

# Bits and Pieces presents Reminis-Zine



All: a ruse that makes you squint

\$4.00 (16 gumballs, like the good ole days)

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Lady Knight Michelle and Coach Ben at the Kalahari, August 2014



Leia having friends over for Appethai, October 2023

## Dear Reader,

We buy Adidas Sambas and Doc Martens and listen to pop punk. We watch the live-action *Avatar* series and wear vintage clothes. We download Pokemon Go, an old game made to seem new, and we play Minecraft, a new game made to seem old. The past is never dead in contemporary American pop culture; it is hardly even past. How could it be when it's being repackaged and sold to us daily? Pop culture in 2024 can feel like being at a mall in 2004—placeless and insipid, with a war machine churning in the background, an election looming, and not even a half-naked Abercrombie greeter to distract us.

Editor MJ offers the same note on nearly all my (Ben's) writing: Get more specific! Specificity cures much of the malaise Shelly and I feel about the past's place in American culture and politics. A commitment to specificity unites the pieces in REMINIS-ZINE. This zine is about the particular imprint the past leaves—has left—on each of us. About how playlists bring Celine back to a particular time and headspace. About how Michelle's grandpa Sandy experienced an epidemic as a child and a pandemic eighty years later. About how girlhood, for Gwen and Sarah, was far more complex than the grown-ups wanted to admit. We're grateful to everyone who contributed a reminiscence.

REMINIS-ZINE is our fifth zine. QUARANT-ZINE, released in November 2020, was our first. In the years since then, much has changed. Shelly moved to Boston and built buildings and a life there. (Hi Jord! Hi Billy!) I moved to Madison and made my way through law school. The interval between zines has grown, too. Our mission, however, has never wavered: Delivering value to our shareholders.

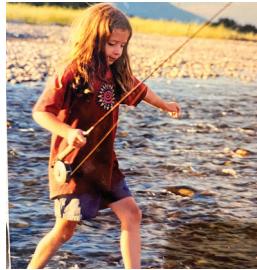
Yours in schvitzing, climate justice, and Appethai green curry,

Shelly and Benji

March 23rd, 2024

## Meet the Contributors

**Sarah Ross, Girlhood (Sarah's Version) (p.3):** I am from Wyoming but live in Madison, Wisconsin where Ben is my law school classmate but also, more importantly, my ping pong rival. I was desperate to write something that didn't need citations and felt like it had a piece of me in it. My favorite childhood meal was my dad's pancakes.



**Gwen Davis, A Monumental Opera (p.5):** Michelle and I became good friends through a very disorganized high school carpool that somehow still manages to have an annual secret santa and definitely never gossips about old classmates. I know Ben from way back when we had the same haircut in 1st grade (see photo). Back then, my favorite meal was Annie's White Cheddar Shells. These days I live in DC and work for a public health nonprofit, but a good bowl of Annie's mac is still my fav late night girl dinner.



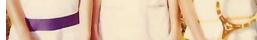
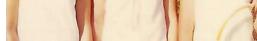
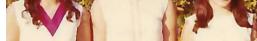
**Nancy, Julie, and Linda Gorens, North River Racquet Club (p.6):** I live in Fox Point, very close to our childhood home. I've known you since I gave birth to you. And I live about a mile north. We met at your bris, though you probably don't remember that. We have known Michelle's family for a long time. My favorite food as a child was crispy fries with ketchup, and I bet Linda's was toast and butter. It was! And homemade pickles. Nana would purchase cucumbers by the bushel. We'd put them in the washing machine on gentle to clean them.



**Michelle Margolies, Finding Balance on the Rocks (p.7):** My favorite food until about third grade was a jar of Gerber sweet potatoes. I am living in Somerville, MA but 414 will always be home. I became close with Ben after he helped coach my high school tennis team. Let's go Lady Knights! I love getting to stay in touch with all y'all through my punny titles and paper folding skills.



**Sophie Cohen, When I was Small and Everything was Big (p.11):** My favorite childhood meal was peanut noo-dles. I now live in the good land, great lake. I don't know Ben and Michelle. They just randomly approached me on the street with a pamphlet titled VACC-ZINE and now I've joined their movement. Go Knights.



**Celine (words) and Lisa (illustration) Lee, How to Listen to Music (p.15):**

I met Ben and Michelle independently through my best friend Bella <3. Ben, getting banh mis in Long Island City. Michelle, stitch-n-bitching on video chat. I live in NYC, baby! My favorite childhood meal was stir fry of baby mushroom, oyster sauce, and (optionally) corn.

**Sandy Mallin, Empty Iron Lungs (p.17):** I am in the front row next to my sister in this 1939 four-generation photo. I live in my home town of Milwaukee where I have known Michelle since her birth (she is my granddaughter) and met Ben through her and also know his parents well. Favorite childhood foods were my mother's cheese cake and blintzes.

**Stephanie Tang, Pandemic Screen Prints (2020) (p.18):**

My favorite food as a child was probably Chinese egg tarts. I had the silly habit of scooping out the custard with a spoon to eat first and saving the crust (my fav) for last :) I live now in Somerville, MA. I know Michelle from Berkeley architecture days, and through overlap of friendships between our Berkeley households. Contributing to this awesome zine because hanging with Mich now in Somerville always involves some reminiscing and makes this place feel more like home <3.

**Ben Levey, Family Business (p.19):**

**B E N J I**

E njoyed buttered noodles + cheese as a kid (Parmesan cheese from the green Kraft shaker bottle specifically!)

N ow lives in Madison, WI

J ubilant when zining with Shelly!

I s pictured with his older brother Jake and without several of his teeth

**Jordana Zackon, Call For Talent (p.22):** As a child, my

favorite food was dunkaroos and lucky for me they have been making a huge comeback. I now live in Somerville, MA, a very short walk from co-zine editor Michelle.

Michelle and Ben are friends of mine from a past life and I contributed to the zine because I believe in supporting independent media outlets.

## Girlhood (Sarah's Version) by Sarah Ross

On a warm night in Chicago last June, I participated in the great girlhood revival of 2023. At Taylor Swift's feet, I unabashedly screamed the words to a song I first heard—and hated—when I was fifteen. “Romeo save me!!! I've been feeling so alone!!! I keep waiting for you but you never come!!!” Belting the words I had found trite in high school, I felt blissfully unburdened from feminism, dignity, and skepticism.

After all, don't we all feel so alone? Don't we all want to be saved? Don't we all wait and yearn? I can more readily say “yes” at thirty than I could at fifteen. The concert was a cathartic surrender to unambiguous emotionality. It was a reunion with prior versions of myself, and, given the number of millennial women at the concert, mine was not the only reunion with past selves.

The sweetness of this reunion remained with me, but the discourse that unfurled afterward made me uneasy. One story called the Eras Tour the “girly dream” that kicked off the summer as “one long, glitter-infused getting-ready sesh, made specifically for the girls.” The following months were marked by the mega-sensation of the Barbie movie and the coining of “girl math,” “girl lunch,” and “girl hobbies.” A TikTok with over 360,000 views gives examples of these hobbies—“grabbing a lil treat,” “hot girl walks (we don't have to play sports),” “social media investigative work,” and “shopping.”

One common interpretation of this girl renaissance is that girls and women have for too long been made to feel ashamed of things they care about. There is power, the argument goes, in reclaiming symbols and experiences of traditional femininity and refusing to feel shame in embracing them. While this is certainly a neat, and not untrue, explanation, I find it unsatisfactory and alienating.

Girlhood was alienating for me the first time too, when I was an actual girl. First, my mom was an immigrant with a pathological fear of raising spoiled American children. While I begged for things like an Easy Bake Oven for Christmas, I would usually receive gift certificates to make microloans to women weaving baskets in Nicaragua. This did not teach me philanthropy, but instead how to manipulate Easy Bake Oven owners into being my friends.

Not only did my parents refuse to provide me with the early-2000s status symbols of girlhood, but deep down, I didn't really ever feel quite like a girl anyway. I didn't feel like a boy either. Instead, what I wanted most was to be an adult. I stole my mom's maxi-pads and made precocious jokes about George Bush. I felt huge, complicated, scary, exhilarating emotions that I didn't have language for or anywhere to put.

<sup>1</sup>“Traditional” here really only applies to one very specific version of womanhood—white, thin, wealthy, able-bodied, straight, cis.

Adults seemed to demand simplicity, innocence, from me, from all children. But I didn't find childhood to be so simple, and I despised the mandate of naiveté. I was maddeningly walled off from power and information—my parents were either about to split up, split up, or getting back together my whole childhood. Did I understand why? No. Would they tell me why? No! Did I tear apart their bookshelves and bedside tables looking for clues? Yes!

While biding my time before becoming an adult when I would finally have information, power, and a period, I read voraciously, ate Otter Pops, constructed elaborate fairy houses, realized I was going to die and so would everyone I love, convinced my brother that our parents had been replaced with aliens, sketched dream wedding dresses, developed an unhealthy obsession with abductee Elizabeth Smart, learned how to do a backflip off the monkey bars, and made my imported cloth dolls from Tanzania have sex.

This is all to say that the 2023 version of girlhood did not resonate. This version of girlhood seemed to have more to do with what adults wish childhood is than what it actually is. In this glittery facsimile, I saw none of the furtive, strange magic of actual childhood. I saw a yearning not for childhood, but for a fantasy. The fantasy that we can divest all the information, power, and control that we desperately want as children and are burdened by as adults. The fantasy that we can live without shame and complicated relationships and ambiguity.

This desire to be freed from adulthood is understandable. But, I wonder if we do ourselves a disservice in trying to brand this fantasy. After all, fantasies aren't meant to last. Nothing makes a dream evaporate more quickly than slapping a label on it, selling it, making it go viral. Like a child smitten with the beauty of a butterfly, pinching its wings between sweaty fingers and ensuring it will never fly again, when we hold on too tightly—when we try to capture ephemera—we lose it.

The truth, and the beauty, about life, is that everything ends—childhood, the Eras concert, everything. Buying merch and making TikToks will not change this basic fact. What made the Chicago concert special was not that we were all wearing pink, but that we were sharing an irreproducible moment. Together, we screamed lyrics about love, desire, heartbreak. We ached with the remembered yearning of our child selves and our teenage selves and our current selves. For a moment, we imagined that our hearts were never broken and we got everything we ever wanted. In an explosion of confetti, we screamed: “He knelt to the ground and pulled out a ring and said, ‘Marry me Juliet you'll never have to be alone, I love you and that's all I really know!'” Then the song ended, the stage darkened, and we were momentarily in silence.



## North River Racquet Club by Julie and Linda Gorens

**LG:** In 1960, our dad and nine other men created the North River Racquet Club, a low-key swim and racquet club. It was a place to develop lifelong friendships and wicked backhands, an alternative to clubs that restricted Jewish members. It was the heyday of tennis, a halcyon moment of youthful freedom with no cell phones, no helicopter parents, and no social media. Blissful ignorance, wonderful innocence.

**JG:** We joined for the tennis, but my memories are mostly about childhood rites of passage:

Wendy didn't do much on the tennis courts, but when Abbe, Wendy, and I snuck into the ladies' locker room, Wendy was the best at standing under the ice-cold shower faucet—she had the record at six minutes, whereas Abbe and I wimped out at four.

We carpooled to the club from Fox Point and Bayside. When Sharon drove, we rode in the backseat of a shiny '67 red convertible, top down, wind messing up our hair as we sailed down Brown Deer Road, past all the farms. When Abbe and I got bored in the afternoon, we snuck down Green Bay Road to discover all the treasures hidden in the aisles at Treasure Island. Sometimes we had spare change to buy candy. One time we had enough for a plastic water gun.

When I was six, I earned the yellow pin for swimming the width of the pool, and I was smug and satisfied...until Dianne, age seven, got the green pin for swimming the length. By the afternoon of the day following my green envy, I had swum the length of the pool and earned my own green pin.

When we had swim meets, I sometimes grew jealous of Linda and Scott when they won their divisions. (Of course, the other swim teams usually had no one to compete in the six-and-under division.) I was on the club's tennis team, too. Almost every week we traveled to different clubs or parks, where we played pro sets and learned how to score and be good sports, the coaches relaxing in the sun, socializing and, every once in a while, watching the matches.

One summer, when the club sponsored a tennis tournament, the coaches made the other girl the top seed. In the finals, my mother, as usual, was too nervous to watch, but my father beamed with pride as he watched me hit the steady groundstrokes he had taught me until I won. The coaches thought I was the most improved player, but I knew better about seeding and playing the game.

The North River Racquet Club was our social hangout, even when we were older. At age fifteen, Mark and I got drunk on sloe gin fizzes at his little brother's Bar Mitzvah party—the seventh graders busy dancing, the parents busy socializing, we, the older siblings, busy refilling glasses, exploring the meaning of Bar Mitzvah and coming of age.

## Finding Balance on the Rocks by Michelle Margolies

**September 2018.** Raine met me in Iceland where we rented Trek bicycles, filled our panniers with dehydrated veggies and a deck of cards, and pedaled out of Reykjavik in the pouring rain, not planning to return for three or four weeks. The elevation was unlike anything I'd experienced on midwestern rolling hills, but I had no problem spending all day every day slowly and steadily conquering the mountains and sleeping in open fields among sheep or lava rock. The winds blew us so far sideways sometimes we had to lean the opposite way so as not to fall into the traffic whizzing by on the Ring Road. None of the challenges tarnished my joy of frolicking in rainbows and seeing more waterfalls than people.

**August 2021.** Ben, MJ, and I packed up our semi-thought-out food supply, drove eight hours north, and hopped on a tiny seaplane that dropped us on Isle Royale for our six days of hiking. No cell service, and no hospitals without a ferry or plane. I felt at peace among the thimbleberries, Lake Superior and its jagged rocky shores, and the dense birch groves. We walked and walked, carrying everything on our backs, and all that ailed me were my tired feet! (And I could have done without the gluten-free vegan Daiya mac.)

**August 2022.** After I got Covid and vertigo spun my world, even then I ventured into the wilderness with close friends and a year's supply of Dramamine. With Tyler and Noah in one canoe, Ben and me in the other, we commenced our padoodle through a narrow lake, following Tyler's map to our island to set up tents. It was truly serene—I remember lying on my back at every opportunity, both to find my balance on the rocks in the midst of the moving waters, and to take in the vastness of my surroundings. I love being a tiny human in the midst of everything. This trip was the first time I felt totally weak, though. Every portage made me feel faint, and Ben had to dole out my Dramamines after long stretches of paddling. I felt like I did not do my fair share of canoeing or cooking. I was the only girl but I'd never had an issue with that before. This was my first glimpse of my post-Covid self. I didn't feel unsafe, but I didn't feel powerful either. I had dizzy spells throughout the year, but mainly tried to carry on with my activities as best I could.

**July 2023.** Dani, Rachel, and I went backpacking in the White Mountains over the Fourth of July. After making it up a good bit of elevation, we had to carefully carry our bags down a steep descent to set up camp. From there we headed all the way back up to a scenic lookout. On our way back up the mountain-carved stairs, I could feel my heart pounding. Once I finally made it to the top, I did not enjoy the view as much as I desperately needed to get down and try to take back control of my body. This was the first time I felt a little scared. This was not about my fitness. I did not know what this meant.

After returning home, tired and a little nervous, I attempted to continue with life as it was, but life was not as it was. I couldn't bike up hills anymore, and a single gym climb made my chest burn. I started saying no to bike rides, and traded biking for running. I began training for a half marathon, knowing in the back of my mind that it was not in the cards, but needing something to latch on to. My recent history buried my years of successes and seemed to indicate that I couldn't do it. I knew my denial was ending soon, and I declined a fall backpacking trip to instead hear ER Dr. Goldstein tell me a virus had caused my heart sac to swell and I would need to rest for three months. Reassured by the validation of my pain, petrified as to what the news meant...

All I had left in the name of adventure was the memories. I reminisced about my multiple off-the-grid experiences. I worried that I would never get to feel so happy and alive again. The three months ended as 2024 began, and here I am, somewhat improved, but not (yet) free of long Covid, and not ready for a bike trip or a half marathon right now. I haven't given up. Sometimes to reminisce can also be to long for. To wish for a future more like the past. I have decided to look back at my outdoor experiences as motivation for my recovery. I will need both fitness and confidence to get back on the bike and off the grid. That will only be possible if I start finding smaller, and then hopefully bigger, successes leading up to that point. I need to kick out the new voice in my head telling me I can't do it and find the unshakeable girl that's back there somewhere. She has to learn how to accommodate a more tired version of herself. To know her limits, but also to remember and harness her old strengths. To kindle a path forward inspired by the past, with a little more attention to exactly how much food and water she packs.



## **Reminis-Zine: Who or what do you miss?**

**SA, Fairfax, CA:** My grandma and grandpa. Elementary school summers. All my friends living within a ten-mile radius instead of none of them living within a ten-mile radius.

**JZ, Somerville, MA:** I miss the simplicity of learning to learn, moving to move, and being so fixated on the "here and now" that there was no space in my little brain for rumination about the past or catastrophization of the future. Also super smash bros on the game cube.

**TL, Brooklyn, NY:** Sitting in a small classroom at college having debates and philosophical discussions with my friends and professors.

**CMS, Tucson, AZ:** i miss home—i've been gone for so long, it's starting to feel like a dream. i always hated having an office job, and when i worked at LA opera i would take two hour lunch breaks and walk around downtown LA feeling sorry for myself. i'm weirdly nostalgic for that—for that specific feeling of having my ennui swallowed by the city, of being just one small body in a huge sea of lives.

**LN, NY, NY:** Scheduled recess and midday naps.

**LGL, Milwaukee, WI:** Roe v. Wade.

**AS, San Francisco, CA:** The days when I would come back from school, play backyard football or basketball for three hours, eat dinner with my family, practice an instrument, and go to bed. The best routine I've ever had.

**JL, Brooklyn, NY:** Hanging on the couch with my high school friends at the LGL after-school program.

**HM, D.C.:** I miss driving home from soccer practice on Lake Drive in the spring. Especially on Thursdays, just before the weekend. You could taste summer. The sun began setting later. We used aux cords then. I miss living in the same place as my older sister and my parents. I miss our "assigned" seats at the dinner table.

**BZ, D.C.:** Scattered family VHS tapes of old sporting events and movies re-run on cable, Melvin Mora, debating facts instead of looking them up on our pocket computers.

**MK, Boston, MA:** Being blissfully unaware of how expensive it is to be a human being. I also miss the Bar and Bat Mitzvah party circuit.

**CL, NY, NY:** My old apartment's crappy living room that we jammed too many couches and too many roommates into.

**MS, Oakland, CA:** It's more of a smell. I've been moving between cities lately, missing a bit of each as I go. When I'm not in Oakland I miss the way the air smells like jasmine for those few sweet months that it blooms. On my street, it mingles with the bakery two doors down. Sour-dough and ash, sweet and smoky. When not in my hometown I miss how summer smells—peat and moss, faintest trace of gasoline. I miss New York too but I couldn't tell you how it smells. Kind of everything at once. Coffee grounds and fish bones and sometimes perfume. Maybe we'll reminisce about that in ten years: how the city laid so much of itself on us that it was hard to parse. How our nostrils flared. How we breathed it in anyway.

**NZ, Cornelius, NC:** Talking to my parents about everyday things and challenges. Shabbat dinners with family and friends. Meeting longtime friends at the usual spot.

**RSB, Madison, WI:** Spontaneously spending time with friends—Riding my bike half a mile to my friend's house and knocking on her door to see if she wanted to hang out, to which she always said yes. We'd spend hours just sitting around and it never felt like wasted time. Now I have to schedule time to see my friends, sometimes weeks in advance. Instead of experiencing life together in the way that we used to, we spend most of our time catching up on what we missed in each other's busy lives.

**JMS, Brooklyn, NY:** I miss many people: my parents, sister, grandparents, friends, who live all over. I miss very few things: my Qazaqstan hat I lost this summer, my iPod touch I left in a movie theater in 2010, plates of laghman.

**MJE, Seattle, WA:** Dip n Dots.

**LA, Phoenix, AZ:** Playing beach volleyball at Lincoln Memorial in DC

**AW, D.C.:** Brain plasticity.

**RK, Albany, CA:** living with/close to my friends in college (@Mich, @ZHaus, @Loth, @ClarkKerr)! I'm lucky to live near a few people I love, but nothing compares to living within a ten-minute bike ride of all my pals. Text me if you want to start a commune together lol.

# Reminiscing about when I was small and everything was BIG!...

and climbing a tree was like



I actually fit in a bathtub (though I hid the photo evidence)



I played with my food and now I cook it



ascending into a rainforest canopy!



a twin bed was the "big girl" bed and now  
I'll only settle for royalty-sized



playing a tiny violin was not  
sarcastic sympathy but rather  
how I made music

a dogs greeting was a tail

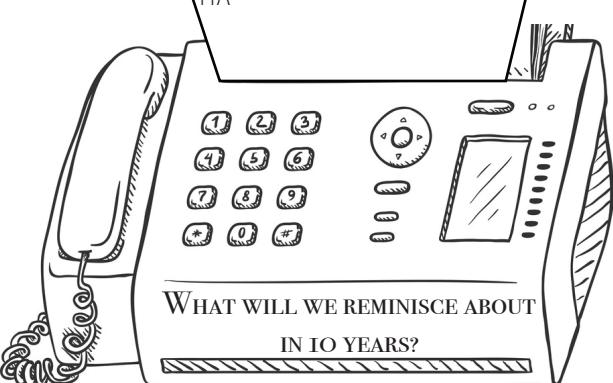


to the face



and the world felt big and full  
of possibility. (It still is!) Stc

Stc



Receiving a zine in the mail every few months (unless you guys keep this up!!) - SA, Fairfax, CA

About the freedom and opportunity of being in my early twenties, surrounded by peers and with tons of doors still open. And uncrustables. Can't get enough of 'em! - JZ, Somerville, MA

We will reminisce over you, my god. - THR, NYC, NY

Living life in late twenties with no kids! - TL, Brooklyn, NY

Giannis' greatness. - MG, Milwaukee, WI

About being single and confused in my twenties in this big big city. I also can only assume I'm going to reminisce about my parent's health. But I hope not. - CL, NY, NY

Enjoying nature during covid before it became too hot to go outside - BZ, D.C.

Is this a job interview? - RKL, Planet Earth

The FREEDOM and Instability of YOUTH. - JMS, Brooklyn, NY

The Eras Tour take-over. - MK, Boston, MA

Winter and snowy holidays... - LO, Highland Park, NJ

The memes! Literally the best part. Will not miss photos of everybody's sourdough starter - FMD, South Bend, IN

Maybe the big skies and towering saguaros and even the ungodly summers and the forced languidness that they bring will feel like a precious memory instead of a current nuisance. or maybe i'll say, thank god that's over! there's no way of knowing. - cms, tucson, az : ) : ) : )

About the log cabin, Emily playing left-handed, the van rides, our sweat angels, and being like animals. - SR, Tel Aviv, Israel

Being hot and childless - AW, D.C.

About how quaint and stupid AI was in 2023 : / - RK, Albany, CA

About the incredible access to community I have had so far in my twenties. I have so many friends so near me that I can call upon for a dinner party, a night out for drinks, a run & a dip in the hot tub... I hope to have something similar when I'm older, but I'm not so naive to believe it will always be so easy. - JS, Berkeley, CA

Passports. They're little diaries of our travels, with colors and designs meant to evoke a destination, a nationality, an identity. Although passports can cause heartache, fear, and struggle, these little booklets feel increasingly quaint and almost beautiful as Minority Report style biometric screening becomes the norm in airports. In less than ten years, they will be relics we show our children to tell the stories of where we've been individually and as a society. - RXF, Madison, WI

## How to Listen to Music by Celine Lee, Illustration by Lisa Lee

We are not taught how to listen to music. Corporate Wrapped will count up your minutes and favorite artists and classify your listening patterns within their gargantuan database of user statistics. But this essay is not about summaries. This is about nostalgia.

My music streaming history resembles a train disappearing into the horizon, each passing car a discarded playlist. Each one is ~30 songs long and named with some cryptic phrase that felt relevant to me when I made it. Like “ruf,” for the first year of grad school when I was spending a lot of time on my roof and also having a pretty rough time figuring out how to do research. Or “I’m trying to get to work. I have a work meeting to attend,” after the direct quote on the speeding ticket I received when driving from NYC to Ithaca. Once I make a playlist, I keep adding to and listening to it, those months saturated in a couple dozen songs playing on repeat. Eventually, a new cryptic phrase arises out of my life storyline to replace the old. The old playlist, obscure title and temporary life soundtrack and all, gets deleted, and the cycle repeats. A new car is added to the train.



My friends have slight variants of this practice:

JA has one huge playlist that they never remove from and always add to the end of. Scrolling top to bottom, you’ll see that swaths of consecutive songs tend to resemble one another in mood or are even from the same artist or album.

CR has dozens of playlists titled variations of “chill fam”, and I can’t tell the difference between them but he seems to know exactly which one to play every time he gets into the car.

CD makes a new playlist three times a year and believes that the visual harmony of the auto-generated playlist cover is an omen for how the following four months will go.

My insistence on zero-sum-data-use playlist creation and deletion comes from the way that I learned to listen to music as the music distribution industry, along with the rest of the world, rapidly developed technologically.

My sister Lisa showed me how to burn CDs. We used to sometimes get the “Now That’s What I Call Music!” CDs, but I don’t even remember actually listening to them; we’d just look at the groovy print and see how many titles we recognized. But having a family computer and a stack of blank CDs meant we could make our own periodic “Top 40”s—bootlegged and personally curated. Lisa would burn CDs for our holiday season family road trips. Those CDs laid the soundtrack for the long drives. Then, Dad would make an end-of-year slideshow, and the songs burned onto those CDs would then be burned onto a DVD overlaying the photos. Those songs were subsequently burned into my mind forever and ever as the melodies of my late-elementary-to-middle-school family life.

CDs soon yielded to iPods, and I spent hours every week coming up with a list of songs that I wanted, going to YouTube, finding a song, going to [youtubetomp3.com](http://youtubetomp3.com), pasting the link, and downloading Fergie\_Big\_Girls\_Don\_t\_Cry\_FULL\_AUDIO\_HIGH\_QUALITY\_.mp3 to my iTunes. I’d slot these songs into my standing playlist titled “now in.” And when my devices would complain about the lack of space remaining, I would drag those songs that were no longer “now in” to the trash icon.

Then, more rapidly than I can track, downloaded music yielded to a plethora of online streaming services. They evolved drastically over the past decade, each iteration making new music easier and easier to access. Each also came with better algorithms to simulate a little personal radio DJ, just to my tastes. Every morning, the little bots serve up a platter of new titles and artists, and I pluck out a few to carry with me in my playlist of the moment.

I think if I were to sit there and watch my playlist train pass by, I would witness the emotional roller coaster of phases I experienced and escaped through music. I think I’d be able to tell exactly when I was partying a lot, when I was primarily studying, when I met somebody new who was showing me new genres of music...

Writing this leaves me curious about how you listen to music. Do you walk a long and winding road, like JA? Do you dip in shimmering, serene pools, like CR? Do you read tarot cards, like CD? Or do you do your own thing, memory and music emerging from beats, rhymes, and life?

## Empty Iron Lungs By Dr. Sandy Mallin

I will reminisce about polio epidemics and quarantines in Milwaukee and the later miraculous vaccines that virtually banished the disease. I do not really miss or dwell on this but it came to mind in choosing a topic for the Zine.

In the 1940s (my ages seven to fourteen), polio was a dreaded disease, particularly affecting children in the summer and often causing paralysis and even death. Iron lungs were used to breathe for patients whose respiratory muscles were paralyzed.

My strongest reminiscences of the epidemics are the cessation of family gatherings, closure of public swimming pools, and the prohibition of large crowds.

Fortunately my family was spared from the disease, but my sister and I were much restricted by the late summer quarantines of children, which confined us to our home and yard. The start of school in fall was often delayed. I was, however, allowed (or required) to cut the grass at our house.

One memory from the end of one summer's quarantine remains as vivid as ever. On a Saturday after three weeks of confinement without any exercise, the neighborhood boys gathered for ten hours of play; baseball, football, and bike riding. I felt fine after this, but on awakening Sunday morning my muscles were so sore that I had to crawl down the stairs at home.

There was a brief fear that polio had struck.

Things changed fairly quickly. Scientists reached a breakthrough with the isolation and cultivation of the polio virus, an accomplishment rewarded with a Nobel Prize. By 1955 the Salk Vaccine was widely available in the United States. In 1956, my third year of medical school, there were long lines of empty iron lungs in the hospital hallways, rarely needed anymore.

I cannot finish without commenting on the similarity of the polio epidemics and the past four years of Covid-19.



## Family Business by Ben Levey

When my mother was little, she and her sisters would visit my great-grandmother, Esther, in her apartment near the end of Santa Monica Boulevard in Whitefish Bay. Esther would serve them chicken soup with kasha. Once the steam dissipated, the girls could see the tan groats of kasha in the broth, nestled among matzo balls and pieces of vegetables and chicken. And they could see small black flecks floating in the soup, too—ants. My great-grandmother lost much of her vision as she grew older. Fearful of embarrassing her, my mom, her sisters, and my grandmother never said anything about the ants in the kasha container.<sup>1</sup>

The first time I can remember having kasha was in grade school. My teacher tasked my classmates and me with bringing in dishes to represent our heritage for “Heritage Day.” My grandmother Seema and I made kasha varnishkes, Ashkenazi comfort food—toasted kasha tossed with bowtie egg noodles. I took my grandmother at her word when she said this was what we ate. The class—well, an artist taking direction from the class—made a beautiful ceramic bowl to commemorate the event. Small, hand-painted figures representing one of each of our ancestors lined the outside of the blue bowl.<sup>2</sup> (Heaven forbid you had a racial or ethnic identity that was remotely, well, complicated.) I took the artist at their word when they depicted my ancestor as a Russian peasant who seemed to have wandered off the pages of a Dostoevsky novel, black earflap hat and all.

\*\*\*

History is the study of the past. Historiography is the study of the study of the past. History is written by the victors, historiography by people with fancy degrees and big ideas. In my family, however—maybe in most families—both are narrated by the women, by the mothers, aunts, grandmothers, cousins who are related either by blood or marriage or the simple fact of my mother saying so, at kaffeeklatsches, at the end of *yontif* dinners, at pickle-making parties at which 300 cucumbers start in the washing machine and end up in brine-filled jars, over wine, over coffee, over the din of dishes being washed and children running around, over and over, from generation to generation, *l'dor vador*. My relatives covered everything—or so I thought. For some reason, they left out the burlesque.

\*\*\*

My great-grandmother Esther was born in Plymouth, Wisconsin, as was her older brother Charlie.<sup>3</sup> Their parents, however, immigrated from Odessa, in what is now Ukraine. Their parents died young, leaving the siblings to raise themselves. Charlie first worked selling newspapers before

<sup>1</sup> Did they simply leave her to eat the ants on her own time?

<sup>2</sup> The bowl is still at the childhood home of my best friend from grade school, the greatest soccer player Stormonth Elementary ever saw.

taking a job operating a projector at a movie theater. By 24, he was running Milwaukee’s Gayety Theatre burlesque house and had bought off the city’s district attorney. By 40, Charlie was operating burlesque houses across the Midwest and fighting a charge of conspiracy to embezzle.<sup>4</sup> Charlie, per the record, met his alleged conspirator, a man named Schipper, in Detroit, at the Cadillac Theater.

The Cadillac Theater was one of many theaters owned and operated by a Jewish nightlife impresario from Germany named Sam Levey—my father’s great-uncle. My mom and dad met on a blind date not long after he moved to Milwaukee from Michigan in the mid-1980s. Chinese food and custard at Leon’s. But their families had crossed paths generations earlier, as two Jewish immigrants, their great-uncles, pursued the American Dream, ducking both the law and garments being thrown off the stage.

\*\*\*

As I write this, Purim approaches. Purim, at first blush, is a Jewish holiday like many others, a variation on they-tried-to-kill-us-they-didn’t-let’s-eat. The holiday commemorates the survival of the Jews of Persia millennia ago, and Jews across the world retell the story every year: the Persian king hosts a beauty contest to find a new queen; Esther, a Jew, wins; the king appoints an antisemite named Haman (Boo!) as his viceroy; Haman (Boo!) wants to get rid of all the Jews (naturally); Esther and her uncle Mordecai together get the ear of the king and save the day. Most Jews celebrate by donning costumes for Purim Carnivals and getting shickered.

Something they don’t tell you in Sunday School: what sets the story of Purim in motion is the Persian king’s dismissal of his former queen, Vashti, for refusing to strip for the amusement of his court—thus the need for the beauty contest. Something else I wasn’t told growing up: my aunts and cousins used to wear leftover outfits from the dancers who worked for Charlie Fox to synagogue for the Purim Carnivals. And something I couldn’t possibly tell you now: what’s missing from the account you’ve just read—what I’ve neglected to lay bare for you, what remains shrouded by my poor memory and selective storytelling and ignorance of the past.

<sup>3</sup> A town of just under 10,000 people in Sheboygan County, Wisconsin. Plymouth is known today as the Swiss Cheese Capital of America, but I think it had yet to earn that appellation by the time of Esther’s birth.

<sup>4</sup> *Fox v. United States*, 45 F.2d 364 (7th Cir. 1930). The Seventh Circuit reversed Charlie’s original conviction (because of hearsay regarding the alleged conspirator) and remanded the case back to the Eastern District of Wisconsin. Charlie then took a plea. The feds sent him to Leavenworth, where he served about half of a year-and-a-day sentence before being paroled. He and his (alleged) conspirators (allegedly) embezzled \$216,000, close to four million in today’s dollars.

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EXTRA

## KYRA

AND HER—

## 16 - DANCING GIRLS - 16

SOMETHING NEW

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Call for submissions for



## CUI-ZINE

Hey you! Like writing? Or drawing? Or being in an overly active group chat with Michelle and me? We're looking for submissions for CUI-ZINE! CUI-ZINE could use an essay about what Anthony Bourdain would make of FoodTok, a recipe for fetti-zine-y alfredo, a paean to your grandmother's matzo balls/sopa de fideo/tiramisu, pictures of your sourdough starter, a cartoon of some dinos eating human nuggies (too dark?), a—you get the idea. Reach out to Shelly or me if you're interested!

## Letters to the Editors

"I walked 2,650 miles before you managed to make one more of these things."

MJ Wong Engel, Seattle, WA

"I find your choice of a print format rather short-sighted and pedantic given its incompatibility with my chosen art form of ballet. I cannot give your readers the gifts of my pirouettes and pliés in your soporific publications. Ho hum."

L. Margolies (age 2.5), Bayside, WI

"Please stop threatening to move back into the basement."

M. Levey, Milwaukee, WI

"Last time I wrote for a zine I got a sticker. Just wondering about any perks/merch." S. Ross, Madison, WI

## Postscripts

P.S. It happens when it happens and it always happens right on time

P.P.S. C u @ WI v. TX party summer 2024

P.P.P.S. MJ listened to *Eat Pray Love* 50x to reach her Goodreads goal

P.P.P.P.S. Pickleballers are fermented tennis players

P.P.P.P.P.S. Made you look

Shouts out to: Fenji + I-House Vegan Meatballs, Aussie Bella, Soil Bella, the Old World Milwaukee Exhibit @ old MPM, J Bo's house parties, the IJC girlies, Lindsay Levey, Jacky Styler, Moss Ross, one carditis, a pair o' carditis, Tour La'agam 2013, E.J. Margolies, BBP FM, Twilight Watch Parties, Sap Szn, Girls' Trips, that time Benji went to the movies w/ Poopsie, Vicki Coulter's emails, and Readers Like You.



# What Harry Potter House Do You Belong In?

## START HERE

Are you Jewish?

YES!

NO!

Do you ever lose socks in the laundry? Do you ever wonder if they've been pilfered by a clandestine network of activists working for the liberation of elves across the Wizarding World?

NO!

Were you exposed to whitefish salad before the age of twelve? Did you attend JCC preschool?

NO!

Do you support trans rights? Do you believe people should be able to determine their own gender identity?

YES!

NO:  
You are a legendary wizard and can be in whatever house you want. JK Rowling thanks you for your support of the TERF cause. Proceed to the next question.

Are you hot and mysterious? Did you shop at Hot Topic?

YES!

NO!

You are a Gringotts Goblin. Congratulations!



You are a Muggle, and you need to take better care of your possessions.

You are in Durmstrang. Hope you don't mind the cold!



You are in Hufflepuff. Congratulations!



Pop, Grandpa, Great-Grandpa Sandy at the Purim Carnival, March 2024



Taylor, Ben, and Sarah on their last first day of school, September 2023



Rachel, Michelle, and Dani, White Mountains, July 2023



Jack, Ben, Sydney, and Rafi, Queens Night Market, Summer 2023



Emily, Sara, Michelle at Sara and Michael's wedding event in Tel Aviv, June 2023



Emily (M), Sara (R), Michelle (L) after tennis losses in Kalamazoo, July 2008



Jake and Lindsay at their wedding, July 2023