

# SUNSTRUCK

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# CONTENTS

## NON-FICTION

EMPATHY, TUNNEL VISION AND THE AMHERST UPRISING - WILL LABADIE.....	01
ANDROGYNOUS - KURT MENDES.....	05
A HERALD IN HELLISH TIMES - CALEB DOWNS.....	09
MY PINK CHAIR - BENN JOHNSON.....	18
INTERVIEW WITH ALEX LAW.....	20
DON'T LOOK BACK IN ANGER - JOSHUA DANIELS.....	29
VIOLENCE, AND OTHER LOVE AFFAIRS - MARA O'NEILL.....	33

## POETRY

PREFACE.....	41
A.B. GUSTAFSON.....	42
SEAN SWEENEY.....	44
GREGORY HOLLAND.....	47

## FICTION

GOOD MORNING, GOOD MORNING - WILLIAM AUTEN.....	50
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## ART

MAD LOVE - CHRIS YEE.....	38
CHOCOLATE - JULIETTE VAISSIERE.....	48
ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST .....	59

**"SOCIETY STINKS"**

**-X HEAD**  
***THE DECLINE OF WESTERN  
CIVILIZATION***

# NOTICE

## WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF REVOLUTION.

LIFE, JUST LIKE A NATION'S POLITICAL CLIMATE, IS ALWAYS CHANGING, AND AT THIS STAGE IN HISTORY, THAT TRUTH SEEMS TO HAVE BECOME EXAGGERATED. COMMUNITIES AROUND THE GLOBE ARE RISING UP AGAINST AUTHORITARIAN STATES, AND INDIVIDUALS ARE BUCKING STRICT, TRADITIONAL NORMS IN EXCHANGE FOR SOCIETIES MORE AMENABLE TO THEIR PREFERENCES.

THE ARAB SPRING SHOOK THE ENTIRE MIDDLE EAST TO ITS CORE. SOME OF THOSE REVOLUTIONS WERE INCREDIBLY SUCCESSFUL, WHILE OTHERS, MOST NOTABLY THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION, HAVE BEEN DRAWN OUT INTO FULL-FLEDGED CIVIL WARS. FOLLOWING THE GLOBAL RECESSION OF 2008, PARTIES ON THE EXTREME ENDS OF BOTH SIDES OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM GAINED TRACTION IN EUROPE, WHICH WAS A CLEAR SIGN CITIZENS WERE NO LONGER CONTENT WITH THE STATUS QUO. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AGAINST CORRUPT AND AUTOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS IN RUSSIA, HONG KONG AND MEXICO DIDN'T ACHIEVE DRASIC STRUCTURAL CHANGES, BUT THE POLITICAL WILL THEY DEMONSTRATED WAS SIGNIFICANT AND IMPRESSIVE NONTHELESS.

IN THE UNITED STATES, WE SEEM TO BE DEALING WITH ALL OF THESE ISSUES AT ONCE. THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT HAS HELD DEMONSTRATIONS IN CITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY. POPULIST POLITICIANS ON THE RIGHT AND LEFT HAVE DUMBFOUNDED PUNDITS WITH THE AMOUNT OF SUPPORT THEIR PLATFORMS HAVE RECEIVED. AND TRADITIONAL VALUES ARE REGULARLY CHALLENGED IN COURTS AND ON THE STREETS.

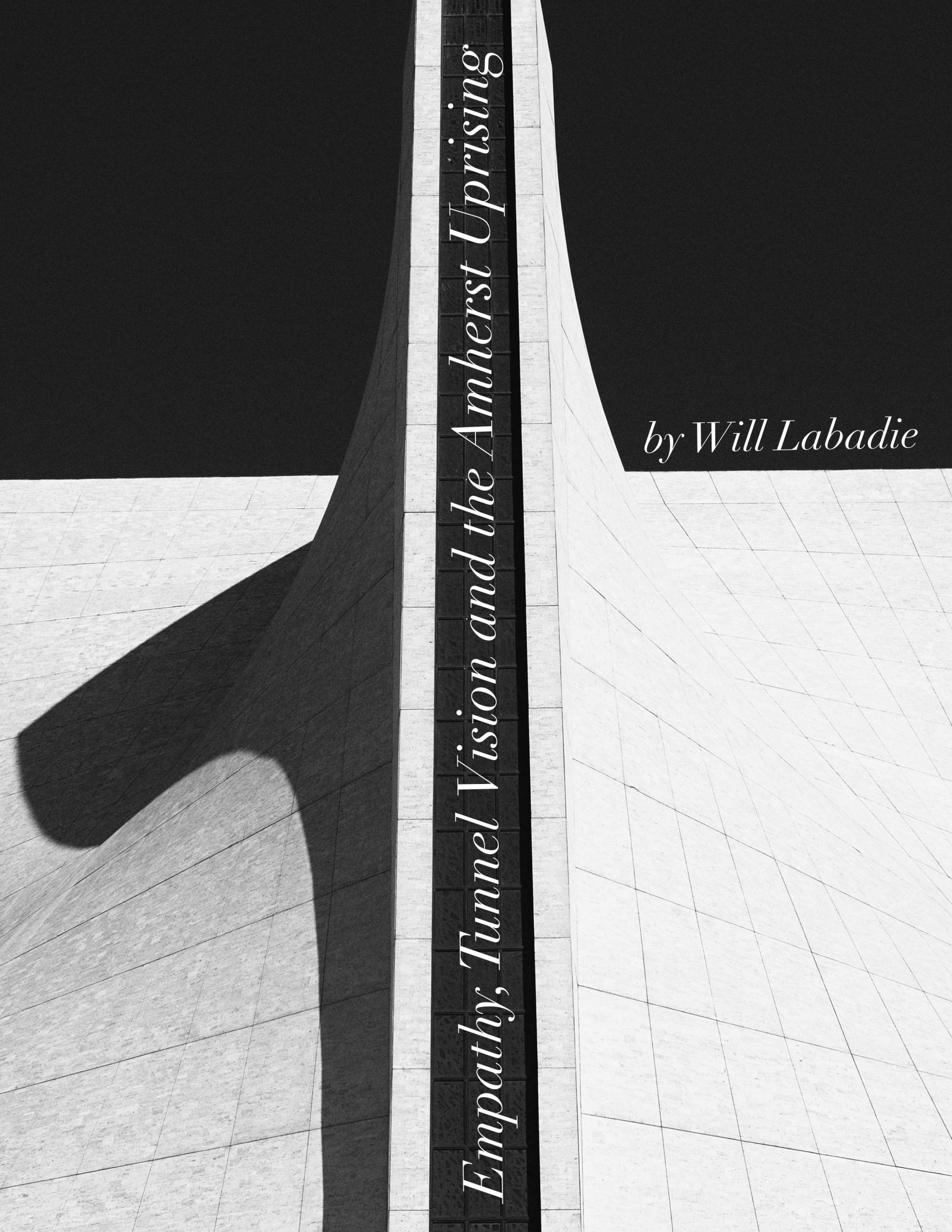
WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS POINT IN HISTORY THAT LENDS ITSELF TO SO MANY INSTANCES OF REVOLUTION? SOME WILL SAY SOCIAL MEDIA. OTHERS GLOBALIZATION. STILL MORE WOULD SAY TECHNOLOGY. YET, IT'S UNLIKELY THAT ANY SINGLE PHENOMENA HAS BEEN THE DECIDING FACTOR IN THE NUMEROUS UPRISINGS OVER THE PAST DECADE. THUS, EACH INSTANCE REQUIRES A RENEWED INVESTIGATIVE EFFORT.

THIS MONTH, SUNSTRUCK DISCUSSES REVOLUTIONS AND THE WAY IN WHICH THEY'RE AFFECTING OUR SOCIETY. OUR CONTRIBUTORS DISSECTED THEIR SUCCESSES, THEIR FAILURES, THEIR FUTURES, THE REACTIONS THEY INSPIRE AND THE PEOPLE CARRYING THEM OUT. THOUGH MANY OF THE WORKS SPEAK ON DIFFERENT CULTURAL AND POLITICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF REVOLUTION, A FEW OF THE WORKS APPROACH THE SUBJECT FROM A MORE PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE.

REVOLUTIONS WITHIN ONE'S OWN SELF, THOUGH THEY AFFECT THE PHYSICAL WORLD TO A FAR LESS NOTICEABLE EXTENT, ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT. ALL OF US, AT ONE POINT OR ANOTHER, WILL EXPERIENCE SOME INNER TURMOIL, AND EXAMINING THE DIFFERENT WAYS OTHER PEOPLE DEAL WITH THAT TURMOIL CAN BE BOTH INSPIRING AND INFORMATIVE.

WE HOPE THE PIECES WE'VE SELECTED FOR THIS ISSUE OF SUNSTRUCK MAGAZINE CLARIFY OR PUT INTO PERSPECTIVE THE RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD WE INHABIT.

EDITOR IN CHIEF  
-CALEB DOWNS



*by Will Labadie*

*Empathy, Tunnel Vision and the Amherst Uprising*

**O**n Nov. 12th a group of students at Amherst University participated in a sit-in at the Robert Frost Library on the university campus, intending to stand (or sit) in solidarity with the students of color at Yale and the University of Missouri. Student protest groups at Yale and Mizzou had voiced concern and outrage over institutionalized white, straight privilege in recent weeks, and students at the Amherst sit-ins wanted not only to support those groups, but to bring awareness to some of the same issues on their campus as well.

The movement at Amherst took a turn for the intolerant when a group of student leaders who refer to themselves as the “Amherst Uprising” published a list of immediate demands directed at the university’s President, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Dean of Faculty, Chief of Police, alumni and a pair of programming officials. Their demands include, notably: apologies from these individuals to “marginalized communities and their allies”; protection from university police; a statement from the university president expressing intolerance for the “All Lives Matter” movement on campus and support for programs requiring “All Lives Matter” campus protestors to “attend extensive training for racial and cultural competency”; a statement from the university president expressing support for a revised university Honor Code including “a zero-tolerance policy for racial insensitivity and hate speech”; and a vow from the dean of faculty not to punish student protestors for missing class.

That a significant number of Amherst’s students wish to examine and address the possibility of long-standing, institutional, subtle discrimination against minorities at Amherst is a good thing. However, Amherst Uprising’s list of demands betrays a misunderstanding of the importance of discussion and debate to a university and education in general.

Intolerance for diverse viewpoints is easily observable in every corner of America, and it seems to be especially prevalent among young adults of the millennial generation. It is worth examining when and how the seeds that grew into the intolerance exhibited at Amherst were sewn, and how prevalent and worrisome such intolerance is.

Standardized testing is an integral part of American educational institutions today. Since the pas-

sage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, American students have been required to pass an aptitude test at the end of every school year in order to ascend to the next level of their education. These tests not only provide the U.S. government, school administrators and researchers with hard data (which allows for more effective research, better policy evaluation and a quantitative evaluation of every school in the country), but also informs educators with a single number what level of education is most likely to be appropriate for a given student. The benefits of standardized testing are great and numerous. However, modern American standardized testing has many significant drawbacks, and long-lasting effects on its subjects. These drawbacks have been treated extensively, especially since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The act was the first to penalize schools that performed poorly according to state assessments, and many school districts have since implemented a similar incentive system, loosely tying teacher salaries to their classes’ test scores. The goal for an educator motivated by the promise of a higher salary then, is not necessarily to maximize student learning, but to maximize student test scores.

This leads to a method of teaching that has been regularly condemned - especially by educators - and is popularly referred to as “teaching to the test.” End-of-year assessments are generally multiple choice tests. When a student is taught in a way that maximizes her test scores, she will be taught to seek one correct answer in a field of incorrect answers. Teachers are expected to convey more information to students than the school year probably allows for, and as a result teachers are pressed for time in the classroom. Teachers may often have to abandon tangential discussions about why a given answer is correct or incorrect. Out of necessity, wrong answers are often shunned and left behind.

Couldn’t this sort of conditioned learning cause a generation to look at difficult issues with a set of blinders on? In a field of incorrect opinions, millennials have been trained to seek one that is correct. Once they think they have found it, it’s natural for them to think others should be silenced or disregarded. Though Americans have faced standardized testing for decades, due to No Child Left Behind,

the stakes are higher for teachers of the millennial generation and the implicit emphasis on “one-answer thinking” is stronger.

The millennial generation is also the first to have had access to the Internet since childhood. As anyone with a Facebook account can attest, interacting with a person online is a different experience from interacting with a person face-to-face. The difference lies in having time to craft a perfect response; in not seeing how your words are affecting the other party emotionally; in being detached from the consequences of words.

Vitriol arises in interactions between people on the Internet that likely would never enter into a face-to-face conversation between the same people. One simply has to open their Facebook, Twitter or the comments section of their favorite newspaper or magazine to experience this phenomenon.

A recent example that engrossed my hometown and my college town - Dallas and Denton, Texas, respectively - was an op-ed written for The Dallas Morning News by the University of North Texas’ Dean of the Frank W. and Sue Mayborn School of Journalism, Dorothy Bland. The piece was titled “I Was Caught ‘Walking While Black.’” Bland’s article sparked a great controversy over speculations about the intent of her piece. Was Bland taking advantage of this moment of race relations in America? Was she earnestly contributing to an important discussion about discrimination by police? Or, as some contended, was she just whining?

Whatever the case was, many of the comments made by readers were inexcusable. Multiple people called and were called “idiot” and “tool.” One user stated simply “Gawd, I hate them” (“them” seems to refer to black people given the context of the comment, though its intent is certainly open to interpretation). Another user cited Bland’s “Black Privilege.” At least one commenter referred to Ms. Bland as a nigger. Many references to the “race card” and “race baiting” were made. And a few comments accused Bland herself of racism.

These comments, and similar instances of such behavior, demonstrate that the insensitivity of users, the lack of responsibility for one’s own comments and the slight anonymity of the Internet have all given rise to a generation of Americans with relatively little empathy, which is a prerequisite for any productive conversation among

disagreeing parties. If this generation is lacking in empathy (to which interactions across social media attest), it makes some sense that a millennial would prefer eliminating an opinion incongruous with his own to discussing or considering it.

The role of “one-answer thinking” and the lack of empathy fostered by the Internet in the millennial generation are likely to have played a role in the Amherst Uprising. Their intolerance for perspectives outside of their own is reflective of their schooling and their lack of empathy. It is brave for the students of the Amherst Uprising to confront the university administration, who could levy serious consequences against the protestors. Yet, their courage is underscored by the cowardly demand that they not be punished for protesting. It is noble for the students of the Amherst Uprising to seek a more equitable forum upon which diverse voices can hold debate. Yet, their nobility is underscored by the ignoble censorship upon which they seek to build such a forum.

All of this is cause for concern as more and more millennials reach voting age and enter the work force. One would think that this generation, aggressive and unsympathetic in disagreement, will be a significant detriment to a democratic nation like the United States. With the U.S. already in a hostile state of political polarization, it is disconcerting to consider a less empathetic generation entering the voter pool and further dividing the nation.

But there is a great deal to be hopeful for. Though the Amherst Uprising is misguided, their cause is a good one. More diverse debate will lead to a more critical, thoughtful, intelligent, empathetic society, all moral arguments aside. And although the Internet causes one to be more vitriolic than he might otherwise be, it also connects the world in a unique and wonderful way. However intolerant one might be on an Internet forum, by simply being there, she will be practically forced to interact with people of other cultures, races, persuasions, religions and opinions without seeing their skin color or their gender. For every hateful comment found on a forum, there are likely as many instances of human connection and understanding.

American teachers are more frustrated by the current state of education and the incentive system

it has yielded than anyone else in the country. The Common Core test, developed in 2009, looks to be a more effective measure of student comprehension than the tests I took as a secondary school student, and the country's evaluations – whether crafted by a state or federal agency – will only improve in this respect as more data is collected and more research compiled. Many teacher preparation programs, rejecting the idea of teaching to the test, are emphasizing the importance of group work and critical thinking. Many teachers achieved their licenses without taking such a course, however, so reforms must be implemented to encourage the same thinking in these teachers.

The next generation faces even greater challenges than this one. By the time the millennials' children reach adulthood, climate change will be an even graver threat, overpopulation will be a more pressing matter, conventional energy sources will be further depleted, and the world will surely have new political, social and religious issues. To solve these problems and all those unforeseen, the next generation will need to collaborate, compromise, and empathize with one another. They will have to learn from the millennial generation's shortcomings and mistakes, as the millennials have learned from their parents' shortcomings and mistakes. As the Amherst Uprising seeks to correct the biases and discriminations of past generations' institutions, they can rest easy knowing that their children will improve on the example their movement sets today.

*androgyno* US

*kurt mendes*

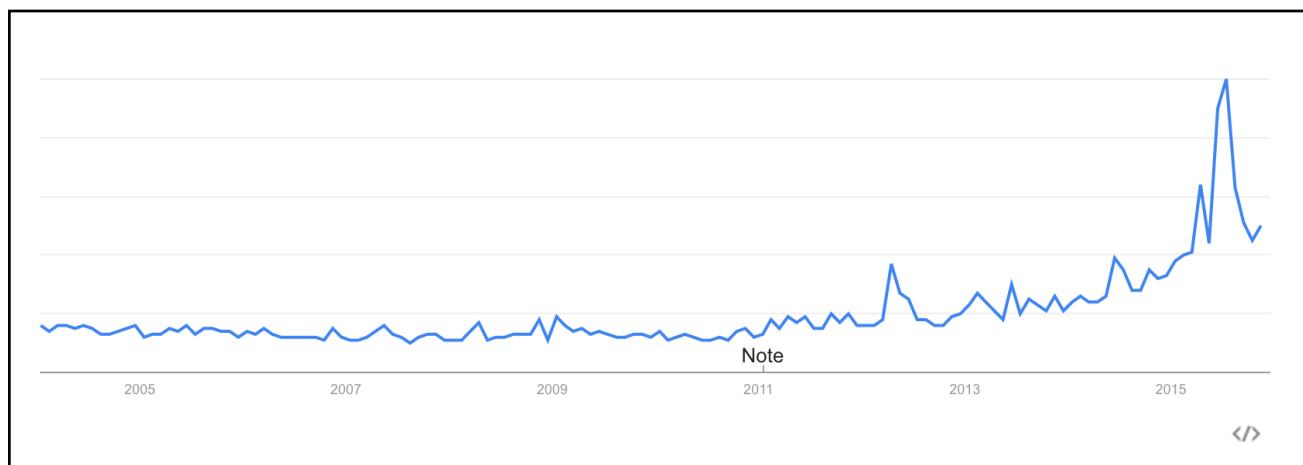
In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association made a landmark decision to remove homosexuality from the second edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-II). Upon the announcement of their decision, the APA stated homosexuality itself was not a mental disorder, but that the distress resulting from living in a culture that stigmatized homosexuals could ultimately lead to various other mental health disorders.

This decision marked a change in the way the scientific community thought about sexuality and gender. This is a change that has continuously progressed, extending its reach beyond the realm of the scientific community and slowly permeating into other aspects of our culture. Now, as same-sex marriage has been legalized, many people have shifted their attention to a new front: transgenderism.

cultural stigmatization of one's desire to become the opposite sex. This is an important distinction, as it shifts the causation of distress from the individual's desires to the general actions of society.

How is society responding? It's noteworthy to mention that if one looks at the search frequency of the term "transgender," one will see that it hit an all time high this past July, when Caitlyn Jenner made her public debut. Since the spike in interest, the frequency has dropped back down, but it remains on an upward trend that appears to have begun in 2012, shortly before the APA published the DSM-V.

If it's safe to say that public interest is growing, can we also say that the interest being generated is productive in nature? For the most part, yes. But as it turns out, the media may be doing a disservice to the transgender population by providing inaccurate statistics to the public. Several articles online



*Graph of U.S. search frequency over time for the term "transgender", Google Trends*

Upon the release of the DSM-V in 2013, the American Psychiatric Association included another important update. The definition of gender identity disorder was updated, and it was given a new name: gender dysphoria. Gender identity disorder was previously defined in the DSM-IV as "...the desire to be, or the insistence that one is, of the other sex." This is what many people know as transsexuality or transgenderism.

Previously, the DSM implied that an individual's identification with the opposite gender was the cause of psychological distress, and was indeed a mental disorder. In contrast, gender dysphoria is defined as the result of inner conflict caused by the

cite the DSM-IV when reporting on the number of transgender men and women in the United States. According to the outdated DSM report, an estimated 1 in 30,000 men identify as transgender, while approximately 1 in 100,000 women do. These numbers depict the transgender lifestyle as something extremely rare. Blindness, for example, afflicts one person in every 350.

How accurate are these numbers? A study done by Lynn Conway, a pioneering computer scientist, transgender activist and professor at the University of Michigan, showed that they're significantly detached from reality. Her research unveiled in 2002 that in actuality, the amount of transgender men in

the U.S. is closer to 1 in 2500, which was a modest estimate. More recently, a 2011 study initiated by the Williams Institute found that there were almost 700,000 transgender men and women in the United States. This equates to approximately one transgender male or female for every 450 people. A far cry from the 1994 estimate of 1 in 30,000 that was cited for so many years.

So what is happening with the number of transgender Americans? Is the population growing, or has it always been this way? With the data available today, it's difficult to say. But it is worth pointing out that just as the number of homosexuals "grew" as society became more accepting, we see the same trend with transgenderism now. I think one could easily make the argument that society's increasing acceptance of transgenderism has resulted in more and more people "coming out" as trans, where in previous decades they may have not felt safe doing so.

It may be trite to ask why all of this is important, but besides the fact that these numbers reveal a large and grossly underrepresented portion of our population, the trends point to larger change that is slowly seeping into the fabric of our nation. The way we think about sex and gender is changing. Two-thirds of people between the ages of 14 and 34 would agree that "gender no longer has to define people in the way that it used to", as shown in a study completed by Intelligence Group, a research firm focused on millennials. However, It would be unfair and inaccurate to say all of this was achieved by the transgender community. Recently renewed feminist efforts, including but not limited to the "Free the Nipple" campaign, have also played an important role in the way that gender is thought about, calling into question some of the disparities between men and women that still remain today.

Since the primary problem lies in the stigmas surrounding transexuals, it is important to investigate the root causes of these negative perceptions.

In today's society, infants are labeled either "male" or "female" upon, or even before, birth. These two labels contain enormous amounts of power, potentially dictating a large portion of the opportunities an infant will have made available to them as they mature. They also immediately smother the infant with expectations on what its general interests, hobbies, and physical appearance should and shouldn't be.

Historically men and women have had distinct and separate roles in society, and many people strongly identify with this, even on a subconscious level. The concept of our gender is so engrained in many of us that the idea of a single individual passing out of one social role and into the other can be outright disturbing and offensive. To attempt to explain to someone that their gender, along with everyone else's, is nothing more than a collection of culturally contextual expectations based solely on their genitalia is no easy task. If someone can, in a single lifetime, transition from a "male" to a "female" (or vice-versa), and thus completely reverse the expectations placed on them by society, they are effectively invalidating the first and most emphasized label that society places on any individual. Though this disregard for society's most engrained expectations will inevitably create controversy, this trend has only served to further equalize the two genders.

While it is a slow process, equality between genders and various sexual identities has never seemed more achievable. With the cost of Sexual Reassignment Surgery sure to become more affordable in the future, it stands to reason that transgenderism will become even more common and accepted. In an episode of the podcast "Meanwhile In The Future," Ann Leckie, a Hugo award winning science fiction author, describes a possible future in which gender is seen similarly to the way we see hair color today. In this future, we would still recognize an individual's gender, but it would have little to no impact on the way we perceive or interact with them. For this future to become a reality would imply that a bevy of the problems we face as a species today have already been resolved. Problems like the gender pay-gap, the conflict regarding unisex bathrooms, and conceivably all sex related hate crimes would become the shameful history our children are taught in school. Yes, all of this sounds idealistic and utopian. And admittedly it is. But if we aren't striving to achieve the ideal, where are our efforts being focused?

Though social-media is poisoning our society in many regards, there is no debating it's power as a public platform. In the right hands, amazing things can be accomplished. One positive example of such a feat is none other than the "Ice Bucket Challenge." Like anything else on the internet, it eventually became nothing more than a popularity

contest, but despite that, the campaign managed to raise enormous amounts of both public awareness and financial support. Lou Gehrig's Disease afflicts approximately 1 in 57,000 Americans. Does this mean it is any less important than transgenderism and gender equality? Absolutely not. But if something that affects fewer people directly can generate so much awareness, imagine the good that could come from a creative grass-roots campaign centered around gender equality.

I think it's obvious that a "genderless society" is the stuff of science-fiction. Though the concept can't be completely ruled out as a possibility, I find the probability of such a future to be extremely slim. This is not to say that all hope is lost or that our conflicts can't be resolved. In fact, quite the contrary. Current trends point to the fact that if we continue on the path we are on, a path where we remain accepting of those who self-identify in ways outside the spectrum of what was previously "traditional," true gender equality will eventually be achieved. It's only a matter of time before more people start to realize that *we define gender*. Gender does not define us. The burden falls on our shoulders to carry this ideology forward into the future, to instill in our children a message of acceptance and understanding, and above all else, to question the things that aren't ordinarily questioned.

# A HERALD IN HELLISH TIMES



CALEB DOWNS

*They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.*

*Colossians 2:19*

**C**onnect Church, a Baptist church located at the far end of a strip mall in Arlington, Texas, greets the outside world with a bland, beige façade. “Connect Church” is displayed in bold, white letters where perhaps a “Hobby Lobby” or “Office Depot” used to be.

Congregants wearing untucked polos and sun dresses walk towards the entrance, where a 50-year-old man with salt-and-pepper hair greets them with a warm “Howdy.” Inside, they huddle around in circles like high-schoolers, sipping coffee and recounting the week’s events to one another. A few kids run around the foyer enjoying the last bits of freedom they have before they’re shuffled into Sunday School, where they’re fed unhealthy amounts of Goldfish and have to color inside lines that form an image of Jesus Christ on a cloud.

This scene could be applied to almost any of today’s southern Christian churches. But, when compared to the nascent churches formed by the first groups of Christians in the ancient Middle East, Connect seems like something completely foreign, perhaps even antithetical, to what a church is. Nonetheless, that’s what Pastor Jay McFadden is attempting to do in his sermon on this quiet, suburban Sunday morning, as he examines the relationship between the modern Christian church and the church at Colossae.

The church at Colossae, located in what is now southwest Turkey, was the recipient of a letter from the Apostle Paul. The letter is now referred to as the book of Colossians, named after the people to whom it was addressed. Paul’s letter informed them that the paganisms they had incorporated into the Christian religion were sinful and that Jesus Christ was their one and only God.

The paganisms to which Paul referred were early forms of individualism which taught that one’s own actions determined the fate of one’s afterlife. McFadden argues in his sermon that the individualism that was seeping into the church at Colossae bears strong resemblance to the individualism found in American culture. More importantly, it’s currently affecting Christianity in the same way it did 2000 years ago.

“In the Christian life, we’ve so made it about ourselves, and the church at



*Jay McFadden poses in front of Connect Church in Arlington, Texas, where he is a pastor. Connect Church is a Baptist church. McFadden has led the church since January 2013. His sermons are regularly attended by around 300 people from the Arlington area.*

Colossae was having the same struggle,” McFadden says as he paces the stage, trying to convey the ideas of his sermon through elaborate, but specific hand gestures. His face is slightly scrunched as he addresses his flock. When his eyes pass over a section of the congregation, the church members straighten up in their seats as soldiers might do when their commanding officer peeks into their barracks.

“Our society says ‘Make it all about you,’” he continues. “It’s all about you. Everything in life, it’s about you. It’s about you. It’s about what you want. It’s about what you need. It’s about when you want it, how you want it, with who you want it.”

Our age, according to McFadden, is an age in which individualism haunts every corner of society. We’ve lost our sense of community and family. We’ve been told time and time again that our success depends on our own actions and has nothing to do with the outside world. Ours is an age in which the Christian faith is slipping further and further away from the soul of civilization.

In McFadden’s eyes, society and the sin it contains are on the church’s doorstep, threatening to infect the congregation with promises of superficial happiness. The unholy triumvirate of individualism, secularism and hedonism is winning the spiritual war of our time. And it is steadily gaining ground as time passes.

Though these claims are abstract in nature, they hold weight in reality. This May, the Pew Research Center announced the percentage of adults who identify as Christians dropped by almost 8 percent from 2007 to 2014, while adults who declared themselves as unaffiliated with any religion increased by nearly 7 percent. In 1998, Focus on the Family, a protestant non-profit organization, found that somewhere between 1,500 and 1,800 Protestant pastors leave the ministry every month due to overwork, low wages, stress, damage to their fami-

ly life, depression, loneliness and discouragement.

The religious landscape of the U.S. is in flux, and McFadden, like so many other pastors in the Bible Belt, wields his pulpit in defense of a church and a god wandering ever closer to cultural irrelevance.

His role as a religious leader in his community



*McFadden meets with his staff early Sunday morning before the service starts. In these meetings, McFadden reviews the schedule for the morning and answers any questions his staff may have. They also pray for each other and the upcoming service.*

isn’t as valued as it once was, and the message he wants to share with his community, the message of his God, frequently falls on deaf ears. He’s sometimes scared, sometimes defeated, but he’s kept his faith and he continues fighting what appears to him to be a “losing battle.”

“Being a Christian is the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life,” McFadden said. “But it’s the best thing I’ve ever done in my life.”

*I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness — the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people.*

*Colossians 1:25-26*

McFadden didn’t know anything about Christianity before the age of eight. Yet, he was obedient to one higher power: his father, Jerry, a short-tempered, physically abusive man. One word of dissension resulted in welts on McFadden’s back from his

father's belt.

"Everyone in gym class always knew when I'd be in trouble," McFadden said.

One of his earliest memories, he said in a sermon delivered this June, was watching his mother, Wilma, and Jerry physically assault one another in the living room of their home.

"Although I was only five, I can still clearly recall their blood-stained lips and their scratched faces," McFadden said. "I'll never forget the tone of their angry voices and their hate-filled words."

In 1974, a neighbor invited Jerry to Central Baptist Church in Weatherford, Texas. Jerry brought his family to church that Sunday. At the end of the service, McFadden's father decided to become a Christian.

McFadden himself was then led to Christ and baptized by Jerry four years later in 1978. The same man that punished him was now the one that led him to spiritual salvation. That same year, when McFadden was 16-years-old, Jerry became the pastor of Central Baptist Church.

By this time, Jerry had left the military and was now preaching on the weekends, and, during the weekdays, building speculation houses. "Spec" houses are built without a particular buyer in mind, but appeal to the largest market possible. In the late 70s, it was a buyer's market, as the Carter administration passed two bills, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act and the Community Reinvestment Act, both of which made it easier for minorities and low-income workers to secure housing loans.

In order to combat the rising inflation rates that the U.S. was experiencing because of the 1979 energy crisis, the Federal Reserve began a tough new interest rate policy. The loans that were so attractive just a few years ago, were no longer dispersed

in the same numbers and the housing market shrunk. Jerry, who had to secure loans himself in order to build his speculation homes, no longer had a market for his houses.

He was left with four ownerless homes and an unbearable amount of debt. His congregation was also suffering from the second oil crisis, and as he soothed his worried flock, Jerry was drowning in his failed investments.

Moreover, his marriage was falling apart. Jerry had a problem with women. Throughout his marriage, especially early on, he saw other women. This continued throughout his time as a preacher.

McFadden said he had no idea what his father was doing until 1979. That was the year his father left his mother for another woman who lived down the street.

That was about halfway through Jay's high school career. The news was devastating, but it would get worse before it got any better. In 1981, when Jay was about to graduate, his parents' divorce became final. His father also declared bankruptcy that year, still reeling from the debt he owed.

When McFadden speaks about that year in his sermons, there's sincerity and wisdom in his voice. The manufactured, fraudulent quality that oozes from the Joel Olsteens of today is nowhere to be found in McFadden. He believes what he's saying, because he's experienced it. The terrors of the world are real, and for many people, including himself, it can be too much to handle.

"The events that happened during the separation were crazy, like something straight off the Jerry Springer Show," he said. "It plunged me deeper, and deeper into a situation that I couldn't control, so I got out."

He joined the military in 1981 soon after he



*McFadden prizes his collection of "Atta-boys." Prior to becoming a pastor, McFadden served in the U.S. Army. He was a Military Policeman before transferring to the an Investigations unit within the department. For most of his time in the service from 1981 to 2001 he was stationed in Germany. He met his wife, Karen, and had three children with her there. The McFaddens moved back to the U.S. in 2007.*

graduated. After a few months of basic training in Ft. McClellan, Alabama, he was shipped to Nuremberg, Germany.

In the early months of 1982, Jerry returned to Wilma while McFadden was stationed in Germany. Jerry was humble and apologetic.

"He said all the right Christian things," McFadden said.

Jerry told Wilma he had fallen victim to sin and temptation, and that he loved her and wanted to get back together with her. They remarried and Jerry moved back in.

A few weeks later, Jerry convinced Wilma to sell her house and put the money in their joint bank account. In turn, Jerry cleared out the account and ran straight back to the woman with whom he had originally cheated on Wilma.

It was devastating news, and McFadden has disassociated himself from his father ever since. He didn't lose his faith because of his father's actions, but he began spending more time in bars and less time in churches.

At the William O. Darby Kaserne base in Nuremberg, McFadden served as a member of the Military Police Corps. He did patrols around the base and responded to emergencies, but he left the post quickly because he felt it was a dead-end job. He then became a desk sergeant, which placed him in charge of directing the patrols to reported incidents and coordinating communication between them.

In 1984, he met his wife, Karin, at a German bar. At this stage in his life, McFadden said he had walked away from religion and that "no one would've mistaken [him] for a Christian." Within six months of meeting Karen, they married, and McFadden told himself that he would do things differently than his father had.

"I promised myself I would do everything in my own power not to end up like him," McFadden said in a sermon delivered this June.

"I would never be like my dad," he continued. "I would be better, much better than him."

In 1987, McFadden was relocated to Baumholder, Germany, where he became a member of Trinity Baptist Church. It was there, according to McFadden, that he was called by God to become a pastor.

"I just had this sense that what the guy was doing on stage was what I felt like I was supposed to

be doing," McFadden said. "To be honest with you, I didn't want to do it."

He became involved in virtually every aspect of Trinity. He thought he would drop out of the military and go to seminary so that he could focus on his preaching, but he said he couldn't make peace with the decision. So, he remained in the military and divided his time between shepherding people and guarding them.

In 2000, McFadden took a job as the senior pastor of the International Baptist Church in Stuttgart, Germany. He had just reached the 20-year mark in the military, which made him eligible to receive a pension, so he retired to follow his calling.

People from 42 different nations made up the body of the church, and McFadden said that was one of the most impactful experiences of his life. He said many churches in America are completely divided. They're either all white, black, Hispanic or Asian. They're not able to unify under their faith. According to McFadden, this represents and contributes to the ongoing racial issues the country faces. But it was different in Stuttgart. People's differences and isolation from the outside German culture brought them together and they were able to practice their faith in harmony.

"I thank God that he brought me to Europe," McFadden said. "Because when you live in a bubble, especially in the Bible Belt, in Texas, you don't see that there's a bigger world and a different viewpoint out there."

"Most people living in Podunk, redneck Texas, you're the navel of the world," McFadden continued, laughing. "You're the belly button. Everybody centers around you, and we become Me-Monsters."

After serving for seven years as the senior pastor at the International Baptist Church of Stuttgart, McFadden's family wanted to live in the country whose military they had been a part of their whole lives. McFadden's son, Erich, was growing up and wanted to play baseball. His two daughters, Mandy and Samantha, were about to enter high school and pined for the American experience. His wife, Karin, wanted U.S. citizenship.

It was time to go back home.

*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human*



*While the bible study classes are running, McFadden takes some time in his office to review his notes and clear his mind for the upcoming service. He said he usually puts in around 16 hours to prepare for each sermon throughout the week. His goal is to make his sermons easily understandable, but challenging to church members.*

*tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.*

*Colossians 2:8*

The America McFadden returned to was vastly different than the one he left behind in 1981. With the fall of Communism in 1991, a sense of American excellency had prevailed in the nation. Individual freedoms and liberties, endlessly praised by Presidents, and seemingly verified by the U.S. victory in the Cold War, were thought to be the tenets of democracy and keys to success up until the 2000s.

Researchers studying religion in America believe this heightened sense of individualism has played some role in the decline of religiosity in America. In a study titled "Generational and Time Period Differences in American Adolescents' Religious Orientation," the authors found that

"religious involvement was low when indicators of individualism (such as more positive self-views, materialism, individualistic language, and need for uniqueness) were high."

The researchers also found that in the year 2000, the number of American adolescents that said religion wasn't important to them began to climb. Thirteen percent of 12th graders said it wasn't important to them in 2000, but by 2007, the number had climbed to 19 percent. Further, polls show that support for the War in Iraq was at an all time low in 2007, with two-thirds of the population saying it wasn't going well and that they opposed it. The two trends, an increased sense of individualism and a lack of faith in authority, created an atmosphere that did not encourage religious sentiments.

That's what McFadden came home to. He believes the self-centeredness so present in American culture has been one of the main causes of religion's decline. It's a topic he discusses frequently both

inside and outside of church.

"We have this nature in us to do a lot of things for ourselves," McFadden said. "We'll walk over people, we'll abuse them, we'll manipulate them. And our society praises that."

This individualist mentality has seeped its way into the modern Christian church, according to McFadden. Preachers feed people messages about prosperity and wealth, fundamentally perverting the message of the Holy Bible.

"That's what I have to fight against," McFadden said. "It feels like a never-ending battle. It feels like a losing battle."

After spending five years as an assistant pastor at a different Baptist church in Arlington, Texas, McFadden became the senior pastor at Connect Church in 2013. One of McFadden's goals at Connect is to be honest and open with his congregation. He talks to them about his struggles, and many of the congregants prize this aspect of McFadden.

Mallory Teck, an 8th grade teacher at Bailey Jr. High in Arlington, Texas, has been a member of Connect Church for four years. She said a lot of people she knows say they don't really know who their pastor is. He's some guy that stands on stage every morning and tells them how to live their life. That's not the way she feels about McFadden though.

"He's wonderful," Teck said. "I think it's because he's so transparent. I think he's such a good pastor because he admits his wrongs."

Teck, whose father was also a pastor, knows how difficult and stressful the life of American pastors can be. Her father was bipolar and had a highly addictive personality, she said. During her freshman year of high school, her father was arrested for drunk driving. It was the culmination of years of substance abuse, which Teck's father had sunk deeper and deeper into due to the stress of being a pastor, she said.

After her father went to rehab, he relapsed in his 50s and became addicted to alcohol and drugs once again. That experience left Teck bitter and distrustful of religion. But experiencing McFadden's openness about his faults and his authenticity about his struggles brought Teck back to the church.

"He's a leader," Teck said. "He leads quietly and by example."

Teck said one of the other things she prizes about having McFadden as a pastor is the emphasis he places on backing up sermons with passages from the Holy Bible. This sentiment is echoed by Nina Burgett, who is the minister of equipping at Connect Church, a position that places her in charge of overseeing small group bible studies and the other programs directed towards adults.

"He's very gifted at taking a book that was written thousands of years ago, looking at what is true in that book and making it come alive in today's world," Burgett said.

Burgett has been with Connect Church since its founding in 2002. Mark Mangram was the previous pastor of the church, but about six years into his service there his wife died of cancer. Not long thereafter, his father, who had played an instrumental role in Mangram's life, died as well.

Mangram was left broken and unable to look over his church. A power struggle erupted between Mangram and a senior member of the church staff, ultimately resulting in the staff member leaving the church, taking much of the congregation with him. After all of these "hits," as Burgett calls them, Mangram was asked to leave the divided and damaged church.

McFadden was hired six months later and was tasked with rebuilding the church.

"He understood when he came in that many people were very hurt personally," Burgett said. "He was very sensitive to people's feelings, emotions and hurt. Yet, right alongside that, there was a strength that he displayed. He exuded confidence that he could lead this group of people back into being a thriving organization."

Teri Riley, the facilities director at Connect Church, said the thing that sets McFadden apart from other pastors she's been led by in the past is that with McFadden "you see what you get."

"He is the same guy you'll see in person or private or in the office," Riley said. "No different faces. He is the same person across the board."

She said that in the past she's dealt with several pastors that did nothing but increase her distrust of them. "I had two pastors that would even make advances on me," Riley said. Other pastors she's had were alcoholics, womanizers or financially irresponsible with church funds.

"I guess I saw that over and over enough that I

just had a bad taste in my mouth," Riley said.

The common theme here is that all three of these women have known pastors who have burned out or become corrupt in some way. This is not uncommon. Practically every church-goer knows or knows of at least one pastor that has gone astray.

Teck, Burgett and Riley all believe that this is a contributing factor to the decline of religious belief in the U.S. And McFadden agrees. His personal experience with his father and his relationship with other American pastors has made him believe that.

"People don't trust pastors because you've got those shysters out there," McFadden said. "I could mention several of them by name that are living in multi-million dollar homes, when their people are not living like that. They fly around in jets. They're going to vacation all the time. They're writing books. It's really about their kingdom and not the kingdom of God. And that's the problem."

McFadden believes that the individualism inherent in American culture has infected religion. He's fighting against that culture, but the problem is that culture is all-pervasive. There is nowhere one can turn without being confronted by it. Commercials, billboards, politicians, television and pop-music constantly berate us with messages inspired by individualism. Our selves are the only beings that matter, and thus there is no point in focusing on the society or community that one finds oneself in.

"My calling is to help people be counter-cultural, to go against culture," McFadden said.

This is a common theme in McFadden's sermons. We've become obsessed with our own desires, and communities, especially the traditional family, have suffered from it. This is not an original message. Passages of the Holy Bible denouncing this manner of life are numerous, and the life of Jesus Christ is the antithesis of American culture.

Yet, trying to get people to do something about it is a whole other issue. McFadden takes an aggressive position in many of his sermons, urging his flock to recognize the poisonous culture around them and fight against it. They're difficult messages, and the responsibility of delivering them can be overwhelming. But McFadden believes that's what he was called to do. The stress, exhaustion and isolation that come with his profession certainly put a strain on his life, but God has requested that McFadden fight through it. So, he does.

"It's an interesting life," McFadden said. "Ministry is definitely not for the lighthearted, especially if you're doing it the way God calls us to do it."

*My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

*Colossians 2:2*

When McFadden is on stage preaching, he looks as comfortable as if he were sitting on his couch on a Sunday afternoon watching his beloved Cowboys play football. His demeanor is calm and cool. His colorful button-up shirts and blue jeans give him a familiar, average-man feel.

He's got a slight drawl to his voice, which makes itself more apparent when McFadden gets excited. His voice flows in waves. Run on sentences crescendo and crash upon the audience, but then McFadden will grow quiet, put on his glasses and then, almost in a whisper, say something like "You and I were created for Him."

His method is effective. Audiences are captivated by his messages, and tears and sniffles are often brought forth by his communicative abilities. But anyone, given the proper training, can captivate an audience. This isn't what McFadden is interested in. He wants to challenge his flock. He wants to push them to live up to what they believe in. He wants to prepare them for the world outside of his humble sanctuary.

In the same way a pianist must show her student how to play before giving instruction on chords and arpeggios, McFadden finds the most effective way to teach his congregation is to demonstrate the lessons for them on stage. For example, towards the end of a sermon given on a warm Sunday morning in the closing days of the Texas summer, McFadden showed his church what he thinks it means to live like Jesus Christ.

After concluding his message, McFadden brought up a chair to the front of the stage. He didn't sit in it, but instead called up one of the worship band's guitarists, Matt Grope. Grope ambled up the stage, clearly uncomfortable with all of the

attention on him, and sat down in the chair.

"Take off your shoes, brother," McFadden said to him.

Grope did as requested. McFadden sat down a large, white bowl and a ceramic jug of water at Gropes's feet. He began telling the congregation about Grope and all the thankless work he's done for the church. Everyone in the audience knew what was about to happen, and the sniffles could be heard throughout the sanctuary.

"Jesus didn't say if you do it, he said when you do it," McFadden said, getting down on his hands and knees in front of Grope.

McFadden asked Grope to roll up his blue jeans a bit, filled the bowl with water from the jug, then, quietly and delicately, McFadden began washing Grope's feet.

McFadden prayed over Grope as he washed his feet. The sanctuary was silent except for McFadden's low voice and the quiet splash of water dripping into the bowl. After he said "Amen," McFadden dried off Grope's feet with a towel, the two embraced and the service was concluded.

"I'm trying to bring back a respect for ministry," McFadden said. "I think a lot of it has been lost. But yet, when the problems come, who do they go to? I think there's still hope there. I think people still want to trust pastors."





# my pink chair

by Benn Johnson



**I**t sits in a dimly lit corner, sagged below the rest of the furniture; fifteen green dollars' worth of soft pink corduroy, stretched loosely over factory-formed foam. Pitifully, it peeks out from behind a monstrous black leather couch and seems to moan with desire for a bit of chair love. What does a chair care for but the soft pressure of a human posterior, anyway? Alas, little compassion will befall the tiny pink chair in my living room corner, if only because of its utter ineptitude at providing comfort—its only purpose. The seat sits; all day it wallows in loneliness, and I stand away from it. When I am tired, I find another choice.

The back of the pink chair is flimsy and cannot support even the lightest of humans. The bottom is mushy, and the faded azalea fabric that bathes the seat slopes downward, discouraging comfort. A fine conversation piece, but a poor excuse for a rump-shelf.

As it dwells there, gazing at me with two big lopsided buttons, a rip in the fabric seems to speak to me. “You sorry excuse for a human—you aren’t satisfied with me? You don’t realize that my sole purpose is to help you relax and bring cheer to your life? Fifteen Goodwill dollars can’t buy your happiness? I know I am not perfect, but you don’t really even deserve me. The simple fact that humans prior to you evolved intelligence and were able to create comfort does not mean that you, who have never truly done or known a single thing in your life, should be allowed comfort more than the squirrel outside, gathering nuts for the frosty winter, or the fungus in your bathroom wall, decomposing and reconstructing your vile apartment into what it should be—Earth.

“And yet you like things of my nature—you seek them out, and you destroy the green mold that is diligently preparing a home for you, and all the while you uplift Plasticine and The Manufactured. Even so, my only use is as an ironic aesthetic; I am the logical extension of your interests. I am entirely created, entirely arbitrary, entirely useless and altogether removed from life. Yet, you still cannot be satisfied, even with me. Contemplate, if even for a moment, the connection between nature, humankind and the unnatural. You believe that you can separate nature from me, The Manufactured, but your result is contrary; I am connected with nature in my pity for you. The squirrel and I both see what you have done. You have turned your back on nature and basked in ego-centrism. You don’t care anymore. Thus, you are left only with two options: distraction or complete sadness.”

The chair sits there in the darkness, illuminated only by a yellow incandescent bulb diffused with a conical plastic shade. When it was first made, I suppose it was clean and synthetically vivid; a small child probably kept it in her bedroom and was not so large that she slowly slid off the seat as she sat there. I like to think that she might have often leaned against the cheap foam and contemplated, as a 4-year-old child, the likelihood of an evolutionary change in the human lumbar in the next hundred years.

Slowly, I approach the chair and place my vertebrae against the worn fabric—yes, I decide, she was right to contemplate this question. Certainly, comfort has purchased my evolutionary future.

*Photograph of chair by Quinn Dombrowski*

# AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEX LAW

THE 24-YEAR-OLD  
CONGRESSIONAL  
HOPEFUL FROM  
NEW JERSEY



**A**lex Law, a 24-year-old resident of south Jersey, spent his most formative years experiencing the effects of Wall Street's irresponsibility and Washington's corruption. The two trends, driven by the all-American love of the dollar, have resulted in a kind of slow-motion car crash that's reverberated throughout the rest of the United States. The recent developments in American politics have inspired an apathetic helplessness in most millennials.

Not so for Law. He wants to do something about it, and he's decided running for Congress in the first district of New Jersey is the most efficient way of enacting the political change he wants to see. If he wins, he'll be the youngest member of Congress since 1974.

Law grew up in Voorhees, NJ, an upper-middle class suburb of Philadelphia. Voorhees is located in the first congressional district of New Jersey, which is the seat Law is hoping to be elected to next year. Over the past few decades, the congressional representatives of the first district of New Jersey have been a source of anger and embarrassment for its citizens, according to Law. The latest such representative is Donald Norcross, a Democrat who was elected in 2014.

Norcross is a member of what Law has deemed the "Norcross Machine." Norcross' brothers, George and Philip, are the other members of the powerful, influential and controversial "machine." Between them, Law says, the Norcrosses have given massive government contracts to organizations in exchange for campaign contributions, shoved out politicians that don't want to play ball and raked in enormous personal profits due to decisions that benefit companies they own rather than the surrounding community.

But rather than simply pit himself against the Norcrosses in hopes of attracting local voters, Law has used the them as a jumping off point for a broader conversation about campaign finance reform, which he believes is the biggest issue facing the U.S. right now. His progressive campaign, though primarily targeted at the residents of the first district of New Jersey, is designed to portray him as a voice for millennials across the country. He supports more investment in sustainable energy, term limits for members of the House and

Senate, student loan reform, marijuana legalization, subsidized loans for small businesses and net neutrality.

He's publicly announced his support for Bernie Sanders, and, like Sanders, Law is painting his platforms as "common sense." That might be the case, but his stances certainly go against the status quo. His campaign reflects the restlessness and dissatisfaction most Americans have grown and nurtured over the last 20 years.

SunStruck had the opportunity to speak with Alex Law about his path to victory, his views on capitalism and the economics of higher education. But perhaps most importantly, Law spoke on what he plans to do about the increasing influence wealthy individuals and large corporations have on the American political process.

\* \* \*

**Q:** You're 24-years-old and just a few years out of college. Why run for congress now?

**A:** When I was deciding to get involved in this race, it really came down to a series of conversations I was having with my friends. We looked at politics in south Jersey, and New Jersey in general, but specifically south Jersey, and we were really complaining about how things were being run: the graft, the corruption. We really weren't comfortable with a lot of things going on in the government and in our community.

So, I decided rather than talk about it, I would try to do something about it. That was what fundamentally brought me into politics and into this race. We realized to really change things and make a difference in people's lives here, we needed to go after the top of the ticket, the top of the machine, so we could really break up a lot of the corruption going on in south Jersey and change how politics are looked at in the community that brought us up.

**Q:** What have you had to sacrifice for this campaign?

**A:** A lot. I quit my job. I had a very good job as a strategy consultant at IBM. Quit that job, got rid of the nice apartment that I had, no longer had the ability to go out to dinner or fun trips and all of the kind of stuff like that, which, if I would've kept the job and the career path that I was on, I certainly would've had.

So, those material things I gave up, but in general it's been the best decision of my life by far. Every day I wake up I have a team of around 50 interns working with me that are all excited about the political process, excited about this campaign. Being able to go to work and be passionate about what I'm doing and knowing I'm trying to help people really makes all of that stuff that I gave up totally worth it.

**Q:** Tell me about your strategy to take the seat from Norcross.

**A:** I'm a big numbers guy. I have a finance degree from NYU Stern, and I've always been very into numbers. So, when we look at this district, there's roughly 172,000 Democrats, there's about 60,000 Republicans and there's about 180,000 unaffiliated or independent voters. It's a closed primary, so that means in New Jersey, only the Democrats can vote in the primaries. Essentially what we're dealing with here is roughly 172,000 that can vote in the primary, which is really the deciding thing because it's so overwhelmingly blue, especially in a presidential year.

What that means is, we need to understand what Norcross and other people running in the primary in the past have gotten so we can understand what our realistic goal should be moving forward to win this election. For all the money and power and influence that his machine has, last time, when Donald won his seat for the first time, he got 18,000 votes out of 172,000 Democrats. To me, that's astronomically bad. It's even worse when you compare it with the amount of money he spent. He spent almost \$50 per vote. Now, in politics, \$1 per vote is the ideal, \$5 per vote is totally acceptable, \$10 per vote is high. \$50 is "off-the-charts-what's-going-on-this-is-ridiculous." The fact that he was only able to get 18,000 votes, despite spending all this money, really, to me, speaks to the

fact that their machine, and his candidacy, is very unpopular with actual people. Now, it might be popular with the elected officials that are part of this machine and the fundraising that goes on with all of those people in office, but actual people, in general, have a very negative affiliation with the Norcross names.

So, to us, we see a really exciting strategic opportunity here where we need to get 20,000 votes. 20,000 votes. Even if he keeps all 18,000 of his, we think if we can get 20,000 votes, we can win this thing. And that's very doable. Typically, when insurgent candidates run against incumbents, they have a huge challenge because they're running in a general election where they have to get 90,000 or 100,000 votes to win, which is very expensive, often to the tune of over \$1 million. But we feel here, if we spend between \$100,000 to \$200,000, which we're very confident we will raise - we have all of those fundraisers in place for this winter - then we're going to be able to put ourselves in a very competitive place, especially because of the nature of my candidacy: how exciting it is, how many volunteers are coming out to work for us, how robust our ground game is, our field effort is and how well people have responded so far. So that's really our strategy for how we get it done with the numbers.

**Q:** Camden, which is in your district, is the most dangerous city in the U.S. according to a number of studies. It's also one of the poorest cities in the country, and it's one of the least educated. About 7 percent of the population of Camden has a bachelor's degree. How do you approach such a daunting issue?

**A:** It's good that you brought it up because there's a big difference in approaches. Believe it or not, even though Donald and I are both Democrats, we have a tremendous amount of difference in policy, Camden policy being one in particular. His key piece of legislation when he was still in the State House of Representatives was the Economic Opportunity Act, which gave the state the ability to give tax credits to companies, in an effort to create jobs in Camden, which sounds really good. The reality is that it's only given money to big corporations, which are either controlled or owned by his

family, or that are campaign donors.

The corruption part of it aside, I fundamentally disagree with the idea that we should be giving huge tax credits to big corporations, because they are not efficient in creating jobs in areas like Camden, and often they're not even creating jobs for residents of Camden. They're creating jobs and just moving those jobs in from other towns, like let's say Marlton, to Camden. My idea with Camden is if we're going to be giving tax credits and tax dollars to Camden in order to develop some economic growth there, what I'd like to see happen is those dollars go towards middle and small-sized businesses. These are the businesses that actually hire people in the city, that actually create the kind of economic, sustainable growth that we need to see. Right now, that's just not happening. We should be investing in people – in these small business owners and these entrepreneurs – because that will allow a middle class to grow in Camden where there currently is none.

**Q:** You're a graduate of the NYU Stern School of Business and you've previously spoken about the shockingly irresponsible statements made by some of the professors there. How did going to Stern shape your political consciousness?

**A:** I think Stern in general gave me a great education. I'm a proud alumni of Stern. I think they do a very good job of preparing people to enter the world of finance. But, I will say there was an environment there in which the practices of Wall Street, which a lot of us would look at as irresponsible or wrong, are pretty prevalent. Things like deregulation, so that the people inside the club, the people in finance, can make more money, is certainly part of the culture in at least some of the classes at Stern. Not all of them.

But being in an environment like that, where people were happy and excited to join the world of finance, where they knew they would personally make millions of dollars, despite the fact that they just saw Wall Street crash our economy with risky, totally wrong actions, was worrying to me and really shaped the fact that I knew I didn't want to go into that world. It really killed any desire I had to take a lucrative job that I was offered at a few

different banks, and to go into politics to see what I could do to help people, rather than going and trying to help a bank make a ton of money.

**Q:** You've encouraged millennials all over the country to view you as their representative, yet people aged 18-30 have the lowest rates of voter turnout. What's your plan to active that voting group?

**A:** That's actually one of the biggest questions I get about our campaign. You know, "Young people don't vote, and young people are your supporters. So, what are you going to do?" The reality of it is that most of our support comes from baby boomers because they've lived here a long time, they understand the whole structure of what's going on here and they're excited about my candidacy.

But getting back to the question that you asked, how do we activate young people? I think we're seeing a couple of things happen. One, right now my campaign has a team of around 50 young people that are volunteering on a weekly basis for my campaign and they're excited about it. The difference in how I've approached them, is rather than "Hey, come to the office and make phone calls" or "Hey, come work for me" or whatever, is I've gone and talked to them at their schools or at events that they care about and said, "Come be a part of the team. Come be a part of the process. You can make a difference." I'm giving young people a role in decision-making and running initiatives within the campaign, rather than just being drones part of a big operation to reach voters. At a micro level that's how we've seen a huge engagement with young people.

On a national scale, I have young people across the country write me almost every single day, saying "Hey, I'm running for assembly in Kentucky," or "Hey, I'm thinking of running for school board in Illinois, and your campaign has inspired me. What should I do? How do I raise money? How should I make my website?" I've had over 100 different conversations of this kind with young people all across the country. So, I'm excited that our campaign is getting young people to consider getting involved, whether it's working for someone or running for something themselves. I think we've also

seen Bernie Sanders' campaign excite young people in a way that we haven't seen in a very long time. The message that he is bringing is a message that I think a lot of millennials can relate to. Because, in my opinion, it's common sense. We need to address income inequality. We should care about campaign finance reform so big money and very wealthy people and huge companies aren't buying our democracy. Things like that, I think, resonate very well with millennials, and that's why I'm someone who's endorsed Bernie Sanders for president.

**Q:** I'd like to talk about student loan reform now. It's one of your major campaign platforms and I've read that you support Senator Sanders' plan to reduce student loan debt, which basically includes a robin hood tax on Wall Street to pay for public higher education and reducing federal student loan interest rates. However, do you think his proposal is reasonable given much of the reason tuition, and thus debt, has increased has been due to budget cuts at the state level. In other words, do you think the federal government has the ability to fix what seems to be a state issue?

**A:** I do. I think at the very least what we need to do is look at the interest rates. So, placing aside interest rates people get when they go to third parties, and just talking about interest rates for student loans from the federal government, which is the biggest lender for student loans in the country, oftentimes people borrow at rates from 6 – 12 percent. I have friends borrowing at 11 percent. Banks borrow from the government at less than 1 percent right now. What we're doing is we're turning our future, our students, into profit centers and we're turning our banks into charities. To me, that's totally backwards and totally not okay.

I think at the very least what the federal government can do is lower those rates. I'm not saying to the exact same rates that banks borrow at, but much closer to that rate. It's not okay that students borrow at 10 times the rate that banks borrow at. That, immediately, especially if you let people that have already borrowed money refinance at these new rates, will save millions of Americans thousands of dollars a year. I think it's absolutely crucial that we do that.

The piece of the federal governments that gives out student loans would've been in the top 5 most profitable companies in America if it were a private company last year. To me, that just isn't okay, and it's something we absolutely need to do something about.

**Q:** I guess one of the problems I've been having difficulty with is that yes, we can lower interest rates and make it easier to pay back the loans, but we're still going to have this issue of ridiculously high tuition rates. I don't know if any of the current proposals really address that, because you kind of have to address it on a state level.

**A:** How it gets addressed is we take federal dollars and we subsidize community colleges across the country. Community colleges are often an inexpensive option for people, but we expand their capacity and we give them the ability to charge even less or make community colleges free. That way people can take the four-year degree for which they're paying \$30,000 or \$40,000 or \$50,000 per year for that and turn it into two years at a community college for free with the federal government assisting them. Then, they go to whatever state or private institution that they want to go for the final two years of their education.

I was just yesterday in a retail store and I was talking to a person working there and she was telling me that's exactly what she's doing. She got into Penn State and Rutgers straight out of high school, but she can't afford to go to those places for four years. So, what she's doing is she's going to community college for two years and then she'll transfer those credits and she'll go to either Rutgers or Penn State for her final two years. Instead of spending \$100,000 on her education, she'll end up spending \$40,000.

**Q:** Moving on to another issue in higher education. In the past few weeks, students have been staging protests all over the country against racism and a lack of diversity on campus. I think a fairly common sentiment is that people understand their frustration and they agree with their cause, but don't think they're going about it in the right way. Admittedly, this is the impression I'm getting most-

ly from people who are white. What's your view on the Black Lives Matter movement and the methods students are using to promote it?

**A:** I think the Black Lives Matter movement is incredibly important in this country. I'm someone that's from the northeast, rather than where you're based in Texas, and I think our everyday lives look a little different in terms of how this is discussed. I think black people in this country are living totally different lives than white people right now. Whether it's driving around and being stopped by police for things that white people wouldn't be stopped for, to their pay at work, or opportunities in higher education, to education that they have access to in urban areas such as Camden, which limit their opportunities moving forward. I think the frustration of people in the African American community is very real and very legitimate. When you look at all of these things that are captured on tape with these interactions with law enforcement or hard evidence of things that make it more difficult for the African American community in higher education, I think those frustrations are real.

Now, are some instances of how some students are protesting inappropriate? Probably. But you have to realize that that is in the face of them seeing people beaten to death by police. Or that is in the face of them seeing their friends of family have less opportunities because of what neighborhood they grew up in. These are very real things that affect their lives and their families lives. In general, I really do support the Black Lives Matter movement, and I think they're doing the very best they can to fight to change the inequality that they're seeing.

**Q:** Let's talk about climate change now. You're a big supporter of investing in renewable energy. But we've seen over time that large corporations object to making such investments and they lobby hard against them. And, you know, why wouldn't they? It's expensive to make that switch, and, as a corporation, they're primarily concerned with the bottom line. What is your plan to incentivize corporations to start investing in renewable energy?

**A:** The reality of it is that big oil and big

coal are actually more expensive oftentimes than renewable energy, and the reason they look so cheap is all of the subsidies the government puts towards them. For example, you look at coal. It's a cheap source of energy if you literally just look at how expensive it is to just get the coal out of the mountain. But what we don't take into account often is the cost of the coal roads we have to build: how thick they are, how long they are, the externalities of the clean up, the incredible pollution we cause when we mine coal and destroy mountains. Things like that. So, if you take that into account, oftentimes those "traditional" forms of energy are actually more expensive than sustainable energy.

What I'd like to see is less subsidies from the government to big oil and big coal. If we're going to be subsidizing anyone, we should be subsidizing sustainable energy. If you take out the moral argument that we need to be protecting our environment and our planet, which I obviously agree with, but if you take that out of it, sustainable energy equals sustainable jobs and it equals growth for the United States. Countries all across the world are going to be using sustainable technology in the future. We have an opportunity to lead the world in this kind of technology, to be the country that exports this kind of technology to everyone else, rather than being the country that buys it. I know Sweden has already pledged to be totally run by sustainable energy by 2050. They're going to be making huge strides in sustainable energy technology, and I think the U.S., a country in which a lot of the economy is based on technological development like that, would be doing itself an incredible economic disservice not to invest in sustainable energy, not to create these American jobs and growth. I think it's incredibly important that we do that.

**Q:** One argument that interests me, intellectually at least, is one that Naomi Klein popularized. Most basically, it's that we're not really going to be able to combat climate change in a capitalist society. By its very nature, capitalism relies on about 6 percent growth annually and because of that, it's requiring more and more resources. What are your thoughts on that?

**A:** I think that argument holds true only if

you agree with the presumption that sustainable energy isn't a more efficient way to produce energy than oil and coal. I would argue that as technology progresses, that just simply isn't the case. We now have energy that we'll be able to produce with solar power, wind power, tidal energy, geothermal energy and other types of energy that are already rivaling coal in efficiency and can only get more efficient. While our cost of getting oil and coal are only going to increase. As that equation starts to shift, and as sustainable energy becomes more cost effective, I think the argument takes on the other direction in that, as a capitalist society, our only option is to go with sustainable energy because it is more efficient and provides us with more ability to grow.

I'm a strong believer that the only reason we are still, as a society, using oil and coal so reliant is because of the lobbying that is done and the influence held by corporations that make billions and billions of dollars. It's why on every piece of literature that I give out, the number one thing on there is campaign finance reform. I think Citizens United in 2007 was one of the worst things ever to happen to our country and I think in order for us to address any policy issue in an honest and earnest way, whether you're a Democrat or you're a Republican, is if we get these big dollars and these corporate influences and these untraceable super PACs out of politics. That affects every issue, but one issue that I think it really, certainly affects, because they're companies with tons of money, is oil and coal.

**Q:** Speaking of Citizens United, you've previously talked about how reversing that decision is going to be an extremely time-consuming and difficult process. With that in mind, there was an article in Vox by Matthew Yglesias whose thesis was essentially that Democrats are in serious trouble. He found that 70 percent of state legislatures, 60 percent of governorships and 55 percent of attorney general and secretary of state positions are controlled by Republicans. However, we do have this growing group of millennials that are overwhelmingly Democratic and are coming into voting age. So, I was wondering what you think about the future of the Democratic party and progressive policy. Do you think they're going to be able to

change recent decisions, such as Citizens United?

**A:** In relation to Citizens United specifically, let's say today we started the process for a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United and it saw no road blocks. It wouldn't be done for years. So, the question is what can we do in the meantime as we wait for the political steam to build for us to reverse Citizens United?

I think Seattle is a great example of what we can do. Seattle recently joined many other smaller cities and towns across the country in passing legislation that actually makes pay-to-play efforts illegal. Pay-to-play being corporations and businesses that do business in a given area donating heavily to politicians and then oftentimes receiving special treatment. A lot of people think pay-to-play is illegal, but in fact, it's not in most places. So, Seattle became the first city in the U.S. to ban that. I think that is what we should be doing in the meantime to address campaign finance reform. Municipalities and cities across the country very easily could enact these kinds of things and really start pushing corporations out of the local and county-wide elections.

Now, speaking to why I think Republicans have done such a good job in state assemblies and governorships. I think it's a credit to how conservatives have looked at politics. I think they've prioritized those elections. I think that they've had organizations like the American Legislative Exchange Council, in which they are united in terms of their policy stances. Whereas I think the Democratic party is relatively fragmented and regional right now. But looking to the future, I think the country is Democratic, but gerrymandering and very good strategy by the Republicans allow them to capture these governor's houses and these state assemblies and things. I think in terms of national elections like for the presidency, Democrats are going to continue to do very well.

I also agree with your stance that millennials are overwhelmingly Democratic and as we increasingly become the voting group in this country, I just can't see the clock being turned back on things like LGBTQ rights, or addressing income inequality, or dealing with equality between African Americans and whites and Latinos, or immigration policy. I just can't see America moving backwards with

these things with a generation of 100 million people, that in large part are very progressive, coming into voting age. I have confidence that as we move forward, we're going to be in a good place with progressive policy.

**Q:** One of the issues were facing in the United States is political polarization. I think the 2016 presidential race embodies that. We have the rise of outsiders like Trump and Carson on the GOP side and far-left politicians like Sanders on the Democratic side. So, say Sanders is elected. Do you think he'll be able to accomplish anything with such a divided congress?

**A:** If he is able to win the nomination, I think that his candidacy will bring more Democratic seats to the House and to Congress. I think that that is a part of the reality of the election. If he wins, we might not be dealing with the same situation with a Republican-controlled House and Senate. Even if that doesn't end up shifting, if he wins and let's say the House and Senate remain the same, I think we are going to have to see things start moving forward and for him to be able to accomplish certain things. We've had eight years now of President Obama doing his very best to get Congress to move, and we've dealt with scares like the standoff on the budget and things like that. I think another four or eight years of that would fatigue Americans to such an extent that, at the very least, after two or four years of it, we'd see a change in Congress.

Congress cannot continue to be the roadblock to progress, and if we have a Democratic president like Bernie Sanders that continues to push these progressive issues that President Obama has been pushing, and Congress continues to halt the government from doing anything for people, eventually the American people are going to have enough of it, in my opinion.

**Q:** If you're elected, how do you plan on operating within that divide?

**A:** I think there's something unique about my candidacy in that if I win, I'll be the youngest con-

gressman elected since 1974, and the only millennial elected to federal office. So, with that comes a big soap box from which I could speak about these kinds of ideas. In a perfect world, I'm elected, we have a President Sanders, and I can be one of the people in Congress working with him to get things done. Now, I think it is important when dealing with Republicans, and one of the reasons why I think I'd be very good in Congress, is to remember that Democrats and Republicans all want the same thing: that the United States become a better country and that our country moves forward. I think oftentimes the representatives that are in Congress right now forget that we're both running towards the same place. We're just taking different paths. I think remembering that and working with Republicans under the assumption that we should have compromise, and being someone that has not and will not take corporate dollars and can afford to compromise with people because I don't have people controlling my campaign dollars, I think, will put me in a position to be able to help get things done in Congress when I get there.

**Q:** Your campaign is heavily focused on domestic policy, but I'd like to talk for just a moment about foreign policy. In light of the recent Paris attacks, the Beirut attack, the Sinai attack, do you think ISIS poses a substantial threat to the U.S.? If not, why? But if so, what do you think is the most effective way to neutralize that threat?

**A:** Well, I think ISIS poses a threat to the world, not just the U.S. Thinking about it posing a threat to the world is how we need to solve the problem. No longer can the U.S. afford to, nor should we want to, take these unilateral actions in the Middle East that we've taken so far. I'm a firm believer that we've created more terrorists than we've killed through our drone strikes and our incursions in the Middle East.

Think about it. If in the place you live there were some other country's drones, Chinese drones flying in the sky, and every week or two someone's house got blown up from it, people in your hometown would hate China even if they knew nothing about them just because there were drones they couldn't see blowing up their neighbors' houses.

That's the kind of situation we've created in the Middle East with our drone program and how we operate there. I think the way that we deal with ISIS in coalition with France, with the United Kingdom, with the rest of the European Union, with Russia, with China to deal with this destabilizing force that will affect all of us in the world. Together, united, moving to take on this challenge. I think that is incredibly important with how we deal with ISIS.

In terms of the very hot issue of refugees, I think it is absolutely imperative that the U.S. take in some refugees. What makes us who we are is two things: our constitution and our willingness to do the right thing as a people. I think it's undoubt-able that in this situation, doing the right thing means helping the women and children that are running away from poison gas and a war that has no problem killing civilians and who will probably die if we turn our back on them. Helping them is the right thing.

The question is are we up for it? I've never seen our country stand down from a challenge like that because we were afraid of something. Americans boast all the time that we're the "home of the brave," and I see governors across the country really reacting out of fear, refusing to help these people that need our help. We can't act out of fear. We need to be inspired past our fear and do the right thing, even though it's hard, even though there might be a risk and something could happen. We need to trust in our government that we will do all of the requisite scanning and background checks to make sure that ISIS doesn't get through and comes into the countries with the refugees. There has to be a way to do it and I'm firmly in support of us doing what we need to do to help these refugees.

**Q:** What have you learned from your campaign?

**A:** I've learned a lot. I've learned how challenging it is to raise money for a campaign when you're not someone who is independently wealthy or someone with lots of business connections. We're finding a way to do it, though. I've found how much your feet hurt when you've walked 100 miles to knock on doors. I've learned how to talk

to people about issues when you're at their door or you're meeting them at a farmer's market. It's very different from how I initially thought, you know, "Give them all the good ideas! You have the right vision and they'll want to listen to you." That isn't always the case. What I've learned is that you need to make people feel something when they interact with the campaign, make people feel like they've just had a special moment and that what you're doing is exciting and important. Once you do that, then they'll be open to listening and talking about your ideas.

I still believe that this grassroots campaign that we're running is the right way to do it. I really couldn't imagine being involved in politics and doing it in any other way. We make people the priority, rather than big dollars or things like that. I've learned how exciting it is to have a group of young people believing in what you're doing and being willing to give their time and energy to this campaign, and really just how truly awesome that is.



Alex Law

# DON'T LOOK BACK INANGER

A MEMOIR BY

JOSH  
DANIELS

I had two days left until I had to move out of my house in New Brunswick, New Jersey. I had only been living there for three months with my two roommates, Kyle and Austin, whom I met on Craigslist. My roommates and I signed a nine-month lease, but it was cut short six months early. My landlord was a small soft-spoken Polish man in his late thirties, and a true capitalist at heart. Apparently we had overlooked a section of the lease that gave him the ability to cancel our contract at any time, provided he gave the tenants a thirty-day notice. We had never had any issues with him previously, but he found new tenants willing to pay more rent. I guess the heart wants what the heart wants.

Before I moved to New Jersey, I had lived in Brooklyn and Queens. I'm originally from Texas, but I decided to move after meeting Donny, a musician from New York, at South by Southwest in Austin a year earlier. He invited me to play in his band. I said "Why not?"

Despite the fact that I didn't have a job lined up, I was going to move to one of the most expensive cities in America: New York City. The average monthly rent for a studio is over \$2,000, and that's if you can find a vacancy in the first place. Before making the move, I had planned to buy a cheap van, park it in a Wal-Mart parking lot and live there. Fortunately, I wasn't forced to do that. I ended up living with some friends that already had a house in Brooklyn, and I got a job at a Guitar Center in Manhattan.

The band with Donny didn't work out, but since I was already living in New York, I decided to start my own. I formed a rock band called Gravity Calls and played with them in Brooklyn for a year before moving over to Queens. I found a woman on Craigslist who set up rooms in her basement and only charged \$500 a month, which was a little more than half the price for renting a room anywhere else.

But when something seems too good to be true, it usually is. The worst part was listening to her fight with her boyfriend or ex-husband late at night -- or worse, early in the morning. She only accepted cash and had no problem kicking the door off the hinges to get it. You wouldn't believe how loud it was in there.

After those few, hard years in New York, and the experience of my landlord in New Jersey kicking me and my roommates out, the struggles of living on the grid without enough money weighed on me. I knew I needed a drastic change. I could no longer afford to live in overpriced rooms managed by underperforming landlords. Remembering my earlier plan to live in a van, I decided to see if it was possible for a functioning member of society to live in a car with nothing more than the essentials.

I rented out a storage unit for everything that wouldn't fit in my old, beige Corolla and planned for it to be my "home base." In the last days of enjoying life as I knew it, I bought a membership to a gym near the Apple store where I had gotten a job a few months earlier. The gym would be a good place to take a break from the outdoors and would also allow me to take showers regularly. I was worried that people from work would find out about my living situation, so I decided not to tell anyone I knew. However, in case there was an emergency, I informed a long-time friend living in Arizona of my situation. We had always imagined what it might be like living in a car, so he wished me luck and told me to let him know if anything went awry.

Within the first night, I encountered a problem. I knew I would sleep in my car, but where would I park it? I spent two hours looking for a good place to call home. It had to be somewhere with enough cars so I wouldn't stand out, but it couldn't be too populated because people could walk by and notice what I was doing. I was worried that if I drew too much attention, I would have to deal with the police or a tow truck operator.

I eventually found a hotel next to Highway 9 in Woodbridge with a parking lot that had only a few cars in it. The lot was far enough away from the main building of the hotel that my car would remain inconspicuous, but not anomalous. As I finally laid down my seats to go to sleep that first night, the reality of my situation set in and I knew it was going to be rough. The back seats of my Corolla, where I had planned on sleeping, were unbearably uncomfortable. The street lights were too bright. The cars driving along the freeway just 20 feet from the parking lot were louder than I had

ever noticed. Fortunately, I was so tired that none of these new problems kept me awake that night. As the weeks wore on, I started getting comfortable sleeping in the back of my Corolla. I had figured out a system to make my living situation actually livable. I stacked blankets on the back seats of my car so that I could get some decent sleep. I had a bottle I pissed in when a bathroom wasn't available. I showered and changed clothes at the gym as often as I could before work.

To avoid unwanted attention, I found other suitable parking lots to sleep in, and I would rotate which one I slept in every night. I had two spots near my job and three spots in Linden, NJ. One of my favorite locations was near my job in the parking lot of an upscale apartment complex. Some of the apartment's balconies overlooked the parking lot where my car was parked, and when I couldn't sleep, I'd lay awake and watch people live in their comfortable homes.

On the fourth floor there was a man who would come out onto his balcony and smoke cigarettes every night. Due to the way he slumped over in his chair and puffed on his cigarettes, it seemed to me that the balcony was his only place of solitude. After watching this man, hunched over in some unconscious attempt to escape within himself, go through his routine one night, I remember feeling grateful that I was free to move anywhere I liked at a moments notice. This, I thought to myself, is a freedom many people desire, but are too afraid to chase.

\* \* \*

In the mornings, I would jump in the driver's seat, start up my car, put the seats back up and head to work. I was relieved and proud that nobody from work suspected anything, even though I would hang out with them in my free time on a regular basis. Since I was saving money on rent, I was able to have an active social life and frequent different bars. Most of my meals were fast food or something dried since I had nowhere to cook. A significant portion of my diet was crackers with peanut butter and Nutella.

When I wasn't at work, I would visit local parks. During those early summer mornings, when I wasn't enduring the hot and humid weather, I

would lay a blanket out and catch up on sleep or read. I became somewhat of a New Jersey park connoisseur over the summer since I visited and explored so many of them. Roosevelt Park and Warinanco Park quickly became my favorites. They both had benches away from the main trails, which were ideal for relaxing in privacy.

Before leaving the park, I would brush my teeth in my car using a two water bottle system. I would pour a little bit of water into an empty bottle, which had my tooth brush in it. After the toothbrush had been thoroughly soaked in water, I would brush my teeth and spit the tooth paste back into the empty bottle. When I was finished, I'd put my tooth brush in the fresh bottle and shake it to rinse everything off.

At around 2 a.m. one night in August, I was getting ready to sleep in the parking lot of an Indian restaurant. After I lay down, I realized I needed to take a piss. Transitioning to the drivers seat of my car, I grabbed my usual piss-bottle. Mid-stream, I heard someone with a thick Indian accent yell, "What are you doing?!"

It was at this point I realized my windows were still rolled down. With my pants around my knees and my dick in my hand, I did the first thing that came to mind. I screamed "Hey!" with the most ferocious snarl I had in me.

Indian Man jumped back and was obviously startled by my response, but he slowly approached my car to get a better look at me. I grabbed my pants and tried to pull them up over the water bottle. I continued to scream at him as he made his way around the back of my car. The only thing keeping Indian Man from getting any closer were some bushes and the foulest words I could think of.

"Why are you here?!" Indian Man demanded.

"I'm taking a nap!" I said. "I won't cause any problems, just leave me alone."

"This parking lot is for my restaurant only. I'm going to call the police if you don't leave!" he said. With my free hand, I desperately searched for my keys among the food, blankets and old clothes that cluttered my car. I was still attempting to pee in the bottle, but by that time piss was everywhere. The man kept yelling at me to leave while I scrambled for my keys. In hindsight, I don't blame him. Who wants a homeless guy soiling their parking lot?

I eventually found my keys in the backseat cup-holder of my car. Still in a daze from being confronted so unexpectedly, I crammed the keys in the ignition while yelling back and forth with him. I cranked my car on and threw it in reverse, but I lost the cap for the piss-bottle in the confusion. Fueled by adrenaline, I decided to kill two birds with one stone. I threw the piss-bottle out of the window, nailing Indian Man square in the chest. I peeled out of the parking lot into the night in search of a new place to sleep.

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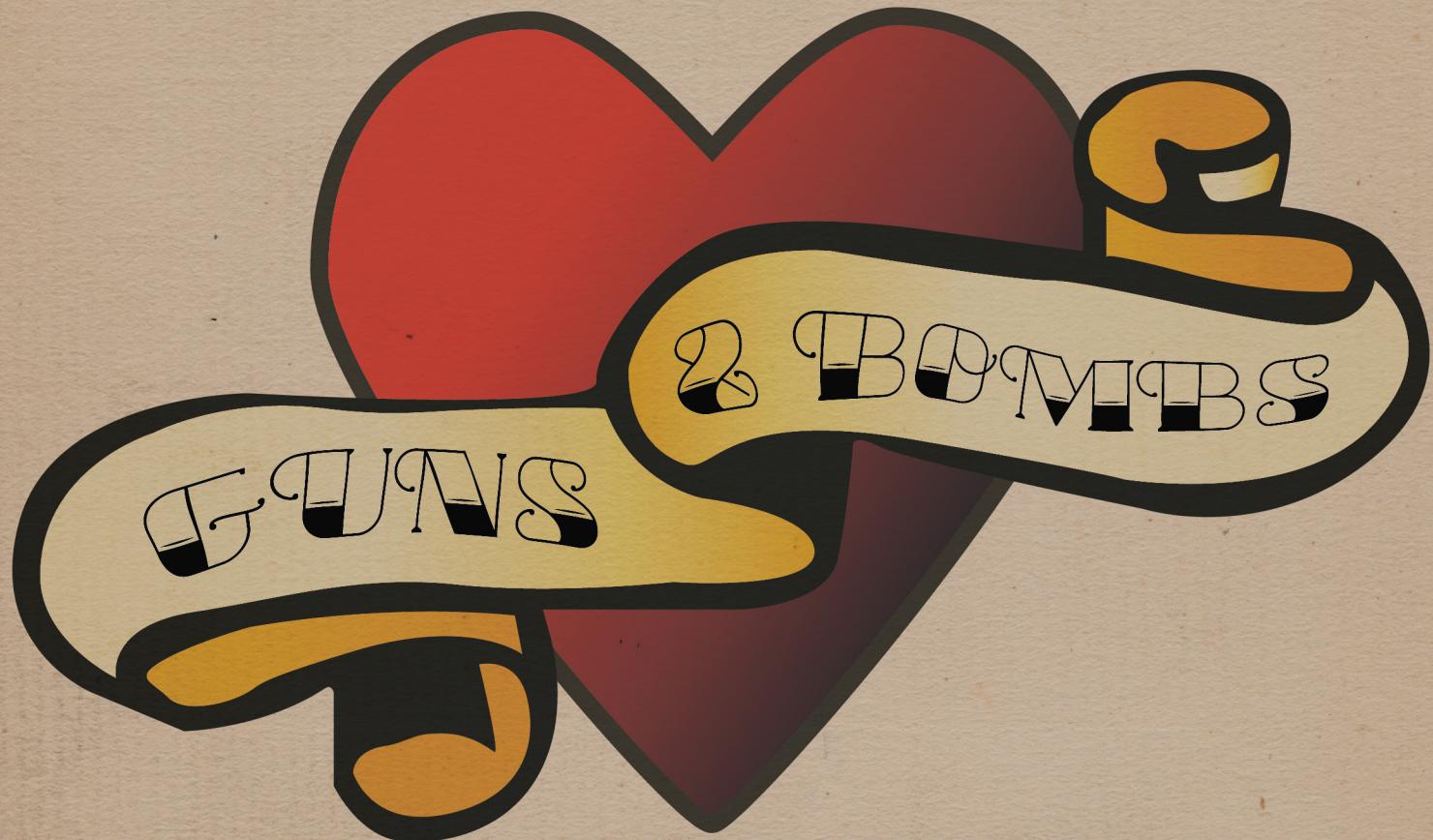
As the weeks turned into months, I started wondering how long this was going to go on. I had planned to live in my car for only three to four months, but I was now five months in. I had a couple of friends who wanted to get a place together, but, one by one, they bailed. I began to realize that my fun experiment was turning into a nightmare. Each day that I showed up for work I started feeling more and more worn out before I even started. I began losing track of the days, and I started to feel that it didn't matter what day it was anyway. Looking for places to live seemed useless, but my biggest struggle was whether or not I actually wanted to live in New Jersey.

The only factor keeping me there was my band. But I was tired of sacrificing my happiness. The stories of Steve Jobs, Noel Gallagher and the rest of my idols had taught me giving up my comforts, my relationships and my financial stability to pursue my love of music was the only way I would achieve success. However, time had finally run out. I was checked out mentally and physically. With less and less energy each day and even less motivation, I finally had to take a break. You learn a lot about what matters most to yourself and what truly makes you happy when the lifestyle you took for granted becomes too difficult to maintain.

I began to realize what I needed to do after hitting the six-month mark. I called my friend from Arizona. It wasn't an emergency per say, but he had a place for me to move into and I needed to get out of the city. I didn't have many options and decided to make one of the hardest choices I've ever had to make. I quit my band, which I had formed and

played with for a little over two years. I left my job at Apple. I sold everything in my storage unit that wouldn't fit and packed my car with as much as I could. I left New Jersey, chasing the idea of a haven in Arizona. After living for such a long time without comforts or stability, moving into a house with a bed was all I really needed.

# VIOLENCE,



## AND OTHER LOVE AFFAIRS

MARA O'NEILL



The Eiffel Tower - Paris, France - Photo by Klovovi

**T**wo days after the Islamic State attacks on Paris, 12 French aircraft carriers, including 10 fighter jets, carried out “massive airstrikes” on two jihadi sites in the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

This attack was in keeping with French President Francoise Hollande’s statements that France would lead a “pitiless war” against the perpetrators of the Paris attacks. They were also backed up by comments from French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius who remarked that France now had the “legitimacy” to take action.

These retaliations made by Western governments are part of the War on Terror that began in the mountains of Afghanistan 14 years ago after the Sept. 11 attacks. They’ve since expanded into Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East. In that space of time, it has been reported that 1.3 million people have died as a result, including 58,000 Americans. This figure is actually said to be a low

estimate, with additional reports claiming that it could be closer to 2 million or even as high as 4 million.

Ironically, the War on Terror is predominantly reported to have increased the frequency of terror attacks, rather than quell them. It has resulted in millions of deaths, increased radicalization, the rise of extremist groups and the further destabilization of Middle Eastern regions.

Perhaps the most intuitive explanation for this increase in terror is mathematical. It’s as if 1 terror + 1 terror = 2 terrors. But of course, terror, in this case, needs to be defined. Is terror just another word for violence? Is it something different? Do we terrorize, or is it just other people who terrorize us?

Terror normally implies intense fear, originating from the French *terrorisme*. The act of causing terror is what we understand as terrorism, and according to most international legal documents,

terrorism is defined as the use of violence for political goals. However, there is no universal consensus on a strict definition of the word. There was an 8-year attempt in the United Nations, for example, to agree on a strict legal definition of terrorism that was eventually abandoned, predominantly due to UN officials' inability to come up with a definition that didn't label themselves or predominant Western leaders as terrorists.

Further, the most commonly used definitions of terrorism reveals another interesting dilemma: terrorism is essentially defined as violence. Although terrorism is understood in these definitions

as this would potentially stir up moral sentiments among the public and lead to public pressure to get involved. Further, under the 1948 Genocide Convention, signatories, who included the U.S. and virtually every other nation in the Global North by 1990, are supposed to intervene in conflicts deemed genocides.

The Rwandan Genocide, in which 500,000 to 1,000,000 Rwandans were killed, including 70 percent of the Tutsi population, was – by all definitions – an act of genocide, where one ethnic group targeted, and annihilated, another particular ethnic group. Hesitation on the part of the Clinton

Administration to call it what it was underscored political motives, while also demonstrating the power of language to maintain complicity and prevent social insurgency.

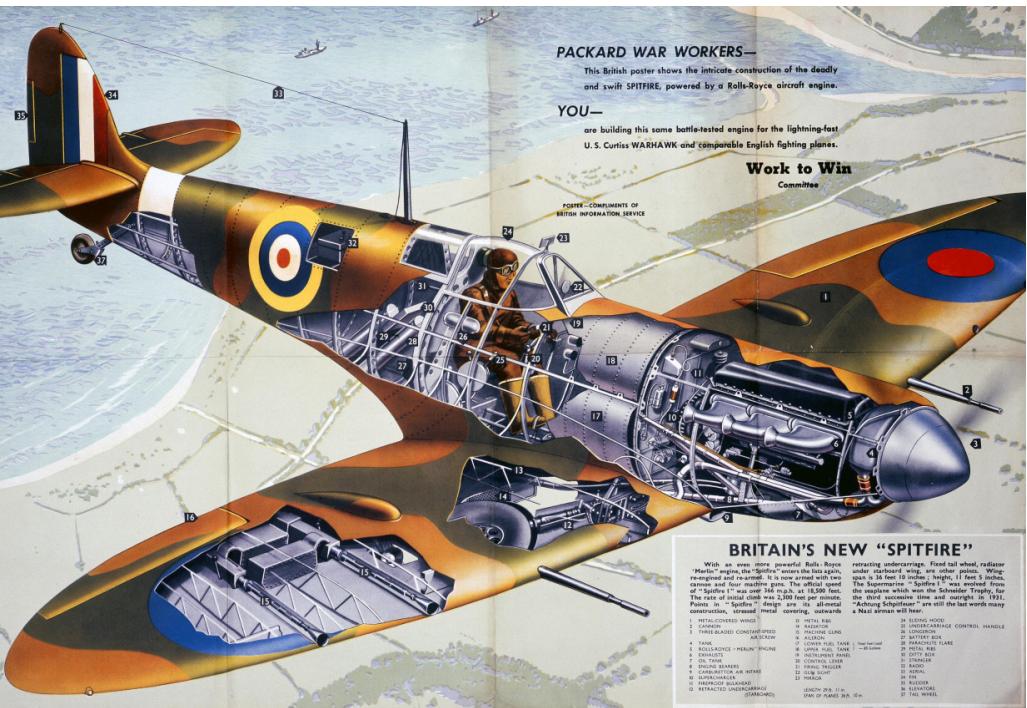
In our current situation, one reason for the focus on terrorism, and not violence in general, may be attempts to de-incriminate those who are involved while maintaining the social function of particular types of violence. Another may be that we don't really think that violence in general is all that bad. In fact, we just might like it.

In everyday life, violence forms the driving plot for our movies, books and TV shows.

We embody and glorify violent behavior in video games. We consume it constantly by a war-obsessed media who knows all too well that violence sells. "I guess I was part of the group-thing," Bob Woodward lamented some years into the Iraq war, after the Washington Post examined its dramatized coverage of the war and its failure to take an at least partially critical stance on the initial events and reactions.

In many arenas of American life, violence is considered far less scandalous than sex, as reflected in a 2011 Supreme Court decision to reject a ban on the sale of violent video games to minors. In reaction to the decision, dissenting justice Stephen Breyer remarked:

"[W]hat sense does it make to forbid selling to a



as the use of violence, what is focused on is not the violence itself, but rather the cause and context of violence. What makes something a terrorist act, therefore, is who is doing the violence and the cause it is directed toward.

But this does beg the question: isn't the focus of this definition absolutely – and almost comically – subjective? According to this understanding, not all violence is bad, but only particular kinds of violence, done by particular kinds of people. "Other violence," is presumably "not as bad," and could possibly even be seen as "good", or "legitimate". Similar examples of political arbitrariness with regard to definitions are not uncommon. The Clinton Administration, for example, instructed leaders not to call the 1994 Rwandan Genocide a "genocide,"

13-year-old boy a magazine with an image of nude woman, while protecting a sale to that 13-year-old of an interactive video game in which he actively, but virtually, binds and gags the woman, then tortures and kills her? What kind of first amendment would permit the government to protect children by restricting sales of that extremely violent video game only when the woman – bound, gagged, tortured and killed – is also topless?"

In relation to popular entertainment, Justice Samuel Alito further wrote, "for better or worse, our society has long regarded many depictions of killing and maiming as suitable features of popular entertainment."

Guns – weapons of inherent violence – are symbols of American identity, associated with freedom and self-empowerment. Violence is celebrated (sometimes in a party-like manner) when we kill our enemies. We like it when our politicians are aggressive, and when their rhetoric reflects that. For all intents and purposes, violence is not something shunned in our society, but something embraced and often, glorified.

What we don't like, though, is when that same violence is used against us, in a manner that we do not choose. This is what Robert Koehler referred to in a 2012 Huffington post article when he differentiated between "good" and "bad" violence. According to Koehler, "we don't normally address the issues [of violence in general] systematically because of our social investment in good violence."

Good violence, in this case, is the kind of violence that we approve of, that doesn't affect us and that allows us victory over our opponents. Whereas bad violence is the kind of violence of which we have to reap the consequences.

Of course, many people don't necessarily believe in the good violence vs. bad violence distinction. They argue that all violence is bad, but that sometimes it is a necessary evil to wipe out something

worse. This is the kind of utilitarian thinking that ostensibly formed the ideology behind the Vietnam War, the Iraq invasions and the present continuation of the War on Terror.

However, there are dubious assumptions made in this position. Namely, that the use of violence is an effective method to eliminate larger amounts of violence.

In a 1967 debate titled "The Legitimacy of Violence as a Political Act," in which Noam Chomsky, Hannah Arendt and Susan Sontag were among the participants, Chomsky made a case against this assumption. Though he argues there are reasons to adopt a pro-militant position, there are, more often than not, disproportionate grounds to reject it. He argues that the use of violence predominantly leads to increased radicalization and insulation of

dissenting groups, a lowering of dignity with regard to the populations affected and immense harm to both the perpetrators and victims.

Citing detailed studies of the Vietnam War, Chomsky claims that the basis for the success of the Viet Cong was not in the terror and violence perpetrat-

ed. Rather, it was in the organizational structures they developed, which "drew people in to beneficial organizations, organizations that they entered out of self-interest, that they to a large extent controlled, that began to interlace and cover the entire countryside." Further, he points out that the utilization of violence in China was much less than in the Soviet Union, and China had much greater success in achieving a fair society. Another example mentioned in the debate is the anarchist victory in Spain in 1936, where their success is largely attributed to successful mass organization, as opposed to the use of violent measures.

Perhaps, most poignantly, he argues that regardless of victory or loss, there will inevitably be problems in creating a just and peaceful society through unjust and violent means. Chomsky says "a new



Kigali Genocide Memorial - Kigali, Rawanda - Photo by Dylan Walters

society rises out of the actions that are taken to form it, and the institutions and the ideology it develops are not independent of those actions. In fact, they're heavily colored by them . . . shaped by them in many ways."

Citing a distinction between what he deems "justified" and "legitimate" violence, he argues that justified violence forms the majority of the violence we see states and groups partake in today: it is violence that is retaliatory, provoked, often done in reflex and completed for the sake of victory. But, he argues, just because an action is justified does not mean that action is legitimate. Legitimate actions, according to Chomsky, are those that take into account the full consequences for all people concerned. Are the proposed actions compatible with the ends? How will it impact those affected? What are the long-term consequences? To this end, he argues that real legitimate violence rarely exists, and more often than not, adopting ideas and perspectives of legitimacy allows us to "raise ourselves to such a cultural and moral level, both as individuals and as a community, that we would be able to control this [violent] reflex."

These sentiments are not new, and Chomsky was not the first nor will he be the last to utter them. They continue to echo in academia today. They are apparent in historical sources. They're commonly put forth by social groups worldwide. But the question remains: if violence isn't necessarily the best or most effective way to respond to violence and establish peaceful societies, why does it continue to be our first response?

Perhaps the problem lies in our love affair with violence. As long as violence in general is so thoroughly accepted and adored, we will continue to live in a violent society, where the distinction between "good" and "bad" violence remains entirely subjective and the shifting, arbitrary boundaries between the two invariably affect the most innocent among us.

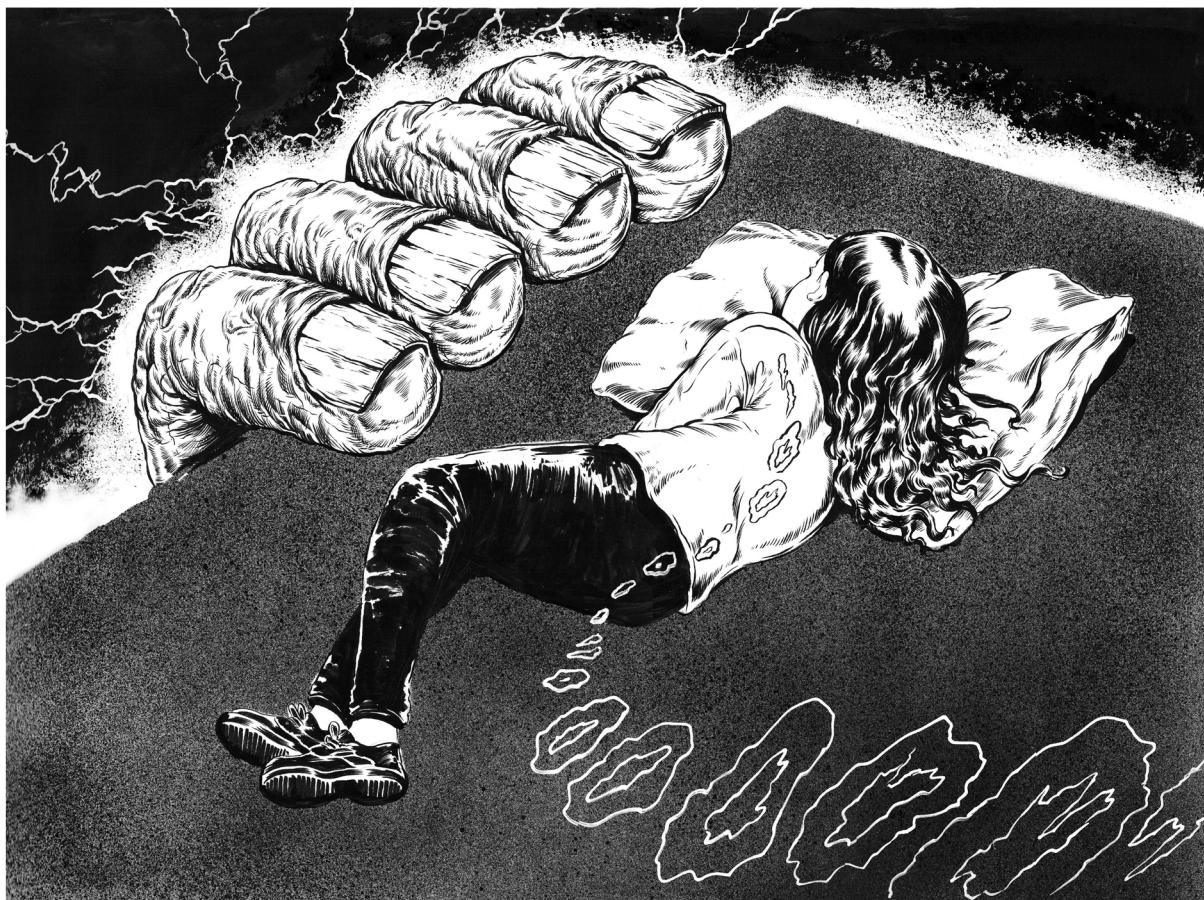


Navy Soldiers on an Anti-Aircraft Cannon - Photo by Degoyler Library,  
Southern Methodist University

# MAD LOVE - CHRIS YEE







# POETRY

READERS,

THIS MONTH'S FEATURED POETS -- A.B. GUSTAFSON, SEAN SWEENEY AND GREGORY HOLLAND -- HAVE ALL BEEN GOOD ENOUGH TO PROVIDE WORK RADIATING ETHEREAL SYMMETRY, RIGHTEOUS HELL-RAISING AND THE KIND OF SPECIFICITY THAT CONJURES COLOR AND THE SMELL OF SCORCHED EARTH.

EVERY SINGLE PIECE CONTAINS MULTIPLE MOMENTS OF WONDER. AS YOU BEGIN WITH THE WORKS BY GUSTAFSON, YOU WILL BEAR WITNESS TO AN EXPLORATORY AND BREATHLESSLY OPEN DESCENT INTO THE PROFOUND COMPLEXITIES OF SEX AND LOSS AND THE DEEP ROOTS OF LONELINESS. THE VOICE IN THESE POEMS SOUNDS DELICATE, YET STONE-CARVED AND POSSESSED WITH A LEARNED ANGER. THOSE NOISES PREPARE YOU FOR THE FIERY SIDEWALK PREACHER FOUND IN THE POEMS BY SEAN SWEENEY.

ONCE "SISTER I WAS THERE..." HOOKS YOU, RELISH IN ITS PERPETUALLY SHIFTING TEXTURES AND IMMEDIATE TELEPORTATION FROM THE ETHER TO HUMAN MOMENTS THAT WRING YOU OUT AND REMIND YOU OF YOUR VITALITY AND WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO REDEFINE PHRASES LIKE "WE THE PEOPLE." SWEENEY'S PASSION FIGHTS AGAINST THE CATACLYSM LAID OUT SO PLAINLY AND TERRIFYINGLY IN OUR FINAL POEM, GREGORY HOLLAND'S "NAGASAKI (ROUND II)."

POETRY EDITOR  
- BEN ABERCROMBIE

# A.B. Gustafson

## You

You love how I always smell like cloves, how I only call it either *making love or fucking*. How I pull you close, all smoke and coke and whiskey, lookin' like I can't wait to burn it down. Damn right, I could burn it down. I could burn you down in a minute—

if I wanted to.

You love it when I come home half drunk and half dead, when I stumble in all sweat and rage and fire. You kiss my broken fists and lick the blood from your lips. You bandage my bloody knuckles and touch me where it hurts. I could hurt you. *I could hurt you, I could hurt you—*

if you want me to.

You love putting me to bed, the way I pull your hair and tell you, tonight, I want you to *fuck me*. You love it when I'm all savage and ravage and raw. I throw you down, my mouth on your throat, like I could tear into you—

oh baby, I want to—

and you love it  
*don't you.*

## *I don't, no.*

Break easy, my love—  
Break the dawn and shake the rust  
Break my bones and breathe the dust  
Break your rules and slake your lust  
You try to take it slow  
To not go where I can't go  
“Sometimes I wonder if you love me at all”  
I don't know, I don't know, I don't know  
Break the “have to,” break the “must”  
Break my promise, break your trust  
Break your heart. Break it just—so:  
I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

# The Machine

The letters I wrote never made it far past my fingers. I drew a picture of you, folded it into an airplane, and made a wish as the wind took it away instead—

I wake up to the whitewashed walls of my little white apartment and take my little white pills.  
White ceiling, white fan, white mug of dark black coffee.

—tell me, did it make it to you?

Paper-plane wishes and large-frame glasses, letters that end with hanging sentences—  
I set sail corked, glass bottles across eddying waves. Inside, these hand-scrawled notes to Please, Save My Soul—

I flip it on: the Master Switch in the whirring, ticking, smoke-filled factory of my body. The machine lurches and grinds as warning sirens flash fire-red through the choking, charcoal smog.

—did they make it to you?

Radar blips and shadowed sightings, the wings of birds, and words carefully carved, “But still, there is always a way.” Though foreign and forlorn, the cry is raised: There is always a way.

The metal groans as a gear somewhere gives, and the machine comes alive with a clangng hallelujah that echoes and emerges despite the efforts of the Override Valve. From my chest it’s all waves, Hallelujah, and Save My Soul.

And the world  
is white.

# Sean Sweeney

## *Sister I Was There When You Lost Your Mind*

Sister I was there when you lost your mind,  
When you felt beautiful for the first time—and you were! dripping wild-eyed unstoppable  
beautiful...

Sister I was there when you found your soul mate floating on radio waves.

And I was there when you were carried out to eternity—

Knees bleeding to eternity

Lipless cigarette to eternity

Fuck you shades to eternity

Everything ALL to eternity!

I was there when you destroyed yourself trying to come back, too.

And Sister I was there with you at the end

On those laughing spinning carousels

Before the drunk moon fell again (But we fell first).

Now, can you tell me how you never learned

To walk through HELL

Without burning?

And Sister, my sad Sister,

I was there when people ate themselves alive kissed themselves alive fucked themselves alive loved themselves alive! I was there...

I was there when everyone died at sunrise;

When the last flame lied to the match-made house;

When you tried to hide your face and cry

And cry

And cry

And cry.

Sister I was there when you lost all your hair (But it was great hat weather).

You still have your wings Sister and I was there when you painted them

Black and Blue—

And disappeared in those eyeless skies.

I was there in your prime Sister.

Now, you and me we drift without knowing which way the wind is blowing but I'll always be here for YOU.

And Sister, my damned Sister,

Can you tell me next time we meet if you'll be

Another stranger on the street?

# We the People

The ship's sinking and the water's on fire.  
You're busy on your knees looking for a lighter  
to burn a flier that reads: "Vote for a change".  
The sell-out fairy paints pictures of hope  
with blood of the poor on the Captain's door.  
He's inside blowing a revolver as his first mate laughs because  
he was never a swallower  
unless it was for the almighty dollar.  
The rich preacher is screaming from the edge,  
"We're in debt with our first breath,  
and it'll only be paid when there's no air left!"  
As the S.W.A.T. team raids with military-grade weapons  
those who oppose the way things must be.  
And the people in the sea, they are chanting,  
"We're the only drones,  
the only drones,  
the only drones."

The lifeboats are full and the well's been poisoned,  
You're ringing the bell for the ones who've been chosen  
and giving roses to the nose-less to spite the posers.  
They're marching port side to the national anthem  
played by the phantom limbs of veterans using the devil's violins.  
Monsanto is gluing genetically-modified wings to children  
before throwing them overboard. Scavengers sing as they circle  
the oily shores and the bodies ignored by the deformed survivors.  
The news is spreading:  
fear, hate, blame the poor;  
fear, hate, blame immigrants;  
fear, hate, blame Muslims...  
... unless you have money, then you don't have to worry.  
You just have to eat—  
eat iPhones and HD face lifts;  
eat American flags and silent heroes;  
eat the Russians and the Chinese;  
eat Super Bowls and chemotherapy;  
eat music festivals and armless black kids;  
eat CEO bonuses and Wall Street bailouts;  
eat spit-shined celebrities and meat puppet politicians;  
eat so you can't hear the people in the sea who are chanting,  
"We're the only drones,  
the only drones,  
the only drones."

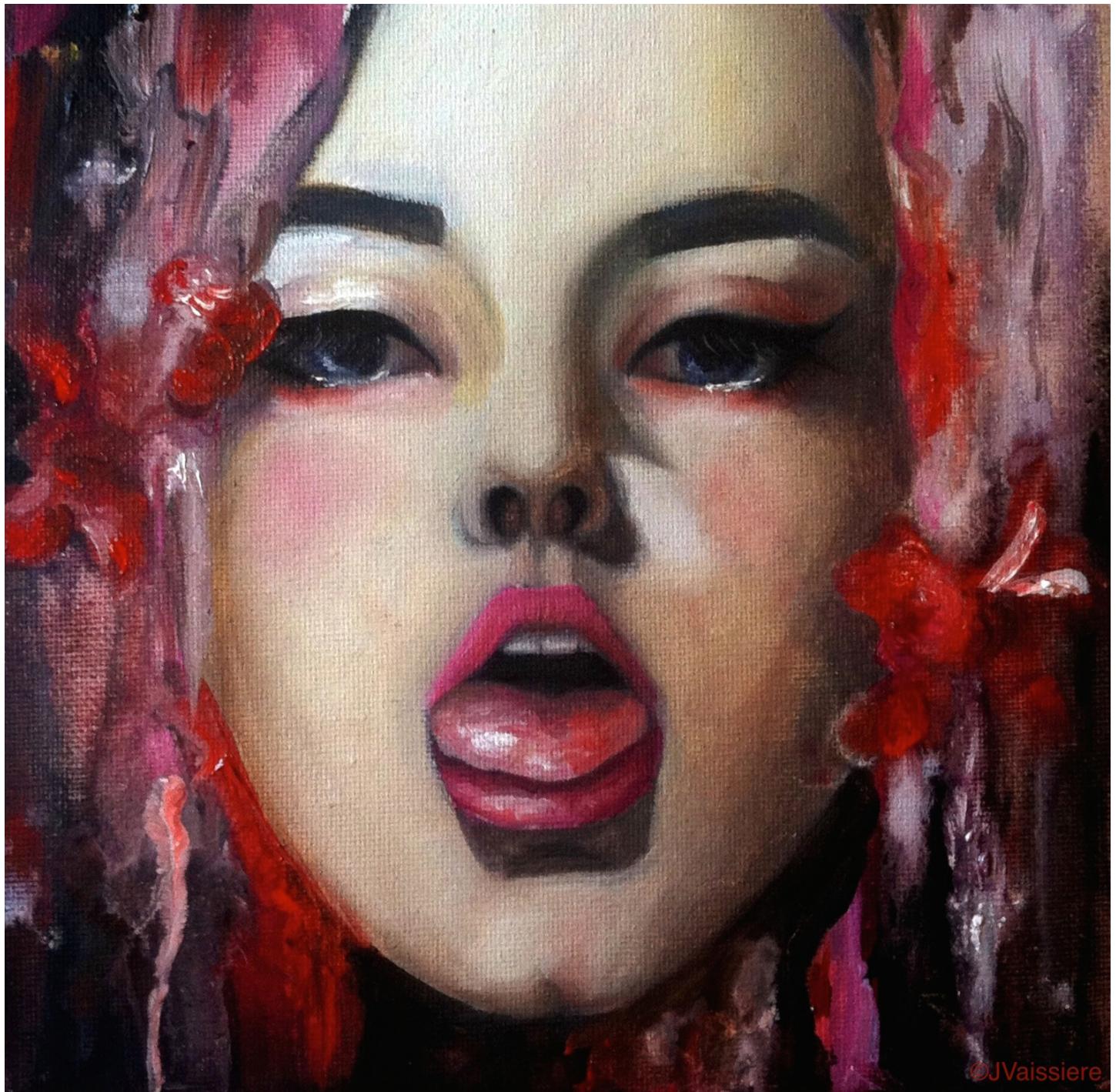
The stage is set, but the podium is vacant.  
The prophets are drinking sodium fluoride  
As the one-eyed architect placates the masses  
with golden caskets and eternal favors.  
You're sipping our neighbor's flask from the labor class  
As the whipping boys are being institutionalized,  
protest movements are being marginalized,  
and a new constitution is being realized:  
We the People in order to form a more imperfect Union  
will wallow in apathy, torture in the name of justice, and overthrow  
democratically-elected leaders who don't kiss our asses;  
We the People will provide defense for the one percent,  
promote general warfare, cum on liberty, and piss on posterity;  
We the People will only evolve when we have no choice;  
We the People will destroy ourselves when it's easier to save ourselves;  
We the People are the best and worst of everything in the world and  
We do ordain and establish these military-states of America.

# *Gregory Holland*

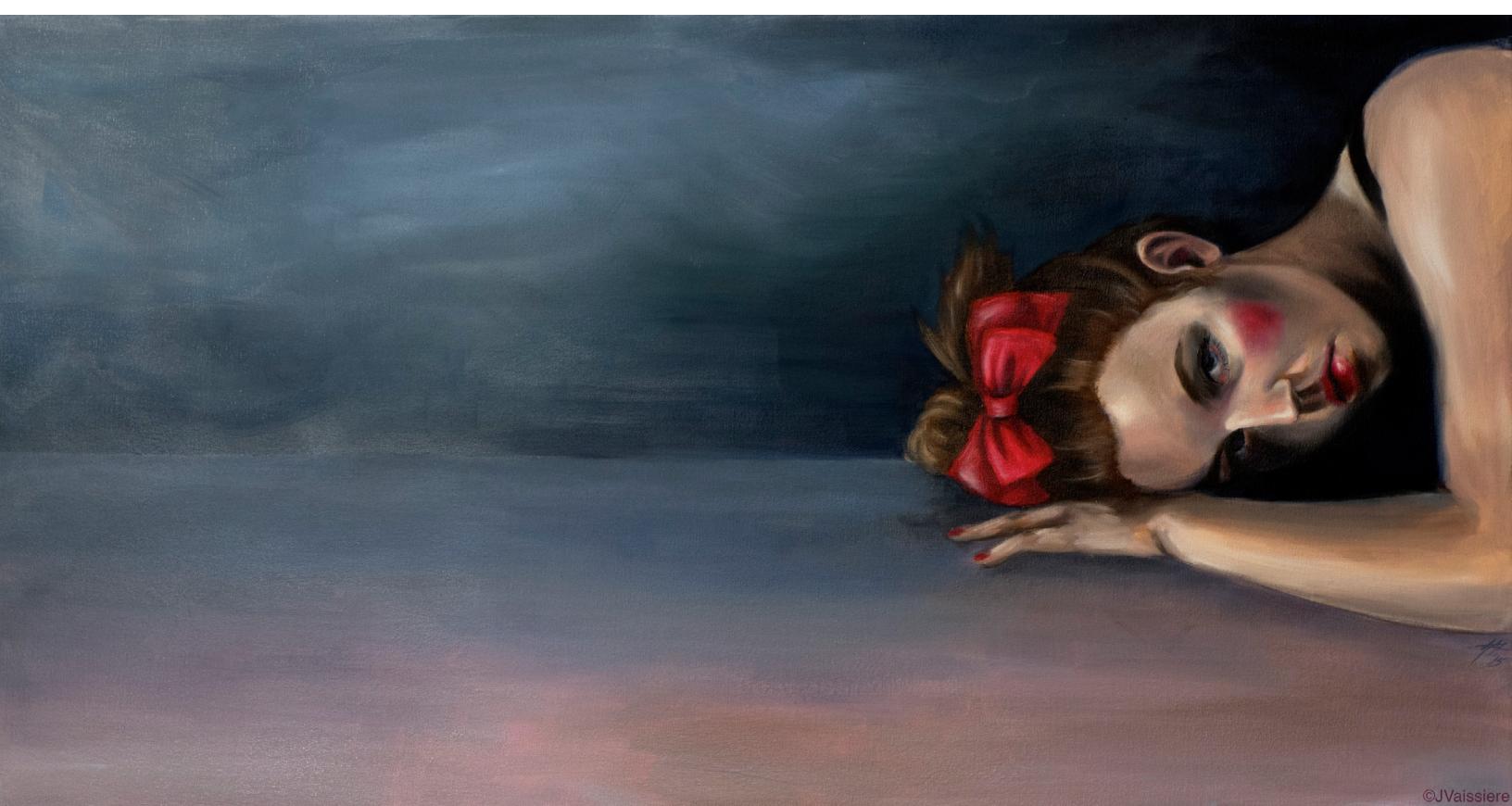
## *NAGASAKI (ROUND II)*

Where Fat cigars burn  
Much slower than people,  
They're buying blue jeans  
Now, in the quivering wake of an Eagle's dive,  
Where fateful Hands  
Clutched a Big Stick,  
Pounded the Earth,  
And ripped waves through the piling ash.

# CHOCOLATE - JULIETTE VAISSIERE



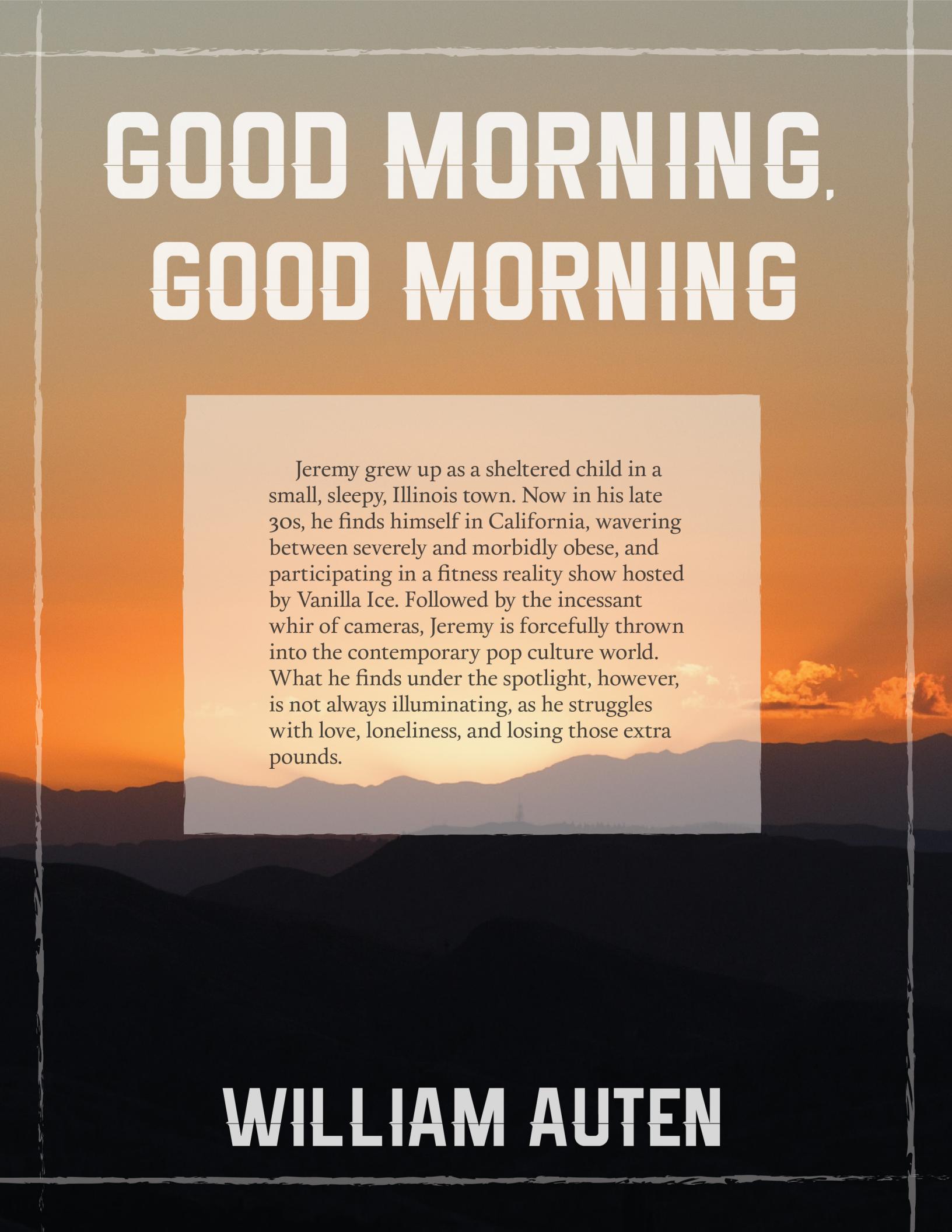
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# GOOD MORNING. GOOD MORNING



Jeremy grew up as a sheltered child in a small, sleepy, Illinois town. Now in his late 30s, he finds himself in California, wavering between severely and morbidly obese, and participating in a fitness reality show hosted by Vanilla Ice. Followed by the incessant whir of cameras, Jeremy is forcefully thrown into the contemporary pop culture world. What he finds under the spotlight, however, is not always illuminating, as he struggles with love, loneliness, and losing those extra pounds.

## WILLIAM AUTEN

**T**he camera loves Jeremy, thirty-seven, bachelor his whole life, toy designer for a company headquartered in Orange County, CA, which makes him one of three contestants from SoCal on the show. “In spirit, not real life,” he jokes with the camera. Standing at around six feet and weighing close to 280 pounds, fifty-five percent body fat, Jeremy wavers between severely and morbidly obese. But after the morning’s weigh-in and production setup, dodging cords and boom mics, Jeremy weighs in at 262 pounds, the red numbers flashing as the nurse next to him re-wraps her stethoscope around her neck, which brings a small smile to his ruddy cheeks and pasty baby face. “Well done, Jeremy,” Nurse C says, as the cast has been calling her.

Once filming begins, Ice wants Jeremy to do today’s Workout of the Day involving twenty-five high-clean pulls at bar-weight for time, telling him that he thinks Jeremy can do it all, including the twenty-five scissor-kicks on the mat and a twenty-five-calorie bike sprint, in just under fifteen minutes. This would safely place Jeremy a few points outside of the top five contestants of the men’s division, and it would build some more space between Jeremy and Ken from Phoenix, AZ, who is starting to fire on all cylinders. A sub-one-five on time today would also get Jeremy within reaching distance of the cast and crew’s love-hate favorite William, whose transformation, in what will be spliced and whittled down to become two episodes, has changed him from someone who sits all day in a cubicle in the IT department at the University of Missouri to someone who could be cast as an extra in Game of Thrones. “Six packs are made in the kitchen,” William has been repeating to the camera every chance he gets, appropriating what Eddie told him after an intense nutrition seminar and check-in, which the contestants must attend every Sunday afternoon.

Since filming began, Jeremy, along with some of his fellow castmates, have upped their rep count by five or ten each time a WOD is thrown at them. Some of them, as has been the case with Jeremy, have sliced off a few seconds from their aerobic challenges, which has Ice and Gina and Eddie, Ice’s two assistants, who do most of the actual training, jumping up and down and pumping their hands in the air as they watch the computers on the ski ergs, stationary bikes, and rowers. When it’s over, Gina is a hugger, while Eddie, the former SEAL and Operation Iraqi Freedom Vet, is a clapper and hand-shaker, saying, “Good job. Proud of you. Today was another day to find out what you had in you.”

But this morning, after Nurse C’s medical equipment and weigh-in gear are put away, the cameras rolling for what will be fashioned into the sixth episode, Jeremy is still tending to a sore lat from the other day’s timed kettlebell complex. Ice, wearing his signature flat-bill baseball hat, loose enough to cover the tops of his ears, punches his

fists together and tells Jeremy, “Pace yourself, J-man. You can do this. I believe in you.” Ice spreads his arms wide, his full-sleeve tattoos consuming the space in front of Jeremy like watercolors spilled on paper. Staring at Jeremy with his wrinkled, sun-damaged eyes and slapping his palms on the bike’s computer, Ice quickly adds in his raspy voice, “We all believe in you. All of us. You got this, J.”

For a man with so many tattoos, an attitude, and the excessive, thug-like personal history that he parades around the set, cast, and crew, especially illustrated in what will be the show’s loud, quick-cut, and music-saturated opening credits, Ice has perfectly straight, blinding white teeth and often talks about his favorite local kombucha at Whole Foods. After standing in front of Jeremy, smiling, arms crossing his chest, Ice juts out his hand for a fist-bump. Jeremy, breathing heavily from the anticipation of watching Eddie punch in the number of calories needed until the computer stops, taps Ice’s tattooed knuckles with his meaty, pale hand and nods. Eddie nods back and covers the computer screen with his palm. Inhaling deeply, Jeremy slightly smiles on the left side of his baby-smooth face and reminds himself not to say, “Thank you, Rob” or “Thank you, Mr. Van Winkle.”

Following the success of his home-makeover show, Vanilla Ice decided to enter fitness reality television and the personal-makeover space. To the Xtreme CrossFit with Vanilla Ice. The tagline: Ice Is Back With My Brand New Invention. Only Jeremy doesn’t know who Vanilla Ice is, at least not in the same way his castmates and fellow contestants know Ice. Jeremy grew up in a small Illinois town, where everyone knew everyone. The population topped out at 937 in the 1980s. Both of his parents taught music in junior high and were the music directors at Calvary Baptist. Classical music was preferred and expected, jazz was allowed, but no rock, and certainly no music for rolling up and down streets in a five-point-oh with the rag top down. And though he feels more comfortable calling Ice Rob or Mr. Van Winkle, he has started getting the hang of it. “Be real, be true to yourself and your castmates,” the PA said to him, having taken him aside during a break between filming. She smiled at him, quickly spoke into her radio, and then walked away from the production table covered in neat stacks of print-offs and notes and the day’s objectives. \*\*Emotions = us + them\*\* Jeremy saw written and circled in red pencil in what he assumed was her hand.

Jeremy has pretended to know who Ice is and has gone along with his castmates calling Rob “Ice,” “Ice Man,” or “Nilla,” as a few, such as William and Ken and LaToya, the thirty-two-year-old mother of two and bakery owner from Atlanta, GA, have started calling him. There are large swaths of pop culture, especially the 1990s, omitted from Jeremy’s life: boy bands, everything flannel and Doc Martens, suburban boredom, heroin, J-Lo when she was Jennifer Lopez and a Fly Girl. And he is clueless when his castmates squeal and giggle about having Vanilla Ice as a personal trainer and being on his reality show and loving the 90s and endlessly quoting from what Jeremy has gathered

is Ice's one song and that this one song uses, perhaps flat-out stole, another band's bass line.

William, the thirty-one-year-old IT engineer from Columbia, MO, with a smug attitude, stringy black ponytail, and British teeth, has also been repeating to Jeremy, Dave, and Dan, a former pro surfer from San Diego, CA, looking to get his beach bod back in time for his tenth wedding anniversary, lounging in their room, that the sample hook is the bass line from Queen's "Under Pressure." "It's exactly, completely the same," William smirks every chance he gets, sipping on his orange-colored sports drink and drying his long, sweaty hair. "He'll never admit it, but it's the same."

When Jeremy finally hears both songs, as played by William on his smartphone in the room they share in the large mansion located on a horse ranch at the mouth of a quiet, sun-carved canyon, he notices a slight difference in the rhythm and tone. During his end-of-day video diary, Jeremy says this very thing to the camera. The PA catches wind of this and encourages Jeremy to mention these subtleties to Ice, which he does, out of kindness and because he always wants to be gracious, the next morning at weigh-in and production setup, accidentally starting off his compliment with "Um...Rob...your song," before quickly shifting to "Ice..." Ice grins for several seconds, holding his large, toothy smile bright until he laughs out loud and slaps Jeremy on the back before walking off set to finish his coffee and makeup, readjusting the large white napkin around his neon-green shirt.

Once the lights snap on and the day's filming begins, Ice approaches William, a hand-held camera and mic hovering behind Ice, and tells him that he's pretty pissed off that William thinks he stole music from one of the "best [bleeping] bands ever." William laughs, says he was teasing, and brushes off Ice as he continues warming up on the stationary bike. "You think I'm that low?" Ice asks, grinning and staring at William from under his flat-bill hat. Stretching his tatted neck lower, Ice rambles on, "I'm not joking, dude. Today's gonna be a [bleep] of a workout for you. Good thing your wife is on this show too so she can identify the body." The PA will find footage and cut to Holly, twenty-nine, foodie blogger, who, as the sequence will present itself, watches Ice confront her husband while she warms up on a rower. Ice crosses his arms over his defined chest. "I'm gonna go back over what I was gonna have you do today with Eddie, but nah, it's gonna something entirely [bleeping] different now."

The volume of Ice's voice rises, and William, staring down at the drops of sweat accumulating under the bike, shies away, which makes Ice walk away at first, but then he whips back, the camera stumbling behind him, steadyng just as he blows up, "Get off. Get the [bleep] off." Ice latches onto the bike's handles, dragging it to a stop, causing William to look at Ice's many veins bulging in his throat and face. The director glances at the PA, who levels out her hand in front of her clipboard while she smirks, looking down at her notes, and rapidly moves her red pencil. The tension unravels more. The

camera crew dodges Ice as he circles the exercise room's equipment like a shark. Ice stalks William into the stretching area, where William rolls out a stability ball, which, at the time of this filming, will be almost as large as his belly, and places it between Ice and him. Ice punches his fists together, saying, "You come on my show, diss me, call me a thief, and now you want to work out, staying in first place?" Throwing his head up, Ice arches his back, knees popping forward, his underdeveloped calves barely keeping his top-heavy frame balanced.

"Dude..." Ice chuckles, face fully red, and storms over to the black metal rack housing three rows of kettlebells. He loops his arms through some of the lighter ones on the top row and chucks them down onto the padded flooring in front of William. Ice storms out the workout room and into the hallway, the door slamming behind him. Gina takes over, barking at everyone to step it up. "See what happens? See why you need to be aware of everything you eat and think and say?" Flexing her biceps, she motions to Eddie who talks to William and gets him going on burpee-man-makers. Although Jeremy is concerned about William, he's more concerned about whether Ice will return. Mr. Van Winkle seems to always be putting on an act, which the cameras can't help but gravitate towards, whereas Eddie and Gina are serious about pushing the contestants to the max. They want to see results from the workouts and challenges they've prescribed. But if Jeremy has to pick between the two, he rationalizes taking Eddie over Gina, which surprised him at first when he mentioned it in his video diary. The former SEAL doesn't disclose much of what he's seen or done in Iraq, and Jeremy acts sheepish around Eddie, feeling that it's like, "Well," he said to the camera, cocking his head to the side and flashing his hazel eyes, "walking through a landmine." Gina, however, is forty-three, shredded like a rock, and unashamed to broadcast those two facts as well as that she's in the best shape of her life, having all the products and branding to back it up. Many cameras love her too. She's been photographed for her Instagram account wearing tight clothes or lingerie, images notated with an uplifting and inspiring quote for her followers, oftentimes Bible verses. Jeremy doesn't appreciate that and finds it fake and inauthentic, which he struggles with, but he compromises with himself after she's led a session and before he gets in bed. At least she's a Christian, he has said to himself, thanking God for her in his life. Heart's in the right place, just the wrong note played, he has remembered what his mom used to say about her piano students.

"Hey..." he softly says to William that night, who mumbles as he awakens and wipes his face, assuming his apnea has bothered Jeremy again, which is true, but Jeremy doesn't want to bring it up, especially after the morning's drama. "Hey...you OK?"

"What?"

"Earlier today. Rob...Ice was pretty hard on you."

William gives a thumbs-up and smiles his horse-mouth smile.

"Yeah...thanks,

buddy," he whispers back and shakes Jeremy's hand. "Ice and I talked it out. We did it in the living room, but the director liked outside better. So we went out there. Super nice out. We were inside the big garage by the stables. Hadn't been in there yet."

"The one with the old cars?"

"Yeah...really cool. Reminded me of Ferris Bueller."

Jeremy laughs with William, even though he has no clue what Ferris Bueller is. The two men fist-bump, and William rolls over on his right side to stop snoring. Jeremy, as the room's camera watches him, doesn't lie back down. He sits on the edge and then shimmies himself up off the bed. With a small hitch in his left hip, he waddles over to the phone charging on the little desk in the room, and sends out a text. Bracing his large frame against the desk, as though he's out of breath, he waits for a reply. Once he sees it, he smiles and puts on his white shorts that hang down to his fleshy knees, slides on his sandals, and slips out of the room.

For many nights this has been happening. At first the PA thought Jeremy was going to the kitchen at night to get a late-night snack, which is a strict no-no set by Eddie, Gina, and the nutritionist during the knowledge seminars. Yet, in hopes of stirring up drama, the PA would've let it happen. If it were true that Jeremy was sneaking late-night snacks, she could tell Ice in the morning over his coffee and makeup. But every time he's done this, Jeremy has walked right past the kitchen and headed for the patio out back, where one of the interior cameras can't film because the height of the door-frame cuts off Jeremy until only his swollen ankles can be seen. A hand-held camera was eventually sent out.

And tonight, as with the other nights, another pair of ankles join Jeremy, slightly slimmer ankles, ankles connected to feet that pivot like an excited child's, point to Jeremy's feet, and shuffle closer to him. It turns out that Jeremy has been meeting Katie, twenty-nine, speech therapist from Marblehead, MA, separated but not divorced. "Working things out on our own," she said dourly during her interview to the camera, her bottom lip quivering and hinging on the transformation she's looking for. Post-production will amplify that her husband left her after she gained forty pounds within a few years of their marriage, which she described, in a tearful segment, as "so American...with our house and cars and vacations...and everyone watching us, expecting things." She told the PA in a second interview, and with more sobbing, that it was the stress of work, of her husband's demanding job, of her being a new speech therapist, of living a lax lifestyle that caught up with her and, after she inhaled deeply, the marriage. To distinguish between Katie from Marblehead, MA, and Katey from Tulsa, OK, the PA has labeled Katey from Tulsa, OK, as KT, which, the PA has said, is more reflective of that area.

Tonight, as the mic picks up, Katie and Jeremy talk about music. His eyes light up when she speaks of her love for the Beatles to him. He confesses to her that, when he

was in the eighth grade, he took a stack of Beatles albums from a neighbor who had moved and left them behind, lodged between bags of trash. He saw the Sgt. Pepper's album cover sitting on top and stared at the many colors he'd never seen and the many faces he didn't know, feeling his gut tell him one thing and hearing his mind override what he felt in his gut. "I promised myself only one," he says to her and describes running away into the woods behind his house, waiting until it dinnertime, pretending that he had been playing outside all day. "They felt like Playboys to me," he continues, as she rubs his arm. "No, my parents don't know," he answers her, "and I still feel guilty about it all." The PA will review this and make notes. Katie from Marblehead, MA, five-foot-three, size eighteen, "much to offer on top," she laughed during her interview in order to break her crying, tells Jeremy that "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" is her favorite Beatles song.

"There's that feeling of emptiness and sadness of so much missing," she says. Their legs touch. She continues, "When I was in the ninth grade, I heard it for the first time, driving to my mom's funeral. She had ovarian cancer. It was horrible. It's the worst thing I've ever felt, even with my marriage." Jeremy wipes his eyes and nods. "I heard it, and..." Katie clears her throat, "later that day, I listened to it again and again...and couldn't stop. That melody, that opening lyric..."

Jeremy reaches for her hand in the darkness and, holding it, can't put into words what he feels for her at that moment. Even if he could he wouldn't because of the cameras and because he knows she's only separated, not divorced, from her husband. "Because of my brother," he answers another question for her that night.

They will do this every chance they get until Katie is eliminated. Jeremy holds her hand that night. After the show has aired, they will reunite again in May, at the live season finale to find out who's Ice King and Ice Queen: the fittest and worthiest of the cash prize and a lifetime membership at To the Xtreme CrossFit.

Jeremy will remember touching Katie's hand for the first time on the back patio that night, but he'll linger on the smell of Katie's simple red dress floating over his body as they hug for the first time since she left the show. And Jeremy will finally tell her what he's felt for her since the first time they met, that although the feeling is ultimately wordless, he's finally found words for what he feels for her. "It's like a piano sonata," he begins telling her in the quietest part of the studio, while the other cast and crew and Ice and Gina and Eddie and Nurse C are laughing and celebrating with Ice King Steve (the thirty-three-year-old futures trader from Salt Lake City, UT) and Ice Queen Holly, who blows kisses to William pouting in the front row. The two of them off in the corner, Jeremy hands her a CD he has made with some of his favorite Beatles' songs and, the last song, a piano sonata he played for her.

"The best piano sonatas mean someone has been waiting for someone else for so long...and because it has no words," he tells her standing outside the commotion. And then Katie's husband will come up behind her, wrap his arms around her thinner waist,

kiss her creamy neck, nearly all the way down to her collarbone and tell her that he's ready to leave.

"Who's this?" he asks.

"My dear friend, Jeremy," she says, smiling at him, wiping her eyes, and hugging him goodbye, sliding the CD into her purse. And Jeremy will be left there alone, just briefly, before he joins the others, alone just long enough to feel the very thing he felt for Katie drift away into expressions that deepen in memories, spectators occupying a place sustained by echoes. Jeremy will feel that everything seemed to fit for just the right amount of time for him, not wondering if he's fallen behind or if he's too far ahead with anything, like chasing cloth in the wind, accepting that sometimes the sky shifts from robin egg to amber glaze, and that the source of this surprise comes much later but only after it's been searched for. The cameras won't capture any of this.

The next day, at the small production meeting the PA holds every morning, after watching Jeremy and Katie hold hands on the back patio, the PA feels it's time for Jeremy's story to be recycled again and wants to run the clip from his application tape for what will become today's episode.

"The one from his house?" an intern asks, furiously typing into his computer.

"Exactly," she answers.

When this episode airs, Jeremy will be the focus. "Because," he wipes away tears from a much fuller face, "my sister encouraged me to do this, especially after my parents died. I need to be around for Scotty, who needs me...and all the money can go towards his treatment." The pre-contest clip, filmed nearly a year ago, shows a larger Jeremy taking care of his autistic brother in their small, old house in Carbondale, IL. Standing outside the door, the crew films Jeremy in the bathroom explaining that he and Scotty often come in here to talk things out or cry or be calm or all of it. "The Booth," he blushes, shyly looking away from the camera, before looking up, sniffling, a sly grin on his smooth face because he knows it's a play on the vowel sounds of bath and booth, which, he recounts for Katie that night on the back patio, always reminds him of John Lennon's puns. But mainly he calls it The Booth because of the bathroom's shape and height, its lack of open space due to the sink jutting out from the wall's peeling plaster and the porcelain-clad tub sunk in the water-damaged substrate.

Jeremy wipes his eyes and goes on to say that so many conversations between himself and his brother happen there. "Big and little talks," he smiles into the camera. "The Booth," he repeats, voice-over only, as the camera captures Jeremy cradling Scotty in The Booth's tight space, made tighter by Jeremy's previous size, which accentuates Scotty's frail body.

Later the next day, the director and the PA disagree about who should storm into Ice's gym, slamming their boxing gloves down and confronting Ice. The PA thinks it should be Ken the retired Marine from Phoenix, AZ, who's already shown his temper and lack of patience for Ice's antics, especially during the boxing challenges when it was

clear that Ken, a former champ in the Marines, knew what he was doing.

The director, however, thinks it should be either William or Holly, the only couple on the show. “They’ve been winning the Ice Breakers left and right. They feed off each other,” he lays out his case. The director wants to break them up, break up their energy, which not only would make for good drama but would also change the playing field and quite possibly give an opportunity to someone like Jeremy, especially after last night’s intimate talk with Katie, to charge to the front.

After a private deliberation during a late lunch, the PA caves in to the director’s idea: either William or Holly will be going home. But before that happens, Ice is leaving, having put in his three-hour day. It’s late in the afternoon, slightly later than he wants it to be, and he needs to pick up his kids from school before going to the office and handing off some paperwork to his accountant and legal team, probably a record of the incident involving Jackie, thirty-five, from Saginaw, MI, and Bryan, “Out and Proud,” he’s gleamed into the camera, twenty-six, from Paris, TX, cutting open their hands on one of the power racks. “Not my equipment,” Ice raises his hands in front of the power rack and the PA as he walks away into the setting sun. The PA nods and then scrambles to get some crew outside for a shot of Ice speeding off in his truck as he leans back, wrist loose on the steering wheel, other hand cradling his phone next to his ear, the sky turning pink and purple behind the mountains.

And that night, which could be any of the nights, depending on how the nights are edited, feeling his heart so inflated again, sitting next to her, holding her hand, Jeremy shares more with Katie about his brother and where they live and what life is like for them. Katie becomes emotional, as do the PA and the crew watching this.

“What have you made for him?” Katie asks Jeremy, resting her head on his shoulder, both of them looking out into the dark blue field blurring into the base of the canyon, the stars overhead, their legs stretched out, ankles interlocked, the camera drifting and whirring behind them like hummingbirds.

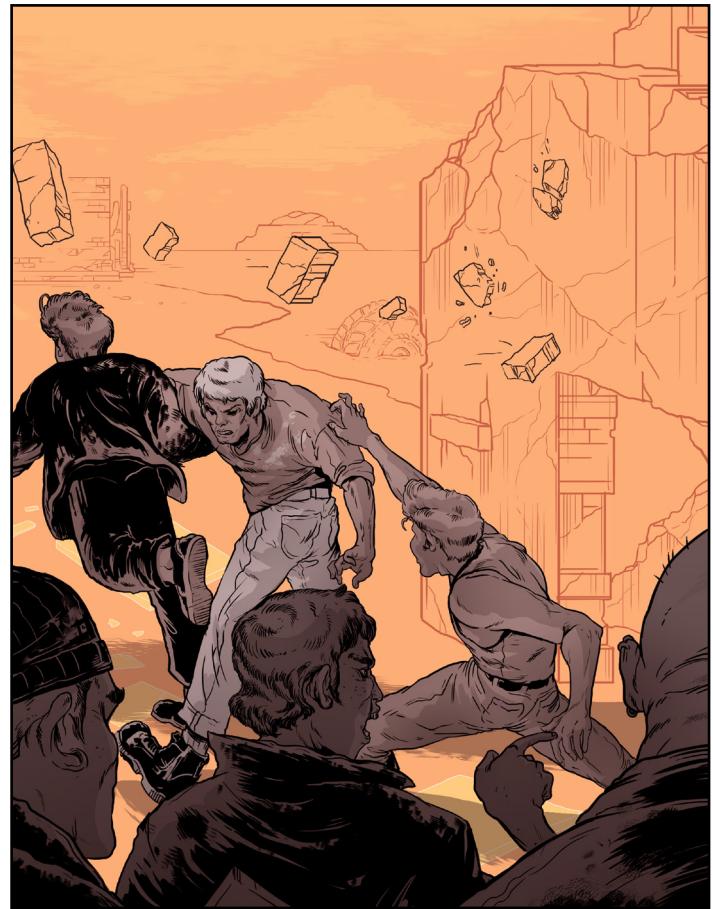
“Little things,” Jeremy says, looking down and thinking of the small toys he has privately made for his brother, the ones that he refuses to reveal with the cameras on, the ones that his bosses will never see, the ones that will never go into production, the ones that would never sell anyway, the ones that aren’t too stimulating because his brother’s sensitivity is sometimes intense, the ones that play little songs inside them when they are pulled across the floor by a small string.

# ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

**B**eginning from a graphic design background, Chris Yee is a Sydney based artist/illustrator who specializes in traditional “pen and paper” methodologies. Raised by the power of print, Chris’ main influences stem and vary from 90’s post-apocalyptic manga, rap and punk aesthetics and the legendary work of Jack Kirby. Through his imagery he constructs narratives ranging from the humorous to the monstrous and macabre.

Chris has done work for many clients, including, but not limited to, Hurley, Red Bull, Mad Decent, Grainwaves, VIVID Sydney, Sydney Art & About, Chapstick, Have Skateboards, Capsule Store, Tiger Beer, Schweppes AU and Doritos AU.

The featured works are from his show “MAD LOVE”, which was held at the aMBUSH Gallery in Sydney this past June



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