

An open book is shown from a top-down perspective, slightly angled. The pages are a light, off-white color. The text is centered on the pages in a dark, serif font. The book's spine is visible in the center, and the edges of the pages are slightly darker, suggesting depth.

*the essays*  
*and politically one-sided rants*

# *Nonfiction* NONFICTION

Let me tell you a story about a woman. I can't tell you her name, because the law prevents me.

You see, this woman is the typical victim of a stranger rape. She was walking down the street after getting off of a late train from work and she was cornered by a man with a knife. She was violated, she was hurt, she had the blood stains and bruises to prove it. And she decided she wanted to report it.

She went to the hospital the next morning, after she put on an extra layer of clothing and huddled in her bed the night before, trying to sleep. The doctors took her clothing for evidence, and then they took samples.

She leaned back in a cold chair half-naked in a doctor's office, feet in straps three feet apart, and then they took samples from inside her to see if they could prove who was there. They pulled fifty hairs from her head and twenty-five pubic hairs with their fingers to compare them to what they brushed off her.

She then talked to the police. Because she couldn't identify him, because he had time to flee, because the police couldn't match the evidence to anyone, she couldn't find justice.

But her friends helped her through this. They slept in her room with her at night, when she didn't want to be alone. They listened to her. They accepted her. And she was able to take the first steps toward recovering.

It's a sad story, isn't it? She didn't deserve it. But it seems, especially with her attempts to find her attacker and with the support she received, that she may be able to eventually get over the pain.

Now I would like to tell you the story of another woman. I could tell you her name, but I told her I wouldn't.

She begged me not to.

She's a junior at a state university. The first day she came to college, the day she moved in, her boyfriend raped her.

He gave her roommate so much alcohol that she passed out, and wouldn't know

what was going on. He gave his victim so much alcohol that she could barely think or move. During the course of the evening she wondered why her boyfriend was pushing alcohol on her roommate. Now she knows, hindsight is 20/20, and now she feels guilty. She should have said something to him, she thought, but what could she have said at the time? And why should she have suspected anything?

She didn't go to the hospital. She thought something was wrong with her only because she didn't want him. She thought what happened was normal. She couldn't understand why she was so hurt.

She didn't tell anyone. She didn't talk to her boyfriend about it --- in fact, she didn't even break up with him until weeks later, when she couldn't take it anymore and had to come up with an excuse to avoid him.

No one understood why she was acting so strangely. No one understood her mood swings. No one understood why she would break into tears for no reason. She would stand in the bathroom of her dormitory, look in the mirror, and cry before she took her morning shower. She looked so tired in the mirror those mornings, like she had been attacked just the night before.

She waited about six months before she told anyone. She told one friend. He did everything he could to help her. But there wasn't much he could do. She never told her family. She felt ashamed. She felt alone.

And as she told more people, she received more support. But it only came one year, two years later.

You see, even though it wasn't her fault, and even though she had help from her friends, she still couldn't help but think that she could have done something to stop it. She teased him. She was drunk.

He was her boyfriend.

Now, these are two pretty depressing stories, I know. But when people hear the word "rape," they tend to think of story number one first. The man could have been jumping out from a bush, an alley, or breaking into her home in the middle of the night, as long as he was a stranger. He had a weapon. It was a crime. But both of these stories are similar, because they both are rape. Pure and simple. According to Illinois law, for example, if a woman is intoxicated, she cannot consent to sex, just as she cannot consent to driving a car. That alone defines what the second woman went through as rape. Her feelings, her pain, also define it as such. But still, the endings to these stories are very different.

Let's imagine that the woman in the second story pressed charges against her boyfriend. Better yet, let's take another crime, like a mugging in an alley, and ask the victim the same types of questions the woman in the second story, or even the woman in the first story, would be asked.

We'll set the scene: A man leaves a bar that he entered after work, took a short cut home and was mugged in an alley. He is now at the stand, testifying, being questioned by the defense.

"Now, let me understand this - you were in a bar, drinking."

“Yes.”

“And you were talking to strangers, you even flashed around your money around.”

“I bought a few people a beer. That’s all.”

“You bought a few strangers a beer. And what you were wearing - it was a nice suit. And your watch - it had to cost a lot. What were you doing in a neighborhood like that wearing clothes like that if you didn’t want to be mugged?”

“That’s not the point. I -”

“And you left the bar, and it was late. What time was it, sir?”

“12:30 in the morning.”

“Did you think it was safe for you to be walking alone at night, especially looking the way you did, in the neighborhood you were in?”

“Well -”

“Let me ask you another question. Have you ever given money to a charity before?”

“Yes, but I don’t see how that -”

“Now if you’re just giving it away freely, you’ve done it in the past, hey, you even bought drinks for complete strangers at the bar just hours before, then why wouldn’t this man think you were giving it away now?”

“Because, he was robbing me -”

“Well, did you see a weapon? Do you know for a fact that he had a weapon? And did you scream, yell, fight back at all?”

“He had something in his pocket, I thought it was a gun. I didn’t want to yell, I thought he’d hurt me. I panicked.”

“But you didn’t see a weapon, you didn’t yell, you were wearing that suit and flashing your money, you were in a bar and you were walking alone in a bad neighborhood late at night. Really, sir, some people would say you were asking for it.”

Society tends to blur the lines between sex and violence when the attacker is someone you know. The sexes are antagonistic toward each other: this is just an extreme. Men are taught to chase women, to try liquor or money to get a woman in bed, and women are taught to hold out sexually, which naturally puts the sexes against each other.

Women in society are taught to be “feminine”, to be giving, and to be weak instead of assertive. They are taught to look good for men, and they are taught that they are nothing unless they get married. They are taught that all they have is intuition, but it is usually wrong and they shouldn’t stand up for it. If a woman doesn’t feel comfortable in a situation, it is probably all just in her head and she should just get over it.

Men in society are taught to think of sex as a competition -- by “scoring” and “getting some” -- instead of thinking of it in terms of love and affection. Looking at terms for sex in today’s society shows this perfectly: scoring, banging, bopping, hammering, nailing, pumping, bagging. All are violent terms, and half of them are related to either hunting or building, typically male dominated activities.

Men are taught to look at women as objects - making them feel less than human, making them feel as if they should serve men. Harassment at the workplace, obscene phone calls, stalkers, wife beating, pornography, cat calls and whistling at woman on

the street - none of these things would happen if this wasn't the case.

And women are taught to be objects for men, to bend over backwards to make themselves beautiful. Make-up, long styled hair, shaving their hair, wearing skirts, or high heels - half of these things are painful, and the other half are time-consuming, yet women are taught to do these things for men.

And maybe the woman in the second story knew she had friends she could trust, but still couldn't break free from what society taught her.

If you want a happy ending here, you won't to find one. Not for these two women.

But maybe it would be easier for women to heal from rape if men and women began to see each other as people and not as just sexes. Maybe then rape would end, too. And then there would be a happy ending for everybody.

It is reported in some surveys that one out of every four women will be raped before they leave college, and that one out of three women will be raped in their lifetime. And 90% of these crimes are by someone they know (either someone they know well, like a boyfriend, husband or family member, or by someone they know, but not well, a coworker, a classmate, someone they met at a party or a bar earlier that night).

A University survey in Illinois reported that the three most common places for a rape to occur were: (1) in a dormitory, (2) the man's house/apartment, or (3) in a fraternity house. In other words, it doesn't happen in back alleys or behind bushes, and because the woman knew the man, and felt comfortable with going to his house. It happens because the man won the woman's trust.

Or it happened because the woman didn't really like the idea of going over to his place, or letting him in to her apartment after he walked her home, but felt like she couldn't tell him no, that she owed it to him. That maybe after a while he'd just leave. She wouldn't want to sound rude.

Women, as a rule, don't "cry rape," or falsely accuse someone of raping them. Most are frightened so much by the system that they don't even report it, and the incidence of "crying rape" is currently at about 2%, which is comparable to national averages for robbery. It is estimated that as many as 90% of all rapes go unreported, which is drastically higher than other violent crimes.

And why are so many women frightened by the judicial process? Because many times women are blamed for the rape, by men as well as women. Because men still equate this act of violence with the act of sex. Because on the stand, a woman has to defend her past, defend what she was wearing, explain why she went to his place, why she was alone with him, why she kissed him. The accused's past is protected, and in essence, the woman becomes the one on trial.

But many people want to blame the woman because it's simply the easiest way. No one wants to go through life believing that a violent crime like this can just happen to them, for no known reason. If the woman is at fault, then she can change her behavior and not be at risk of being raped again. And other women can feel safe if they just don't let the wrong things happen. And men can feel safe that they're not doing the wrong thing. When in fact they may be.

And the effects of rape are longstanding. Some women leave the city they lived in, worked in, had friends and family in, because they are afraid they will see their attacker again. Some women have extreme difficulty ever sustaining an intimate relationship with a man again. Some women never tell their experience to another person, keeping their feelings bottled inside, eating away at them.

The world is a difficult place to live in for a person who is a rape survivor. Their values no longer make sense to them: if you can't trust a boyfriend, if someone you cared about could do this to you, what else could happen?

Different women react to rape in different ways, and the time it takes to recover from it varies greatly. Some will say you never recover. Many go through denial. After admitting it to herself, a rape survivor then begins to face those difficult questions: why did this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this? How could he do this? Can I ever tell anyone? Can I ever be close to another man again? Can I ever trust again?

Telling others also helps, because positive support from her friends will make her feel that her feelings of anger or hostility are justified, that it wasn't her fault, that she can get over it. But she may still harbor ill feelings for years, she may shy away from all relationships, she may become a man-hater, she may go on "sex-binges," using men the way she felt she was used, taking her revenge on others, and still not feeling any better.

The thing is, something can be done to stop this. Attitudes about women in general have to change, for sexism as a whole gives some men the mentality that this really isn't a crime. I mean, I bought her dinner, and what do I get for it? She's been holding out on me for so long, what is she trying to do? I gotta get some, and I know she wants me. It's not a crime, it's sex.

On the following pages are some of what I have written and created because of sexism and rape. It's a shame to have to see this work exist. Hopefully in time we as a culture will be able to make a change.

Most seem to feel that an act of rape, acquaintance or stranger, is just too bizarre to actually have no reason for happening, so most will look for a solution to the puzzle - an action that caused the rape, something to safeguard people from it. It may seem too strange to think that a man you've never met before could just come out of a bush, pick you out and attack you. It may seem too strange to think that a friend, or a boyfriend, or someone that you thought you could trust, could turn on you in such a way for no apparent reason and hurt you so much. In this world, things don't just happen— there's a reason for things, and there is sense in the world. Besides, the victim probably brought themselves into the trouble and therefore deserved what they got. If we as onlookers just don't make the same mistakes that they did, we won't have the same problems that they did. In this way unexplainable, traumatic acts such as rape can be explained away and therefore be easier to handle.

This is the line of reasoning that many people go through, and it is commonly called "victim blaming." It seems to make sense at times, but there is a note that we as a society have to remember: just as a robbery victim doesn't ask to be mugged, a survivor of sexual assault doesn't ask to be raped. No matter what reasons people come up

with to defend a rapist, she was wearing provocative clothing, she was drunk, she kissed him - none of those things means that she consented to have sex with him.

If a woman can victim blame another woman, then she can eventually say to herself, "That has never happened to me, so it must have been something she did. Well, if I don't do what they did, then I will be safe." Since women have to live with the fear of rape all the time, victim blaming makes them feel better about the irregularities of the world. If a man blames a woman, it may be because he can't understand that another man - possibly someone that he knows, possibly a friend - can do what the accused did. If another man has the capacity to do that, than that male onlooker may have that capacity, too. It's a frightening thought to think that you could be a rapist. The man may eventually say, "I couldn't do that, and therefore that other guy couldn't do that. It must have been something that she did."

Many victims will even blame themselves for what happened. I should have been more explicit in what I wanted. I shouldn't have had so much to drink. I shouldn't have been so nice to him. I should have said something afterwards: to him, to the police, to myself.

If there is a reason for everything, then there must be a reason for something as insane as rape - even if the reason doesn't seem immediately apparent. Maybe, as many come to think, maybe the reason that it happened is because the victim led her attacker on or didn't do enough to stop him. When someone blames the victim, the behavior is then correctable, and when the victim corrects that 'wrong' behavior, then they feel not only safer, but also a better person for correcting their own faults. If one keeps looking over the pieces of the puzzle, something will fall into place and make it all understandable, all comprehensible. If you keep looking for what the victim did wrong, you'll find something, and then you will be able to explain away what happened. If the victim is blamed for what happened, then the problem of rape is solvable, avoidable, and correctable. It makes the world make sense again.

Victim blaming may, however, give women a false sense of security, if they feel they are safe by taking certain precautions, but not others. It's possible to be more aware of what is happening around you, to always stay with friends in social situations, to avoid walking in bad neighborhoods at night, but that doesn't mean that you are at fault if something happened to you. And it doesn't mean others are at fault if they were attacked.

When a woman speaks at a trial about someone who attacked her, instantly her past becomes important, her sexual history, what she was wearing, and so on. And the defendant's criminal history is barred from use in the case, even if he was convicted of sexual crimes in the past. Instantly the woman is on trial, and the survivor of the rape is tried and not the rapist.

It's hard to understand something like rape. But that's exactly what a survivor of an attack needs.

# *The Wrath of Valentine's Day*

## THE WRATH OF VALENTINE'S DAY

Valentine's Day is here again, and like most unattached women in the United States, I'm filled with a vague sense of panic, fear and dread. What was meant to be a holiday to express your love for the one you care about has now become (a) a contest between coworkers for who can get the best flower arrangement delivered to their office, (b) a month-long guilt session from one half of an unsatisfied couple to the other, using the holiday as an excuse to vent their anger for being in a loveless relationship, (c) one more occasion for single men to skirt the constant badgering for a commitment (they already have birthdays and Christmas to contend with, this holiday makes winter pure Hell), or (d) a day-long seminar on depression where women sit at home alone, over-eating, watching must-see-TV, wondering if they will ever find someone to love and honor and cherish them and save them from the horrible fate of becoming the dreaded "old maid."

Valentine's Day is supposed to be a heart-felt holiday all about love, but has instead become a commercial holiday about either desperately trying to not feel alone or desperately trying to spare yourself from getting a guilt trip from the one you're supposed to love.

Half of the confusion, I think, is from how men and women interact on a romantic/sexual level. The other half rests on how people define love.

### *The Battle of the Sexes*

What do women think of when they think of love? Commitment, finding a soul mate, having someone romantically sweep them off their feet. What do men think of when they think of love? Being tied down, finally giving in, getting the old ball-and-chain, or else something to fake to get sex. Speaking of sex, women generically think of sex as the greatest connection between two people, something sacred, while men jokingly refer to the act with analogies to power tools or sporting games (see the cover, which is from the art series, "What Sex With Women is Called").

Imagine a woman, looking for commitment, having what was most sacred to her taken away because a man thought he earned it by buying her dinner.

Granted, these are brash generalizations, but the fact that these examples exist gives an inkling to the differences between men and women, and the potential conflict between the two when it comes to relationships. How is love supposed to flourish when the two halves come in with such distinct ideas and plans?

### *The Definition of Love: Altruism Versus Respect*

Love, by a dictionary's definition, is rooted in three different ways: from kinship or personal ties, from sexual attraction or from admiration or common interests.



Think about that for a minute. From the first way, you'd love someone because they're your family. Not because you like them, but because you've grown up with them. From the second way comes the more spur-of-the-moment feelings, none of which usually last. From the third way, you love someone because they share interests with you and you admire them.

Admire comes the closest to defining respect, and as a result, it comes closest to defining permanent and earned love. Unlike a religious-based altruistic love which tells you to love people even if they are not worth it - especially if they are not worth it, a love based out of respect and admiration, as well as common interests, is a strong, earned (therefore not easily lost) love.

The altruistic "give everyone in your class a valentine because everyone deserves to be loved" doesn't even fool grade-school children - usually someone is left valentine-less. The question children haven't at that point figured out how to ask is "Why do they deserve it? They haven't earned it."

People claim to fall in and out of love sometimes with amazing turnaround, it seems, and I think the reason for that is that they were never actually in love in the first place. Unless someone you once admired and respected revealed that their life and your perception of it was all a lie, or else drastically changed their life so as not to be respectable any longer, the admiration and respect probably wouldn't die. Real love is a strong, earned (therefore not easily lost) love.

In my lifetime I have met only a handful of people that deserved respect. Imagine how difficult it must be to find someone to respect so highly, to have common interests with, and to be attracted to - that feels the same way about you.

Imagine a woman, looking for a soul mate, someone she could respect and admire, looking for a man who wants the same things in a relationship, finding men that are looking for a mate that will do their laundry for them, that will be subservient to them.

### *Images of Romance in an Unromantic World*

Even to those in a happy relationship, Valentine's Day has lost some of its appeal. If you're in a happy relationship, you don't need an occasion to celebrate it. And flowers and candy are hardly good symbols for true admiration and respect - real love. Who needs us as consumers to spend the money on these items anyway, other than businessmen?

So what place does Valentine's Day have in our world? It helps conjure up the language of poetry, the beauty of flowers, the romantic notions of a world long gone... and sometimes you get a heart-shaped box of candy to boot. But in our world, considering the different ways men and women are raised to view themselves and their mates, there are a lot of other issues that have to be taken care of before we can make a valentine card out of a doily and pink and red construction paper hearts and have it actually mean something.

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Previously Published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, *Challenges*, *poets2000.com*, *Children Churches and Daddies* volumes 89, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuyppers-writing.htm>, *A Wrath of my own at* <http://www.yotko.com/a-rant-of-my-own/the-wrath-of-valentines.htm>, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuyppers.html>, and in the book (*Woman*).

*Child Molesters & the Government:*  
**CHILD MOLESTERS & THE GOVERNMENT:**  
*Big Brother is Watching*  
**BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING**

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

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

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

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

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

People were talking about the heinousness of these crimes, how these child molesters should be killed, etc. - some also brought up the fact that the information about these people is already on public record - the only thing this law would be doing is

informing people about the child-molesting history of such-and-such, instead of making individuals search out this information for themselves, which they would undoubtedly never get around to.

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

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

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

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

# *Letter on Religion*

## LETTER ON RELIGION

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

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

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

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

Or at least be provable.

Morals taught by religion and the notion of a God are not usually bad, in fact, they are often quite redeeming in society - not killing people, being monogamous, being kind to others - but those are morals, virtues, values, which by definition are not based on religion. One can learn good values, morals without a God or religion. It's just that

most people, as I see it, cannot see a consequence to being “good” unless the consequence is a God. I see consequences in doing good, for myself as well as others, and that is why I choose to be a good, kind, successful person.

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

You believe there are two possibilities for you when you die. Since I don't believe in a God, I believe one thing happens - you die (worm food, to be rude). That I believe is the other major reason why religion and this notion of God has existed for so long - because people are afraid to face death - people really don't want to believe that death is an end for them. Well, it is an end - for their body, for their personality - of course, their matter and energy go on to exist in new forms after their death, but when you die, you die. That's what I believe. Your memory can last in others, you can have an effect on other people's lives after your death, but when you die, you simply cease to exist.

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

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

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

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

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

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

You see similarities between us, and you say that in my searches for the right party or the right man I was looking for Jesus. Well, in the past I suppose I was searching for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I don't think that's wonderful. It makes no sense to give unconditional love. If love is unconditional, then there is no value in it. If you love something or someone whether that something or someone is good or bad, you love something or someone whether you want to or not, then it is not earned, it is not chosen, and it is not a value and it

possesses no worth. Value is a standard to be judged by; worth is defined as deserving of or meriting. To me, love is a standard that people earn and therefore deserve, and that is what makes it valuable to me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But if I'm right, wouldn't you like to be with me in heaven?"

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

I don't think you're some brainwashed right-wing preacher, as you write. I do think you have intelligence. I also think you're scared. I think most of us, most people our own age, still feel as invincible as we did when we were too young to understand death,

and none of us are really ever ready to face our own mortality.

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

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

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

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



Previously Published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, *poets2000.com*, *Children Churches and Daddies magazine* v 132, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, and in the books *Contents Under Pressure*, *Sulphur and Sawdust* and *Rinse and Repeat*.

*letter to a troubled friend*  
**LETTER TO A TROUBLED FRIEND**

I've never been able to tell you how I feel, because you never let me. When I try to say something, and believe me, I try to do it in the most tactful way possible and I only begin to scrape the surface, you react in one of the following ways:

- 1) You cut me off, get defensive, say you never do these things.
- 2) You go through denial, and say I'm overreacting, because your behavior is normal.
- 3) You apologize, but the behavior never changes.

No one wants to deal with a sour reaction, especially when you're trying to tell them something is wrong. I've pussy-footed around you through subjects such as your work, your family, the men in your life and the men in mine, your surgery - you name it, and all because I can never tell you when there is something wrong. I've wanted to confront you, but you make it impossible. I really feel like I have gone above and beyond the call of duty when it comes to maintaining a friendship with you. In fact, I think that a lot of the time the work I have put into it has been very uneven in comparison to what you have done. But I was willing to do it; I cared about you as a friend.

I've noticed a change in you in the past few years. When you were in college, you were still being supported by your parents, you had the love of your life with you. Since you have been on your own, you have no direction and no one to share your life with. From what I can gather, this behavior now relates to your feeling insecure about yourself and seeking positive reinforcement in men. They can be men with whom you have no future with, men that are gay and you have no chance with, men you have no interest in, or men who are abusive at best. You've gone after men that fit all of these examples. They can even be men I've expressed interest in, or men I'm dating - and then they would be an additional boost to you because someone would like you more than me.

I have seen this self-destructive behavior in you and I have known that for the most

part there was nothing I could do or say about it, because you never listen to me. You don't want to hear it from me. You get angry when I try to tell you what I see. You call me a therapist. And I don't want to get the third degree when I'm trying to help you.

If you think you really need other people to boost your ego, maybe you should realize that the only person that can make you feel good is you. All this work you are doing in manipulating other men only makes you feel worse inside - because it is costing you yourself. You have to start working on what the real underlying problems in your life are and finally face them head-on. Until then you are only going to lose more friends, be used by more men, and feel like you have gone nowhere in life.

I have overlooked many double-standards in our friendship. If I talk to my boyfriend more than you in a single conversation, you pout and get mad, but as long as you have another friend with you, you can ignore me for literally hours in a social setting, then ditch me, and I'm not supposed to be angry. Yes, this has happened before. My boyfriend putting his arm around me in front of you would remind you of your ex and depress you, but when you make out with a friend of mine - after he flies across the country to visit me for only a short time - I'm not allowed to react. You expect me to take all of my savings and my only weeks vacation and spend it alone with you when I could be with the man I planned to marry, but if you were still going out with your ex, I would never see you, much less have the chance to think about spending a vacation with you. In fact, if I ever suggested a vacation where your boyfriend wasn't allowed (and yes, you flat-out said my boyfriend wasn't allowed with us), you'd scream at how inconsiderate I was. You can call me every swear word in the book, but I can say one wrong word - call you child for acting like one, for instance - and you'll instantly be set off into another mood swing.

I flew across the country and entertained you for a weekend because I wanted you to be happy. It's not as if I've ever had anything but your interests in mind. Only now have I realized how much it has cost me. How much you have hurt me.

I've tried telling you over and over again when something is wrong, and your reaction is usually denial or defensiveness. Especially last time. A guy I've gone on two dates with doesn't matter to me. You do. And that's why it hurt more than most anything any other friend has done to me. I saw your behavior. You were drunk, and paying every ounce of your attention to him. If you weren't planning anything, you wouldn't have waited outside my apartment after I said good-bye to you in order to see him. You did it secretly, behind my back, because you didn't want me to know what you were doing. You say you don't remember our discussion (if that's how drunk you were), but in my bedroom, I told you about me and him, that we had gone on dates, that I was somewhat interested in him, because I noticed your behavior earlier in the evening, and it was hurting me even then. Your response was, "Oh, Janet, I would never do anything like that." Then that's exactly what you did. You threw any trust I had for you in my face. You really showed me in one evening how little you cared for me. You can't tell me otherwise.

If this is another example of how you seem to need attention from men, then realize that you were willing to jeopardize what you called your best friend for it, and that you have a problem. If you don't remember anything from the evening, then you may

have a drinking problem. Either way, there are issues there that you have to address, and I don't think I am strong enough to carry your problems quietly for you anymore when you are unwilling to face those problems yourself.

I almost didn't write this letter. I've asked friends what I should do.

One person, who didn't know you, said I should give you another chance. They were the only one that said that.

One said that you didn't care enough about me, that I tried as hard, or harder, than was ever expected of me, and nothing will change with you, so I should just let it go.

One said it was about time I ended our friendship, because all I have been doing was complaining and struggling to keep you happy.

One said they can't see me as a difficult person to be friends with, because I'm forgiving and don't ask for much. That these problems in our friendship don't stem from a lack of my trying, and don't even stem from me.

One person, after seeing you at the party, was very disturbed with your behavior in general. They said they would swear you were on drugs, and I couldn't tell them if they were right or not. They said you looked like you have seen something the rest of the world doesn't know about, and that it had made you very depressed, like you were over the edge, like there was absolutely no hope, and that you just didn't seem to care about yourself anymore.

I can't fight that. I can't fight feelings like that.

If you feel like you hate yourself, then there is nothing I can do for you. If you really think nothing matters, that you can't feel anything anymore, if you're not willing to help yourself, then I can't help either, and I never could. Trying to help you was then pointless. Trying to please you was pointless.

In all the times I've tried to tell you how I feel, I usually got defensiveness or denial from you. Never once were you concerned about how I felt. I told you over the phone that last time that you hurt me more than you ever had - more than probably any friend ever had. You didn't care about that, though. I don't think you ever did.

And that is what also hurts. I don't think you do care, and I don't think you know how to care.

I don't know what to do anymore, and I don't know that there is anything that I can do. Or should do. The ball is not in my court, as you have put it in the past, but it is in yours. It always has. It is up to you to make yourself better. To help yourself. This is not a healthy friendship. You have to make yourself whole first.

I've seen you degenerate over the past few years. It was one thing when we were still growing up to not know what you wanted to do with your life. It was even normal to feel so confused that you'd go through mood swings. But it has gotten worse. Mood swings become event where you have to tip-toe around, be careful of everything you say. Sometimes knowing that there's nothing you can say.

I don't know what to say anymore. You don't let me say anything. You don't listen. You need attention, but I can't give you enough. I don't think anyone can.

I'm not writing this letter in an effort to save our friendship. I've received no indi-

cation that you want to change, to help yourself. Even your last letter to me was only an effort to clear your name, to make you look better, to make sure someone knew what you thought. You didn't write that letter for me; I've seen you go through this with some of your men, wanting to write them letters to get the last word in. You wrote it for you, to make yourself feel like you've had your say. It wasn't out of concern for me. It never is.

You are the one that did this to yourself, and only you can change you. Remember that: you are the one that did this, to you, to me, to what friendship we had. All of this is because of you. There is nothing I can do about it anymore, and I'm not going to sit back and take your behavior anymore. I shouldn't have to.

You've been in therapy for years. You've spent a lot of time and money talking to a person every week for years. What has it shown you? What have you learned? You've told me that you sometimes won't tell her things solely because you don't feel like talking about something, or because you don't think she should know it. If you're not willing to share these things, how is she supposed to help you? She doesn't see a full picture of who you are. Are you just going to her for the attention?

I hope you actually read this letter, not read it and then throw it away because it's not what you want to hear, but read it, and listen to what I'm telling you. Show it to your therapist. Let her see a different side of the story. Listen for yourself to a different side of the story. You've never thought of how other people perceive you, at least not realistically.

Figure out what it takes to make you like yourself again. Or for the first time. I can't make you do that. No one can. Not your family, friends, not your therapist, not your current abusive man. Most of those people are out for themselves as well, and might hurt you in the process. Find yourself. I don't know where your hope lies, or if you could ever still have hope. I just know that if you don't change, and I've seen no reason to believe you will, and if I still remain your friend, you'll only keep hurting me, having no regard for me. A friend shouldn't make me feel this way. I have to let go. You hurting me is doing neither of us any good. I've been a crutch to you; you've been a burden to me. I can't take that burden anymore, and you shouldn't have the crutch. Do something for yourself. I can't be your friend if you keep falling the way you have been. I don't want you to fall, but I can't pick you up anymore. Only you can help you.

*A Letter to our*  
**A LETTER TO OUR**  
*Political Leaders*  
**POLITICAL LEADERS**

After watching a few of our elections, I noticed that politicians were trying to warm up to the twenty-something crowd. It's a wise decision: we're a strong group of intelligent, new voters. And, as a rule, we're dissatisfied with the United States' current political system. It's a chance for either party to take a hold of a growing and promising voter group and insure additional votes in future elections.

It would help to know what this group is looking for, though, if there's a dissatisfaction with our current parties, and to understand this, it may help to learn a little more about this group. Although I claim to be no spokesperson for all people aged 20-29, I can give you some insight into how I think, as a member of this "age group."

I'm a twenty-something. But classifying us "twenty-somethings" or "generation x-ers" by our age is something I as an individual finds insulting. I know that we're Americans, but I also know that we as a group have differing opinions, and we have a right to those opinions. We can have different views on our careers, or families, our music. And that's something I value - and I feel like is constantly being taken away from us.

Other pressure groups may want you to pass laws telling them when a rapist moves into their neighborhood, but I know that that just causes more red tape and costs us through tax revenue more dollars, when that information is public; besides, it's not the government's responsibility to inform, it the individual's. Other pressure groups may want you to pass laws telling them that they need to wear their seat belts, but I know that in a Capitalistic society it's not the government's role to protect people from themselves, but from the force of others, and that is all. Other pressure groups may want you to pass all sorts of laws, but they are by and large laws that go beyond the jurisdiction of the American government. Other groups may want the government telling them what to do all the time, but I don't.

Part of the twenty-something dissatisfaction (if I may speak for the group) with our

current parties may be because neither party embodies a consistent set of values. Granted, our government-sponsored school systems teach students in general that philosophy is too difficult a subject for a single person to understand. And religion may not offer a practical solution for anyone that believes in individual rights, the rights this country was founded on (I mean, Christianity telling people that the meek shall inherit the earth and the self-sacrifice for the benefit of others as good directly clashes with the idea that the individual has a brain and the right to use it, the right to claim what they have earned and even become successful). But young people, especially ones who still have a glimmer of hope that there is something out there that makes sense, when all their lives their schools and leaders have kept from them that their mind is the answer, young people want their political parties to make sense. Currently, neither platform, whether Democratic or Republican - is consistent or cohesive.

If a person believes that government intervention beyond the necessities - police protection from the force of others, for example - is wrong, neither political party supports them. Republicans believe in less government when it comes to leaving businesses alone - economically the government should let businesses prosper - but when it comes to personal parts of people's lives - choosing to have an abortion, whether consenting adults want to engage in sexual activities that are not what they consider "the norm," the kinds of art work people make and see - then Republicans know what's best for us, and want to tell us what to do.

Democrats believe in less government intervention when it comes to these personal issues, but when it comes to businesses and the economy, Democrats want to be able to regulate industries because they'll hurt people, they want to be able to tax businesses because big business is bad (Why? No answer.), and they want to be able to take money away from people, via business regulations and taxation, in order to give it away to people who haven't earned it (there's no more realistic explanation of the welfare system - other than robbery from the people who produce in this country).

Republicans and Democrats both believe the government should stay out of their business, whatever their business may happen to be. Other people's business? Feel free to meddle.

Even on more specific subjects both parties split their decisions moralistically. The religious right, a Christian group of Republicans, as well as Republicans in general, will tell you that it's horrible to kill an unborn child, but it's okay to kill someone that's already alive and that has committed a crime (what happened to "turn the other cheek"?). If life is so sacred, why is capital punishment being pushed by Republicans? With our current appeals system, it is estimated that it takes six times as much money to kill someone as it does to keep them in jail for life. And who pays for it? We do, the individuals. The tax payers. The producers.

But the one thing both parties have in common is that they want to take away at least some of our rights. That's why we're so disenchanted with the political parties we have today. Republicans want to take away our personal rights, Democrats want to take away our economic rights. Taxation, the Democrats' answer (so that people can still have goods and services while not working for them) taxation for anything other than

the essentials is forcibly taking away what individuals have earned. It's forcibly taking away people's money. That's the definition of robbery. And laws instilled by Republicans to protect our private lives, so that we are just like them, are not only forcibly telling us how to live, but enacting laws that also cause paperwork costs and costs in enforcing them. Who does the government pay for these things? Taxation, again, which means: we, the individuals, pay for the government telling us what to do.

Every election, I'm sure a good number of people, people with intelligence, people using reason and logic to the best of their ability in making a decision, go to the polls wondering, "Which rights am I willing to lose?"

Well, we shouldn't be losing any of those rights. We should have less government intervention in all respects of our lives.

I'm a twenty-something. I'm a woman, but I don't tell the government I need quotas to get a job, because I know that "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" means just that - it means I can pursue whatever I want. But it doesn't mean the government should be handing it to me on a platter.

I'm a twenty-something. I'm intelligent, and I don't need the government protecting me from myself. That's not what I'm paying for it to do.

I'm a twenty-something. I'm looking for a political party that embodies not my beliefs, but the belief that people can have their own beliefs (whether or not people choose to live by logic and reason or not is not for the government to control). I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals can have their lives (that's the "life" part of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"), they can have the right to keep their lives (that no one has the right to take something that belongs to you, like taxation for the welfare state, or that no one has the right to try to take away your life, unlike what the government does to death-row prisoners, for instance). I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals have the right to pursue their own goals, without intervention from the government and without help from the government (that you can't expect hand outs, but you also can start a business to sustain your life without being burdened by overtaxation and regulation).

I'm a twenty-something. I'm looking for a political party that embodies not my beliefs, but the belief that people can have their own beliefs. I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals can have their lives, they can have the right to keep their lives. I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals have the right to pursue their own goals, without intervention from the government and without help from the government.

I'm a twenty-something, and I'm looking for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Can anyone give it to me?



Previously Published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, [poets2000.com](http://www.poets2000.com), *AuthorsDen*, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, *Children Churches and Daddies* volume 96, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, *A Rant of my Own* at <http://www.yotko.com/a-rant-of-my-own/a-letter-to-our-political.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, the chapbook *This is My Dilemma* and in the books *Survive and Thrive* and *Contents Under Pressure*.

*The Christian Coalition*  
**THE CHRISTIAN COALITION**  
*and the Religious Right*  
**AND THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT**

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

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

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

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

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

### Christian Coalition.

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

Previously Published in *Children Churches and Daddies* magazine v132, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks> the chapbook *The Matter At Hand*, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, *A Rant of my Own* at <http://www.yotko.com/a-rant-of-my-own/christian-coalition.htm>, and in the books *Contents UnderPressure* and *Survive and Thrive*.

# *Balancing the Budget*

## BALANCING THE BUDGET

If we are going to try to balance the budget, the key isn't in doing it by taxing everyone until the debt is gone. The key is accepting more responsibilities as citizens, and not expecting the government to make things easier on us.

The reason why the government costs so much money is because we continually expect it to do more and more for us. The capitalist base that this country was founded on suggests that the government is there to protect our basic rights - "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This means that as individuals we reign supreme - the no one has the right to take our life, our property or our ability to achieve what we are willing and capable of achieving.

However, as the years have progressed, our political leaders have told us that we need to be taken care of, and to appease us they have offered, as a government, to do more and more for us. And we have agreed, these things would be better if the government took care of them for us. But that was where we went wrong.

The government is bogged down with a quagmire of laws protecting ourselves from ourselves. Seat belt laws. Motorcycle helmet laws. Speed limits. Laws to tell you when a rapist moves into your neighborhood, or laws to tell you when you're mature enough to drive a car, or drink. Although it seems to make sense that we shouldn't do these things, that we should make responsible choices, the government is going beyond it's basic role of protecting us from the force of others by telling us as individuals what is legally safe, which is infringing on our rights.

We haven't offended the rights of others, for instance, if we speed on a highway. By telling us we cannot speed, the government is infringing on our rights to do what we want with our property, as long as it doesn't infringe on the rights of others. If, because of our speeding, we hit another car and injure another person and/or their property, then we have infringed on another person's rights and we should be punished. But not until then. The government's job is to protect us from others, not from the possibility

of accidents caused by others.

We haven't offended the rights of others, for instance, if we choose to not wear our seat belts while driving or riding in a car. The government's job is not to protect us from ourselves, but from others. Even if we get injured in our cars because we weren't wearing our seat belts, we cannot and should not blame the government for not intervening - their job is to protect our right to decide whether or not we want to use these safety measures.

I won't argue that wearing your seat belt is not a good idea, or that all 10-year-olds should be learning to fly airplanes, but I'm not going to tell anyone that they should relinquish the responsibility of making these decisions to their government. When you let the government make some choices for you, what's to stop them from making all your choices for you? Capitalism is a clearly-defined set of rules, all surrounded around the notion that the individual human being's rights are most important. When you start to slip into socialism, however, and let the government take control of some aspects of your life for you, they can take more and more - you've let them - until you're faced with a dictatorship, with communism, and no rights as an individual at all.

The government is also bogged down with providing for those who originally can't - and now won't - provide for themselves. The productivity generated by a free economy has produced a great many things, for all of the people in this country and others. It has raised the standard of living for all. Considering the standards people lived at two hundred years ago, considering the number of religious wars that killed so many over the thousands of years of human history, considering the hundreds and hundreds of years the world lived in moral and economic darkness with other political systems, it is evident what people owning their own work can do for productivity, creativity and progress.

The creation of the welfare state has given people a reason to be unproductive. The creation of the welfare state has made people believe they deserve something for nothing. The government never said that every individual in the country was granted "life, liberty and a block of government-subsidized cheese." But this attitude, the attitude that people deserve something for nothing from their government, can be seen in our homeless on the streets, with their cups in their hands, marking a post to beg from in front of people daily commuting to work. They ask for money, bless you when you pass (invoking the notion of a god and the altruistic notion to give to others, even if - especially if - they don't deserve it), and occasionally, when they don't get the money they want from you, they scream in protest, as if the money in your pocket isn't yours, but theirs, and they have every right to expect a handout from you. America created this mentality when they created the welfare state, and we're paying for it in many ways. The lack of a balanced budget is only one way we're paying.

When the government - and the people - thought it was a good idea to help others, they didn't realize that helping themselves by being productive raised the standard of living, created new products and services for everyone, and did end up helping others. They also didn't realize that the productive earnings given to those who didn't earn it had to come from somewhere - and where it came from was from the productive people's pockets. And our productivity, as well as our budget - suffered for it.

The government is even bogged down with controlling and subsidizing many aspects of our lives.

National defense is a job for the national government, because part of it's job is to protect us from outside threats (that's the "life" part of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"). But supporting the arts, education, medicine - the government is not responsible for any of these things. And most of the mediums the government has some level of control over have suffered in one way or another.

The arts have come under great scrutiny because people don't want their tax dollars funding certain kinds of art works. America's health care is more expensive and rated worse than eleven other countries in the world. And the education system? We need metal detectors at the gates of our city schools and kids graduate from high school without being able to read.

A business couldn't run without producing a good service or product - in fact, it would have to produce a better product, since it would be in competition with other companies. And a business couldn't run at a deficit - it has to be able to run efficiently in order to run well. In what has been the most capitalistic society to date, we have proven that companies can run efficiently, run well, and always produce a better product. This could also happen in the areas the government still has control over.

Privatizing education, for example, may bring the standards of schooling better, because suddenly there would be open competition. It would also allow for ideas that have merit but have been suppressed to be taught, because when goods and services are in demand, the demand will be met in a free economy (versus state schools, where boards of education have to impress the higher-ups in order to get more funding, and may alter their curriculum accordingly). It may cost more at first, but if Americans weren't paying taxes for schools, they'd have more money in their pockets to be able to meet these expenses. Parochial schools do this already. And in this example, we wouldn't have concerns about whether or not prayer is allowed in a school, because it is not state sponsored. And there would be no debate over whether uniforms are allowable - you may pick the school of your choice to send your children to, and base your decisions on prayer, uniforms, and even ability to teach.

Previously Published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, [poets2000.com](http://poets2000.com), *AuthorsDen*, *A Rant of my Own* at <http://www.yotko.com/a-rant-of-my-own/christian-coalition.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, the chapbook *And What I Want To Know*, *Children Churches and Daddies* volume 93, and in the books *Contents UnderPressure* and *Survive and Thrive*.

DIVERSITY,  
POLITICAL CORRECTNESS,  
AND CREATIVITY

Are we looking for Diversity or Political Correctness?

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

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

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

### *Working Too Hard to be Politically Correct*

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

And you see, these were questions I had never thought of before. I mean, I never thought of watching someone because they were gay or straight, or white or black, or



male or female. Okay, maybe female, a bit. But it never stopped me from looking for talent across different ethnic, cultural or sexual lines. And I never thought that a group of people going on tour needed to fill quotas in order to be politically correct. I mean, can you imagine a heavy metal band going on tour saying, “Maybe we should bring a rap group and a Christian folk band with us?”

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

### *Crossing Over into Another Culture*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Using your Diversity to Your Creative Advantage*

As I said, I'm a writer, and I'm female, but I never thought of myself as a “female

writer.” But I’m sure that men listen to my work and think of me as a “female writer,” even if that decision is based solely on my own writing. I write about rape and domestic violence. I write about flirting with men. I write about being a woman.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Previously Published in *Political Correctness and Creativity*, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, *Tunnel Rat, Children Churches and Daddies* volume 132, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, *A Rant of my Own* at <http://www.yotko.com/a-rant-of-my-own/diversity-political-correct.htm>, and in the books *Survive and Thrive* and *Contents Under Pressure*.

# *The Illness of Volunteerism* THE ILLNESS OF VOLUNTEERISM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Businesses, by producing better goods and services, have increased the standard of living - for everyone in this country (consider that poor people can purchase televisions, have entertainment and other "luxuries" that no one could afford fifty years ago). Businesses are doing a service to the world as well as to themselves when they produce.

They earn a product; competition brings better products; everyone wins. It is not the responsibility of businesses to lose their workers to regular volunteer times, because they don't owe anything to "the community."

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

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

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

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

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

General Colin Powell is working on the volunteerism summit, and he added that it is in individual's best interests to look beyond their neighborhoods when volunteering. Why? How is it in any individual's best interest to do work for free that doesn't affect their lives? No answer.

Companies may be interested in participating in volunteering programs because it bolsters their image in their community, providing business. Or it may give the employees a feeling that their company cares about others, which may reduce the turnover rate. Or it may be a tax write-off. Either way, the only reasons a business should - in order to be an efficient business - explore volunteerism, is in order to help their own business out somehow. The CEO of Home Depot, Bernie Marcus, said, "We don't do it (volunteerism) because it increases our business." Well, then, your business isn't running as efficiently as it should be. Where are the costs of volunteerism going? Probably the prices of the goods and services the company sells. When you don't see a return on an investment, the loss has to be eaten up somewhere.

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

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

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

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

Previously Published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, *poets2000.com*, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, *A Rant of my Own* at <http://www.yotko.com/a-rant-of-my-own/the-illness-of-volunteerism.htm>, the chapbook *What I Want to Know*, *Children Churches and Daddies* volume 95, and in the books *Contents UnderPressure* and *Survive and Thrive*.

*Welcome to Corporate America*  
**WELCOME TO CORPORATE AMERICA**  
*Creativity, Drive, and the Perversion of the Work Ethic*

“The course of a career depends on one’s own action predominantly, but not exclusively. A career requires a struggle; it involves tension, disappointments, obstacles which are challenging, at times, but are often ugly, painful, senseless - particularly, in an age like the present, when one has to fight too frequently against the dishonesty, the evasions, the irrationality of the people one deals with.”

- Ayn Rand, The Ayn Rand Column

I am an Art Director. Impressive title, isn't it? I supervise a staff of designers and production artists who design three monthly trade magazines, a quarterly trade magazine, promotional materials for the magazines and trade shows, and accompanying web sites. I've worked my way up at this company; I started here in a low-end position making less than half of what I make now. Now I do good work, and I get compliments on our product from others regularly. My name is on the masthead of every magazine. I have my own office. I work in downtown Chicago, with a relatively impressive view of the Chicago river and the Mercantile Exchange building. I've worked at this company for four and a half years. I commute on the train. I have a health plan and a 401(K) retirement savings. Occasionally I sit in for the editors and go to special functions and media events and get free food and drink. All in all, I have it pretty good.

*Diary Entry, July 1997*

I think I'm going to quit my job. I really can't stand it here; even though I'm paid well I'm treated like crap by the owner; he resents me because I asked to be paid what I'm worth. And everyone seems to fight me on any decision to be made, even though everyone will say I am the best here at my job, they'll still argue with me. I have really gotten to the point where I just hate it here, so much that I feel like I almost have to leave.



Oh, I forgot to mention it, though: Corporate America, as represented by the company I'm employed at, is horrendous. And I plan on giving up that office, that view, those media dinners, my name of the masthead, that salary.

You see, it goes like this: I love my work. I enjoy designing magazines. I enjoy working on Macintoshes, retouching photos, playing with typefaces. I don't know why, but I love it. And the thing is, I know I'm good at what I do, and every single person in this company would agree that I'm a good designer, but every person in this company also tries to still tell me what to do, even though I'm the head of this department, even though they repeatedly say I'm good at what I do. This company does not let me just do my job.

### *Office Memo, January 10, 1997*

S., I know we've gone over this before, but I just want to let you know when problems came up. Today C., in front of myself, D. S. and D. E., badgered myself with design questions focusing on two scans (specifically on whether or not they would be outlined). I told her that barring technical difficulties or purely a lack of time they would be done. She insisted on having them done, that these two photos not outlined jeopardized the integrity of the design, that I looked at every scan and personally told her that they would all be outlined (which I did not do). Her tone was more than condescending, it was flat out rude. If I were her secretary I would have been offended. The demands she posed were trivial and out of her jurisdiction, and they were made to not a low-ranking member of the staff, but to the Art Director, in front of her staff. Behavior like that is unprofessional and intolerable.

We have discussed and agreed that her behavior and attitude is a problem in this office. It has caused one designer to quit and it was part of the reason the associate editor quit. I suggest that something be done as soon as possible, before she jeopardizes the job position of the new designer we plan to hire next week.

The people that work here, I've discovered, are not rational. I've done my best over the years to work with them anyway, to meet their demands, to come up with a compromise that will temporarily appease them so that I can do what I'm supposed to do. But the more I've compromised the more I've realized that a compromise between good and evil always ends up with some evil. If you concede a small token to the enemy, they will continue to try to take more from you. And I can no longer let incompetent people destroy a good product.

### *Office Memo, June 12, 1997*

For months I have written repeated memos, had regular meetings and expressed an urgent concern about not only the meddling but the design incompetence of C. that has proven to be detrimental to this magazine and to this company. I have demonstrated over and over again that I am a good, quick

designer, even when regularly faced with an late, incomplete and inconsistent work from editors. I have documented repeatedly that her interference in the design department has hurt the morale of the design department, has cost hours upon hours of time and additional money to this company and has ultimately sacrificed the design integrity of the magazine.

For a full year I have outlined what a problem this is. You have told me it will get better, that you'd talk to her. Apparently, however, she has not listened to memos or discussions about this problem.

In the beginning of the June issue you told her not to meddle, to let the designers do their job. For once she actually listened, and the result was not only a smoother month in getting work done but a great looking 112-page issue. I have received compliments on the design of the issue. The magazine looks good because she was not actively involved with the design, not in spite of it. This month, however, she apparently forgot what you told her. In our design meeting she picked on almost every subjective matter she could... Why are you listening to her, when she has been told repeatedly that this is out of her jurisdiction, when it has been shown that her input in these matters only hurts the final design of this magazine?

I've had to replace one staff member that quit because of her; I've had to remove one staff member from working on this magazine because they cannot stand working with her. The challenge of working well under difficult circumstances is not the problem; the challenge of working well when inexperienced people are actively trying to stop you from doing a good job is the problem. I can't tell people they should work on this magazine when I can't even think of any reasons why I should continue to.

Something, apparently something drastic, must be done immediately. I genuinely do not know how much longer I can work with the current circumstances. Please let me know as soon as possible if we can implement these changes and if you have any other ideas on how to solve this problem.

I know I sound like I'm overreacting here. But shouting matches are somewhat regular here, as well as multiple rounds of corrections in copy (after having three editors read something 15 times, there shouldn't be any need for more changes, they just cost time and money). Butting in to the production department's jobs is also a regular occurrence here. Having the goals of your department change without you knowing it. Having work redone because people weren't paying attention. Redoing work because someone new saw it and said it needed to change, after 7 other people approved it. Welcome to Corporate America.

### *Diary Entry, September 9, 1997*

I took a sick day today. A well day, so to speak. A mental health day. I didn't think it would be good for me to go to work today. I really hate that place.

Everyone hates everyone there, I think. J. told D. he's sending out resumes again. D. says he wants to leave. B. was interviewing a few weeks ago.

Are we not supposed to have balls and ask for things we deserve? Are other people in the office jealous because there are actually some people with some talent in the production department, and they have the power to expose the ignorance of the rest of the staff? I hate the fact that there are so many stupid people that are able to hold a job there. And of course it then becomes my job to cater to them, because they can't figure out what to do. I hate the fact that I have to follow other people's whims. That's precisely what they are - whims. People in that office don't know what they want, and don't trust the production department to do their job. They cost tons of money and tons of time. And the boss blames us for their ignorance.

I know I've said over and over again that I'm afraid of losing my financial security, that I'm afraid I might be making a mistake, that I'm worried about not having a plan, but there is no way whatsoever that I could stay there. It's beginning to get hard to stay there now, and I still have over a month and a half before I quit. Five weeks before I tell them.

The turnover rate in the production design department, according to rough estimates only done in my head, are something like thirty percent annually. When we're talking about a staff of seven, that means having to hire - and train - two or three people a year. If it isn't that bad, why are they all running out of here?

### *Diary Entry, August 2, 1997*

A co-worker quit from the company I work for today. I work in an office with about thirty-five people. Now this co-worker was in charge of our trade shows and quit two days before our annual trade show was about to begin. Apparently she was at a meeting about the trade show and someone else started badgering her and twenty minutes after the meeting she was on the phone with her husband saying, "It's been bad enough that every day after work I cry when I get home, but now I'm on the phone crying while I'm at work." So her husband told her it's okay if she wants to leave, they can work it out. So leave she did. She collected her things, and just... left.

Now I only got to hear about this scene second-hand, I didn't actually see her or even get to say good-bye to her, and that's a real shame because I probably would have shook her hand and thanked her for doing something that just about every person in our office has pretty much dreamt about on a daily basis. I mean, when I heard about what she did I let out a low, sadistic laugh, you know, one of those laughs that comes from really deep down, because we haven't had one of those angry quitting scenes in a while, and believe me, they're always fun to watch. And I laughed like that because I know what she was going through and I know what a relief it must have been for her to do it.

I work in my spare time as the editor of the literary magazine "Children, Churches and Daddies." One of the reasons I do it is simple: I want to put together a good magazine, one people like, on my own terms, and know that it is good. I have been praised for the design of the magazine. Everything about that magazine is a result of my own decisions: what the covers look like, what kind of sections the magazine has, who the contributors are, what the type looks like, what photos are used.

I need "Children, Churches and Daddies" for my own sanity. I need to do the work I love, without anyone telling me how to do it. I don't get that at work, and I know I deserve it. People tell me I'm good, but they still get in my way and obstruct my progress - not at getting ahead at this company, but from producing a good product - the best product - at this company. I love my work. But they haven't let me do it here.

### *Diary Entry, August 29, 1997*

I hate having pride in my work at this place. It is hard when you know you're good at something and everyone tells you you're good and yet no one will let you make decisions. I'm the highest-ranking designer at this company and people outside my department overrule decisions of mine arbitrarily - and regularly. They destroy any consistency or style something may have. And then I have to answer for it, since I'm the head of design. But I'm really not. I'm a slave to the whims of people who don't know anything about my work. It makes me want to leave so badly.

I just hate seeing things that are good get destroyed. It's one of the hardest things for me to witness.

There are two types of people: people who think of work as an extension of themselves, people who are productive, and continually strive to improve, to move forward, and there are people who think of work as some sort of evil necessity to help them exist because no one will give them free money for some reason. So they go through work making a greater effort to not work and act like they are working, they stay in the same job, they gossip, and they make life difficult for productive people.

One of the greatest benefits of Capitalism is that when the most productive people are allowed to work and to excel and to own and fully reap the benefits of their labor, then the standard of living is raised for all. Consider how well off homeless people are in this country as opposed to other countries, for instance. There is such a wealth of goods and services that it trickles down and improves the lives of all. When new technology is created, the old technology becomes cheaper, and more affordable to the lower classes. Well, my point from all that is that yes, that's one of the greatest things about Capitalism, but I must admit that there are times when on an entirely selfish level it bothers me that people who choose not to create, not to work hard, not to really contribute to society, still get the benefits from intelligent people's work.

There's a group of women that work in another department here at the office. Their pay is equivalent to that of a secretary here at this company, and this company has a surprisingly low pay scale. They punch in on time, they sit in the lunchroom together and gossip while eating their fast food, they take their smoke breaks in the lounge on the 22nd floor, they try to look like they have a lot of work to do so no one bothers them. They're all overweight. They all punch out at 4:30, go home, watch prime time television, and come back the next day and talk about it as if the characters on Melrose Place are friends of theirs. They never try to get a promotion, but they are angry if they don't get a raise. They never ask what needs to be done. They are resistant to change. They don't like people who succeed.

And these people make my blood boil.

It angers me that they are in the same office as me, taking partial credit for the magazine I work on. It angers me because these are the people that are a detriment to progress; that is the only thing they should have credit for.

“The difference between a career person and a job holder is as follows: a career person regards his/her work as constant progress, as a constant upward motion from one achievement to another, higher one, driven by the constant expansion of his/her mind, his/her knowledge, his/her ability, his/her creative ingenuity, never stopping to stagnate on any level. A job holder regards his/her work as a punishment imposed on him/her by the incomprehensible malevolence of reality or of society, which, somehow, does not let him/her exist without effort; so his/her policy is to go through the least amount of motions demanded of him/her by somebody and to stay put in any job or drift off to another, wherever chance, circumstances or relatives might happen to push him/her.”

- Ayn Rand, *The Ayn Rand Letter*, Vol. III, No. 26

So I've made this decision that I don't have to deal with all of this trouble anymore. One coworker told me that people in the industry refer to this company as a slave camp. But it stays in business anyway. So I've made this decision to give up the salary, the schedule, the “plan.” You see, I've planned everything in my life. I'm a control freak and need to have everything in order at all times.

And I'm not going to have that kind of security, that kind of stability, that kind of plan anymore. I have a plan to quit my job, to visit Florida for a month and then enjoy my Christmas holiday for once in my adult life (you see, it's crunch time at this company from November 1st to February 1st, so you're putting in 80 hours a week and have no time for the holidays). I plan to tour around the States, some for pleasure, some for writing, some for doing readings at bookstores and coffeehouses and bars and festivals. And then I plan on going to Europe for a few months.

I've never left this continent before, and I'd love the chance. I know some people in different countries in Europe, and figure that if they help me out I can afford to do

this, to take almost a year off and travel.

But am I only running away from something?

In all the decisions I've made in my life, I've tried to move toward something, not to run away from something. So what am I looking for?

### *Diary Entry, August 29, 1997*

I feel like I'm making such a large decision in my life now. When I left college, I knew I was only going to be going to school for four years, this was the logical conclusion to my schooling, but it was still a great change to go back home, as an adult, and start to look for a job. Once you're working, though, you make your own schedules. You can stay at the same job for thirty years, you can marry and quit your job and take care of a family, you can get another job. And the thing is, I had no idea how long I was going to be at this job. I thought I'd be here for at least six years; that's when my 401(K) becomes fully vested and I will have made the optimal amount of money in it, then I'd be ready to go, I could quit my job right about when I was probably ready to get married and possibly move to another city. But here I am, quitting a year and a half ahead of my plan, planning to spend a ton of my money on travelling instead of working for the next year.

It's strange. I've always been so insistent that I be financially secure. I've always planned everything. I've always done the most logical thing. Is this logical? I figure that I'm young and I have a savings and I hate my job, this is as good a time as any. If I get married and/or start another job, I might not have this opportunity in my youth again. Right now there's really nothing holding me back. So this is my chance.

But it's not like me. It's not like me to throw away a job that makes me great money. I have perks here. I can work on other projects here. The equipment is excellent. But I'm treated like a second-class citizen here. I have four to six people who answer to me design-wise, but I can't tell them what to do when someone from another department is overriding my decisions all the time. I can hardly be an effective leader when no one allows me to lead.

I've mentally just gotten tired of fighting this place. So I'm here for another two months, I'll try to save all of my money, and then I move on.

And recoup for a year.

I don't know what I'm looking for in Europe. I want to be alone, really. I want to see different sights. I want to see different sights through my own eyes, with my perceptions, with my perspectives. I want to be able to react to the world. Does that make sense?

I want to know I can do this. That I can.

Why I stay at my stupid corporate job:

1. I'm a masochist at heart and this company turns me on.

2. I was raised in a slave camp, and this place lets me drink water while I work.
3. He keeps telling me he'll deny everything in court if I leave him.
4. This company is cheaper than a sedative.
5. My boss makes me homesick for both Mother Russia and my vodka.
6. I don't have the resources to study chimpanzees in their natural habitat; had to find similar test group.
7. I'm hoping the rays emitted from my computer will eventually give me a tan.
8. Staying trapped in my office all day allows me to avoid interaction with all people.
9. I can't think of any faster way to become brain-dead.
10. All the fat people that work here make me feel thin.
11. It's fun to bet on who will quit next.
12. I'd hate to have to spend my days outside in the sun, say, being active or doing different things.
13. The constantly changing whims of my supervisors keeps me on my toes.
14. Because you can't have an abuser without an enabler.  
and the bonus...
15. Contrary to popular opinion, my olive complexion does not mean I'm made of money.

### *Office Memo, April 28, 1997*

I thought you said you told C. not to tell designers how to design departments. She did (see attached).

She also told me what to do for some of the show coverage, things that (1) go in conflict with consistency in the magazine, (2) go in conflict with consistency in design of all the show coverage per our meeting Friday, (3) would make the section look cluttered. She didn't cause problems in the meeting Friday; she's causing them on paper now. Why?

Please let her know that these changes are unnecessary. I've outlined it in a memo to her; she should also know, however, that it's not her place to be doing things like this, and she won't listen to me. Thanks.

I've tried to work through this unhealthy environment. I've tried to swallow my pride and just do what they tell me. But I can't do it forever; I have too much pride and I know I should be doing something more. I've tried to fight for what I know is right, and then my supervisors will agree with me, and then one of the supervisors will disagree and no one will want to fight it. Everyone is so afraid to fight for things here, that they just let the cycle continue on and on and on.

### *Diary Entry, September 15, 1997*

Why would you hate someone for paying them something close to what they're worth? He did this to P., the old editor. When P. quit, he needed to replace him with three people, and I'm sure he's paying the new editor more

than he was paying P. He shoots himself in the foot that way. He resents people for having pride in themselves. He wants weak people here, so he can pay them next to nothing. And then he treats them like crap for doing sub-standard work.

Then he gets someone on staff who is good, and eventually they stand up for themselves and ask for more money, and he gladly gives it to them, and then he thinks about it for a while, and he thinks, "You know, I used to be able to pay them less money for the same work. They're screwing me." And then he hates them and makes them feel like crap until they quit.

I don't understand how someone who can run a successful business can be so short-sighted.

If this place wasn't so whim-oriented, it would be a lot better. The owner makes changes from one issue to the next, he changes his mind about everything, he doesn't remember what he said, he blatantly lies.

I was told that he has told A. to sit on expense checks and petty cash requests as long as she can, so he can hold off on paying out what his employees have coming to them.

The thing is, work can be something that makes you happy (yes, I've heard that it is possible). I produce the literary magazine "Children, Churches and Daddies" for no money; I typeset it, I design it, I write for it, I scan photos for it, I make all editorial corrections, do spell checks and make sure it gets out on time, and I do it all with more efficiency that a staff of people do here in this office.

Maybe that's another problem. I've think I've learned all I can learn from this place. A career is supposed to be a constant progression of learning and applying what you've learned, but for the past year, or year-and-a-half here, I haven't been learning, I've just been fighting to stay at the same point I've always been at.

And that shouldn't happen. Not from the standpoint of the owner, who wants efficiency and can most easily get it by allowing his staff to produce (a happy employee is a productive employee), and certainly not from my own standpoint. I want to learn, I want to grow. I don't want to have to fight for things I fought for a year and a half ago.

### *Office Memo, January 13, 1997*

#### Bonuses and Christmas Parties

Most companies have a decent Christmas party as well as bonuses at the end of the year. HOW magazine estimates that the average production/designer received a bonus of nearly \$4,000 in the midwest and nearly \$6,000 nationally. Folio magazine estimates that production directors, people in positions such as myself and D. S., receive bonuses on average of over \$8,000 for trade magazine work.

In 1995 we had the closest thing to a real Christmas party, although we could not invite a guest (like a spouse). This year we received less than a party.



For a staff that has been overworked and is looking for some sign of gratitude, no bonus and a lunch instead of a party is insulting.

#### Current Overtime Compensation

Overtime is supposed to be compensated for by being able to take time off. Usually, however, we only take time off at a ratio of 1:4 or 1:3. If I work 60 hours of overtime in a given month, seldom do I have the opportunity, much less the permission, to take nearly four days off, which would be a 1:2 ratio, much less a week and a half off at a 1:1 ratio. Yet this is supposed to be my compensation for losing half of my spare time. I have had to repeatedly relinquish social and family obligations, as well as eliminate basic money-saving and necessary household chores in my life like grocery shopping because I have simply had no time to do these things that I should be doing. The sheer amount of time I have worked has also made me physically sick, and with more work always piling on, I do not have the chance to take the time off I need to get some rest and recover from illness.

The Fair Labor Standard Act requires government employees to get 1-1/2 hours of comp time for every hour of overtime worked. The average (norm - expected) ratio for any company offering comp time in lieu of wages is a 1:2 ratio. The Federal government is now trying to set up a standard of one hour of comp time for every hour and a half of overtime worked (in lieu of wages). This company's policy puts our comp time drastically below those ratios. Considering that giving an employee comp time off at a 1:2 ratio doesn't cost the employer anything, during less busy times there is no reason why this ratio should not apply to this company.

I have consistently worked far more overtime than a worker should. Consistently I have produced quality work at a much faster rate than the rest of the production/design staff at this company. And consistently I have wondered when I'd get paid for the work I have done, if I would even get compensation for the work I did, or when I would even have a day off. I look around and see the sales staff making three to four times my salary, all while working a normal work week (when not travelling around the globe). I see an editorial staff and a marketing staff that does not put in overtime give me work consistently late, asking me to spend my spare time catching up their mistakes.

I have battled with and created a good product in spite of an inadequate staff, or an incompetent staff, or an uncooperative staff. In short, I feel I don't receive adequate compensation in most every front at this company.

Well, if I have learned anything in the past year, it has been how to deal with the incompetency of an inadequate and uncooperative staff, which is probably a lesson I'd have to learn sooner or later anyway.

At least I haven't given in and joined them with that mentality. Then I would have really lost.

But I know there is more out there, and I know it is time for me to learn some-

thing new. It's time for me to shake up my routine.

Change is hard for anyone to look forward to; when you get used to something, it just gets ... comfortable. Change can be scary. I've been at this company longer than I've been in college. The pay is pretty good. It could be worse.

Yes, I suppose it could be worse. But it could definitely be better, and I know that if it's going to get better, I'm going to be the one that will make it that way.

### *Diary Entry, September 15, 1997*

M. just came into my office with the most recent issue. She was so excited about how it looked, and she was going on about how the printer did a good job, and she's so pleased. And she keeps saying things like "Next year will be better," and "We'll have a lot more ads next year," and "We'll have a lot more time to work on it next year," and I keep nodding my head and agreeing with her, but I know the issue she just handed me will be the last issue I do, at least while I'm employed here.

So now I sit here, grinning and bearing it, trying not to tip anyone off, trying not to burn any bridges. Who knows, maybe they will want to freelance out one magazine to me, have me work on it at home, on my own time. Maybe I'll have the best of both worlds for a while.

Maybe it's not like this everywhere. Maybe after travelling, I'll find a company that thinks it's a good idea to pay people what they're worth. Maybe I'll find a place that judges people on merit, and not on how they dress or if they're gay or not or how well they play golf or if they can hold their liquor or how many friends they can make - or should I say fake - with the staff.

Or maybe I'll win the lottery and become independently wealthy. Oh, I guess that means I'll have to play first. Well, I hate throwing away money, and I know I'd have to work anyway, because as I said, I love my job, I do my own work in my spare time just to keep me sane.

Maybe I'll get sick and tired of working for someone else and go for another change altogether and start my own company. One where I produce a product with content I care about, that looks as good as I know it can look.

Anybody need a job in a year or two?

### *Diary Entry, September 17, 1997*

I make it through the day here by thinking about October 17th, the day I put in my two week notice. It's one month from today. Thirty days from now I will be telling the owner and D. S. that I'm putting in my two week notice.

Thirty days from now I'll be telling everyone in production to come into my office, so I can tell them I'm leaving. And D. J. will be pouring champagne for me, and I'll be telling everyone about my travel plans, and I'll be laughing and smiling.

And when S. finds out and comes to me and asks me not to go I'll say too bad, that apparently they can't pay me enough to stay here, and if she asks me why I'm going I'll tell her it's because I can't stand incompetence and idiocy and whim-worshipping and I deserve something better because I'm talented, hard-working and intelligent.

And I bet she won't even get that she is the incompetent, whim-worshipping idiot.

And C. will be glad that I'm leaving, because then she can take over the design of this magazine, even though she's not a designer or an art director but an editor, and a bad one at that.

And I'll look at J., the main saleswoman for this magazine, and I know she'll be thinking two things:

1. if the magazine looks worse it will be even harder to sell, which will make her near-impossible job of selling crap even more impossible, and
2. she'll be jealous, because she wants to get out of here too, because this place places constant barriers in front of any attempts to do your job and she's underpaid and her job depends on there being a good product when editorial can't write to save their lives.

And I'll feel bad for J., and I'll want to tell her to just get out of here, that working at McDonald's has to be better than this place, you'd have to have more pride in your work any place else than here.

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I keep trying to think that it's not that the weak and stupid are able to beat the intelligent and hard-working and rational. That I'm not leaving because they beat me. That I was wrong. I have to keep reminding myself that it's that the intelligent and rational human does not need to put themselves through this kind of abuse. I have to make a point to actively consciously remind myself of this. There is nothing to gain from battling those who do not listen to reason. Consider trying to have a rational argument with a religious fanatic - they are not coming from a rational base, so the foundation of their argument is not sound, even though they don't question their foundation and accept it as true. And therefore they won't listen to your argument, no matter how much reason and logic you use. They've rejected that line of thinking. They've rejected thinking.

The ignorant are different from the stupid, because being stupid is not a statement on whether you choose to be that way. Being ignorant, the way I see it (I know this is not in the definition), means you choose the option of being an idiot; you ignore the better choices; you choose irrationality over reason. You're stupid because you weren't educated, but you're ignorant because you choose not to be educated, that's the difference that I see between the two, and that's how I use the word ignorant. Being ignorant is detestable. Being ignorant, since it is a choice to avoid rationality, cannot be rationally argued with. Reason won't

change their mind.

So if the choices are: 1. fighting a losing battle, not because reason is not on your side, but because your opponent does not recognize reason, or 2. leaving the battleground, so you don't have to bang your head against a wall, then I guess choice number two seems to be most logical.

D. J. refers to working here as "pounding nails into your cock." It's extremely painful and also absolutely pointless.

Kind of crass, but well said.

So I just keep thinking, "Thirty days."

So I now embrace change with open arms, I welcome it into my life, and I keep my eyes focused on the future, to make the best out of what I have and what I've learned in order to face the challenges I give myself in the year - and the lifetime - to come.

Previously Published in *Nation* magazine, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, *Art/Life Limited Editions, Children Churches and Daddies* volume 122, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, and in the books *Contents Under Pressure* and *Changing Gears*.