. McDonald. Foolishly, I had not remembered to bring either of "the folks" a present from the States.

And so, up and dressed for adventure, I checked out and was on the road by "half seven." Around 8:40 a.m., I saw the sign for the turn onto a gravel road. It amused me to observe the local fauna, or some of it, leap up in a startled way as I sped down the rutted single lane, the sun low in the sky before me and a huge cloud of dust visible in my rear view mirrors. I still have no idea what species of 'roo I was disturbing, but I was amused to designate them "wallaby wannabees." I wished them no harm, of course, for they, as Katy says, are God's creatures, but I did sound my horn a few dozen times to announce my presence to any late sleepers among them.

Suddenly, I regret to say, one of them, like a giant bunny, suddenly appeared in the road in front of my vehicle, darting out of the brush or bush or whatever it is. He—she—it hopped along the side the gravel road ahead of me, going in my direction. I realized that I was very rapidly overtaking the beast and prudently applied the brakes so as not to come too close to it—and then it crossed right in front of me, and I felt cold in my neck and numbness in my face when I heard the loud whump-ing sound and saw the poor thing propelled through the air.

Thankfully, my vehicle stopped short of the beast. As a teenager, I had once run over a raccoon in Ohio and had nearly been moved to tears for months after that whenever I thought about how I had not only killed but had crushed and torn up the body of a beautiful, perfect little living thing. When I told Katy about this event and my reactions to it, she smiled and called me "tender hearted" and later, at night, called me her "tender man" before we went to sleep.

I descended from the now dusty SUV to see the fruits of my foolishness.

Before me on the rough gravel lay the body of a large kangaroo, perhaps four feet long from its heels to the top of its head. Dust from my careless speeding caught up with us and hung faintly in the air, some settling and some blowing beyond us, down the deserted lane.

I could detect no breathing, but I saw no blood either. I felt “prickly,” as if I had just had a close brush with death myself—as I often do on the freeways of southern California. My breathing was labored, and I had to take several deep breaths with conscious effort. For a moment I almost felt on the verge of tears again, even though I am now almost thirty-five years old.

I walked around the perfect little animal, nearly half my weight, perhaps, and more than two-thirds my height. I looked at its narrow shoulders and narrow snout, its long feet and ears, its dull once-beautiful eyes, its long heavy tail. It, too, had stood erect on two legs and had been carefree on this warm, sunny morning. And I, in my thoughtless carefreeness, had altered the course of its life.

And then, like a vehicle with an automatic transmission, I felt my mood shift. I needed to be practical. Had I damaged the rental vehicle? A brief glance at it told me I had not. The McDonalds were expecting me, their future son-in-law, and time was passing even as I stood, immobilized by my tender heart, near this creature. Should I move the cadaver from the lane and proceed to the beryl mine, hoping to purchase a gift for my future mother-in-law? At the least, I decided, I must move the poor little beast from the lane so that no other vehicle would strike and desecrate its body.

Feeling sorrowful and somewhat ashamed, I picked up the ‘roo’s little shoulders and dragged it towards the gravel lane’s shoulder, planning to take it at least fifteen or twenty feet into the bush—partly so that it would never be disturbed by anyone, but partly, too, so that no evidence of my “crime” would ever be seen by anyone else. And then, as I paused to catch my breath, another thought crossed my mind. A wicked thought.

I pulled the ‘roo over to my rental vehicle and propped it in a sitting position against the front bumper. Its eyes were open, and it looked almost alive in that position. Then I got my camera out of its heavy canvas case and walked back to the front of the SUV. After taking five photos of the creature, I suddenly got an even more wicked idea.

I was wearing the “adventure gear” that Katy had bought for me, special for this trip. Sturdy shoes, khaki socks, khaki shorts and shirt, khaki hat, aviator sunglasses, and a roomy khaki vest with dozens of small pockets and hiding places for hundreds of odds and ends. First I took off my hat and sunglasses and put them on the ‘roo. Then I took a couple of photos of it sitting there, looking, as we used to say in high school, *tres* cool. Then I pulled off my multi-pocketed vest and slipped this garment onto the animal and fastened four of the snap fasteners in the front, over its chest and belly. Proud of the effect and nervously amused as well, I again walked five or six paces down the lane and snapped half a dozen more photos.

With the sixth of these, I caught a faint sense of motion through my viewfinder. I looked up, my mouth dropping open. The creature was—stirring. My hands, still grip-

ping my camera, fell almost to my waist, and I took one step forward. The kangaroo suddenly was fully awake and in motion. Before I could take a second step, it made two, three, four great leaps and disappeared into the bush on the right side of the gravel lane, dropping my sunglasses with the first hop and my hat with the second. Perhaps fifty yards away, it appeared for a brief second—still wearing my khaki vest—and then it disappeared again, for good. I began to laugh in relief: I *hadn't* murdered the poor thing after all. Then I began to laugh, too, about the joke I'd played on myself—I'd given it a vest that had cost my dear Katy nearly a hundred dollars.

3

Fortunately I had left the keys in the SUV's ignition when I had gotten down to inspect the animal. Unfortunately, as I discovered a short while later at the beryl mine—after eating a delicious mutton sandwich, drinking a nice cold cola, and picking out a pretty little gem for Katy's mom—when I had dressed that morning, I had put my cellular phone, my booklet with personal addresses and phone numbers, and both my passport and my wallet with all my credit cards, my cash, and my driver's license into three of those fasten-down pockets of my new vest.

I explained my problem to the old gentleman at the mine's shop, and he agreed to accept my sunglasses in exchange for the sandwich and cola and advised me to speak to the local police when I arrived at the next town, about an hour down the highway towards Sophy Springs. I did so. Except for the tags on my suitcases and a copy of the vehicle rental agreement, I had nothing in my possession that identified who I was. The police there were very polite and professional, but I was certain that I sensed they were a bit skeptical when I explained what exactly had become of my passport and other identification—as well as all means of paying my way.

"Perhaps you think I am some sort of terrorist?" I said impulsively, attempting to laugh. My tone sounded unnatural to my own ears, for my throat was suddenly dry and tight. I sat down in the large wooden armchair beside a large wooden desk.

The desk sergeant laughed easily and said, "O' course not. What would be y'r tahgit? An' b'sides, they're all fah more compost mensus'n you ah."

His two officers grinned at his wit. My face suddenly felt unnaturally warm, and I imagined that my color had deepened four or five shades.

"I'd like to phone the American embassy," I said hoarsely. "Do I have the right to make a phone call in your country? Do I have any rights here?"

The three of them grinned, looked at each other, and again laughed. My breathing was becoming labored. My chest felt tight. My vision began to blur. My nose began to run.

I attempted twice to clear my throat. I sniffed and wiped my hands across my nostrils and then across the sides of my dusty new shorts.

"I am a U.S. citizen. I have done nothing wrong!"

"Ah y' heah t' visit anyone, young fellah? Maybe they c'n straighten all this out f' y' in a jiffy," said the sergeant, patting my on my left shoulder. My heart sank. I felt my pulse beating in my neck—heard my pulse drumming in my ears.

"I'm on my way to see—Mr. and Mrs. Brian McDonald—in Sophy Springs,"

I said numbly. “I—they’ve never met me, never seen me. I—I am engaged to their daughter, Kathleen—Kathleen McDonald—Katy.”

“An’ where is this Kathleen, y’r fiancée, now, young fellah?”

My jaw muscles began to cramp. I felt suddenly very warm. I sensed that I was doomed—I had admitted to taking—to taking—one of their *women*. Now they knew I was worse than a terrorist—and they had the names of two prime witnesses to my guilt. I pictured them taking me far out into the bush—into the outback—with the wallabies and the vipers and a hundred species of ’roos of all sizes—making me dig my own grave—making me stand in it as they pumped me full of lead—and then they would pour gasoline—petrol—on my warm corpse and toss in a match—and the black smoke would be visible for miles, but no one would notice—or care—and my poor Katy and my poor parents would never know—my parents who, I was certain in my heart, secretly disapproved of Katy—and our lifestyle together.

“She—she’s back in Irvine—Irvine, California. She—she was injured while we were climbing a rock face in—in Colorado—during a vacation break from—school. She’s—she will be coming here to join me—in a week. Maybe two weeks.”

My head slumped forwards, and I stared numbly at the dark, scuffed boards of the police station floor. I felt myself perspiring profusely and felt ashamed of that fact.

4

“Somebody heah to see y’, young fellah. Try to pull y’rself t’gethah,” said the cheery voice of the sergeant. “An’ y’ might want t’ give y’r face a bit of a wash up first.”

He pointed to the door of the lavatory that was down a little corridor leading to some small cells. I looked up at him but didn’t move.

He shrugged. “Suit y’rself, then.”

I wondered vaguely if there would be some mockery of a trial first. Would they invite the whole town to my execution—or would it be a “private affair”?

I took a deep breath and felt that I had resigned myself to my fate. I straightened up in my seat and squared my shoulders. Then I marched to the lavatory and “gave my face a bit of a wash up.” And ran my fingers through my dusty hair, giving it a semblance of a part.

“Mr. Hass’n, meet Mr. and Mrs. McDonald, y’r intended’s folks,” said the sergeant when I returned to his office.

“Hey, Ibrahim,” said the tall florid man with thinning gray hair and pale blue eyes. He extended his right hand, then patted my shoulder. “Call me Brian.”

“Welcome t’ the family, Hammie luv!” said the short portly woman. “I’m May. Bry an’ me, we got here as quick’s we could, aftah th’ sergeant here rung us up. Y’ look all done in, luv. We’ll give Kate a ring t’ assure her y’ made it okay, get a good supper in y’, an’ yore’ll be right as the ol’ rain by tomorrah mornin’!”

Then the dear woman threw her plump arms around my aching neck and planted a big wet kiss on my trembling lips.

Two weeks later, when Katy arrived, she pointed out that developing my film would have removed any doubts as to my veracity—had anyone ever had such doubts.

A Boy and a Bridge

Mel Waldman

How long does it take to cross a bridge? Gee, I don't know. But the other day, I saw this kid do it in no time. I was amazed.

I went home and thought about the kid who did it. How come? When it's late and you can't sleep, you wonder. I fell asleep later. I saw a lot of bridges in my dreams. But not even in my dark kingdom did I cross one bridge-not even an old crooked one ready to crumble. Not even that kind.

I woke up. You have to if you're not dead. After I watched a golden sunrise, I looked for that boy who made it. I couldn't find him or the bridge he crossed.

Can't get that boy out of my head. Maybe I'm obsessed with him. He looked familiar and I felt I really knew him. The day I saw him I was wandering around town, going nowhere in particular, when I passed this bridge but didn't cross it. I circled around and slowly approached it. But I kept my distance. Took a few steps before I turned around. Guess I was scared out of my skull. And then this fellow came out of nowhere and walked right across the bridge without hesitation. That was phenomenal.

I'd like to praise that boy in person and tell his mother he's a fine lad. And brave too! Not many cross a bridge today.

I looked for the place all day and night. In fact, I had the whole town looking for the bridge. I went from bar to bar, church to church, synagogue to synagogue, crap house to whore house and just about everywhere. No one knew where the bridge was. No one ever heard of a bridge in this town. Hey, what is a bridge anyway?

He reminded me of someone. He looked like many folks I've seen. But I felt he was really close to me, like a twin brother or a son.

I haven't crossed a bridge since the days when things were different a long time ago. I guess I crossed a bridge before The Change came. After it happened, I never crossed a bridge again. That's why I know that boy is brave. I still remember that part of my past. But folks around here don't even know what a bridge is.

I could be drunk or crazy. You see, I'm this fellow who saw a boy cross a bridge the other day and I want to thank him.

The boy vanished. And the others never saw him. I did and I'm proud.

Say it. Come on. Ask it. What kind of folks don't know what a bridge is? And how can a bridge disappear? I bet you even wonder if the boy really existed. Yeah, maybe I was hallucinating or high. You see, I've stayed away from bridges for many years, except for the other day when I saw that courageous boy cross the bridge. But the others don't remember.

I know what a bridge looks like. I've been on one. After *IT* came, however, no one crossed a bridge. We went to bars and drank until we forgot. We crawled and crept and cried for strong legs, not the crumbling kind, but we never went back.

The others say they never heard of a bridge. And they didn't see the boy. I don't care. I saw him and the bridge. He was brave. I never asked him if he knew what a bridge was. He just crossed it, you see.

The Executive and the Good Humor Girl

Bruce Adkins

After bidding farewell to a large assembly of fellow employees, Greg Fletcher packed all his belongings, including his cowboy hat, and hit the highway to begin his new stress free life. At the youthful age of 48, Greg sought to give up striving to make more and more money. He was determined to forget the pressures, tensions and anxieties that he endured for 24 years, most of which was spent serving as a high ranking executive of the Alton W. Ramsey Oil and Gas Company.

Greg drove his BMW north out of Houston on that hot summer morning with Willie Nelson's "On the Road Again" blaring from his car radio. He tried on his new cowboy hat while observing his reflection in the overhead mirror. If I could eliminate those harsh lines around my eyes I might make a good looking cowboy, Greg decided, even though he couldn't deny he was overweight and had a protruding stomach to prove it.

Attached to his glove department on the dashboard hung a plastic bag that contained all his medicine. High blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, you name it and he had a pill for it.

Greg hoped he didn't have another one of those dizzy attacks before he got to New Mexico and his 620 acre ranch that his last tenant had long since vacated. He dreaded the long drive, but due to health reasons the doctor advised him not to fly.

But outside of his health Greg didn't have any worries, he realized. He was financially secure. In fact, he was tired of thinking about making money. He was tired of making deals and taking advantage of people to get ahead. He was tired of having women by the dozens chasing him because of his wealth. His wife died three years ago and since then he had given up finding another woman like her.

After a long day of fighting traffic jams and road repairs, Greg checked into an Oklahoma City hotel, and then stopped off at the adjoining club to have a drink before having dinner and retiring for the evening.

Greg took a seat at the bar and placed his order when a girl squeezed in beside him. "Hey cowboy, buy a girl a drink?" she asked.

"I'm a non social drinker," Greg said, removing his hat and checking his appearance in the long mirror that ran along the wall behind the bar.

The girl laughed and laughed, an outrageous, contagious laughter, Greg thought.

"That's so funny. What's your name?" she asked.

"John Wayne," Greg said without looking up.

"Ah, you're too fat to be John Wayne," she said, and laughed so loud that Greg couldn't help laughing too.

"Would you like a date John Wayne?"

"No thanks," Greg said. But then it occurred to him that he wouldn't mind having someone cheerful to talk to. He needed some laughter in his life and he didn't like to eat

alone. "Would you like to join me for dinner?" Greg asked.

She stood up. She was dressed in a red blouse, a white mini skirt and black zip up boots. She was tall, with thin shoulders, a flat chest, clear, dark skin and long black hair. Her lips were painted a bright pink and a trace of rouge was still damp on her cheeks.

"I can't do that," she said. "I have to work, unless of course you'd like to pay me for my time."

"All right," Greg said.

"Are you talking about a romantic dinner in your room or what?" she asked.

She looked to be in her late twenties and so innocent that Greg wondered how she got into her profession. "That's sounds like a good idea," Greg said. "But you can leave off the romantic. I just want some cheerful company."

"Well, it's gonna cost you," she said. "I charge a hundred bucks for that."

"Ok," Greg said, as he finished his drink and got up from the bar.

"Up front," she said.

"You don't trust me," Greg said, as he peeled off five twenties from a roll of bills and handed it to her when no one was looking.

As they walked to the elevator she stopped abruptly. "Say John Wayne, you're not one of those violent guys, are you? I've never been beat up before and I don't go in for that kinky stuff."

Greg turned and examined her up close. Despite all her laughing and confidence she exhibited, she looked afraid and so innocent, he thought. "You can back out," Greg said. "In fact I've changed my mind. You can keep the hundred bucks. I don't need any company tonight," Greg said, as he stepped on the elevator without her.

Some twenty minutes later Greg answered the door to his suite. He had just come out of the shower and answered the door in his bath robe. "I came up to have dinner with you," she said.

A whore with a conscience, Greg thought. "How did you find me," Greg asked while opening the door for her to come in.

She laughed that contagious laugh again. "You're the only cowboy registered in this hotel," she said.

The two room suite was furnished with all the comforts of home. Paintings lined the walls. A vase of flowers and a bowl of fruit decorated the table and a morning newspaper laid on a chair beside the king size bed.

They dined on a variety of fish and vegetables and finished the dinner with a bottle of red wine. Greg, his unruly gray hair combed in place and dressed in red silk pajamas and a white robe, tried to get the girl to talk about herself, but the standing operating procedure as he came to understand was for the customer to do the talking.

"I'm headed back to my ranch in Happy Valley, New Mexico," Greg began. "I'm tired of the big city rat race and all the stress, noise and pollution. I'm going to kick back, relax, go fishing, maybe grow a beard and try to lose about 50 pounds," he said, patting his stomach. "I'm going to get healthy again. Greg said, smiling. "But I'm running off at the mouth. What about you?"

"I don't know your name," she said.

"Greg, Gregory Fletcher," Greg said.

“Are you a real cowboy?”

“Well, I’m going to be when I get back to my ranch,” Greg said.

“Are you gay?”

“No,” Greg said, nodding his head.

“Children?”

“No wife, no kids, I’m all alone.”

“Where do you get all your money, Mr. Fletcher?” Do you rob banks?”

“I’m a gambler. I made most of my money in investments.”

“Good Lordy, I wish I could do that,” she said, while pulling her legs up under her like she might be performing a yoga exercise. “Well,” she continued, toying with her wine glass. “I hope someday I find a husband and have two kids before I get too old.” Then, she paused and began talking fast and Greg wondered if she was reciting her prepared speech. “I’m 27 and my name is Alberta although most people call me Birdie. I got raped when I was nine years old. I married at 16, but my husband got drunk and was run over by a train.”

She continued to tell one tale after another and Greg had trouble separating her facts from fiction. At one point he got so sleepy he went to bed. “Birdie,” he said. “You can leave if you want to. I’m going to sleep.”

Some two hours later Greg awoke to find Birdie down on the floor doing push ups and watching a late night movie on TV and laughing that outrageous laugh again. Greg sat up and watched her and started laughing too. Then he turned over and went back to sleep.

Greg awoke the next morning with the sound of coffee brewing. From the shower he could hear Birdie laughing and splashing in the water. “Hey, good morning,” she called out when she realized Greg was up. “I made you some coffee.”

While getting dressed she told Greg about the television show she watched last night and laughed and laughed. Greg, while watching the stock market report on the television found himself laughing too, but he didn’t know what he was laughing about.

“Won’t you have some breakfast?” Greg asked a few minutes later when she was finished dressing.

“No, I guess I’ll get going.”

“Do you have a busy schedule today?” Greg asked.

“No, I guess I’ll go back to my room and hang out,” Birdie said.

“Well,” Greg said, turning off the television. “You could ride out to the ranch with me.”

“Are you kidding?” Birdie said. “You think I’d go out of town with a strange man. The last time I did that I got in trouble. But,” she said, pausing “you’re a nice man. How much would you pay me?” She wore no makeup now and her long black hair was combed down below her shoulders. Her brown eyes reflected compassion and good will. She could have been a Sunday school teacher, Greg thought.

Greg smiled. “Oh yeah, I know it’s going to cost me.”

“Oh sure.”

“How much?”

“Well, let’s see. It’s a long way to New Mexico. Maybe about five hundred,” she said.

“Just to keep me company?” Greg asked.

“Well, you know it’s gonna cost you,” she said, shaking her head. She looked so pretty at that moment, Greg thought. She stood there measuring him with her big brown eyes and her refreshing child like innocence brought a smile to Greg’s face.

“I’ll give you three hundred,” Greg said.

“No sex, not even a kiss?” Birdie asked.

“Just your company and good humor,” Greg said.

“I’ll take four,” Birdie said.

“Ok, you got a deal,” Greg said.

“Good Lordy! Just to ride with you. It will be like taking a vacation,” Birdie said. “But how am I going to get back?”

“I’ll fly you back,” Greg assured her.

Greg, concerned about being seen with Birdie in her provocative clothes stopped off at a ladies wear store before leaving Oklahoma City and bought her a pair of blue jeans, a cowboy shirt and some tennis shoes, all of which she wore proudly out of the store.

It was on the outskirts of Oklahoma City that Greg suddenly pulled his car over to the side of the highway and held his face in his hands. “I’ve got to stop for a minute,” Greg said.

About that time a policeman pulled up behind them. “You can’t park here,” the policeman said.

“He’s sick,” Birdie said.

“Yeah, well there’s a walk in medical center just around the next corner,” the policeman said. “You got to move this car.”

Greg put the car in gear and drove up in front of the medical center after stopping with a jolt.

“Your husband is a sick man,” the doctor told Birdie a short time later. His blood pressure is too high. I gave him a shot and some medication. I think we ought to admit him to the hospital for observation. An ambulance is waiting for him out in front of the building,” the doctor concluded.

Greg was assigned a private room in the hospital with two beds. Birdie slept in one of the beds what time she wasn’t pacing the floor and complaining to the nurses. Greg was given a series of tests which all proved to be negative. His blood pressure was normal the next morning and he was dismissed with a warning to cut down on his salt intake and to lose some weight.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were a sick man?” Birdie asked when they were back on the road again. “I can’t be playing no nurse maid. How did I get myself in this mess?” she kept asking herself.

By that afternoon they had made their way across Oklahoma into northeast New Mexico. As they approached Happy Valley, located only three miles from his ranch, Greg stopped at a super market and stocked up on groceries.

The old four bedroom ranch house, sitting well back of the road, looked the same, Greg thought, but he was shocked to discover his land that used to be so good for cattle grazing was now filled with weeds and cactus plants.

Behind the house were two barns and a big fenced lot where in times past cows

and chickens maintained their residence.

The interior of the house was clean, but the furniture, badly in need of replacing reeked of a dry musty smell. Greg opened the doors and window of the house and then tried out the telephone.

They had only two doctors in town. Greg called both of them, but the earliest appointment he could get to see a doctor was three weeks away. Then while Birdie was putting away the groceries he called the airlines. "You can leave in the morning at four," Greg said.

"That's early," Birdie said.

"You could stay here and go to the doctor with me. I might need some morale support," Greg said.

"Me, stay here for three weeks," Birdie said. "That would really cost you."

"I might not be able to afford you," Greg said.

"I'll have to do some figuring," Birdie said, but no sum was ever settled on.

They were tired and after a light dinner they retreated to separate bedrooms. The next morning Greg was shocked to see Birdie standing by his bed dressed in shorts and in her new tennis shoes. "Want to go for a jog?" she asked.

A jog. A health minded running prostitute, Greg thought. What's this world coming to?

"I been thinking you need to lose some weight and maybe I can help you," Birdie said.

This is not the kind of stress free life I envisioned, Greg thought, as he crawled out of bed. Maybe I should tell Birdie to leave.

Greg couldn't jog, but with Birdie prodding him he managed, despite the hot summer heat, to walk two miles around the weeds and cactus of his ranch before he gave out. The next morning Greg, so sore he could hardly walk, tried to get out of exercising, but Birdie kept urging him on. Exercise is good for you she kept telling him.

Birdie proved to be a good cook too, Greg thought, but he wished she would stop trying to starve him to death. She served him a bowl of oat meal, a banana and a glass of skim milk for breakfast, soup and salad for lunch, and fish and vegetables for dinner. "I can't exist on this diet. I can't exercise," Greg told her one morning. "I'm too weak."

In addition to their daily exercise Birdie showed Greg how to plant a flower garden and how to care for a stray dog that had wandered on to the ranch. Later, Greg held the ladder while Birdie painted the eaves around the house where the wind and rain had inflicted so much damage in years past.

One night Greg awoke to find Birdie in bed with him and kissing him on the mouth. "You're a wonderful man, Greg Fletcher. Do you know you're the first man I ever willingly kissed," Birdie whispered, but when she got no reaction from Greg she hurried back to her own bedroom located on the other end of the house.

Two days before Birdie was scheduled to leave, Greg got in to see a doctor. According to the doctor's scales Greg had lost 16 pounds and his vital signs, including his blood pressure were normal.

On their way back to the ranch that night Greg handed Birdie an envelope.

When Birdie opened it she squealed at the top of her lungs. “Good Lordy, five thousand dollars. Is this for me?”

“Yes, but you don’t have to leave. You could stay longer,” Greg said.

The following afternoon when Greg came home from running errands and getting his car serviced he found the check along with a note on the dining room table.

Dear Greg, the note began.

By the time you read this I’ll be on a bus heading back to Oklahoma. Greg, staying with you these few weeks has been the most delightful time of my life. I didn’t know there were any nice men in this world like you. You have really opened my eyes. I’m going to find me a good job and hold out for that picket fence and two kids that I told you about. You need to continue your diet and exercise. Best of luck, Greg. You’re a great guy

Birdie

PS—I’m returning your check since I don’t want to cheapen the best three weeks of my life.

How could she turn down five grand? Greg wondered. He wanted to tell her the time she spent with him was the most delightful days of his life too.

Maybe it was just as well he got rid of her, Greg thought. She was a cheap prostitute wasn’t she? Yes, but she had no business being a prostitute, Greg reasoned.

The more he thought about it the madder he got. Two weeks later Greg wondered if he was losing his mind as he drove back to Oklahoma City. He stopped at the club where he first met Birdie and hung around there for over two hours, but she never showed up. Finally, the bartender told him he thought Birdie was working at the Hi Way Café located on the edge of town.

The Hi Way Café was a small place filled with loud music and cigarette smoke. “*I Didn’t Know God Made Honky Tonk Heaven*” was playing on the juke box as Greg was seated in a small booth near the back of the café.

Straining his eyes with every ounce of energy Greg was sadly disappointed for there was no trace of Birdie. When his waitress came back he asked her if a girl named Birdie worked here.

“Yeah, she’s in the back” the waitress said. “I’ll go call her.”

A few seconds later Birdie, dressed in a white waitress uniform with her long hair tied up on the back of her head approached Greg’s table. Upon seeing Greg she put her hands to her face and screamed, “Good Lordy, what are you doing here!”

“Came to see you,” Greg said.

“Good Lordy, what a shock. I never thought I’d see you again,” she said.

“Can you sit down?” Greg asked.

“I’m the only cook on duty,” she said “but maybe for a minute.”

“Birdie,” Greg said, holding her hand. “I want you to come back to the ranch. He took a small box out of his shirt pocket and handed it to her. “Go on, open it.”

When Birdie opened the box an expensive diamond ring stared her in the face. “Oh Good Lordy,” she screamed again. Greg took the ring out of the box and placed

it on her finger. “Is this for me?” she asked in disbelief.

“I want to make a respectable woman out of you. I want to give you that picket fence and two kids if I can,” Greg said.

“You want to marry me?” she asked. “But why would you want to marry a girl like me?”

“Because I love you, damn it,” Greg said, not caring who heard him. “Come on, we’re leaving, Greg said, grabbing her by the arm.

“You’ll have to get you another cook. I quit,” Birdie said, as she grabbed her purse on her way out the door.

Greg, in his blue jeans and cowboy hat and Birdie in her white waitress uniform were married later that evening in a small wedding chapel. Not long after the ceremony they checked into a hotel only this time there was no fooling around. “Come on Greg, we better hurry and have two kids before I get too old,” Birdie said, laughing that outrageous laugh again.

“We can’t waste a minute,” Greg said. Greg hoped he didn’t have a stroke as he successfully demonstrated his manhood for the first time in over three years. “If I die right now,” Greg said a short time later. “I’ll die a happy man.”

“Good Lordy, Greg Fletcher,” said Birdie. “You’re not gonna die now. Our life is just getting started.”

Freedom:
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Mona Lisa's Smile

David B. McCoy

Mona Lisa's smile has moved into our neighborhood. Daily, faces drive by her house hoping to snatch a glimpse. Once in a while I do see Mona Lisa's smile peaking out from behind her curtains—but she appears rather reserved and shy. Only on holidays, when Andy Warhol's wig drops by, do you hear a peep out of her. But when you do, you'd think all hell is breaking loose.

Capturing the Wild for our Entertainment

I recently came back from the Galapagos Islands, where you become the nature fanatic, snapping pictures like mad of Red-Footed Bobbies, Blue-Footed Boobies and Nazca Boobies (yes, these are the actual names of birds, and when you get back to town the have of tourist shops with mass-produced t-shirts emblazoned with “I love boobies” on them), or land or marine iguanas, lava lizards, fur seals and sea lions, dolphins, penguins and flamingos (even Sally Lightfoot crabs and Frigate birds and American Oystercatchers and finches). But while we were traveling through the islands we took a special trip near the Highlands on Santa Cruz Island to a farm where giant tortoises were allowed to roam free on a large amount of land — and it was better than seeing and tortoises confined in a pen, even an outdoors one. The Charles Darwin Research Station in Santa Cruz Island had older tortoises displayed there, but they were in pens, in relatively restricted areas. (I know, I know, you think: they won’t want to go far, so that’s no big deal, but because these had areas in the Research Center that were only separated by very low steps in parts, these animals would try to move freely and leave their quarters).



And these giant tortoises were really amazing to see, probably at 3 or 4 feet wide, making them probably 4 or 5 feet in length (at 2 or 3 feet high). Some of these tortoises were insanely old (100+ years old), and you could see it not only in the way they walked (but trust me, being in that shape with that shell, *anyone* would lumber slowly) but also in the wrinkles when they stretched their skin to arch their neck and turn their head or reach to drink water for the standing water ponds. And it was really cool, after walking slowly (they would sense the vibrations from our walking), to be able to walk along the grass and find tens of giant turtles eating grass, or drinking water, or just enjoying themselves in the sun.

And now that I’ve gone on like this about the greatness of seeing this, you’re probably getting pissed off. That’s the point?, you ask. Well, I came back to Chicago and took a walk in the local mall before it opened (it’s not like I’m going to go out for a walk when it’s 34 degrees outside out, with tons of slush and snow on the ground), and I passed Rainforest Cafe. Now, I have issue with that restaurant already (it’s not like they donate to *preserving* rain forests, in fact, they hurt the rain forest by using concentrate orange juice in this massive chain, which takes a portion of it’s concentrate oranges from cleared Brazilian rain forest land, they like to just give their chain restaurants and jungle-life feel and monopolize on the fact that people

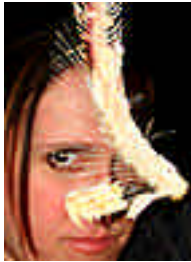
in general respect the rain forest by using that name), but the Rainforest Cafe has a shop right across the mall hallway called "Serpent Safari." Now this place boasts "America's finest reptile zoo" with guided tours (that are only \$5 to \$7), but on display in the mall windows are some of the animals. And I would see a "giant turtle" (which, by the way, was about one fourth the size of the ones we saw outside on Santa Cruz Island, in captivity or not). And as our to the Galapagos Islands was approaching and I would walk by this window and see this turtle, sitting in the exact same position of this 3-foot by 4-foot display, thinking that trapping this animal like this is not fair to the animal, while I also wondered what tortoises I would see in the wild.



Well, got back from that Galapagos trip now (my photography from different islands are online at <http://www.chaoticarts.org/galapagos.htm>), and over a month after I returned I went to the mall to try to talk (you know, because the weather here is so horrendous right now), and I saw this same tortoise sitting in the window in the exact same spot in its little display window at the mall. And you know, I thought of it in passing before I went to the islands, but now th wrongness of keeping this animal trapped like this seems that much more. . . well . . . what is the word I'm looking for. . . I want to say "inhumane," but that seems so wrong because I'm talking about an animal and not a human, but still. I think there's a difference between keeping a mock habitat in a zoo for animals to attempt to more freely (I mean, hey have trees for places for monkeys and even lions and tigers to Jaguars and Cougars to be near in their habitats, at least it's *something*), and keeping a tortoise penned in a 3-foot by 4-foot window box with their floor covered in wood chips (at not grass). I know most people don't make a trip to the Galapagos Islands, but there has a to be a more humane way to show off these rare animals to people.



And as I write this, the vegetarian that tries to be so high and mighty, I hear the water fountain noise form the other side of my office. I look over at the water, aerating the 1-foot by 4-foot tank I keep for a Clown Knife (the 14 inch long fish with the undulating bottom fin) and a Plecostimous algae-eating fish.



I suppose we all try on some levels to be respectful to living things, ut I suppose it's easy to cross that line in this world.

Janet Kuypers
 Janet Kuypers

The Ethics of Embryonic Stem Cell Research

John J. Yotko

When setting out to write on the subject of embryonic stem cell research I came in with my own set of opinions on the subject but very little knowledge except that which was gleaned from radio talk shows and the evening news. I read two speeches hoping to derive some direction for my journey: President Bush's speech and Ron Reagan's speech to the Democratic National Convention. I found the president's speech amazingly impartial throughout reflecting much thought with the decision ultimately lying in religious conviction. Reagan's speech in my opinion was a thinly veiled plucking of vulnerable heartstrings. While researching these two speeches, I discovered that the president did not ban stem cell research as Reagan purported. President Bush actually provided federal funding for stem cell research for the first time ever and lifted the ban in place during the Clinton administration.

I then decided to go back to the beginning of medicine and discover what Hippocrates might have to say on the subject of embryonic stem cell research. In doing so, I discovered a statement in "The Law" written by Hippocrates approximately 2400 years ago, that would become the guiding force behind my research, "There are, indeed, two things, knowledge and opinion, of which the one makes its possessor really to know, the other to be ignorant." It was time to cast away my opinions. I had to, in the words of Master Kim, "unlearn so that I could learn."

I discovered that there are essentially two types of cells generalized into the single category of embryonic stem cells, embryonic stem and embryonic germ cells. There exists a significant scientific difference between the two different types of stem cells, which may translate into different moral status assigned to them. Embryonic germ cells are those cells derived from cadaveric fetal material. These are cells that are obtained from abortions either to protect the woman's life or from elective abortions. Embryonic stem cells however are manufactured in the laboratory using either in-vitro fertilization techniques or somatic cell nuclear transfer techniques (a method whereby the nucleus that has been removed from one cell is mechanically injected into a cell that has had its nucleus removed).

Since my position on life is that life is sacred, I must first provide a definition for life. In "The Oath" Hippocrates states, "I will... abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous. ... I will not give to a woman a pessary to produce abortion." This position is consistent with mine in that I am opposed to abortion. Relying on the wisdom of Hippocrates, with the addition of my own opinions, my conclusion is that a life begins when a woman becomes aware that

she is pregnant. I realize that this is a somewhat subjective conclusion, but I cannot hold someone accountable for what she might do when there is no awareness that what she is doing is wrong.

The opens me to the question, do I support the use of embryos gained from abortions for use in stem cell research? The question of conceiving a child or creating an embryo through in-vitro fertilization, for the sole purpose of scientific research or medical treatment is a foregone conclusion in my mind - this is unethical. Those who are involved in medical research, although they may not be directly treating people and their ailments, because they have chosen to support this treatment have tacitly agreed to comply with the "Hippocratic Oath." This opinion is shared by James Burchaell who "maintains that those involved in research on fetal tissue enter a symbolic alliance with the practice of abortion in producing or deriving benefits from it." A response to this is that this would be comparable to stating that the doctor who perform organ transplants and the recipients of those organs support homicide. I can see that there are similarities between the two, but they are not equivalent behaviors.

This led me to consider the question that George Bush had to ask of himself when considering funding for this research, "if they are going to be destroyed anyway, shouldn't they be used for a greater good, for research that has the potential to save and improve other lives?" That question gets at the crux of the issues surrounding the ethics of embryonic stem and germ cell research. This same issue is not present when considering adult stem cell research since the donors are doing so voluntarily.

Before continuing it should be understood that when I write that something is unethical, I do not necessarily mean that it ought to be or should be illegal. As an example, it is unethical to drink or take drugs to escape from life's problems - this is a form of cowardice. I do not believe that it ought to be or should be illegal to drink to excess or take drugs. One should be free to do as one chooses provided, that person's actions do not infringe on the property or liberties of others.

There are those who say that using germ cells from aborted fetuses is wrong. They call these stem cells "morally tainted." Although I oppose abortion, I cannot immediately agree with a statement that says that all germ cells obtained from abortions are morally tainted. There may be times when the abortion is morally justifiable as is the case to save a woman's life - everyone however, does not share this view. Although the act that made these germ cells available may have been immoral, does the morality of the abortion transferred to these cells? Is it therefore immoral to perform research on these cells? What is the case if the researcher does not know the source of the cells? Perhaps it is a greater evil to destroy those cells since there is the possibility that scientists may be able to make use of them in finding a treatment or a cure for a disease.

For many, the morality of stem cell research revolves around the theological concept of "playing God" in addition to the moral philosophy of what should we

do. The morality of embryonic stem cell research is closely tied to the morality of abortion, therefore when considering the ethics of embryonic stem cell research one is invariably thrown into the debate surrounding abortion. When Hippocrates wrote, "I will not give to a woman a pessary to produce abortion", he probably did not have an understanding of prenatal human development in the way that we do today. He probably did not have to deal with the moral dilemma posed by the ectopic pregnancy. Where does the answer lie with respect to the modern understanding of human life?

The most conservative scientific statement regarding the beginning of human life is that life begins when the fertilized ovum implants itself on the uterine wall. In the case of the ectopic pregnancy, a human life is not considered viable. Since there is no viable human life, and the only two possible outcomes of an attempt to carry the pregnancy to term are the death of the fetus or the death of the fetus and the mother, terminating the pregnancy does not involve performing an evil act to accomplish the good. The most conservative theological definition of human life comes from the Vatican . The Catholic church has stated, "from the time an ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor the mother; it is rather the life of a human being with its own growth." From this perspective an evil act, abortion, must be performed to obtain the good of saving the woman. Since I am viewing the ethics of embryonic stem cell research from the humanist perspective, I must base my decisions on the scientific definition. This is one possible source of embryonic germ cells. This opinion also extends to those embryos created using in-vitro fertilization. During the process of fertilization, many more ova become embryos than necessary for the infertility treatment. The Catholic Church maintains that these remaining ova ought to be treated as full human persons and should not be destroyed. This places the donor parent and the fertility clinic in the position of either having to find recipients for all of the fertilized ova or preserving them indefinitely in a frozen state.

Another situation arises when a woman is not healthy enough to carry a baby to term. Given that the embryo implants itself on the uterine wall, is it ethical to terminate this pregnancy to save the woman's life? Since the intent is to save the woman's life and not kill the child, maybe, but then one must ask what is the method of saving the woman's life. This violates one of the rules in the principle of double effect therefore this abortion is an unethical action. A utilitarian perspective might hold that it is ethical to terminate the pregnancy since the woman may be able to extend other benefits to society whose ends justify this abortion. I hold that a person who knows that they are medically unfit to carry a pregnancy full term should take measures in the beginning to prevent the pregnancy from ever occurring. In the case of the woman who becomes pregnant and then finds that she her life is in threatened as a direct result of the pregnancy it would be morally justifiable in that she did not intend to place herself at risk.

Another argument for abortion, is that one should be performed because the

fetus is unlikely to be born alive or with some form of disability. These two cases fall into the category of an abortion performed for the convenience of the parents. In a situation where the abortion is taking place simply to destroy the life that is growing, regardless of its potential, if no harm will befall the mother in carrying to term or until the miscarriage occurs then this is unethical.

There exists another source for embryonic germ cells. Some people will choose to conceive a child solely as a source for embryonic germ cells. The June 20, 2003 edition of USA Today contains an article involving a British couple denied fertility treatment by their government. They came to the United States for in-vitro fertilization and implantation so that they could have a child with the intent to use the cord blood to treat their son who had a rare blood disorder. Admittedly, this did not involve the destruction of a developing fetus but it is a step in that direction. This is a situation where a life was created to save another life and is something to be applauded. If the reason for creating the life was simply to destroy it to obtain germ cells, the conception should never have occurred in the first place. It is anathema to create life simply to destroy it no matter the nobility of the end.

President Bush said in his speech that he was going to allow funding for embryonic stem cell research, but only on existing stem cell lines. His position leads me to assume that he believes that embryonic stem cell research is ethical, so long as no additional embryos are used. Does he believe that the embryonic stem cells already obtained were obtained ethically and that it is impossible to ethically obtain additional stem cells? I hope not, that position is inconsistent with reason. What is a reasoned approach? Many scientists argue that as a stem cell line ages there are irreversible genetic changes to that line that will forever alter the usefulness of that cell line for research. This is why it is necessary to maintain a continuing source of new stem cells.

Earlier I stated that there is a direct correlation between the ethics involved in embryonic research and the ethics of abortion. This is certainly the case for stem cells derived from embryonic germ cells. Their association with the ethics of an elective abortion has morally tainted cells obtained from elective abortions. Although we cannot judge the moral status of the cells, we can judge the further use of them. It would be immoral to use cells acquired through intentionally immoral actions.

A scientist performing research at this level is obligated, as a minimum, to ensure that the source material is morally pure just as a used car dealer should ensure that he is not selling a stolen car. The germ cells obtained from a pregnancy where the intention was the derivation of stem cell material or elective abortions performed for convenience are morally tainted. In either case, the intention that the fetus should live was nonexistent. Further use of these cells would be unethical because the original intent was unethical. Through the principle of double effect, the morality does transfer from the act of abortion to the stem cells. In the case of terminating an ectopic pregnancy or other situations where the occurrence of the pregnancy, through no fault of the woman, the intent

was to save the woman's life, the embryonic stem cells obtained from that procedure would be morally pure. I would conclude that the only moral source for embryonic stem cells derived from cadaveric fetal tissue would be those derived from those procedures where the intent was to save the woman's life. Additionally, before using the fetus in research, the woman should provide consent. To use the cadaver without this consent is theft and the research becomes morally tainted.

On the subject of embryonic stem cells derived from embryos created in a laboratory environment, the ethical issues become clouded. This class of stem cells are those; derived from embryos remaining after in-vitro fertilization that would normally be destroyed once they are no longer desired, stem cells created from embryos developed specifically for research, and stem cells created using somatic cell nuclear transfer techniques. A subject filled with much debate is whether these cells are human-persons (an individual with its own distinct identity) or a collection of proto-human cellular material. Demonstrating this difference are the views of the Vatican and Jewish Theologians. As Rabbi Elliot Dorff notes, "Genetic materials outside the uterus have no legal status in Jewish law, for they are not even a part of a human being until implanted in a woman's womb and even then, during the first 40 days of gestation, their status is 'as if they were water.' As a result, frozen embryos may be discarded or used for reasonable purposes, and so may stem cells be procured from them." The official Catholic view is that from the moment of fertilization the zygote that results is fully human. These views, although they come from theology, reflect the range of views of secular ethicists.

The first source for embryonic stem cells are those created using somatic cell nuclear transfer techniques. Utilizing somatic cell nuclear transfer, we have manufactured material for therapeutics utilizing cord blood and adult derived stem cells. Medical science has not developed therapeutics with embryonic stem cells derived using this technique. Stem cells created using this technique do not currently have the potential for creating human life although this technique is currently used for cloning of other mammals. Presently the moral implications associated with this class of cells are in the discipline of cloning. The thought with many bioethicists is that these cells cannot have the moral status of human life since they cannot achieve full human life. The caveat associated with this belief is that when science progresses to the point where human cloning becomes possible using this technique science must revisit the ethics of research using these cells.

Probably the least controversial source of embryonic stem cells is those derived from the remaining embryos used for infertility treatment. The creation embryos during infertility treatments exist with the intention of creating a child. Often, after the child has been born, there are many fertilized ova remaining that must be kept cryogenically frozen or destroyed. Since the expense of maintaining these ova in this state is expensive, it is common practice to destroy these embryos or use them for research, which inevitably destroys the embryos. Eventually, organic matter that has been cryogenically frozen begins to decompose through the loss of water and the

inevitable chemical reactions that continue to take place. The attempt at preserving these cells actually results in their destruction. It seems reasonable and ethical to utilize these cells when their destruction is imminent through either direct action or the passage of time. Naturally, one would expect that obtaining the donor's consent before beginning research using these embryos ought to be mandatory. I feel that this is probably the least controversial of all sources for embryonic stem cells. This position falls between those given by the Vatican and Rabbi Dorff. I feel that this is a scientifically valid position since it simultaneously acknowledges the value of embryonic life, even outside of the uterus, while maintaining that there are times when it is morally justifiable to use those embryos.

Identical in creation but different in intent are those embryos created using in-vitro fertilization with the intent of destroying them in research. As is the case with the conception of a child with the sole intention of obtaining embryonic germ cells, this method of creating embryonic stem cells is questionable. There was never any intent of creating a life, which is the natural purpose of an egg and a sperm. From the beginning, the intent violates the rule of natural purpose. The creation of life or proto-life with its destruction being our intention is unethical. It reduces the value of life and places the definition of life in a more subjective role.

Performing research on embryonic stem cells poses numerous problems not encountered with adult stem cells. This type of research places these cells outside of their natural purpose. Since these cells are highly active, there is a greater chance of unpredictable branching and tumorous growths. Human beings are the only creatures capable of violating the natural purpose. We must wield this discretionary power with great care and with consideration given to both the ethical and evolutionary ramifications.

Currently there are laws prohibiting the use of embryonic stem cells for any use other than research. There is also a prohibition against manufacturing cells using embryos for a specific recipient.

The debate surrounding embryonic stem cell research is not a debate over whether or not the research is ethical. The lack of debate over adult stem cell research provides evidence that there is little debate over the morality of stem cell research in general. The debate pertains to the ethics of the destruction of potential human lives. Research on embryonic stem cells cannot occur without the source embryos. I believe that the use of discarded embryos from infertility treatment and abortions performed to save the woman's life are both morally justifiable sources provided that the donor's consent is obtained following the recommendations outlined by the National Bioethics Advisory Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John G. Galt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being the most prominent part.

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