



# The Observer

An Anthology

Anand Nambakam







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# Preface

*The Observer* reflects my experiences in St. Louis with relation to Professor Lois Beck's Writing Culture course. Five essays are detailed within this booklet, consisting of four non-fiction works and one fictional piece.

This anthology's namesake is inspired by my continued studies within anthropology. The ability to interpret information accurately is paramount to the anthropologist. As interpreted from the aforementioned course, I improve my observational skillset by analyzing different locales and interacting with different spheres of culture, economics, and politics. In certain circumstances, such as within *Doctors and Dollars*, I took on the role of an active participant, acting beyond the role of mere observer.

Many thanks to Professor Beck and my colleagues for providing constructive criticism regarding my work and aiding me in the life-long process of improving as a writer.

**NO PIT  
BULLS  
OR PIT BULL  
MIXES  
ALLOWED**

**PER UNIVERSITY CITY  
ORDINANCE.**

NO PIT BULLS OR PIT BULL MIXES per University City Ordinance, the yellow sign displayed prominently, stapled to the tall fence. Nearby, a bulletin board indicated a single missing dog, complete with a sepia picture and phone number. A smaller sign ordained the U. CITY DOG PLAY AREA RULES<sup>1</sup>. Below the dog park rules, likened to a legal disclaimer read the following -

“All people who fail to comply with these rules will be in violation of University City Ordinance 6327.”

Tall, iron fences delineated the perimeter of the field, acting as a barrier between the grassy field and its paved surroundings. University City Dog Park was nestled between two streets and the River Des Peres. Newly constructed apartments and buildings dotted the avenue. The grass field appeared spotty yet maintained, dried by the St. Louis summer heat<sup>2</sup>. Mature trees provided modest shade from the sun’s rays. Sounds of the creek were drowned out by guttural barking. A keypad and locked gate secured the off-leash area, complete with a forty dollar yearly membership fee. Beyond the gate, situated on concrete, was a small enclosure with a small bathtub and a bucket of used, donated toys.

A concrete walkway lined the length of the park, offering a paved stretch for owners to exercise, while also providing stable ground in inclement weather. Benches and chairs sparse-

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1 The rules were a numbered list with bulleted addendum. Operating from dawn to dusk, some park laws included, “ the park put owners at legal responsibility for their dogs and any injuries that may occur; dog waste must be properly disposed of; leashes are the law; owners must fill in any holes created by their pets; no children under the age of ten allowed.”

2 My visit to University City Dog Park occurred on 7 September 2019 at 12:20 in the evening. The weather was quite sunny, measured at 87° F.

ly populated the field, located along the sidewalk as well as within the grass. A segment of the park was cordoned into a section dedicated for “SMALL/LESS ACTIVE DOGS,” segregating them from the “LARGE DOGS” enclosure via a tall, chain link fence. Lamp posts, trash cans, and water bowls dotted the field, allowing access to responsible owners throughout the year.

Upon observation, the cultures of dogs and humans exist discretely, although fused together within the overall park culture. Dog owners strike up conversation among one and other, often based upon their pet’s choice in playmate, . Dog culture consisted was likened to animal pack behavior, with the “alpha dogs” often remaining active, barking and patrolling, tasked with domineering and maintaining the pack. The pack consisted of all dogs within the park, with new dogs required to communicate with the alpha dog, among the pack, upon entry. This behavior was mirrored in the separate sphere of the smaller dog park.

Using their pets as conversation starters, owners greeted each other cordially, conducting small talk that meandered from sports to restaurant suggestions. Anonymity was generalized throughout the park, with owners often not divulging personal details, or even names, prior to conversation. Instead, owners bonded over shared pet interactions. Farewells were often directed towards dogs, rather than owners, instancing a culmination of dog and human culture. Occasional dog snarls or rough-housing prompted action from stern owners, who quickly distanced themselves and their pets. Conversation ended abruptly, often due to pets wandering or misbehaving. This was often not seen as detriment among owners, but rather, as a component of responsible ownership.

Owners appeared in the majority as late-twenty-year-old males, sporting shorts and sunglasses to avoid the heat<sup>3</sup>. Younger women in running shoes also dotted the park, spending more time in the “Small Dog” park due to their choice in pet. Even among

<sup>3</sup> A survey was conducted via observation on the owners in the dog park. Three interviews were conducted, and information was used to advance understanding of the human and dog cultures within the park, as well as the overall dog park culture.

these generalizations, many exceptions existed, with owners ranging among ages and ethnicities. Among this demographic variability, the reassurance of responsible pet ownership provided social fluidity, providing dog-owners with the opportunity for interaction.

Owners, upon conversation, claimed to attend the dog park “at least bimonthly” and either with their significant other, or alone, if single. People primarily came to the dog park to socialize their pets and provide an outlet of exercise. Owners responded positively to rescue dogs. Not necessarily abused, rescue dogs provided social capital by which owners committed a good deed, indirectly deeming them worthy of acceptance and respect in the park. Rather than imply that rescue dogs were sought for social capital, the ownership of rescued pets demonstrated empathetic human qualities, at the pinnacle of “responsible pet ownership.” The concepts of pedigree and pure-bred dogs were met with mixed response among neutrality, equating the concepts to “status symbols,” lamenting upon the “cruel breeders... only in it for the money<sup>4</sup>.”

Social standing within the park surmounted other forms of moral currency, with “responsible dog owners” fully able to enjoy the park’s amenities and society. Conversely, negative interactions with dogs or owners resulted in lower “dog park standing”, leaving them at odds with the official park rules, and the “responsible owners”. Owners existed in groups, not different from their pets. Deemed as either “responsible,” or “rule-breakers,” owners tended to remain within their groups for conversation. The University City Dog Park presented a unique human-pet culture not seen elsewhere, where pets acted as social and moral currency within the confines of the enclosure. Social contracts were formed upon membership and through responsible pet ownership, although some owners admitted to “breaking rules,” perhaps mirroring greater human society.



# An Observant Perspective of Scientology

Tall, concrete, and grandiose, the Missouri Church of Scientology rose prominently at 6901 Delmar Boulevard<sup>1</sup>. A small sign rested near the entrance to greet prospective visitors, titled “Free Personality Test”. Upon preliminary research, Scientology was founded in May 1952 by American science-fiction author L. Ron Hubbard, initially through a work titled *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. The subject of the novel concerned terminology, doctrines, and the practices used<sup>2</sup>. An open-minded observant perspective was employed upon entering the church, simultaneously easing the Scientologists while presenting myself as a researcher free-of-bias. Throughout my experience, I reflected upon the guiding framework, thereby prompting insight:

## Is Scientology religion?

Scientologist receptionist Mindy greeted me as I stepped through the door. Dictionaries and Hubbard books<sup>3</sup> lined the her workspace, walls covered in larger-than-life depictions of the late author<sup>4</sup>. Upon request for an introduction to the religion, I walked

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1 My visit to the Missouri Church of Scientology began on 20 September, 2019 at 3:00 in the evening. Personal interviews were documented afterward my interactions. Before arrival, I researched the organization, its founding, and preliminary teachings. I decided to be upfront with my purposes, albeit open-minded to the organization, so as not to bias my observations and interviews with preconceived notions.

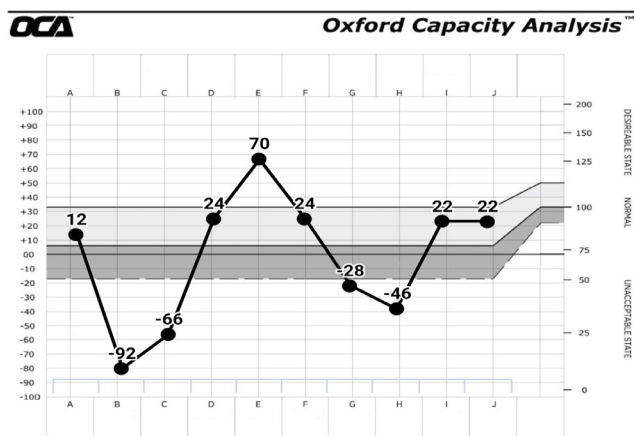
2 Scientology, as described by its founder is the “word or outward form by which the inward thought is expressed and made known – thus, Scientology means knowing about knowing, or science of knowledge”.

3 L. Ron Hubbard’s books *Dianetics*, *The Way to Happiness*, and *Self Analysis*, among other works, were present for sale within the Church. Over twenty copies of *Dianetics* lined the desk of the receptionist.

4 A large painting/portrait of L. Ron Hubbard hung behind the receptionist’s

with Mindy to a larger room, who presented me with a packet of paper titled "Oxford Capacity Analysis" (OCA). I had ample time to complete the questionnaire, which was to be later graded by Mindy. True-or-false questions ranged from questions such as "do other people interest you very much" to "can you be a stabilizing influence when others get panicky." The OCA had similarities to numerous questionnaires and surveys I had previously taken, albeit on a larger scale of questions. I watched a short, glamorizing documentary of L. Ron Hubbard after I turned in my questionnaire.

Sitting down with my "auditor," Mindy, I was initiated into evaluation. My computerized results are indicated below.



Mindy next typified my lettered traits<sup>5</sup>, explaining how my OCA questionnaire translated to the graph. "You performed well in a few categories, but I would like to delve into the regions of the exam that require reflection" Mindy mentioned.

An "E+" and "C-" on my graph represented "compulsive activity among inability to rest", and "E>F" indicated that I was "doing desk. Photos within Church were not taken out of consideration and respect.

5 The OCA test results are typified as follows - A: stable vs. unstable; B: happy vs. depressed; C: composed vs. nervous; D: personable vs. undependable; E: active vs. reactively retarded; F: capable vs. inhibited; G: responsible vs. irresponsible; H: logical reasoning vs. capacity for error; I: appreciative vs. lack of accord; J: communicative vs.

withdrawn



more at once than capable of handling comfortably.” I was asked to provide examples from my life to align with the results, providing unconscious “affirmation” that the results were validated<sup>6</sup>. Mindy advised me to schedule for a seminar<sup>7</sup> the following week. I was affirmed of my place within Scientology, and left with an understanding that my results would improve upon completion of the seminar. Mindy also attempted to sell me Dianetics at this time, to which I replied “I already owned the book,” albeit a digital version. This prompted no push-back or forced sales, but rather an inquisitive “I am glad to know you came in with prior interest”, from her.

Upon reflection, I attempted to ratify my current understanding of religion with that of Scientology. From an anthropological perspective, religious organizations are typified by their respective rituals and social practices, often overlooked by new members and outsiders. My foray into Scientology yielded an understanding of the various rituals at-play, including the OCA questionnaire which I took part in. Among these rituals were the seminars, courses, and meetings conducted within the church. Perusal of the church websites, and conversation with Mindy, provided a cursory understanding of the underlying theology, a fusion of L. Ron Hubbard’s terminology<sup>8</sup> with ancient spiritualistic traditions.

Scientology can be typified as possessing religious characteristics, marked by a story of creation, connection to cosmology, and propagation among social organization. Courses, seminars, and meetings provide ample social identity for Scientologists, who are spiritually guided via “auditing,” which can be considered similar, although not equal, to the Catholic ritual of confession.

Social and religious practices of the organization are high-

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6 Although I did share life experiences regarding my results, I was not tempted to divulge certain personal details, as I was just gaining an introduction and preliminary understanding of Scientology.

7 Mindy recommended that I attend a free weekend Scientology Training and Dianetics Training seminar, where I would “gain greater spiritual awareness”. The seminar was scheduled for 9/28/19.

8 Hubbard’s terminology included operational definitions of “technicity, , well-being, understanding of organization, and personal experience”, among others.

lighted through the practice of auditing which involves the reflection and counseling of life-events, via a methodological spiritual path.

Introduced to me during the "evaluation" phase of my OCA questionnaire, auditing provides exploration of the past, through sharing life-events within the church. Possessing many characteristics of a religion, albeit modern, Scientology presents a unique set of rituals and traditions, while also possessing a distinct social organization among its church. From an observant perspective free of prejudice, Scientology holds cultural and religious merit, as can be noted through its concrete prominence at 6901 Delmar Boulevard. Theological appreciation can be garnered through this perspective, marking Scientology as possessing "religious characteristics," to be further studied in greater intensity.





"The name on my birth certificate says Jeeho, but you can call me Eric," the Korean student mentioned from inside my apartment kitchen. Eric had just arrived after a four-hour flight from Los Angeles. Unassuming and modestly dressed, he offered no indication of the somber discussions to occur, centered on concepts of temporality, life, and death.

Although currently situated in America, Eric intersected Korean and American culture, hinted at by his fluent, subtly accented English<sup>1</sup>. From an observant perspective, he appeared similar to any American college student, clean shaven and well-dressed.

"I'm gone in a year... thank God my shoulder is messed up."

Having suffered through multiple shoulder dislocations, Eric was granted a two-year military desk job by the South Korean government<sup>2</sup>. Although a product of conscription, desk jobs within the military are coveted by South Koreans as a relatively low-stress respite in their mandatory military service. A hard sheen glazed over Eric's eyes as he discussed his impending military service.

"I was born in Los Angeles. My parents chose to have me in the US so I could avoid the military. My dad got lucky – his name wasn't pulled during the lottery. If I skip on service like Luke, [Eric's

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1 Eric is a young Korean student currently majoring in biology and spanish at the University of Southern California. As a distant acquaintance, I was thankful to be allowed to meet him and record our interview and interaction. Our interview occurred at 3:00 in the evening, at my apartment on Forsyth Avenue on September 29, 2019.

2 Korea is delineated into South Korea and North Korea, run by two distinct government bodies.

South Korean friend] I won't be allowed an inheritance. It's a cold world."

While students in similar positions<sup>3</sup> pondered graduate school and their eventual professions, Eric's thoughts of the future amounted to the military. Possessing US and Korean dual citizenship, Eric moved back to Korea within a year of his birth, living with his family in an apartment in Seoul. Eric's father, a licensed allopathic dermatologist by profession, urged him to pursue medicine, in marked contrast to Eric's sister Annie, who had just completed her bachelor's degree at the Rhode Island School of Design.

"My parents aren't sexist, but there are parts of Korean culture that may appear that way. My parents want us [Eric, Annie] to succeed, but they want me to be a doctor. My sister does design work at BMW now – I don't want to disappoint my parents and be a degenerate<sup>4</sup>." Girls, although not mandated to perform military service, were urged to pursue higher education.

"School in Korea is too hard. Everyone is too smart. Me, my friends, and my sister – we all go to school in the US – some go to college in London. All the international kids know each other because we came from one of two international middle schools in Korea." Identifying himself as part of the Korean international community, Eric continued to reminisce over his various acquaintances pursuing higher education abroad.

"I came back to the US, to Ojai<sup>5</sup>, for high school. I went to a boarding school and barely saw my parents. We rode horses and stuff, which was cool. High school was fun.."

"I still keep in touch with my high school friends, although we barely see each other anymore. My friends from Korea are all in L.A., which is nice." Although pushed to pursue medicine by his physician father, Eric noted that his Korean friends were not held

3 South Korean mandatory military service impacts all males with citizenship.

4 In Eric's view, degeneracy was rampant in Korea, causing many of his childhood friends to delve into gambling and partying, shirking school and their other responsibilities.

5 Eric attended the private co-educational boarding school Thacher School, located in Ojai, California.

to the same standard.

"They [friends in Korea] gamble a lot – I'd say we have a gambling problem," he laughed. "One time, mafia came to my friend's house and barged in. He [Eric's friend] owed them \$10,000 – he was playing at the wrong table." As Eric detailed the predicaments facing his close friends, facets of Korean culture and society continued to reveal themselves.

"It's illegal for Koreans to gamble in Seoul. We have to go to underground casinos, but usually we just play among ourselves. On the surface, the casino ban prevented Koreans from losing money to the gambling industry. Foreigners were urged to gamble, in turn stimulating the Korean economy. As we conversed, it became apparent that Eric's favorite pastimes did not stretch far beyond the gambling sphere.

"My parents give me money to go clubbing. Clubbing is big in Korea – I've seen my dad's friends at the club before, although we pretend not to know each other; it's very awkward," he mentioned, casting his gaze down towards his coffee. "Drinking [alcohol] is a great way to blow off steam, after working so hard. My dad is an alcoholic."

"I think everyone in Korea is an alcoholic," he chuckled, fidgeting with his coffee cup.

Upon further questioning into the drinking culture of Seoul, Eric divulged the deleterious health implications. "Last time I drank [heavily] with my dad, I ended up coughing up some blood. My appendix broke<sup>6</sup>, and my dad took me to the hospital. I found out last week that my friend Harry is in the hospital. He's our age<sup>7</sup>. My mom told me – she doesn't want me talking to my friends. Apparently we have a bad rep among the moms."

"All the moms talk. Everyone talks. My mom usually tells me if someone fucks up." Although containing over fifty-million people, Seoul, was a small place, in Eric's perspective. Upon con-

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6 Eric's appendicitis was exacerbated by alcohol, causing it to grow in size, eventually rupturing painfully.

7 Harry was 26 upon hospitalization for acute, alcohol-induced liver damage.

templation, Eric explained the similarities and distinctions delineating Korean and US culture.

"Korean culture comes from the US. Music, clothes, food – everything revolves around here [America]. After I finish military and medical school, I want to be a doctor in LA. That would be the life." Eric's perspective of America was one of potential and opportunity, irrespective of the political climate. Paradoxically, Eric did not recognize the influences of Korean culture upon American popular culture.

"Trump? I don't vote, I don't pay taxes, but that guy's an idiot," he laughed. Eric was more concerned with Korean politics, tensions along the North-South border, and the premonition of nuclear warfare. "I was scared as a kid, and I'm still scared today. I remember the drills, thinking I might die," as Eric formed his hands in the shape of an explosion. Upon conversing about the fear of mortality, Eric noted the dangers inherent in America, yet seemingly unknown in Korea.

"People die from driving under the influence in Korea too, but we don't have guns. Drugs<sup>8</sup> are also not as big of a problem, because the penalty is life in prison." Cognizant of the dangers plaguing the "land of opportunity," Eric appeared unfazed. From our conversation, notions of mortality appeared to pervade Eric's life. Discussions of hobbies, professional aspirations, and culture underlie notions of life's impermanence. Similarities in mortality between America and South Korea, among military forces, drunk driving, and alcoholism, qualified the political, economic, and social "cold world" Eric viewed himself as existing within.

Distinctions between the two cultures stemmed from fundamental societal and environmental differences between America and Seoul – as indicated by Eric's commentary on sexism in Korea. Asked to further advance discussion on cultural distinctions, Eric contemplated his thoughts. Superficially, both coun-

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8        Guns are prohibited for possession by South Korean citizens. Similarly, Korean drug laws prohibit the manufacturing and possession of any drugs not pharmaceutically created. The punishment is often life-in-prison for breaking these laws.



tries speak different languages, operating on different currencies; regardless, aspects of recreation and professional opportunity appeared to align.

Eric glanced at his watch after finishing his coffee – it was now six in the evening. His calm demeanour remained as we concluded our conversation. Our discussions of war, life, and death were not apparent on Eric's face. Although considering himself as "Korean," Eric was aware of the amalgamation of global cultures and environments he had already intersected during his life, morphing his ideologies and practices. His seeming cold disposition seemed disjointed from his aspirations to help people through Western medicine.

Eric mischeviously pondered aloud, "so you want to drink?"



"This is the first organ recovery facility of its kind," Jacqueline announced, motioning toward the unassuming facility<sup>1</sup>. Inside Mid-America Transplant, twenty doctors<sup>2</sup> congregated for the annual American Liver Foundation<sup>3</sup> (ALF) Medical Advisory Meeting. Dressed professionally, physicians exchanged pleasantries in the lobby. Two tables hosted company poster boards for Bayer and Medtronic, two sponsors of the event. Sponsor representatives remained by their posters, waiting to interact with the doctors.

Interestingly, no doctors spoke with the representatives. As the reception ended, members entered the conference room, where tables were arranged in a rectangle. Physicians settled in around the perimeter, with Jacqueline situated at the head of the table. The meeting was set to begin.

"Here is our agenda for today's meeting. But before we begin, I would like to introduce our sponsors from Bayer and Medtronic," Jacqueline began. As the two sponsors began speaking, physicians appeared uninterested – some sent text messages under the table, while others doodled on their agendas. A disjunc-

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1 I visited the Mid-America Transplant Center on October 20, 2019 at eight in the evening to observe and volunteer for the American Liver Foundation's annual Medical Advisory Committee meeting. Jacqueline Dominguez currently serves as the Mid-America Executive Director for the ALF.

2 Doctors consisted of hospitalists, transplant surgeons, epidemiologists, and liver-specialized researchers. These physicians worked in different medical facilities across Missouri, including Washington University, St. Louis University, St. Luke's, and Barnes-Jewish Hospital.

3 The American Liver Foundation is a voluntary health organization focused upon prevention, treatment, and research regarding hepatitis, among other liver diseases. The organization also focuses upon education and advocacy among demographics.

tion existed between the ideologies of sponsors and the medical advisory committee. Shortly thereafter, Jacqueline began detailing the agenda<sup>4</sup>, spanning liver-related medical topics. Discussion of the ALF Taste<sup>5</sup> event and Liver Life Walk differed from the meeting's academic addendum, indicating the economic necessities underpinning the organization. As members picked at their catered food, I contemplated the implications of this revelation.

Although most of the meeting consisted of liver-related discussion regarding recent advances and prospective innovation, time was devoted to the event sponsors and ALF fundraising efforts. Albeit non-profit, the ALF still required funding to function. As such, economic principles surmounted altruism, with all facets of the organization requiring economic feasibility. Discussion of peer-led education, for physicians to educate each other upon advances in hepatology, provided a method for the free dissemination of knowledge.

Following the meeting, Jacqueline detailed the economics regarding the ALF. "I was retired, but they [ALF National Board] came to me because they needed someone to lead Mid-America. Every week I fly between here and my office in Chicago," she divulged. The organization, although afloat, was hampered by the economic logistics of expansion. Efforts to grow the ALF required funding to provide offices, meetings, and wages for new employees. Various facets of the organization required capital, which was slowly drying up, Jacqueline warned. "These doctors are the best at what they do - treating patients. As part of the ALF, it's my job to support their efforts by involving the community."

Jacqueline's comments regarding community involvement introduced a perspective not founded upon economics. Education efforts proceeded through community outreach, as ALF members visited schools to discuss alcohol use, fatty liver disease, and liver health. These school trips provided a cost-effective way to educate

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4 The meeting agenda consisted of Hepatology discussion, management of hepatitis C, ALF "events," and peer-led education.

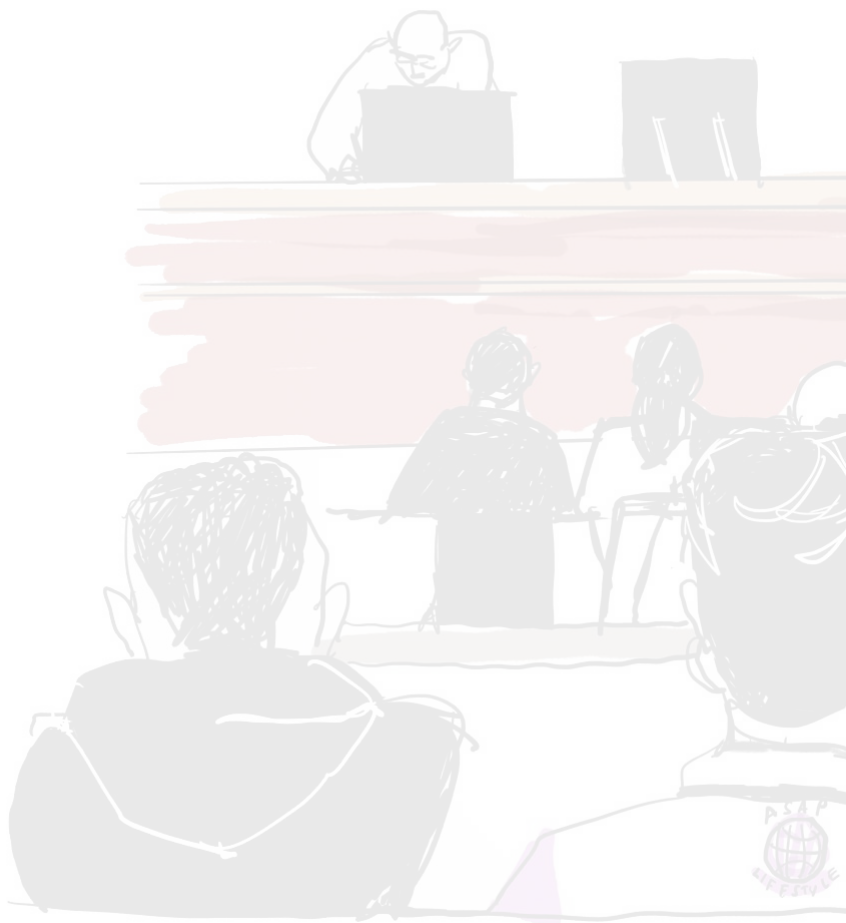
5 Taste is a charity dinner and auction for sponsors, physicians, and members.

numerous people, thereby attempting to reduce liver-related illness via preventative means. Not founded in medicine, via transplants or medications, the ALF's educational outreach initiatives serve as an auxiliary tool in furthering the organization's mission<sup>6</sup>. Viewed in this way, physicians contributed to one component of the ALF, while volunteers, members, and support groups helped in their respective spheres of influence. Sponsorships existed as a necessary evil, not weakening the organization's purpose or initiatives.

After the physicians left, Jacqueline stepped outside to smoke a cigarette. The juxtaposition of the health-related medical talk and Jacqueline's lit cigarette made me increasingly aware of the complicated relationship between medicine and management in the ALF. Physicians and researchers functioned as a core component of the organization, providing implementation of new liver-related treatments and potential cures. American Liver Foundation management operated as a business entity, albeit reliant upon medical professionals to carry forth the organization's mission. Sponsors were necessary for the organization to run, while also supplanted their personal agendas, thereby muddling the mission. Although the organization functioned altruistically as a whole, its components consisted of individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Perhaps Jacqueline should have involved with the American Lung Association.

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6 The ALF's mission is "to promote education, advocacy, support services and research for the prevention, treatment, and cure of liver disease."



"So let me get this correct – although you got in a car accident, mind you in 2010, the car wasn't yours," the judge announced skeptically.

"Yes Ma'am."

"And why did you decide now, in 2019, to show up?"

The man's disheveled hair meandered to his shoulders, in contrast to the judge's tidy bun. His hands stuck to the inside of his pockets, perhaps as an act of independence, potentially borne of indignation.

"I got in anotha' one – anotha' accident. The other day."

Quickly, the judge's incredulous demeanor morphed into an inquisitive expression. Her face, previously rested in her right hand, was now upright. Her pupils pierced like that of a bald eagle.

"And you weren't driving it," the judge advanced.

"Yes Ma'am."

"I hope you are aware, you are here in traffic court for three counts of moving violations. If found guilty, you will have three strikes against your license, and must inform your insurance company".

"I don't have insurance. Can I talk to the prosecutor?" the man recited slowly, almost robotically. This was evidently not the man's first time at traffic court.

My feet shifted nervously in place as I wracked my mind for what to say, come my turn. I was not yet at the front of the line, but I was worried. I had forgotten to drive with my license, clearly a rookie mistake – one the judge might overlook. The judge probably had some kids – maybe they were my age. Hopefully she would sympathi...

"NEXT!", barked the officer who loomed to the right of the judge. The officer's hands were held behind his ruler-straight back, belt exposed prominently showcasing various tools-of-the-trade.

I took a small step forward in the queue, thoughts racing endlessly. Eventually I would reach the double-swinging doors before the judge. *Saloon style doors*. I had to collect my thoughts, or I would inevitably say something I may regret. My eyes darted around the small court room. Traffic court. This wasn't a big deal. I felt overdressed – my fellow traffic-violators were an eclectic bunch. Hair of all colors dotted the heads of people of varying age. Sweatpants, Nike sneakers, and t-shirts differed from my expectations for court attire. My collared shirt and dress shoes were starting to become uncomfortable.

The following defendant reminded me of my grandmother, with her shawl, cardigan, and snow-white hair. Her diminutive figure attested to her age, which was no-doubt considerable.

"Well judge, I'd just like to explain..." the lady spoke softly, all the while riffling through her oversized tote. The lady smiled, pulling out a manila envelope rife with papers, laminations, and the photocopies.

"Here is my police report, and this is my proof-of-insurance. I also brought the title to my vehicle, and have copies of my insurance and license too."

The judge put her glasses on before skimming through the documents.

"I can waive your ticket, but you'll still have to pay a fine – thirty dollars."

"NEXT!"

I took another step in the queue. I was clearly underprepared without a manila folder. Would the judge accept my flimsy license, in lieu of my lack of diligence?

The following defendant resembled my notion of a court-goer. Her hair was trimmed neatly, and her dark suit imbued a professional aura.



"Number 425868" the lady mentioned abruptly, holding up a manila folder for the judge. An attorney it seemed.

Perhaps I should have hired one.

Nevertheless, I had not wanted to waste my money, and now I stood in court, without a manila folder. Although unassuming at first glance, the people of Court Room 3 all appeared to be savvy in their own ways. Yet here I was, out of my element, completely unfamiliar to the court's cryptic machinations.

"NEXT!"

As I again inched towards inevitable doom, I was surprised to see a tiny hand pushing forward the double doors. The hands of a toddler. Looking upwards, I saw another figure, hands gripped tightly around the child's wrist. The child's mother, I surmised.

"What brings you to court today, Ma'am?" the judge questioned. It was not evident if the child's presence was gaining any sympathy with the judge.

"I'd like to request a continuance," the mother stammered. "I want another court date if that's alright."

"Alright, your next court date is scheduled for the seventeenth of December" the judge announced promptly. I could not understand why the mother had requested to come to traffic court again. Looking again at the child, it dawned upon me. Analogous to the greater world, the world of traffic court reflected all walks of life. Variances in socioeconomics and environment among other factors culminated into the exchanges I had witnessed. Perhaps the mother forgot her manila folder.

Stepping forward once more, I found myself directly before the doors. Although overdressed and underprepared, I had observed enough of traffic court to know that I was merely a "defendant number" in the eyes of the judge, who was simply going about the rigamarole.

"NEXT!"



This work was based upon an actual visit to traffic court. All accounts and individuals were fictionalized, although based upon true observations made of defendants in the court. My inspiration for writing this work stemmed from my initial surprise at the variety in demeanor, age, gender, and ethnicity present among the traffic court. I was also amused at the absurdity of the accounts presented by defendants.

I attempted to represent the variety of people within the traffic court, while also presenting an account of my internal thoughts at the time. Rather than to focus upon my personal exchange with the judge, I chose to detail my observations of the various defendants, providing a stylized depiction of the courtroom atmosphere and happenings.

Although not directly stated, the situations I observed in traffic court provide evidence of socioeconomic strife, as alluded to by the account of the mother with her toddler child. Many instances of consternation appeared to be borne of lack of means to pay for fines. This made me realize that although the traffic court was an extension of the American government, it also functioned as a distinct economic entity, dependent on fines as a means of capital. Nevertheless, I am cognizant of the necessity for a traffic court, and give my appreciation to the judge and court-goers for providing inspiration to the accounts I have detailed.



The majority of the pictures among the pages were self-taken at the time of visit.

The image of the South Korean flag shown in *Cold World* is credited under a public use license.

The image depicted in the fictional work *Moving Violations* was inspired by a courtroom sketch by Anna Harvard. The APA citation is included herein.

Harvard, A. (2019). Retrieved from <https://img.srgcdn.com/e/w:1740/V3B4MFg5cXBrWEFYNUtvNWWhZTHkuanBn.jpg>





