



JOURNAL 2020 fosters an interdisciplinary community of students with a mutual interest in creative nonfiction—encompassing and connecting seemingly disparate disciplines, fields, and genres.

CREATIVE NONFICTION
VOLUME ONE • ISSUE ONE



JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY
PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

VOLUME ONE • ISSUE ONE



CREATIVE NONFICTION
VOLUME ONE • ISSUE ONE

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

SPRING 2013
VOLUME ONE • ISSUE ONE

EDITORS

Mariah Hermsmeyer

Hannah Beckler

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Abigail Nelson

EDITORIAL STAFF

Alli Matney

Kelly Givens

80 82

FACULTY ADVISOR

Jay Ellis

Program for Writing and Rhetoric

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY would not have been possible without the support of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric, John-Michael Rivera, Director; and generous funding from Susan and Dick Kirk.

Special thanks to Dave Underwood for invaluable guidance in layout and design.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY will publish in print each Fall and Spring. Expansion online is planned for later issues, but we are a print journal. We only publish creative nonfiction (with accompanying art), only by students who were undergraduates at time of composition. We especially welcome work that includes research (including journalism), and work with attention to issues of community and sustainability; we publish all sub-genres within creative nonfiction. We acquire First North American Serial Rights; rights revert to authors and artists on publication. Send queries and submissions to the Program for Writing and Rhetoric, UCB 317, University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0359; or journal2020@colorado.edu. We are a green journal and prefer electronic submissions and correspondence. Printed on recycled stock and fully recyclable (including the cover). Single copy costs are \$12.00 per issue U.S. and Canada, \$14.00 outside North America.

Cover Art: **MARIAH HERMSMEYER**

ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

While taking the course that inspired this journal, I was struck by the power of creative nonfiction—of being able to take something true from life and turning it into a new experience for others. It was therapeutic, finding the words for moments I thought I could never explain. As I read my classmates' stories—stories of heartaches, of triumphs, of oddities and fears—two-dimensional strangers became wells of hidden depths. I learned we write because we have something to say, but we don't always know how to say it out loud. Whether we want to explain ourselves and tell the stories that have shaped who we are or we want to reveal a world overlooked, writing creative nonfiction brings past experiences back to life one more time.

At the end of the class, our instructor Jay Ellis mentioned creating a journal of our work, nothing fancy, and asked for volunteers. I was an editor for my high school yearbook, so I raised my hand. I had no idea what I was getting into. It became clear as Jay and I started working on this it couldn't be a one-time project. The amazing quality of work from sixteen students in one semester proved that there is talent at the University of Colorado Boulder and a desire to further this genre of writing, and so months later of never-ending proofreading and arguing over page margins and typefaces, JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY was born.

Our first issue highlights the work of my classmates and the many subgenres of creative nonfiction we explored. Cassie Beck's memory of volunteering in Nicaragua questions how materialism infects every culture it reaches. Kathleen Childs reports on how the NAMES Quilt Project memorializes AIDS victims, while Hannah Beckler's new journalism finds the mixed effects of Islamic law on the rights of women in Morocco. Her portrait of a matador's heroism beyond a horrible accident combines travel and sports writing while opening a window on a cultural heritage as deep as it is controversial. More exotic rituals are observed by Allison Matney at a baby shower. Joel Perez and Valerie Erwin recall the different dangers of boxing and dance, and Kelly Givens commemorates a lost friend. Sadly, we have more than one story of women assaulted, including Bryn Newman's brave testimony, and Kathleen Childs using her experience of fencing as a metaphor for the dangerous games we play around gender. Aj Gustern memorializes the mother he lost at age ten and I watch my family say goodbye to a loved one. Dominic Haury's sober account of a father with mental illness contrasts Abigail Nelson's darkly humorous portrait of a drunken uncle. Our humor grows lighter as gender stereotypes hit the road with Matt Anderson, only to get poked at by Sam Klomhaus. Jessica Epstein pokes the insides of a piglet. Humor, travel, confession, memoir, portraiture, and new journalism—within these pages are incredible true stories of and by students at CU. 82

MARIAH HERMSMEYER, EDITOR

Editing this first issue of **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** has been both a joy and a privilege. It is always a pleasure to read writers with enough strength of voice, skill, and courage to translate their experiences into words; it was an even greater pleasure to get to work with an entire class of such writers. The essays in this journal are brave, often personal, sometimes funny, and always true. I want to thank each author for their strong contributions to this journal.

Yet, even with the high quality of these essays, **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** would never have reached completion as you see it without the wonderful contributions of CU Boulder undergraduate artists. **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** is a creative nonfiction journal, a difficult enough genre to define when applied to writing, let alone art. In selecting the art to publish, I struggled with the question of what makes artwork creative nonfiction. If art is a reflection of the artist's own experience, is it similar to personal essay? Is a photograph new journalism? Can abstraction be related to memoir?

Our inclusion of each piece of artwork in this issue is a result of struggling with these questions. What has been chosen is not only meant to reflect the tone of the essay it accompanies (or in some cases contrast it), but must also be imbued with a certain quality of nonfiction—subjective, objective, or otherwise. The nonfictional aspects of artwork might be in a photograph that reflects reality, in the emotive color used in abstraction, or a personal truth communicated in a drawing. I think that it is this undercurrent of nonfiction that allows the art to hold a dialogue with each essay, one that teases out greater meaning and nuance from the text itself. I am very excited to have helped share these great works from writers and artists alike. Enjoy. ☀

HANNAH BECKLER, EDITOR



JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY began in the classroom, but what began there had to find you here. Teaching my fall 2012 section of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric's course, Introduction to Creative Nonfiction (WRTG 2020), I had the undeserved fortune of a classroom full of talent beyond what I had seen in over twenty years of teaching. Individual brilliance shows up now and then in any class, but how could so many students bring this much talent to one classroom? As this journal is devoted only to Nonfiction, I can't begin to take credit for the sentences you will read here. These students took to my method of student-centered classrooms relying on small groups with impressive energy; that means I never exactly edited their work. The writing of these students is not the rewriting of this teacher. Instead, improvements in their inclusion of detail, structural management, incorporation of evidence, avoidance of sentimentality—and especially their daring in subject matter and wide-ranging curiosity in subjects—came from their honest hard work. They worked collaboratively then, and a core of them continued working together beyond semester's end to produce the issue you hold in your hands.

THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC had already become the home of creative nonfiction at the University of Colorado Boulder. Meanwhile, CU clearly had enough strong talent and deep interest in this genre that we needed much more than a single course on it. The 2020 course could only generate the idea of publishing that coursework; any teacher realizes the problem of asking for volunteer work beyond semester's end. After the grades were in, with no course credit hours to earn or any other remuneration—and I was already bound to write the best recommendation letters I can manage—fifteen of 2020's sixteen students took up the equally hard work of building a journal that will live beyond their time at CU. They created what is now the publishing home of creative nonfiction for this campus. Future issues may include work from undergraduates nationally, but as unlikely as it may seem to have a single issue with as much good writing as this come out of a single class, readers can judge for themselves the results; my bet is that Issue 1 will hold up as a strong start for a journal with an impressive future.

Without the support of **PWR DIRECTOR JOHN-MICHAEL RIVERA**, and **SUSAN AND DICK KIRK**, our first print run would have amounted to a vanity endeavor. And instead of merely dumping this strong writing online or into unimaginative slices of dead trees, we had the further good fortune of CU's Digital Media Consultant **DAVE UNDERWOOD**'s expertise in layout and design. Students played a part in every step of the editing process—including the layout you see here. But Dave's energetic teaching of multi-modal graphic design, and his keen eye for design that starts conversations, helped immeasurably.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY will remain uniquely committed to our founding characteristics, even as we broaden our base of contributors. At press time, no other journal in the country fits all four of these criteria:

- We only publish creative nonfiction.
- We are a print journal.
- Undergraduates create all content.
- Undergraduates edit all content and manage layout, design, and production.

Creative nonfiction remains a key part of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric's mission. As we grow, so does the integration of CNF throughout our curriculum. This is also true of multi-modality, but the sensory experience and aesthetics of print best serve our content—and reward the hard work of students. We will expand online, including video interviews with writers, multi-modal pieces, etc., but we promise to continue print issues twice a year. Finally, what you read here was created by undergraduate students in one class, but we already reached across the campus for our artwork, and students edited this issue.

Our next issue will draw from undergraduates across campus at the University of Colorado Boulder. But watch these students grow this journal. After another semester in WRTG 2020, we will have our own course—and probably with a different number. But this journal will retain its title in all its iterations: hindsight, reflection, 2020 but also TWENTY TWENTY (because we like the look of it). Read on. ☀

JAY ELLIS, FACULTY ADVISOR

CONTENTS

WRITING

ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY	3
MOROCCAN BLUE, HANNAH BECKLER	9
MY VERY OWN PIG, JESSICA EPSTEIN	17
THE JACKET, AJ GUSTERN	21
FACIAL HAIR CLUB FOR MEN, SAM KLOMHAUS	27
STEEL, KATHLEEN CHILDS	35
CURTAINS, MARIAH HERMSMEYER	43
DRUNK WITH SUCCESS, ABIGAIL NELSON	49
REQUIEM FOR A BABY SHOWER, ALLISON MATNEY	57
ALGO ES ALGO, MENOS ES NADA, CASSIE BECK	63
THE DANCER IN THE DANCE, VALERIE ERWIN	71
EIGHT HOURS, BRYN NEWMAN	81
I LIVE TO FIGHT, JOEL PEREZ	91
CLOUDS, KELLY GIVENS	97
MEMORY WORK, KATHLEEN CHILDS	103
THE ROAD GOES ON FOREVER, MATT ANDERSON	111
DEVOTION OF A ONE-EYED MATADOR, HANNAH BECKLER	119
WHAT HE LEFT BEHIND, MARIAH HERMSMEYER	129
STILL ON THE FENCE, DOMINIC HAURY	135
KNIGHTS IN SHINING KNEE BRACES, SAM KLOMHAUS	141
CONTRIBUTORS	149

ARTWORK

HANNAH BECKLER	8, 96, 118
DYLAN BEGNEAUD	25, 55, 110
MEIGAN CANFIELD	34, 56, 61
KATHLEEN CHILDS	102-109
HEATHER CLARK	76
JONI HAYWARD	70, 79, 114
MARIAH HERMSMEYER	41, 42, 47, 62, 128, 133, 140
RYAN MATTHEW LONG	33, 134
GEORGE PEREZ	80, 95
JOEL PEREZ	90
CASSIDY ROBISON	16, 26
BESSIE STANISZ	48, 99, 148
HALEY WHITE-BALLOWE	20



MOROCCAN BLUE

By Hannah Beckler

My memories of Morocco smell of turmeric and cinnamon, saffron and paprika—the heady spices sold in high stacked pyramids of copper and rust red. They are steeped in the rich ochre of sweet apricot tajine. Bathed in argon oil and fragrant attar. My memories of Morocco are awash in blue.

All the streets and walls of Chefchaouen, a city in northern Morocco, are painted blue. A deep bold blue that sinks into the dimpled surface of ancient stone. There are no cars in the inner medina of the city. Instead, the streets—some barely wide enough to walk two abreast—wind in the absurd twists of medieval engineering. Tangles of white flowers spill across the buildings and branches laden with oranges or figs sweep low from behind cloistered walls of private garden courtyards. To the west, the sun sets behind the mountains and wreaths of quiet pink and gold bloom across the horizon. The air thickens with evening scents—ginger and rose oil. In the fading light, the blue streets deepen to twilight.

In the central square next to the mosque is a quiet tea house where I sit drinking mint tea with my guide and friend, Sabri. Sabri and I are a part of a cultural exchange program in which American students studying Spanish in Sevilla, Spain were matched with Moroccan Spanish language students who acted as our guides during our stay in Morocco. Sabri lives in Tetuán, but we have taken a day trip to Chefchaouen along with the other American students in my group. We chat together in our broken Spanish—my second language, his third. Our language barrier hangs between us in a semi-translucent veil. I want to ask him about the Arab Spring, but I don't know the words. Instead, I tell him about the flowers in my mother's garden. I wrap my fingers around the warm tea, served in tall glasses still aflush with mint sprigs. It tastes sweet and strong. Sabri begins to tell me the history of the blue painted city.

Nearly every street, wall, and doorway of Chefchaouen has been painted blue once a year for the last 500 years—an ancient Jewish tradition continued by the predominantly Muslim population. Originally, the color symbolized the sky and heaven. It imbues the city with exotic beauty and a certain nostalgia. Today, this ancient practice is contrasted against the silhouettes of satellite dishes and antennas that are mounted chaotically on the rooftops. A bizarre juxtaposition of the twenty-first and fifteenth centuries. This is modern Morocco. A country embroiled in an often contentious debate between the desire to adhere to a deeply rooted traditional identity and the increasingly incessant call of modernity. As Morocco moves towards a more modern, globalized structure, opponents say that it runs the risk of succumbing to cultural homogenization and unwanted governmental secularization. However, neither can Morocco remain entrenched in the past to such an extent that beneficial progress is sacrificed. It is a precarious balance.



In 2004, the Islamic parliament of Morocco enacted a sweeping reform of the Moudawana, the country's family code. This governmental code oversees issues related to the family including the regulation of marriage, polygamy, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Propelled by both the king and Muslim feminist

*Never before have
Moroccan women
enjoyed such a
powerful
affirmation
of their
natural rights.*

groups, the reforms gave women the right of divorce, raised the legal age of marriage to eighteen, granted more custody rights to mothers, and guaranteed protection from the traditional practice of repudiation, whereby husbands could dissolve marriages nearly at will.¹ These rights are unprecedented in the Muslim world and have been lauded by international human rights organizations for the measures taken to address women's rights and gender equality within an Islamic legal framework.

First proposed in the late 1990's, the Moudawana was finally passed unanimously by the Moroccan parliament in February of 2004. This victory was in part due to careful compromises sacrificed on both sides of the liberal-conservative spectrum. In an attempt to assuage the religious conservative pressure against the passage of the reform, proponents of the Moudawana took great efforts to verify that all proposed measures would be in concordance with Muslim law. The result was a uniquely Moroccan re-interpretation or "re-reading" of the basic tenants of sharia law. However, the most persuasive catalyst to the process stemmed from the suicide bombings in Casablanca on May 16, 2003. The attack was committed by the Islamic terrorist organization, Salafia Jihadia, and killed at least forty-five people and injured more than a hundred. For a country traditionally devoid of violence instigated by religious extremism, the attacks came as a brutal shock. In the aftermath of this tragedy, Morocco experienced a surge in anti-extremist ideology accompanied by a broad sweep of liberal leanings that helped propel the Moudawana to its implementation less than a year later.

In 2012, the Moudawana had effected great changes in the lives of many Moroccan women. Previously prohibited, a woman can now marry at eighteen without the consent of her appointed proxy, usually her father. She has the right to divorce her husband in cases of "incompatibility" or abuse, with the increased security of fairer financial settlements and custody rights. She also enjoys unprecedented rights and gender equality within an Islamic judiciary framework primarily based upon the tenants of Sharia law.² Never before have Moroccan women

¹ Hursh, John, "Advancing Women's Rights Through Islamic Law: The Example of Morocco," *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice*, (2012): 252-305.

² Guessous, Nouzha, "Women's rights in muslim societies: Lessons from the Moroccan experience," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*,

enjoyed such a powerful affirmation of their natural rights. To many women, the Moudawana is palpable victory.



“I feel free, really free.” Salma tells me as we walk through the dizzying labyrinth of the inner market medina. Salma is a good friend of Sabri’s who would often accompany us in the afternoons to shop and later for tea. Salma and Sabri help me to barter for fresh cooking spices, perfumes bottled in delicate glass, and traditional leather slippers richly embroidered in patterns of intricate geometry. We dodge through congested streets interwoven with scent and overwhelming color. The market is stacked upon itself in suffocating proximity and pulsates with living sound.

The three of us eventually arrive at a teahouse at the edge of the market overlooking the central square of Tetuán. The minaret of the mosque spirals upwards behind us—capped with gold and stuccoed in white against the light blue of a Mediterranean sky. Salma orders sweet honey tea and a platter of sfenj—warm doughnut pastries dusted with light sugar. Salma is a student at the local university studying law and also a member of a local feminist campaign in Tetuán.

“Young Moroccan women are beginning to know their rights—to know that to have their natural rights is not to go against their faith, their Muslim faith,” she says, “but we must be vigilant. We must always be aware of our rights, so they do not take them from us.”

Sabri agrees. As my guide, he has been desperate to impart upon me that Islam should not be something to be feared. His desire to correct Western stereotypes of his religion permeate nearly all of our conversations. We speak openly about his faith and he goes to great lengths to demonstrate his own tolerance of my beliefs. I have grown used to his absences at each call to prayer—an exquisitely exotic melody that resonates deep below my diaphragm, sending shivered ripples to my scalp.

Yet, when I recently spoke with Sabri, he acknowledges that religious extremism within Morocco often contributes to the continued oppression faced by women within his country.

“I believe that in Moroccan society there is a large percentage of people who do not apply Islam the way that I think

*This penal code
was used to justify
the traditional
practice of
marrying a rape
victim to her
attacker.*

God intended,” Sabri said. In fact, many young Moroccans agree that the Moudawana does not go far enough to fully protect the rights of women, particularly within rural and conservative populations.



As recently as March, 2012, article 475 of the Moudawana allowed for a “kidnapper” to escape legal prosecution by marrying his victim should she be less than eighteen years old. This penal code was used to justify the traditional practice of marrying a rape victim to her attacker. In a country where rape victims carry a debilitating stigma of shame and dishonor, conservative judges would recommend this option as a method of preserving the honor of the victim’s family. The law received international attention after sixteen-year-old Amina Filali committed suicide in the northern city of Larache by swallowing rat poison after a six-month forced marriage to her rapist. Filali’s death spurred outrage among Morocco’s internet activists and increased pressure to further reform the family code. Activist Abadila Maaelaynine tweeted, “Amina, 16, was triply violated, by her rapist, by tradition and by Article 475 of the Moudawana.” Fortunately, the law was amended to eliminate this judicial option. However, despite this improvement, the Moudawana continues to suffer from a lack of universally standard enforcement.

Due to the ambiguity of certain passages of the code, conservative judges are able to exercise their own discretion regarding the new regulations. Consequently, while the Moudawana initially had a dissuasive effect on polygamy and marriage involving minors, it was quickly realized that it was not difficult to receive dispensations from judges. Between 2006 and 2007, a fifty percent increase in the number of marriages of underage girls raised the number of all marriages involving minors in Morocco to ten percent.³ Furthermore, polygamy under the Moudawana remains legal. However, in order to obtain a second marriage, a man must prove to a court of law not only that his first wife is in complete agreement, but also that he will

³ Eisenberg, Ann M., “Law on the Books vs. Law in Action: Under-Enforcement of Morocco’s Reformed 2004 Family Law, the Moudawana,” *Cornell International Law Journal*, (2011): 693-728.

be able to treat both wives with complete equality. The problem manifests itself in the subjectivity of the judge's personal decisions. Different judges, influenced by various combinations of socioeconomic or religious factors, are susceptible to differing interpretations of the law, ultimately resulting in an inconsistent enforcement of Moudawana law that undermines the general effectiveness of the code itself.

Yet another detriment to the success of the Moudawana is the continued prevalence of illiteracy and lack of education within Morocco. As of 2009, illiteracy for Moroccan women was at a high sixty percent.⁴ With access to education limited by social or economic pressure, many women become socially marginalized, with little understanding of their protected rights and newly granted freedoms. Many important measures of the Moudawana are dependent on the active participation of women. Should women remain ignorant of details concerning the Moudawana reforms, rights such as divorce, child custody, and equal inheritance are undermined due to a lack of invocation by women themselves. The single greatest challenge for the continued progress of the Moudawana law within Morocco is basic—some people simply do not know how it works.



“The future of Morocco is in education, education and literacy,” Sabri tells me. He and I are standing together on the rooftop terrace of his university building along with the other American and Moroccan students. Before us stretches the silhouetted panorama of Tetuán wreathed in sleepy twilight. The air is imbued with cinnamon and roasted chicken basted in coriander and lemon. It is my last night in Tetuán. Tonight, we celebrate together with food and music. For now, Sabri and I chat easily with several Americans by the balcony.

Below us, many of the ancient buildings in the center of Tetuán have been painted blue—echoing the tradition in the streets of Chefchaouen. The color glows, reflected against the white tile and limestone stucco. I imagine the depth of the color—the paint layers built upon themselves with each yearly wash

⁴ CIA- the World Factbook. “Morocco.” Accessed December 4, 2012.

of slightly new hue. And I imagine the color changing, evolving, reflecting different timbres and lights through its centuries-old history to today. A Moroccan blue, a color in motion.

So too will Morocco change. Perhaps hesitatingly, slowly, with uncertain leaps and reluctant compromises, but ultimately the people of Morocco will continue to seek progress for their country. The Moudawana represents an important step forward for Moroccan women—an affirmation of their natural rights regardless of religion, yet still inherently bound to a deeply rooted Muslim faith. In the coming years, the Moudawana will keep evolving as Moroccans continue to find ways to acquaint ancient tradition with the inevitable advance of twenty-first century change.

Dusk settles over Tetuán. The shadows cast by the lanterns strung over the terrace lengthen and the band begins to play loud and fast, lead by a young man with a high tenor voice. We all sit in a circle surrounding the music, Americans and Moroccans alike. We smile and clap to the beat of the music so beautiful and strange. Sabri and Salma know the words and sing them aloud on either side of me. Soon, we are all dancing—we laugh and spin circles around each other to the beat of Chaabi melodies.

My memories of Morocco are flooded by that last night. By the music. By the dance shared together with women and men, Moroccans and Americans. They are wrapped in heavy spice and perfume. Painted in the rose tints and copper of the sunset over the mountains to the west. And they are blue, the moving color, that beautiful Moroccan blue. ☙

*I imagine the color
changing,
evolving,
reflecting
different timbres
and lights through
its centuries-old
history to today.*



MY VERY OWN PIG

By Jessica Epstein

He rifled through the plastic bag of fetal pigs and handed it over to me after finding the perfect specimen. I squinted at the plastic bag that didn't have a zipper, wondering how they got those pigs in there. Did they have a plastic soldering machine in whatever lab smothered those babies in chemicals? I stuck my gloved hand into the heavy liquid-filled bag and pulled out the first pig that caught my attention. It looked slightly less discolored than the rest. The chemical smell of formaldehyde quickly seeped into my nose, and after about a minute, my brain stopped signaling. I plopped the pig on a tray next to a scalpel, scissors, and whatever tool is used to poke organs.

I carried the tray to the desk that I shared with my lab partner, Emily, and dropped it on the surface between the two of us. I sat at the desk with the scalpel in my hand, staring at this fetus that hadn't opened its eyes yet. Its umbilical cord was still attached, and while checking its sex, I couldn't help but make a dirty joke. I didn't know where to begin. Each time I touched its belly, my fingers sunk in a little because of the puffy organs, and it tipped onto its side, as if trying to cover its shame.

My professor suggested that I tie each of its limbs to the four corners of the metal tray so that the pig remained still. It lay on its back with its extremities spread apart; the way my dog, Shelly, sleeps at night, or rolls around in the leaves with her tennis ball in her mouth, and I felt the sudden urge to blow a raspberry on its belly.

I took the knife and sliced down the center of the swine, starting at the bottom of the neck and working my way to the opposite end, stopping just below the intestines that immediately became visible. My lab partner used her gloved fingers to pry open the chest cavity, revealing the rest of the organs. The first thing I noticed was the heart. Of course, it didn't look exactly like those dazzling red candies that you get on Valentine's Day, but it was pretty close. It reminded me of one of those stress balls you can squeeze and the plastic squishes out between your fingers. But you can't squeeze too hard or else it will burst, and the innards will ooze out all over your hands. Well anyway, I wanted to poke the heart, but I thought that would be unprofessional.

The liver looked the way I would expect my liver to appear, from all of my excess drinking in college. It was blotchy and gray, and looked kind of like the mushrooms you find on a pizza. And then I scolded myself for thinking about food while this baby pig lay split open on the tray in front of me.

And then I couldn't get food out of my mind. It reminded me of the quail I ate a while back, and at that moment I knew I would not be able to eat poultry again for a very long time. I knew that every time I ripped the leg off of a steaming chicken, I would think of the legs that I tied helplessly to the metal tray.

The intestines could be fun to poke too. I couldn't help myself. I giggled squeamishly, like a kid on Halloween who closes his eyes and sticks his hands into a bowl of spaghetti. They had the same texture as those slimy noodles that I eat for dinner, but were way smaller in size. They could maybe pass as an appetizer if they came with a handful of shrimp.

We labeled all of the organs and it was now time to clean up and go home. The fetus would be thrown in the trash can, along with the other unwanted pieces of matter in the classroom. But I had other plans for it. I had to see the brain. Get as much use out of it as I could before it was thrown out, or incinerated, or whatever they do with this carcass that is too spoiled to be made into bacon.

The first thing I noticed was the heart. Of course, it didn't look exactly like those dazzling red candies that you get on Valentine's Day, but it was pretty close.

My lab partner agreed to watch, while I got to be the one with the scalpel. I brought the scalpel down onto the top of its head, but couldn't find the right angle to cut with these utensils. I decided it might be a better idea to use the scissors instead.

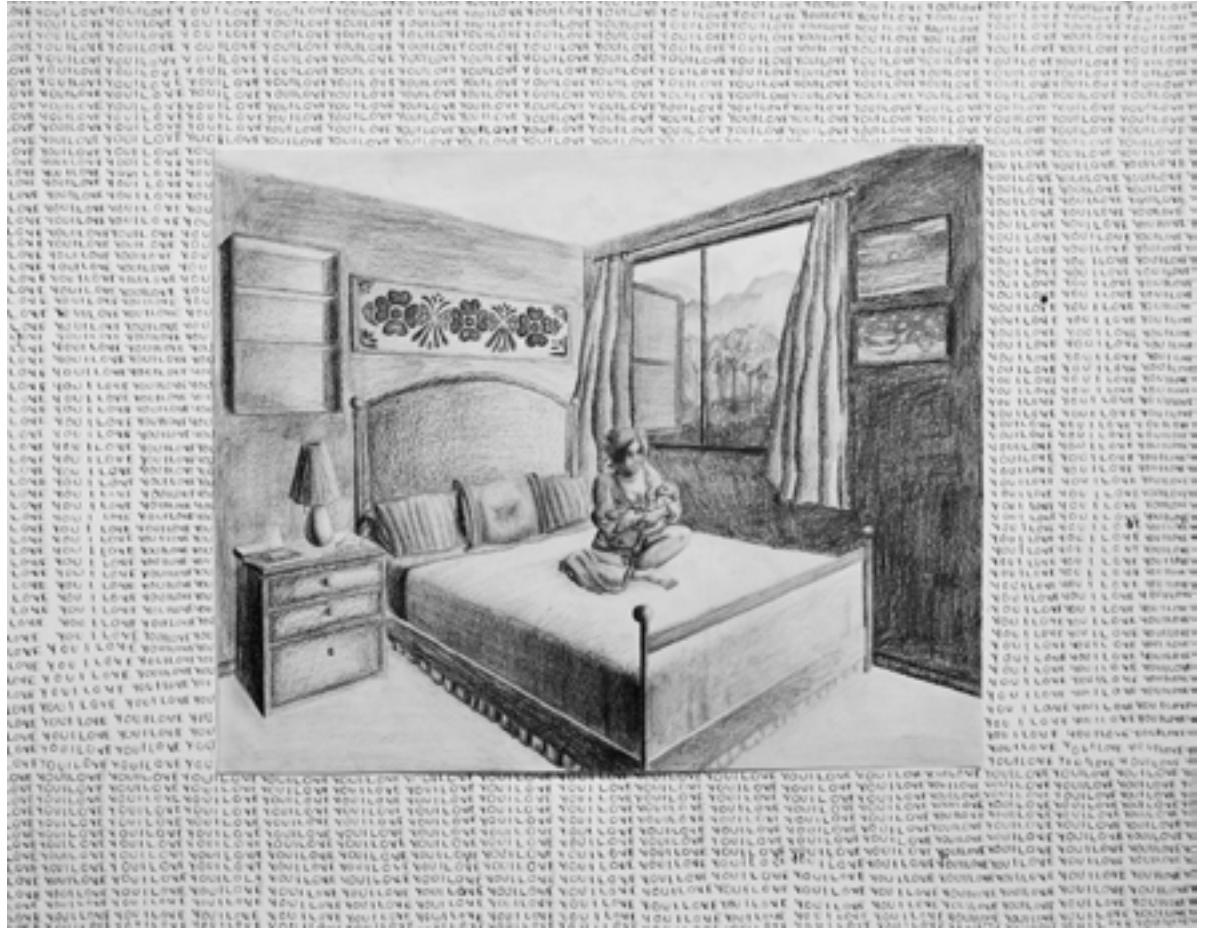
Almost the entire class had cleaned up and left as Emily watched my postmortem examination of the fetus. She leaned in closely as I fixed the blades of the scissors on the upper jaw bone and squeezed the handles together. One of the last remaining students jumped at the cracking sound that resonated through the room as the jaw and skull spit, and I looked up at him and laughed. "Gross, huh?" I smiled the way a small child might as he pokes a dead bird with a stick.

"That's disgusting," the student said, as if about to vomit. I kind of hoped he would.

I used two of my gloved fingers to tear open the skull. It crackled with each jerk of my fingers, and finally ripped into two barely connected slices. It wasn't quite as exciting as I had expected. I guess I have seen too many special effects on crime scene television shows, but it looked kind of plain. It was still a brain, and that was pretty cool, but it was smoother than I had expected. The ridges were a lot less defined. I guess it's like that restaurant dish you have played up in your head for so long, and have waited a week to eat. You go around telling everybody about how great it is, and then you finally get there and it's just not what you expected.

"Goodbye, little fella," I said in my head as we tossed it into the trash can along with our plastic gloves.

We cleaned our tools, left them to dry, and walked home. I greeted Shelly and walked to the kitchen and opened the fridge. I reached for a double bottle of red wine that sat comfortably next to a half rack of baby back ribs. ☕



THE JACKET

By Aj Gustern

There are some days I get awfully down on myself. It's probably on one of those lazy, rainy Sundays where you spend the whole day inside doing practically nothing. It's days like these that I sit under a tree and drag on my cigarette. I love the rain—don't get me wrong. It's just that rain has a tendency to erode my thoughts and expose buried memories. When the barriers in my head fall, others erect themselves and take their place. It could be a closed door or a just a look I have in my eyes. People don't knock on a house with shutters on the windows. They wouldn't hear me over the rain and thunder anyway. I'd speak and try to tell them what is going on in my head, but what pours out of my mouth they wouldn't understand. There is only one person I knew who could speak in raindrops, but she joined the clouds a long time ago. The drops would pour and pour, and we'd sit in the car and just pour into one another. We'd laugh or we'd cry. She'd smoke and I'd cough. It didn't matter. Nobody could see us through the rain anyway.

After the day drags on, and the moon has settled in the sky, night is when my memories are bare and have had time to breathe.

This is the time when I begin to chain smoke. The soft glow of the cigarette burning floats in the night like a specter. The smoke climbs the air up through my nose and I try to suffocate the reanimated memories. But the memories thrive in the smog. I know this. I always have. I always will.

A flick and a fall.

The little flame drifts down onto my jacket. It burns for a moment, then fizzles and dies. The jacket is unscathed. The jacket is tough!

After what this jacket has been through, a little cigarette cherry isn't going to do any harm. It just smells like cigarette smoke now. But that's okay because it always has. The smoke has stained this jacket, has lingered a long many years. Even when I found it buried away in my mother's old clothing, smelling like mildew and another era, the smell of smoke still stuck.

This jacket was hers, after all.

It's military green with four pockets, two on each side. It has thick bold buttons and no zipper on it. There are straps on the wrists and shoulders that you can button (though you'd look fairly silly if you walked around without them buttoned). It's very long and extends past my waistline. There are four pins on the upper pockets on each side. On one pin sits The Walrus himself, accompanied by a smaller button next to it, which reads simply "love rocks." I found it fitting because not only did The Egg Man love, but he also rocked—hard—both things she would have approved of. I know this because this was her button. When I found this jacket, Mr. Lennon's grinning face sat there alone over the left breast pocket.

"Come on kid. Pick me up. I'm bored of sitting here under these old clothes and rubbish."

So I humored the old Brit, and I did.

The jacket emanates a foreign aura. Maybe pulled from a time machine or off of some murdered foreigner. Clue to the jacket's origin can be found on the patches sewn onto it. On the right sleeve, the bright red star of the Soviets sits with the hammer and sickle engraved onto its guts. On the back sits the insignia of a corporal from a former enemy's army. I still don't know what the writing on the back says, which means I still don't know anybody who speaks Russian. That's not important, though. The jacket as a whole is what really sends the message. You can tell it has a soul.

Her soul.

Most people are scared of spiders, but it's TV screens and magazines that scare me. I can't talk to anyone about it.

The true origin of the jacket is somewhere in Russia. I never got the chance to ask my mother about it. From what my family has told me, in 1986 she decided to get away from the land of the free and really see how the other half lives. So she went to Russia. It was nearly the end of the cold war and she decided to visit the Communists to see if they really were as bad as her country had said. She was eighteen when she decided to make this journey. Like her, I made my own foreign pilgrimage at the same age. I didn't go to the Middle East to see where our "enemies" come from. No, no. I decided I wanted to see where I come from, so, sonotravatonel Italia (that means I traveled in Italy). They were our "enemies" before the Soviets; I thought it would be an ideal place to live for a while. I traveled all across Europe, from Munich to Dublin. Like her I learned that people are people, no matter where you go. However, unlike her, I didn't bring back a relic from a lost era. On the flight back, my mother had to remove the Communist insignias and re-stitch them back on or they would have been confiscated.

This jacket represents the both of us. The both of us suffered from clinical depression, as I still do today. Both of us were wounded by our parents. Both of us have brown eyes and black hair, and I feel like both of us were born at the wrong time. Both of us were infatuated with the sixties. The history, the political tension, the style, the people, the movements, the pure free energy that existed then that doesn't today just simply fascinates me. I feel like I should have been with the flower children in this jacket, fighting for something, even if it did fade to nothing in the end. The counter-culture's revolution is over, and my dream of a bohemian lifestyle died before I even drew breath in this world. I look at myself now, and can't figure out how the hell I got here. My dad certainly isn't the type to wear tie-dye. He's a suit. It's what he's good at. He also is the one who raised me for just about as long as I can coherently remember.

Which is why this freaks me out.

When I'm walking around in the rain and I see my reflection in a puddle, I wonder why I see her instead of him. I look at myself and see a monument to the flower children. I see a person who doesn't like what's put in front of him. Most people are scared of spiders, but it's TV screens and magazines that scare me. I can't talk to anyone about it. I try to send her messages in balloons on Christmas and her birthday. I listen for

her in my dreams, but I rarely dream at night and I've only seen her once. I can't ever sleep. So I try to keep the dream alive, this dream of escaping the veil of raindrops. I just don't know if it is even a dream she shared with me. She went through college. She got her degree and worked as a social worker. She was a mender of young souls, a broken heart sewing together the pieces of broken children. The ones she couldn't help bore heavy on her heart. Case after case the weight grew stronger. She had her own demons she hadn't killed yet, and her career was helping people too young to understand their own monsters.

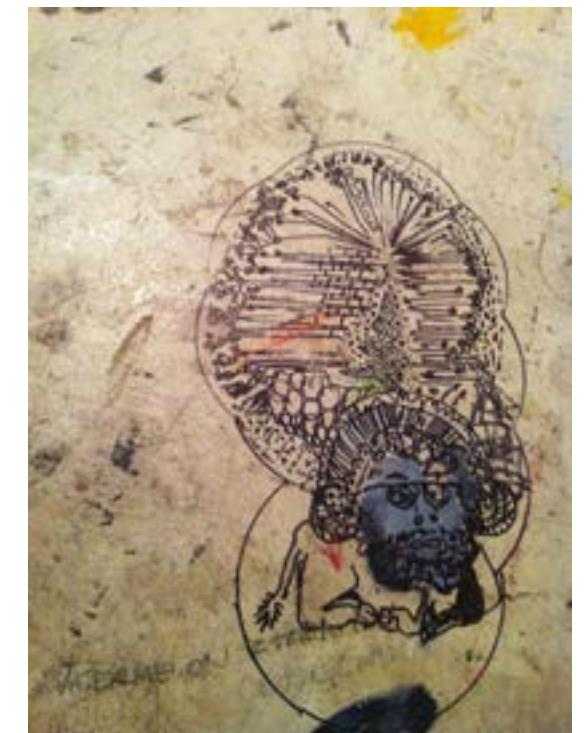
*Most of all
I just wonder
what my life would be like
if I would have been able
to say goodbye.*

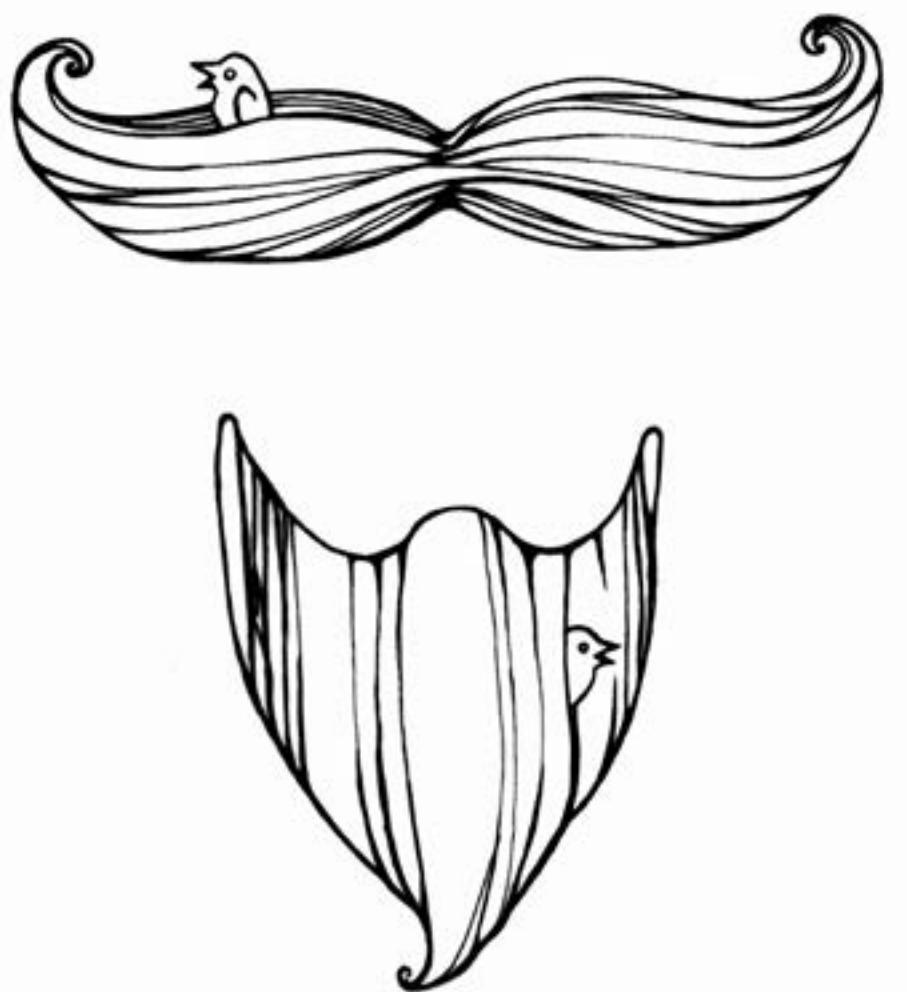
Everybody has their limits. The only ones who truly know where the edge is are the ones who have gone over it. She was one of those people. I remember only bits and pieces of the morning. I remember waking up and getting ready for school that day. I remember not being able to wake her up. I remember her boyfriend giving her CPR, then the paramedics when they arrived. I remember a prayer I sent to god in exchange for her life, my first and my last. I remember curling up into a ball in a blanket on my bathroom floor. I remember waiting to hear her voice from her room below in the basement, and I remember how I felt when I saw them wheel her out of my house covered in a tattered bloody cloth. The depths of the endless darkness I felt are indescribable. I became a thunderstorm, raindrops falling from my eyeballs and thunder from my mouth.

I remember the night before. How we had fought over a dog. I remember lying in bed pretending to be asleep. She comes over and kisses me on the head and tells me she loves me. I said nothing.

No goodbyes, no closure. That's what hurts the most. When you're ten years old it's already hard to make sense of the world. To this day when I think of her all I remember is thunderstorms and cigarettes. I wonder what my mom and I would be like together if she hadn't died. Every time I sit in the dark of night or in a storm smoking alone, I think of all the times she probably did the same thing. I wonder if she used to smoke alone in the rain like I do before she had me.

Most of all I just wonder what my life would be like if I would have been able to say goodbye, because now closure with people who leave me is an absolute necessity. If somebody drops out of my life and doesn't say a proper goodbye I panic. The pain of that day comes back to me. I feel alone. I feel sick, like I have a swarm of locusts in my belly. My mind hums and buzzes about these things in my past. But compared to some people, I like to think I've gotten off fairly easy. Not without scars, that's for sure. At the end of the day, I know I can always cleanse my mind's wounds with a cigarette and a thunderstorm, and this jacket will always be at my back to protect me from the lightning and rain. ☀





FACIAL HAIR CLUB FOR MEN

By Sam Klomhaus

The first primitive man trudges out of his cave to greet the new day. Sunlight pours forth from the heavens like the most glorious pitcher of orange juice. His wife's nagging voice rings in his head as he surveys his kingdom. The area around his loincloth itches. He tugs on it. He needs to convince his wife to do laundry. Perhaps later. She's in one of those moods. He picks up his club and walks into the wilderness. A fly lands on his chin. He smacks himself in the face in a futile attempt to kill the damned thing. A new sensation on his face startles him. His face feels scratchy like sandpaper, only sandpaper hasn't been invented yet. He runs down to the creek to examine the new development on his face. He sees in his reflection a myriad of black dots surrounding his mouth. What witchcraft is this? He has been cursed! What foul abomination has he become?

Beards have been around for quite a long time, and we men have always been fascinated with them. Peach-fuzzed high school students and grizzled lumberjacks and all varieties of man in between constantly experiment with facial hair. There are many theories concerning this fascination, none of which is being explored by the scientific community. The majority of scientists don't

have beards. The fascination could be due to a survival property beards once held, like warmth. Vanity is another possible explanation. There are few greater feelings than being mistaken for a twenty four year-old, then explaining that you are in fact nineteen. Also, it's great fun to walk by baby-faced fools on the street and imagine the envy for your beard that consumes them at that moment. I imagine it's a similar feeling to the one girls get when they pass a less attractive girl on the street. That's just speculation, for I confess my knowledge of how girls think is limited. In all honesty, the cause of this fixation is probably the fact that beards make us feel like men, and there are fewer opportunities for that every day.

I myself sport a goatee. While not as rugged as a full beard, my goatee is a perfectly serviceable alternative. It started out as a full beard. I was on vacation, and as a rule, I never shave while on vacation. If I wanted to do things that bothered me, I would stay home and not go on vacation. All good things must come to an end though, and I returned home from my vacation knowing that I would have to shave. I shaved everything but the goatee because I wanted to see how it looked. Lo and behold, it looked pretty good. So I kept it. My goatee and I have been together since July, and we could not be happier together.

Not everyone is as happy about facial hair as I am. The burgeoning "metrosexual" movement and things like "waxing" are decimating the beard ranks across the nation. With the exception of Brad Pitt's recent growth and Zach Galifianakis's majestic chin-blanket there aren't many beards to be found among celebrities. Also, many men feel that it is more difficult to get a job when sporting a bit of facial hair. They imagine employers will find it "unprofessional." What these men fail to realize is that a beard projects confidence. Legions of great men, including Sean Connery, Ernest Hemingway, Confucius, Jesus Christ, Abraham Lincoln, and Chuck Norris all have, or had when they were alive, beards. The tide has begun to turn against that stigma, and the group responsible is as unlikely a group to be involved in meaningful social change as you can find: hipsters. When hipsters aren't skulking around dirty little coffee shops or whining about "mainstream" things, they have been busy growing beards. I hate hipsters, but one thing that those tight-pants-wearing little cretins have been good for is bringing the beard back, and that's fine by me.

Legions of great men, including Sean Connery, Ernest Hemingway, Confucius, Jesus Christ, Abraham Lincoln, and Chuck Norris all have, or had when they were alive, beards.

Another group busy bringing the beard back to its rightful place at the forefront of our consciousness (and our faces) is the brave men who compete in the World Beard and Moustache Championships. The World Beard and Moustache Championships are held every two years in a different city. They compete in a variety of categories, including but not limited to Natural Full Beard, Natural Moustache, Natural Goatee, Musketeer, Sideburns, Amish Beard, and "Freestyle."

The first World Beard and Moustache Championships were held in Germany in 1990. The Championships didn't start garnering real attention until the 2007 competition, held in England. Since then, there has been a steady rise in popularity though the 2009 competition in Alaska and the 2011 competition in Norway. The next competition is scheduled to take place in Germany in 2013. With the upcoming competition, half of the competitions will have taken place in Germany, and the vast majority have taken place in Northern Europe. The United States has hosted only twice, in 2003 and 2009.

The World Beard and Moustache Championships are governed by a set of rules as unique as the competition itself. A panel of seven beard experts judges the beards. They score the beards on a scale of 5-10 with half-points possible. The judges can only use the numbers 10, 9.5, and 9 once per category, effectively ranking their first, second and third choices in the competition. The highest and lowest scores of each beard are not included in their overall scores. The positions must be clear to the judges, and if a tie occurs there is a second vote. Any arguing with the judges results in a disqualification, though it seems to me if you argue with the judges you aren't in a position to win anyway.

Most of these rules seem logical, but some of them have me so confused the room just started spinning. You get five free points just for entering the competition and showing your beard to the world. Why they didn't just make a 1-5 scale with $\frac{1}{2}$ increments or a 1-10 scale is beyond me. I can't decide if this rule is fantastic and hilarious or wimpy like those participation trophies kids get in tee-ball that make the uncoordinated ones feel like winners. The rule that ranks each judge's first, second, and third choices eliminates indecisiveness, which might sometimes be a good thing. The aim of the rule that eliminates the highest and lowest scores for every contestant was probably to eliminate

outliers and get a clearer picture of what the judging panel as a whole thought of the beard, but that doesn't make it any less stupid. This rule renders the opinions of two judges moot, so why not just have five judges and not seven? Just like every beard should have a fair chance before the judges, every judge should have a fair chance to judge the beards. If it's an issue of fairness, they should institute a more thorough vetting process for the judges. This rule isn't fair to anybody.

Every contestant gets a participation certificate. I would usually be mad about this because I am against telling everyone that they are a winner even though some are and some aren't. It gives them false hope. If your talent isn't bearding (the word used in the competition for beard growing) then you should be told that so you can go find your real talent. I'm not opposed in this circumstance because having one of those certificates would be the greatest conversation starter of all time. The first thought that went through my mind when I found out about the certificates was "I have to have one." I don't know if this reflects more on me or the World Beard and Moustache Championships.

The event that is most associated with the World Beard and Moustache Championships is the Natural Full Beard competition. The description for the Natural Full Beard competition on the website for the World Beard and Moustache Championships (worldbeardchampionships.com/full-beard-natural-2011/) is as follows:

"This is it! The Marathon, the main event, the real McCoy, the Superbowl. No 'tips pointed upward,' nothing narrow and pointed, just who has the best beard! Length is important, but isn't everything. Mass, density, shape, color, and overall impression all count. This category always draws the largest number of contestants and the most heated competition."

I was so fired up after reading that paragraph that I went out and didn't shave for like two days. The Full Beard Natural is taken very seriously at the World Beard and Moustache Championships.

The reigning Full Beard Natural champion of the world is a man named Rooty Lundvall. Rooty competes for an American team (yes there are bearding teams) called The Whisker Club. An air of controversy surrounded Rooty's victory. One of the judges on the Full Beard Natural panel, Dan Sederowski, belongs to the very same Whisker Club as Rooty Lundvall. This

*The first thought
that went through
my mind when
I found out
about the
certificates was,
"I have to have
one."*

*Perhaps
these men in the
beard-growing
competitions are
a little exuberant,
but at least
they don't have
cucumbers over
their eyes.*

ruffled the feathers of (former) two-time defending world Full Beard Natural champion Jack Passion. Jack competes for a team called Beard Team USA and is known to be a bit of a prima donna. All negative personality traits aside, Jack Passion is the best chance the World Beard and Moustache Championships have of gaining some real notoriety.

A recent documentary called "Mansome" prominently featured Passion in its segment about beards. Also, the Independent Film Channel is producing a reality show about Passion and the rest of Beard Team USA called *Whisker Wars*. The first season of *Whisker Wars* received moderate to negative reviews (mostly from clean-shaven reviewers). A second season has been announced. The show focuses on the personal lives of Beard Team USA, where the drama is more outrageous than the lengths of the featured beards. One storyline involves Jack Passion and his quest to defend his world Full Beard Natural title (The show was filmed before he was dethroned by Rooty Lundvall). Another revolves around Beard Team USA "Captain" Phil Olsen and all manner of power struggles surrounding him. Phil very much enjoys being the boss of everyone (much like all of us enjoy being the boss of everyone).

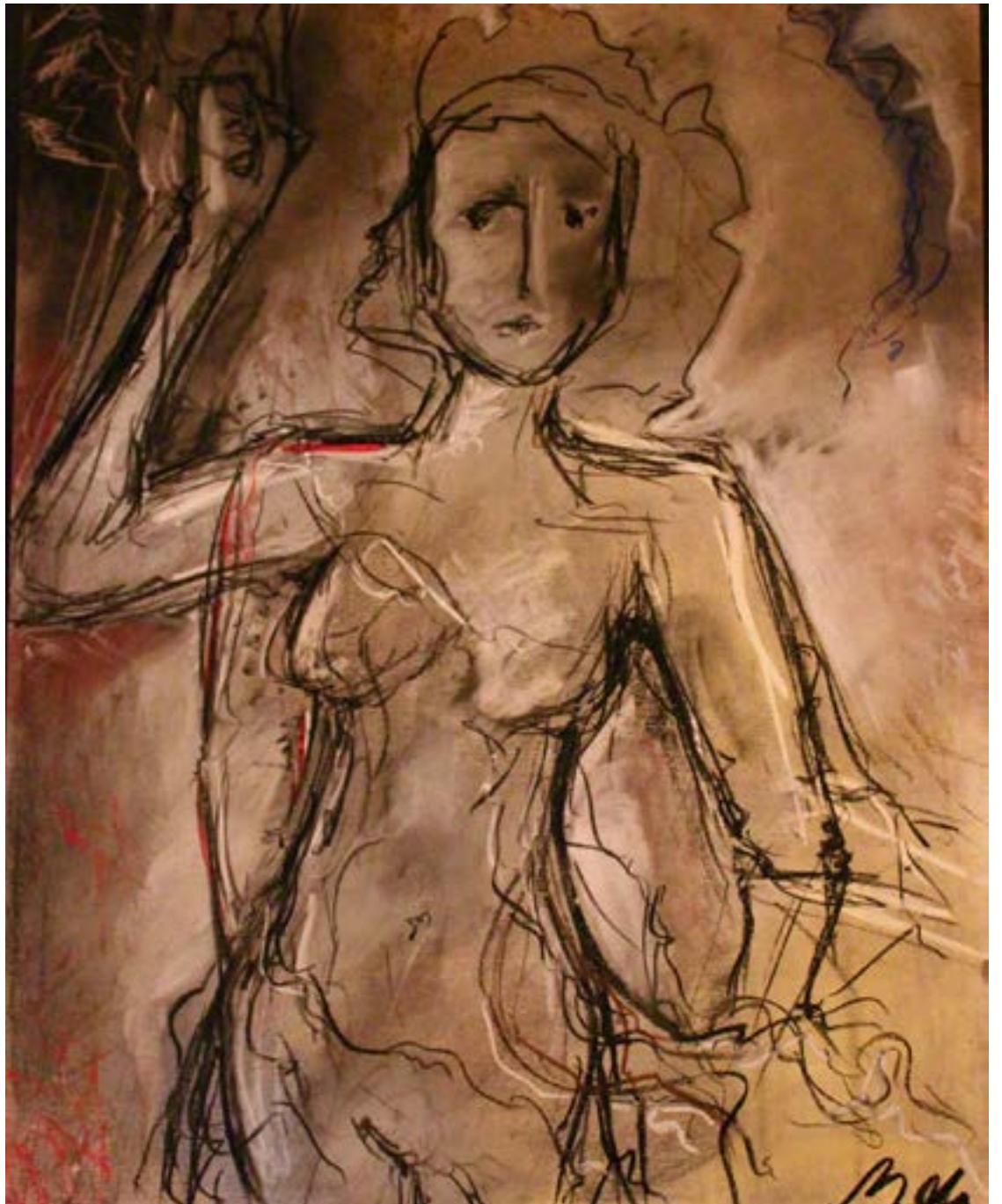
Those portrayed in *Whisker Wars* and their fellow competitors in the World Beard and Moustache championships would have us believe that there is a beard renaissance of sorts sweeping the nation, but that simply doesn't ring true. The beard does not hold as much sway in American culture as it once did. The metrosexual movement has been killing the masculinity of American males from coast to coast. I don't have the time or the attention span to spend fifty pages defending this thesis, so you're just going to have to take my word for it. The reason for the derision and frowning-upon competitions like the World Beard and Moustache Championships is these movements. Someone should inform the poor misguided souls who frown upon beards that you don't have to go to the same spa as your girlfriend and get the same treatments as her. Perhaps these men in the beard-growing competitions are a little exuberant but at least they don't have cucumbers over their eyes. A man's dignity is a hefty price to pay for the removal of a few aging lines.

The competitors might be a little vain but so is nearly every celebrity and we practically worship celebrities as gods. The

World Beard and Moustache Championships are a place where men can be men, and it seems the number of those places is shrinking nowadays. There certainly are folks out there who will look down upon this competition and these competitors. These people are haters with nothing to do but deride others as a coping mechanism for their own failed dreams. They will continue to hate. And these men will continue to grow their facial hair to massive lengths and volumes. I, for one, sleep better at night knowing that all these proud bearded men are out there keeping the baby-faced fools in their places. **ca**



Photo by Ryan Matthew Long



Artwork by Meagan Canfield

STEEL

By Kathleen Childs

No one's ever asked what it's like to remember, but if they did, I'd probably tell them that it doesn't hurt anymore—all I'm left with is residual terror. Every action is suspect, and each word echoes extra meanings in my head until I'm deafened to intent. I blink and shift my weight into my hips. I swallow my voice. When it comes up, I can stay here for days. No one knows I've left.

I can't do this. At 11:59 a lethargic ache sits behind my forehead as I pace small circles in my apartment. The lights are all on. The nice girl across the complex probably hates me for it. I can't fucking do this. The tangerine in my hand numbs my thumbs and index fingers as I separate each of the twelve sections. They're too cold to taste. The back of my throat feels sour and the membranes are rubbery between my teeth and I'm not getting any more words on the page. Just writing that introduction was a transgression, and I've not even explained what's going on yet. I don't know if I'm even going to get that far. Catharsis through confession seems a long way away. I can't

keep running though. Tonight, I'm not hiding in the overloaded academic words I normally use to keep the measure comfortably distant. Foils ready I guess.



It's not that words are stronger than swords—they're steel themselves. They flex and whip through the air searching for their marks. I'll never be a master fencer, but self-defense is paramount. We follow old rules so the scratches don't go too deep. We practice and study. We make it a game. Sometimes we forget we're playing. Me? I keep score.

Each discussion is a secret phrase d'armes. I know that you know. Everyone knows. Wait, you don't, do you? A passé. I'm on the offensive now. How far is it safe for me to go? I can't overextend. You have to have guessed. The bout ends without me being touched. I admonish myself for worrying, but I still play by the rules. If I didn't, you'd be free to run me through, and the right of way wouldn't matter. You might anyway. The names they read on Sunday attest that it might happen just that literally. I didn't go to pay my respects. Those ceremonies are depressing as hell anyway.

"There's nothing I want to write less than a coming out story." It's an invitation. I'm probing, waiting for his counter. He plays cautious though. He tells me artistry can compensate for the cliché. It looks like a direct, but I'm smarter than that. The coffee I'm drinking makes me jittery, and as I bring it to my lips I glise. "Silence being death is one thing, but culture demands those kind of narratives. As soon as we tell them though, they overwhelm the rest of our identities. There's nothing left but the story." The ploy doesn't give me any leverage. He nods in agreement. He smiles gently and tells me exactly what I need to hear. "There's no one right road here. Just like gender." Shit. I left myself exposed. Gender's too big of a word though. I don't know how badly I'm bleeding. He's probably talking more Simone de Beauvoir than Judith Butler, but it doesn't matter. The word pricks. I tell myself these mal-parries are rare. He's giving me an opportunity to learn. Instead of saluting, I step out the door into the bright gray light and am instantly anonymous.

Pommeling like this strains my wrists and makes my actions imprecise. Going corps-à-corps isn't a foil technique, but sometimes it's necessary.

Keeping my guard up like this is exhausting, but I'm still in control. I'm still in control, and people are judging me on the things I'm presenting them alone. Walking north, I notice myself slouching as a group of men's eyes pass my way. I straighten my back and feel my hips pivot as I walk a little faster. Nothing to see here. I'm just playing the game. I can feel the one in the middle's gaze trail down my back as I walk by. The afternoon sun is hot, and I shiver under my jacket. I have to stay in control. I need to be ready the next time I step onto the piste.



I step onto the ancient linoleum of our kitchen at 12:15. The chill's spread up from my fingers into my spine. The sliding glass doors in the living room let all the heat out. I cup my hand to the faucet and take a sip of water. The winter melt-off is steel in my mouth. Swallowing, I shuffle into my room and collapse into the chair in front of my keyboard. I'm still keeping too distant. Pommeling like this strains my wrists and makes my action imprecise. Going corps-à-corps isn't a foil technique, but sometimes it's necessary.

No fucking way. That ends with me pressed against a steel railing and an arm on either side of my head, or a hand on my chin, pinning it to my shoulder before I can even draw. He doesn't have time for ritualized mock-combat. He's direct, with martial confidence. His eyes trace up and down my neck, looking for something, and I don't know what. As I look over my shoulder to the sea of gyrating bodies on the dance floor below us, I can tell I've been chased into a corner. He lets me go, and I hold my breath to not smell his, which is somehow hotter and stickier than the club's neon air. The railing comes halfway up my back. If I lean back anymore I'd fall. My hands are behind my back, and his legs keep mine pinned. As he forces a kiss, I push his nose aside with mine. Rebuffed, he moves in again and I whisper, sweet enough to curdle milk, that I can't. I'm designated driver. I have to take my roommate home. I'm so sorry. I give him a fake number and all but run to where she and her girlfriend are dancing a few feet away. Of course they're going home together, but a few minutes later they walk me out the door and I'm shivering with the heat at full blast, seventy miles an hour on Highway 36.

I pour over snippets of banter for the moment he broke the rules. “So are you a boy or a girl?” Identity is loose and personal spaces come at a premium at the club. Shirtless bartenders serve fluorescent drinks with strawberries skewered on the straws and disaffected butch girls sip both whiskey and cigarettes outside. Everyone has a good time. It’s safe. He seemed playful, so I responded in kind. “I’m a girl, why, what are you? I should have known – no. You’re better than that Leena. “Me too.” I smirked. “Yeah, I’ll bet.” He moved closer. They’re gonna ask me why I didn’t get their attention. What I was fucking wearing. “Hah, just kidding.” “Are you sure? You could be if you wanted.” A few measures of music later, before I could decide whether or not it was okay his right hand was on my left hip he made his move.

On the highway, my left ear rings loud enough to drown out the grooves in the road. I knew this was the way the men and women work but I still wasn’t prepared. I wasn’t prepared, and this wasn’t the place I was supposed to worry. The road stretches on and on as disembodied cream headlights pass around me. The rules were probably already broken the moment he approached you. At home I pour vodka down my throat to disinfect my wounds. At least it didn’t go any further. I nod at the copy of *From Margins to Center* lying under the old laptop speakers in my closet. I guessed he proved me right.



“Hey baby.” My head spins instinctually over my right shoulder to a call across the street. Bad move. You’re not supposed to look at them. He knows you heard him now. I press on. “What? You don’t speak?” I cross my arms and clutch my waist. Keep moving. His buddy chides him. My chuck and military jacket don’t mean anything. “Nah,” he laughs “I seen them titties.”

My desires don’t matter, and when it comes to my body, they never have. I learned the footwork first, navigating the constantly shifting landscape of expectation and identity before I worried about stance or grip. Stand up straight. Stay balanced. It’s about going with the flow at first. I advanced evenly, lightly. Mastered disengages before worrying about attacks. Better to deny dialogue than open new lines of attack. You win if they hurt you less. Move forward with stutter steps, light on the toes

*“So are you a boy
or a girl?”*

so you can retreat if you need. Moving the foil is about momentum and direction more than force.

It makes me run hot and cold. It makes me shrink from conflict. When I’m comfortable, when I have the right opponent, it’s almost beautiful. The bouts are playful, with the kind of flashy engagement, balestras, flèches, that make me seem like a swashbuckling hero. It’s energizing, exhilarating, addictive even. If I get cut a little, I can still walk home feeling good about myself. That ends as soon as the safety ends. Dueling dry, or worse without a referee, risks ugly, dirty play. This is everyday combat though. I can’t presume to afford those luxuries.

It could happen at any time, and anyone could be my opponent. I toss a quick glance around the room, as superstitiously as I can muster. I probably stiffen a little as I do it, but it’s a relatively safe right now. We’re between matches – no one looks threatening right now. Even so, I can find myself en garde at a moment’s notice. Someone else makes eye contact and I force a reflexive smile. Tonight I don’t risk genuine contact, and my lips relax as they look away. I just want to stay safe. All I can muster is to follow the rules.

I constantly analyze my play, looking for where my defense leaves me vulnerable, seizing on the weakness of my advances, choosing engagements carefully. I have to tear down every fault. I tell myself that is what keeps me safe, what keeps me in control. I lose myself in constant replays, dissecting frame by frame what I should do better next time, and each inopportune gesture cuts through the air with a steel whip. I glare in cold satisfaction as I reprimand myself. I was lucky this time, they let me get away with it. Next time I could fuck up worse. Next time they’ll seize on my faults, or bring a sharpened tip. Next time I might find it’s my turn to lose when the stakes are at their highest.



My toes announce their continued presence by biting a little. Sitting on my heels keeps the rest of the foot warm. The chair’s not meant to do this, and the way I’ve folded myself in the seat pulls on my knees. It’s not really a great way forward. Even when I’m giving up my secrets, I do it at a distance, substituting

air for steel. Emotion over substance. When the truth trickles out, it comes out in little low line flicks. That's the way it goes. It's mostly anticipation. The actual swordplay is over in moments, and as loath as I am to admit it, relatively painless.

It's not easy though, to put the sword down, to take the mask off. I can't escape my suspicion any more than I can escape the ringing in my ears. I haven't made a friend of terror, and I probably never will, but maybe, someday I might understand it. When I find myself visiting, the best I can do is draw my foil, extend my forearm, touch my left hand above my ear for luck, and shift my weight across my feet. Who knows how long I'll be staying.

Prêt?

Allez. 





CURTAINS

By Mariah Hermsmeyer

I can still feel his hand. I can still trace my gaze from outside that moving train down to his arm, to my chest, to his face. Dark, mud-colored skin greasy with sweat, small beady black eyes glossed over with a yellow glaze, plump fat lips so large that the bottom one folds over itself, exposing the slimy pale pink inside drenched with saliva. And then those cheeks—those bulbous cheeks. Of all the body parts to be so distorted and hideous, they had to be his cheeks.

He came up behind me and smiled. I thought he was only admiring the view like I was, so I politely smiled back and looked away. He began to speak, but I couldn't understand his language. He came closer—closer than he needed to. He wanted to show me something and pointed his arm out the door, trying to get me to look for it. His arm rested against my body, but I excused it because of the close quarters. I looked out in the direction he was pointing, but there were only the monotonous flashes of crumpled stone buildings and swarms of people flying by—nothing that stood out. He kept pointing, eagerly flapping

his arm. I could make out some broken English, the word “lake,” so I looked harder—maybe there was something in the fields approaching. Then he retracted his arm, slowly grazing his hand across my chest, and I suddenly knew there was no lake.

¤ ¤

I sat down in a seat at the back of the bus. There had only been one other person on the lower deck until he got on. He was headed to the stairs when I accidentally made eye contact and smiled. Stupid small town girl. He stopped to smile back and changed his course towards me. His bleached white teeth shot out in contrast to his dark brown skin and dark leather jacket.

I shouldn't have smiled. I shouldn't have looked up. He wasn't alone.

He took the seat next to mine, beaming and fixing his gaze upon me. Then the six or seven men that came in behind him—large glum-faced giants—took the seats in front and behind the both of us. I found myself surrounded. Alone. Without a map. Without a phone.

“Where you headed, blondie?”

¤ ¤

I didn't believe what was happening at first. I thought it was an accident—the train was unsteady. But when he did it the second time, I understood. I froze, unsure how to react. I wanted to turn and run, but only the blur of tracks and rice fields remained behind me. If I screamed, he could push. If I tried to get away, he could use both hands. So I just stood there, waiting. Waiting for him to reposition himself in a turn for me to rush by.

When it finally came, I turned to run, smiling innocently like I hadn't caught on, when he used both hands. They cupped my breasts, and as I continued to force my way from under his body that had been squeezed up against mine, his index finger made one last trace from the peak of my chest to the pit of my stomach, like a surgeon slicing into my innards. I took one final glace at his face, that disgusting face, but he glued his gaze to my body, his chest rising and falling. The only sounds I could hear

aside from the sirens in my head and the rumbling of the tracks were the nauseating cracks of phlegm through his heavy breaths. I quickly opened the door to my car and staggered like a drunkard into the dark narrow corridor back to my seat.

¤ ¤

*I found myself surrounded.
Alone.
Without a map.
Without a phone.
“Where you headed, blondie?”*

I had to answer—they might get aggressive if I didn't. “I'm meeting my brothers at a coffee shop.” A lie—I'd just left them to go shopping. I noticed a man sitting next to me was handsome and well-dressed, a sculpted face with piercing eyes that petrified me in place, while the rest of the men were fat and ugly. Their swelling cheeks weighed down the corners of their mouths into grimaces, their heavy brows drooped over into permanent scowls casting a dark shadow over their dull black eyes.

I could tell there was nothing normal about this set up. The giants never spoke, never moved, never looked away from the two of us. They were no doubt his goons, and I his target. He kept asking questions—what was my name, where was I from. “Jane Lively—I'm from California.” Both lies.

He wanted to find me on the internet, find me in California and come stay with me. He leaned in closer, his eyes surveying my body. He asked if I had a boyfriend, what kind of guys I liked. I just smiled and avoided the question while he listed off potentials. Then he said, “We like white girls.”

¤ ¤

My family sprawled out among the risers, the curtains to our dirty, dimly lit chamber still open. I silently melted into the corner of the lower bunk, wrapping my arms around my knees to hide my face in the darkness. I strongly wanted to cover myself—every inch of my body—so no one could see me. Could see that I was white, that my hair was fair, that I was a girl. I wanted to be like those women in distant lands that Americans pitied for having to cover themselves. I finally understood the appeal.

I couldn't say anything. There were still six hours on that train and it would only cause my parents to panic. Even if I did

confess, what could we do? Who could we tell? There's no such thing as justice for women here.

So I stayed silent, except to ask that the curtains be closed.

¤¤

I responded as passively as I could. I tried to appear uninterested without being rude, and that I was expected somewhere and didn't have any money. We reached my stop but I knew not to get off. They would for sure follow me, and I didn't want to find out what they were like under the cover of night. He eventually became quiet and his friendly façade faded away. I saw him look at his goons and nod as the bus slowed to a stop. I held my breath, praying they'd just leave and not try to take me with them. As they all stood up in unison, the giants exiting first, he lingered in front of me and winked.

"See you later, blondie."

I sunk into my seat as the doors closed, relieved it was over, when I heard a tapping at my window. That sculpted, dark-skinned face with glowing white teeth grinned at me again as he ran alongside the bus, shouting and waving for nearly two blocks. His farewell felt like a threat and the street we were on was no longer safe. I couldn't go back the same way—I couldn't risk seeing them again. I finally got off the bus into the chaos of the unfamiliar city and got myself lost as I left the only road I knew. I wanted to buy a map, but every store I passed was manned by a greasy, bulbous-cheeked giant. I became faint and nauseous just at the sight of them now.

After hours of staggering through the streets, hiding in coffee shops and clothing stores when drunken men started to follow me, I finally found my way back to my hotel. As I climbed under the sheets of my bed, still shaking and disoriented, my brothers asked how my shopping trip was. I felt embarrassed for going out alone and barely being able to make it back, for being terrified when nothing actually happened, for thinking it would be safe. So once again, I lied.

"It was fine." ¤¤



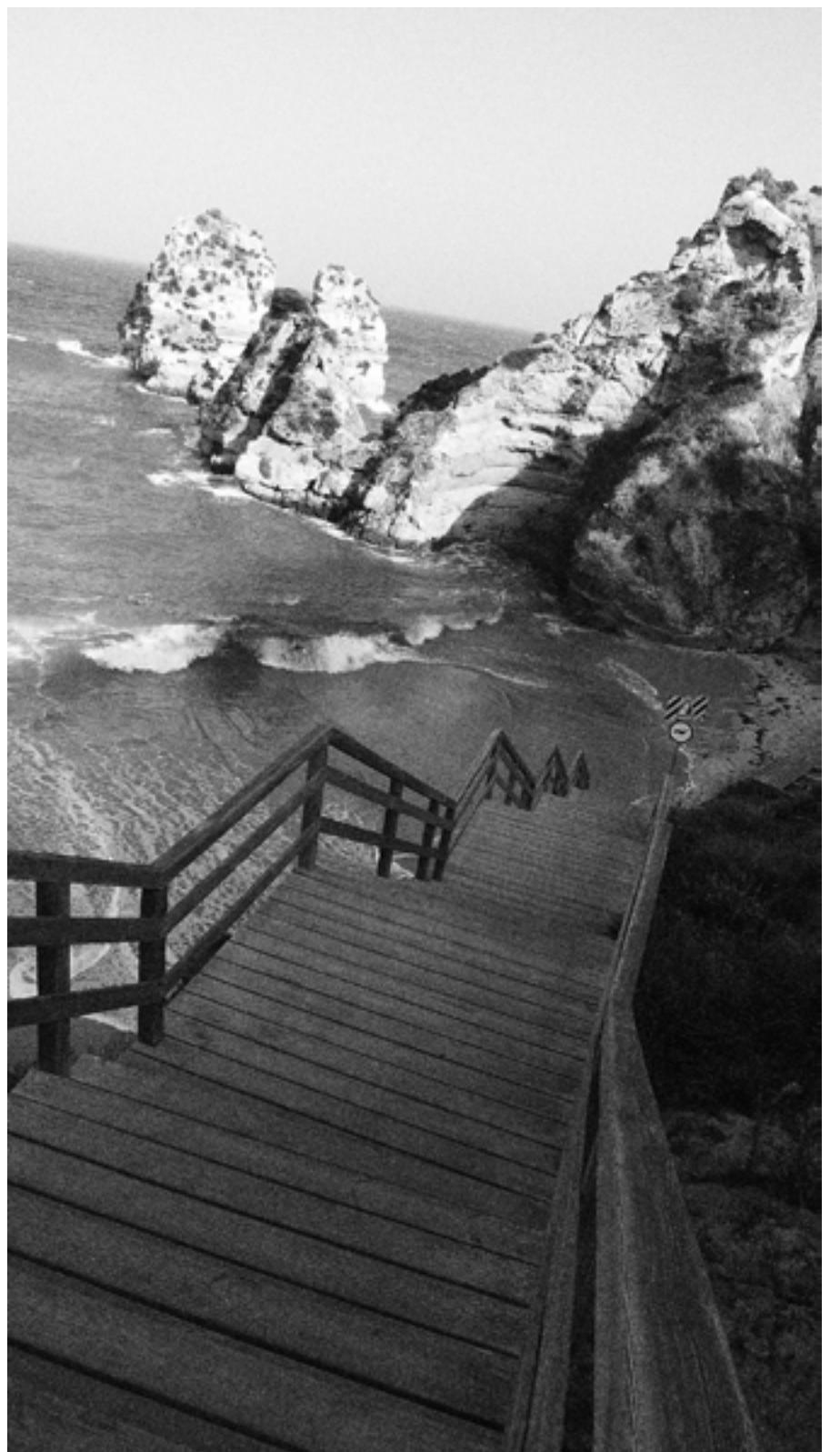


Photo by Bessie Stanisz

DRUNK WITH SUCCESS

By Abigail Nelson

It is a fairly small family, this family of in-your-face overachievers. They are doctors, lawyers, and chiefs of industry and commerce. They are writers, and inventors, and entrepreneurs. They are patent holders, and architects, and professors. They are big talkers with even larger opinions.

Seriously, what other family spends the better part of a holiday meal debating the relative merits of having been a Renaissance era painter versus a Victorian era poet in a surreal, often repeated but never duplicated version of the parlor game “Would You Rather?”

This family engages in that kind of thing.

As a child, one is lucky to ever get a word in edgewise. You sit and listen and learn. Not about football scores, or cooking, or fashion, the likes of which as a young kid I probably could have used on the playground, but about Joan of Arc, the Romans and the Greeks, Mesopotamia, and small gauge railroads and steam trains. You know—the kind of information that helps you get picked first for kickball teams.

Thank God, too, for the invention of the DVR and TiVo. Relatives run to the television at precisely 6:00 PM to sit in a crowded huddle as they watch Jeopardy with Alex Trebek, like a real-life scene pulled directly from the movie Rain Man. Amongst themselves, they create their own games within this game. Who got the most correct answers in a row, who swept the category, who answered first, who bet the most aggressively, who on the show was the bigger nerd, who on the show had the larger rear end, and did large rear ends affect the overall outcomes. Personal family statistics are kept and counted and frequently lorded over others.

Our family members expect only one tangible thing from those who share our blood. Find something you love or are passionate about and don't just be good at it—be great at it. It has never been a question of money or title or fame. It's a question of greatness, no matter what it is. Be great. Do not half-heartedly attempt anything. Follow through to completion. Stay the course.

So what, then, if you are the one member of the family who does not feel like you can measure up to the expectations? What if your passions aren't quite clear to you? What if you don't know, or simply don't know how?

This is my Uncle Tom. He is smart enough, but chose early on to excel only in alcoholism. He isn't just a garden variety good alcoholic—he is a great alcoholic. And in our family's typical fashion, he knows he is great at it and takes a twisted sort of pride at all he has managed to accomplish under the veil of booze. Luckily, my entire family loves to talk and always tells the truth no matter what, so I contacted him.

I asked him if we could discuss his struggles throughout the years.

"I know some of the legendary family stories, but I'd like to understand your perspective and hear them directly from you," the conversation began.

"Sure, Abigail, what do you want to know exactly?"

"When did you start drinking? What prompted you the first time, and what was it like for you?"

"That's easy. I was 11 or 12, which would make this the mid 1970's. It was your Aunt Barbara's First Holy Communion party at Granny and Pop's house in Connecticut. Brian Gorman, who lived next door, was there too, and we were always getting into some sort of trouble together. It used to drive your

*He isn't just a
garden variety
good alcoholic—
he is a great
alcoholic.*

Grandmother absolutely nuts, us running off all the time, sneaking down to the railroad tracks with stolen cigarettes, sneaking down to the beach to go clamming, never turning up for meals...you get the idea."

"At this party, Brian and I were hiding from all the parents down in the basement and found a stash of old Virginia Gentleman Bourbon and thought we had hit the lottery. The two of us got smashing drunk and it was only your Aunt Barbara who knew what we had done for a long time. I don't think anyone noticed we were gone or what we had done in all the party confusion."

"You didn't feel guilty or sick or hung-over?"

"No. In a weird way, I felt great."

"What do you mean by great?"

"I mean it was great, the feeling of not being yourself, of flying high. I enjoyed the feeling of not having a care in the world, of being in charge of your mood. It was just plain awesome. I thought it gave me power and self-awareness."

And so began Uncle Tom's slide down the slippery slope to alcoholism and perdition. He is currently 48. He lives by himself in the "man cave" basement of a crazy older woman who rents rooms to other half-crazed or damaged folks. He is divorced and is the father of three children. He hasn't worked in over two years and has spent countless years in and out of rehabilitation hospitals and clinics. He is dying from advanced liver disease and he is only saved from living on the streets out of the kindness of my grandfather, who is loath to let it "come to that."

We spoke again.

"What happens next, Uncle Tom?"

"Oh, it just evolves."

"Evolves how?"

"I drank through grade school, I drank through high school, and I drank through college. I drank enough to dull my emotions and pain. I drank enough sometimes to give me emotions. But, at least at that point I was still getting great grades, keeping my head above water, pulling the wool over everyone's eyes. Or that's how it felt to me, at least."

"Then what happened?"

"I got your Aunt Lara pregnant."

Lara is Tom's ex-wife.

"Then what?"

"I kept drinking. I wasn't the one pregnant, after all. I now had responsibilities I didn't really want in the first place. Marrying a woman I liked, sure, but loved? I don't think it was ever the case. Not sure to this day why she talked me into it. But your Aunt Lara embraced motherhood like a duck to water. She envisioned herself the grand dame of Greenwich [Connecticut], a PTA super hero, a volunteer at church, a matriarch, and the blessed mother. And she was told she was a martyr and a saint for putting up with me."

"Secretly, I think she ate it up. It was a joke, a sham, and we couldn't afford any part of it. She got pregnant two more times in quick succession. I now had three kids I couldn't afford and I drank because I had to. Our car was repossessed, our home was foreclosed on, and I ran away whenever I could to either rehab or work."

"Speaking of running away, what is the story about you and Canada? I never did get the complete version of that."

"Oh, those were good times." He laughs.

"Your grandfather gave us some money to rent an apartment, pay off some debts, buy into a hardware store in Maine, and put clothes and shoes on the kids, and food on the table."

"So what happened?"

"I wanted no part of that, either. I knew your Aunt Lara would use the money for sensible stuff and keep some hidden from me, so I drained the bank accounts and took the one car we had left and drove to Newfoundland in Canada to buy a boat and sail into the future with no strings attached. I almost made it, but I foolishly used a credit card instead of cash and they tracked me down and dragged me back."

He laughs again.

"They kept muttering about responsibilities and needing the car for school pick up. Spare me. I drank some more."

"Then what?"

"Well, they sent me off to another stint in rehab. Fat lot of good those places do. They detox you, dope you up with other drugs, and turn you into a walking, talking zombie. It's a tradeoff on so many levels. They make you take Acamprosate, Naltrexone, or Disulfiram to deter you from drinking once you are dried out. Then they load you up with Xanax, Klonopin or Ativan."

"Anything to mute the anxiety from not drinking. And then for good measure they top you off with Seroquel, in case you

have mood disorders too. All this does is trade one set of effects for others. It's a big waste of time. I feel better with vodka, not Seroquel. I feel better with Bourbon, not Xanax. How about I have anxiety because I want to drink? How about I feel better when I do drink? I do not feel better taking that boat load of meds. It's everyone else who has a problem with my drinking. Not me."

"Was Seroquel the drug you were taking when you came to visit us in Denver and you almost burned our house down?"

"Yup, boy was your mom pissed!"

Not just my mom, really.

"You passed out making roast ducks and left her convection oven on 550 degrees for hours while you slept it off, and the fire department arrived because there was duck fat smoke pouring out of her house, and the central alarms were going off, right?"

"Got to tell ya, Abigail, I never did that with booze and that was a waste of some gorgeous ducks. I only ever did that kind of stuff on the damn drugs they make you take so you don't drink. What a joke. I'm safer to be around drunk, not drugged, trust me."

I asked, because I never really knew the answers and I knew they would come easily enough from this glib family of talkers, "Do you have any regrets about anything? Would you do anything differently? Did you ever really want to get sober and stay that way? Are you afraid of your liver disease?"

"Well, yes and no. I got three kids out of a marriage. That's good, I guess. They don't speak to me anymore, not as their father anyway, but they are each successful, do well in school and seem happy. I don't regret having them and no, I don't regret not being part of their lives. People tell me that they are better off when I am away from them. I suppose that is true. After all, I am a tad unpredictable."

Seriously? Unpredictable? Good one.

"What about the rest, Uncle Tom?"

"Sobriety is seriously overrated, Abigail. Think of some of the best alcoholics—Mickey Mantle, Winston Churchill, Edgar Allan Poe, Ulysses S. Grant, Ernest Hemingway...on and on. It's a fine club."

"But you have advanced liver failure. You will not live much longer. That doesn't leave you with regrets?"

"Are you kidding me? Not in the least. "It is what it is," as they say, and it was a fine trip to this point. I met great people, had an absolute blast. Frankly, I'm still having fun. They will have to drag me kicking and screaming to the pearly gates."

"Did your mom tell you about the Cuban girlfriend I now have whose husband left her with a yacht when he took off with the younger woman? She's a little old for me but we've been sailing...it's been grand."

I listened to his words carefully. "It's been grand." By my family's standards, Uncle Tom should be considered successful. He found a niche and made his mark. He is a legend in his own happy hour and absolutely the greatest alcoholic he can be. He is not unkind. A bit self-absorbed and singularly focused, but not unkind, and his family should be proud of his determination to be the best at something...anything. He chose something that he loved, followed his passion and saw it through to the end. The end may be perdition and ruin, but he pursued his alcoholism like any other career or ambition. Can't be more successful than that, right? ☀





REQUIEM FOR A BABY SHOWER

By Allison Matney

“There it is, 14209,” I say, pointing towards a cozy suburban home adorned with pastel pink balloons and streamers. As our SUV stumbles up the driveway, I lift a covered tin of carefully crafted cupcakes from my lap, hoping to avoid a domino effect inside. What worth would an authentic American baby shower have, after all, without its pristine mini cupcakes?

My sister sighs resignedly and gives me a lazy eye roll as she pulls her key from the ignition. “Two hours max,” she warns, “and I’m out of here.” I reply with an approving nod and we make for the open front door, dragging our feet all the while like stubborn five-year-olds at a grocery store.

Early birth rituals served as a forum for a transition of wisdom from old mothers to new, and as a celebration of welcoming new life into the family. The Greek ritual of *Amphidromia* included a sizable feast provided by familial guests, as well as a dance around the hearth as a symbol of an infant’s integration to the brood.¹ Years of pregnant siblings and cousins

¹ Rousselle, Robert, “Father Avoidant, Mother Dependent: the First Seven Years in a Child’s life in Classical Greece,” *Journal of Psychohistory*, 33 (2205): n. page

and a healthy dose of cynicism, however, reminds my sister and I that wisdom and amusement don't hang around modern baby showers—unless you really enjoy guessing the girth of Mom's belly or find the latest acronym for your infant's optimal bowel movement insightful. Still, a loving sister-in-law would show the utmost enthusiasm at the prospect of a baby niece, so here we find ourselves, trekking into uneasy territory on a random October weekend.

The toasty air of the foyer compliments a rosy shade cast by the myriad decorations hanging on the walls and suspended from the ceiling. Pink tissue paper roses, pink flower centerpieces, wreaths made of rolled pink baby socks—all surrounding an immaculately dressed table with an endless array of pink mints, cookies, and other gourmet-looking treats. I quickly arrange my cupcakes on a flimsy plastic platter and clear an open space at the table's back corner. The turquoise frosting so mindfully swirled on each chocolate cake now looks like nothing more than an irritating interruption to the otherwise dainty display of traditional femininity.

A light tap on the shoulder prompts me to pivot and find my older brother's smirking face, his forest green T-shirt and stiff Army baseball cap clashing with surrounding soft pastels. Noticing the set of keys in his hand, I ask, "Where are you off to, proud dad-to-be?"

"The guys and I are going bowling for a few hours." He zips up a worn-in windbreaker and slides his hands into its pockets, digging for loose change at the bottom.

"Why do you men get to have all the fun?" I hear my sister scoff. My brother grins in her direction and shrugs his shoulders casually.

"Don't forget to sign the guestbook thing by the front door," he tells us with feigned enthusiasm, retreating a few paces. "It's really important, I guess."

I watch his figure disappear in the garage doorway and find my way through wisps of sweet perfume and pungent hairspray to the magenta book lying open on a folding table. An extensive guest list shows round signatures succeeding one another in perfectly straight lines, each name accompanied by a description of gifts purchased for the shower. Among the many, I see the versatile Bumbleride Flyer stroller, a posh crib sheet set from Pottery Barn, and the lifesaving (or so I hear) Diaper

*The turquoise
frosting so
mindfully swirled
on each chocolate
cake now looks like
nothing more than
an irritating
interruption to the
otherwise dainty
display of
traditional
femininity.*

Genie Elite. I scrawl my name underneath a glamorous autograph and, in slightly smaller print, indicate my gift to the right. "Book—The Giving Tree," I write, and gratefully give the pen to the woman standing behind me.

Not until the 1950s did the tradition of "showering" a mother-to-be with gifts become a social standard. The baby shower as most know it, in all its gendered glory, arose in partnership with the surge of consumerism following the Second World War as a way to help alleviate financial burdens on the family.² While undoubtedly well intended, this emphasis on gifting all the items necessary for childcare, and then some, has paved the way for items to become essential to a modern woman's transition to motherhood.

I pop a square of cheese into my mouth just as the shower's host approaches me, arms open for a hug, her pink diamond cross necklace twinkling in the bath of autumn sunlight that drains in through wide windows.

"Thanks so much for being here today," she bubbles, handing me a sheet of paper and a pen. A shiny charm bracelet tinkles as she opens a manicured hand towards me. "We're starting our first game, so write down your best advice for our mom-to-be on here and we'll share it as a group in a few minutes." She scurries in the direction of another guest before I can respond, her strappy pink heels clacking against the floor as she restarts her welcome speech.

I find a spot on a worn leather couch beside my sister, both of us racking our minds for advice we have no authority to give. "How about this?" she whispers finally with a grin on her face. "If your baby starts crying, put it outside."

"Yes, write that," I laugh, and scrawl instead the one useful piece of information I retained from a half-hearted 6th grade babysitting class—"Never shake your baby."

The beaming expectant mother sits enthroned in a La-Z-Boy recliner surrounded by a moat of meticulously wrapped gifts, awaiting her sage advice and sacrifices of swaddles and pacifiers. "First and foremost, you'll need to pray," says a cozily plump woman from a folding chair next to the fireplace. A round of complacent "mm-hmms" fans through the room like a

² Yalong, Bobby T, "Baby Shower: Its origin and worldwide practices," *Asian Journal* (2012): n. page.

score of devoted bystanders insisting on the wave at a basketball game.

"Make sure you follow the 5 S's when the baby is upset," says a younger lady sitting just beside. "I would have literally died without them."

"At the end of the day," says an assured voice to my right, "God has you in his hands. Let his light guide you through the hard times."

"What does that even mean?" my sister's voice faintly whispers in my left ear. I press my spine through the sofa, hoping not to be cold-called like in a ninth-grade science class.

"Presents!" yells a messy-haired little girl to my relief. She points impatiently to the catalog-ready bags at the foot of the recliner and polite laughter trickles from one rouged mouth to the next. My ebullient sister-in-law picks up the nearest bag, illustrated with an ark full of exotic animals, its handles tied together with a satin pink bow.

"This is so cute!" She lifts the bag up for the party to see, displaying it like a work of modern art. A chorus of melismatic "awws" cues the flash of anonymous cameras as thirty-some women's gazes lock for the moment on a mass-produced plastic bag. The synchronized rhythm of female voices continues through each onesie, teething ring, and children's book to follow.

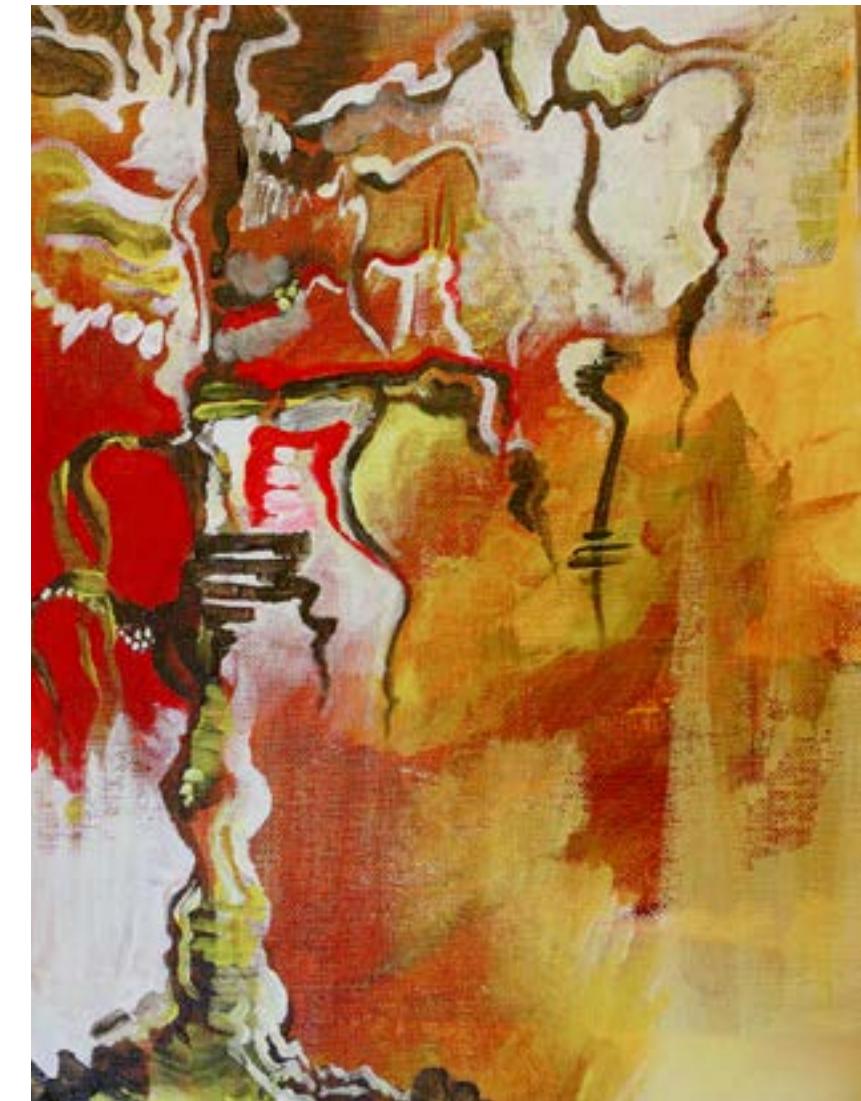
The traditional baby shower strives to maintain a sense of community amongst women, to create a realm in which, even if only for a few hours, females can relate and connect on a personal level³. Perhaps a noble concept for past eras in which women found little refuge under the laws of their male counterparts, the occasion has inevitably become a modern day masquerade of materialism and empty compliments, one which often demands the willing suppression of one's individuality as a human being in the name of an obsolete Stepford-like disposition.

By the time the gift session approaches its end, party guests with painted smiles start funneling out of the house. I study the remaining women around me, their legs crossed and hands in their laps, lacking nothing but a hot cup of tea and extended pinky fingers. Their docile temperaments seem too polished to be real, and I imagine they will drive home later, drop

³ Fischer, Eileen, and Brenda Gainer, "Baby Showers: A Rite of Passage in Transition," *Advances in Consumer Research* 20 (1993): 320-324

their shoes by the door, stash trendy coats in stuffed closets, and peel off their masks of vacuous enthusiasm and "aww" struck eyes in exchange for pajamas and a level head. I smile at the thought as my sister comes into focus, bundled in a navy blue scarf and jingling her keys impatiently in front of my view.

"Two hours," she mouths, nodding her head to the left towards our dozing car outside. I stand up and grab my own jacket from a hook on the wall, then pick out two mini turquoise cupcakes for the ride. ☀





ALGO ES ALGO, MENOS ES NADA

By Cassie Beck

¡No hay más! There's nothing left! Hands reach into the truck in attempts to find more. More toys, more clothes, more anything. *¡No Hay Más!* We're screaming now, as if the reason people keep looking is because they can't hear us. My feet dig deeper into the base of the truck, allowing me to stand my ground. Countless glares of Panamanian mothers penetrate my skin while babies cry in their arms. They don't want toys, I want to scream, they want you. Even my thoughts are drowned out by the chaos.

When we arrived here, our truck was overflowing with things: Plastic cars, Polly Pockets, Beanie Babies, Barbies; there was enough to supply a small town. Somehow we are now standing in the absence of it all. Empty white plastic bags escape the back of the pick-up truck and float to the ground, creating a contrast to the dull dirt. Without toys weighing them down, they flutter freely in the wind, passing by anguished parents tugging at the heads of dolls as if they're the five-year-olds fighting for them.

I try to discern what people are saying amidst the disorder. One man violently waves his hands towards a toy car hiding in a young boy's palm. I can only tell he's talking because his mouth is moving. I wanted that car, he must be saying. Then his eyes direct me downward to the toy in his own hands. It resembles the young boy's toy except for the missing back wheel, which takes me several seconds to notice. The look of desperation he gives me next says everything I couldn't understand. He is looking up at me as if I have the solution, but I have nothing. The toys are gone. I can't give this man a better car for his son; the only thing he can do is be happy with what he has. But how do I tell him this? Looking down from the truck, I shrug my shoulders and shake my head slightly. "No hay más."

Dos Semanas Antes

Nutre Hogar. Two weeks before—the sign stares me in the face as I exit the taxi. This must be it. It's been six months since I signed up for this service trip to Santiago, Panama and ever since all I have heard about from my Spanish teacher, Mrs. Morse, is Nutre Hogar.

"You'll just fall in love with the children. It's the experience of a lifetime. It really is."

Nutre Hogar is an institution that cares for malnourished children until they are healthy enough to return to their parents. The children come from remote areas of Panama and have grown up with virtually nothing. For some of them, once they are a part of the Nutre Hogar community, they never see their parents again.

"You have to understand that you'll become the mother that some of these children never had." Mrs. Morse's words ring in my ears as I brace myself for my first volunteer experience. Nutre Hogar volunteers feed, change, and play with the children for at least four hours every day. They are there to take care of the kids, making sure that they are living a healthy lifestyle and, most importantly, that they are happy.

"The only thing these kids want is to forget any pain that they have, literally or figuratively." Feeling immense pressure now, I try to shake Mrs. Morse's voice out of my head.

I step through the main door of the building to be greeted by the pungent stench of baby poop wafting from a nursery room and the overpowering scent of spices seeping through the kitchen doors. I wrinkle my nose in disgust.

"¡Bienvenida!" Mrs. Morse prances towards me, her short blond hair bouncing with every step. She leans in with a smile still on her face. *"Don't worry, you'll get used to the smell."*

We walk through two more sets of doors, nerves building up in my body with every step. Finally, Mrs. Morse pushes through the last door revealing a room full of people. My eyes scan the familiar faces of the other volunteers I met during the flight to Panama. I haven't seen them since we all moved in with our host families, a process added to the service trip a few years back to force volunteers to speak Spanish for the entirety of the program. I can't wait to talk to them in English.

My eyes continue to search the room, taking in the scratched, light brown, wooden floors and the small iron rods encaging the windows. Two ceiling fans slowly spin above my head helpless to the unbearable heat creeping in through the prison-style bars. The aged brick walls below the bars contrast against the children's colorful toys scattered over the spongy blue mats in the back corner. Next to the abundance of toys is a large Little Tikes playhouse with plastic yellow walls, a plastic baby blue roof, and a plastic bright red slide. It reminds me of something I would find in the backyard of one of my friends' homes when I was a child.

A creak to my right suddenly catches my attention as I turn to find multiple Panamanian children running through the door to the playroom. The boys go straight to the mats waiting for one of the American strangers to join them. My focus stays on the door, watching the last of the children saunter hesitantly through. A small girl with a pink dress and short dark hair is being carried in by one of the Nutre Hogar employees. She looks as though she must be six years old but she cannot yet walk. Following my gaze, the employee sets the girl down by my feet.

"Se llama Mariah. Tiene cinco años." I gently pick up the small five-year-old girl to keep her from crying, but she does not seem amused. I grab the Barbie doll to my right and begin to play with it, showing her what to do. However, after about five minutes, I realize that I am the only one playing while Mariah stares blankly at me. *Please just smile, laugh, something.* I find another toy, a tiny Beanie Baby, and crawl it up her arm. Her eyes stay locked on mine until finally she begins to cry. Panicked, I drop the toy and begin bouncing the girl on my leg.

Eyes staring directly into hers, I try to keep a composed manner and a smile on my face.

“It’s okay . . . It’s alright.” *Like she can even understand me.* She calms down though, recognizing that she has my full attention. I continue bouncing her, hoping she’ll remain calm. Lifting her higher towards the ceiling then lower towards the floor, I keep her locked in my hands. Finally a smile grows across her face. I set her back down on my leg and tickle her bloated stomach. She lets out a giggle. *Unbelievable.* Despite the plethora of toys that have been donated to these children, all this girl wants is someone’s attention. Mrs. Morse’s advice creeps back into my head, sounding more like a melody now. *“You’ll become the mother that some of these kids never had.”*

Dos Semanas Después

Two weeks later—after volunteering daily at Nutre Hogar, and constantly finding ways to make Mariah smile, it is time for the volunteers to return healthy children to their families. We have been driving in a small, white, van for three hours now and are just approaching the village where parents come to collect their children. As we get closer to the village, large brick buildings emerge out of a dirt abyss. These buildings are used as medical centers for children of Nutre Hogar in order to assure that they are healthy enough to return home. Not only are they the only buildings for miles but they are also the only things that expose impoverished Panamanian parents to the lifestyle of Nutre Hogar volunteers, the ones who paid the money for the buildings to be built.

The dark green pickup truck ahead of us is filled with white, plastic bags overflowing with American toys for the new families. I can’t imagine that parents will be too concerned with getting toys when they are seeing their children for the first time in months, maybe even years, but it is a gesture to remind the children of us volunteers from their previous home. As the truck comes to a stop, our van pulls up next to it allowing me a view of the sea of Panamanian parents. I close my eyes and picture their faces as I hand their children back into their arms. I can’t wait.

Tres Horas Mas Tarde

Three hours later—stressed, scared, and confused beyond belief, I use the slow car ride in the back of the green pick-up

*“You’ll become
the mother that
some of these kids
never had.”*

*There is nothing in
their home except
for a bed that is
made of the same
green, grass roots
as the other huts.*

truck as my therapy. I try to forget my thoughts as we proceed to the next village. I just can’t seem to shake the image of parents returning home with their new, healthy children, cursing at the toys that they could have had. The entire time I volunteered with these kids, I was working towards returning them to their loving parents. Suddenly I feel as though my work was for nothing.

I think back to my time with Mariah. When she was without a family all she wanted was attention and love. She never wanted toys, she wanted to be bounced on my legs and tickled on her stomach. Meanwhile, these parents believe that the only thing that will replace their months of absence is dolls and toy cars. They want their kids to feel as though they are giving them something meaningful when they aren’t giving them anything more than a lifeless toy.

A bump in the dirt road shakes me to reality. We are approaching the next village and it is much less developed. Trekking through heavy piles of mud, the truck pulls into the neighborhood of destitute Panamanians. Intricately woven, light-green grass roots compose the huts surrounding us. Despite the humid heat, children are running between each hut, their laughter creating a soothing sound. The truck slowly comes to a stop. I look down to avoid the mud before jumping off the back of the truck and suddenly lock eyes with a pink and white polka-dotted pig that is half my size. He runs away in a frenzy of snorts when I plant my feet straight into a puddle. The last thing I want right now is to be covered in mud, but I am influenced by the boys laughing next to me to simply smile and shake off the dirt.

We are done returning children to their families so now we are merely observing the culture of these Panamanians. After the last group, I half expect hell as I walk towards a mud-floored hut. gingerly, I step inside.

To my surprise, two young boys are sitting angelically on the ground next to an older woman. The woman’s hair is knotted, her skin is rough, and some of her teeth are missing, but her smile radiates throughout the room, causing her eyes to glow in elation.

There is nothing in their home except for a bed that is made of the same green, grass roots as the other huts. I assumed that the woman would be waiting for a gift of sorts, but her

hands stay at her side. As she excitedly shows us her home, I realize that the reason she doesn't ask us for anything is because she has everything she needs. Her family is happy here. They don't think about what they can have but rather what they do have. They do not have the option to compare themselves to others since they are living in such a remote town and have no way of viewing others' lives. All they know is that they have a family, water, food, and shelter. They don't ask for anything more.



Since what seems to be the beginning of time, our world has been built around the idea that wealth, power, and virtue are positively correlated to ownership. Ownership of money, ownership of land, ownership of anything materialistic: that's what causes success. That's what causes happiness. In sociologist Juliet Schor's article "Keeping Up With the Trumps," she discusses the progression of overconsumption. According to Schor, when people see that others around them have more things than they do, they feel the need to obtain more things themselves. For instance, television shows in America have caused numerous U.S. citizens to feel the need to live like the celebrities they see, such as Donald Trump. Schor wonders if, "the likely explanation for the link between television and spending is that what we see on TV inflates our sense of what's normal" (35). Through viewing the lives of people who have so much more than us, we feel as though we need to obtain more things to keep up with others.

Parents who send their children to Nutre Hogar are under the impression that their children will be exposed to a rich, American lifestyle by constantly being surrounded by American volunteers. Their kids are leaving their small homes to enter a world of constant care, food, and toys, all things that they, as parents, could not give to them. Unable to see how these children will be happy returning to a life without materials, they often do not know what to do when their kids are back in their arms. The hands that should be holding their children are instead grasping for toys from the back of a truck. These parents are attempting to obtain the lifestyle that they think the privileged Nutre Hogar volunteers have revealed to their children. Suddenly they believe that happiness will be obtained through pieces of plastic.

*As they say
in Spanish,
algo es algo;
menos es nada.
Something is
something;
less is nothing.*

Parents who do not even have the means to send their children to a recovery center surprisingly do not need much to be happy. They care for the family at their side, bless the Earth under their feet, and are grateful for a roof over their heads. There is no competition in their lives. Through cancelling out the idea of having materialistic things, these families are forced to appreciate the things that they do have. They aren't the hands desperately reaching for more; they are the bags floating freely without anything to weigh them down.



The idea that happiness must be attained through materials is a concept that destroys our ability to appreciate the things we have. When we can't even be grateful for our own children because we feel as though we are not getting enough materialistic entities for them, we are at a loss of life. My life in America has been replete with money, shelter, and opportunity for success for as long as I can remember. I constantly view my existence in terms of what I can obtain next, whether it is a job that will secure my future or merely items, such as accessories, that I do not need. My anger towards the first Panamanian group we met that day was a hypocritical reaction because I am just as guilty as them for not always appreciating the things I am given in my life.

When I first entered Nutre Hogar, I thought the only thing the children wanted to do was play with toys. That's what will make them happy, material objects. Mariah quickly shook this idea from my mind through showing me that sometimes all people need is affection. Standing on the mud floor of the Panamanian hut later that month further enforced this idea in me that happiness must come from within, not from materials. Happiness is the ability to recognize that having something in life is better than having nothing. As they say in Spanish, algo es algo; menos es nada. Something is something; less is nothing. Happiness is not achieved through ownership or consumerism. It is found in the people we are within, the family that surrounds us, and the home that is the mud under our feet. ☘



THE DANCER IN THE DANCE

By Valerie Erwin

The first time someone noticed was on a Wednesday. It was competition season, and I was in my fourth hour of practice. Nationals were the upcoming weekend in Atlanta, and we were attempting to correct any imperfections in our routine that might keep us from securing a national title. My body was weak, working overtime without enough energy to sustain its demands. During a short water break, I found a spot to lie down by the ever-coveted fan at the front of the dance floor.

While hoping to catch my breath if even for a minute or two, one of my coaches walked over to me. Towering over me and trying to speak over the loud, constant humming of the fan, she asked, "How do you feel?"

Her question reminded me of when a police officer pulls you over and asks, "Do you know what I'm stopping you for?" They know the answer, but require a response from you that meets their expectation. Knowing her well-crafted motive, I didn't respond.

"You look kind of pale," she persisted.

"PJ, I am pale. I don't tan."

Bearing no tolerance for my sarcastic reply, she continued. "Have you eaten today?"

"Yes." That was true, at least.

"What did you have?"

I've never been good at lying to people. I can dance around the truth for days, but my coach knew me well enough that if she asked directly, she would get a truthful answer. Not to mention, I lacked sufficient energy to even forge a story that would avoid the truth that daily I fought so desperately to keep hidden.

"Crackers," I said.

"When?"

"At lunch."

"Did you eat breakfast?"

"No."

"Is that all you've eaten today?"

I hesitated, anxious of what her response would be if I continued with my honesty. My mind raced with what seemed like hundreds of what-ifs in a matter of seconds.

Would I still be able to compete that weekend?

Would the team find out?

Would I be able to keep dancing altogether?

Would she tell my parents?

What would they do if they found out?

Abandoning the thoughts that held me captive, I finally answered her, giving her only one word. The one word that confirmed everything she had originally been searching for. One word that affirmed what I knew both of us didn't want to be true.

"Yes."

Her facial expression quickly changed from her stern demeanor of interrogation. Part of me still can't find words for it. She was concerned, that should go without saying. It was something much more than that. Whatever it was, she immediately reached for her purse and grabbed a dollar out of her wallet.

"Here, go buy food from the vending machine; I don't care what it is, but you have to get something. Once you get it, you're going to sit out the rest of practice to eat. If you don't, I'll feed you myself."



*The whole thing
was a game, a
game of perfection.
And I wasn't the
only player.*

Dance was always my greatest escape or my worst enemy. Sometimes it was both at the same time. Once I started competitive dancing it became my religion, my worth, my life. I would go to the gym to practice for hours on end to perfect my technique—to make my leaps a little bit higher, my turns a little bit stronger, to be better than the next best girl on the team. I skipped meals weekly, and in desperate times, daily, in hopes of being smaller for costume fittings and competitions, or sometimes just for the sake of being smaller. Once I achieved one goal, I would move on to the next one. The whole thing was a game, a game of perfection. And I wasn't the only player.

Perfection tends to be a distinct mark of the culture in professional and competitive dance with varying degrees of intensity depending on the company, team, or individual dancer. In its defense, perfection is a necessary element of performance-based dance, which inherently requires that movement in routines and performances look neat, polished, and presentable for audiences and in some cases, judges. The desire for that perfection reaches a new extreme when it is demanded of not only the dancing, but of the dancer. And today, teams and companies are setting expectations for multiple aspects of the images of their dancers from a certain weight, body mass index, height, skin tone, hair style, to even a certain hair color or nail color. Much research even shows that this desire for perfection (whether it be towards image or performance) is a risk factor in dancers developing eating disorders. For many dancers, this culture creates a struggle for perfection that all too often, can never be complete; a struggle that causes countless dancers to inflict harm upon their bodies in order to meet the expectation of possessing the perfect body.



"My freshman year of high school I thought I was tiny (in terms of weight), I still do think that, but I was also short, so because of my shape they wouldn't put me in certain parts of shows. Then, my sophomore year, I had put on some weight and they told me, 'If you can't fit in the costume, you can't dance'

the part.' It didn't have anything to do with technique or talent. Our instructor was a professional ballerina from Russia who had a specific idea of what dancers should look like ... but only a few dancers really looked like that. Ultimately, that's why I ended up leaving the company. I didn't feel like I was going to move up any further there, and simply because of my body type. I remember one time a girl that had been dancing two years and was probably 5'9 and 120 pounds got a part over me, and at the time I had been dancing for seven years ... I cried myself to sleep over that. That was kind of the straw that broke the camel's back."



The topic and discussion of the expectations and physical demands placed on dancers and their bodies is a double-edged sword: the demands are motivating for some but crippling pressure for others. Many dancers fall victim to harmful habits like eating disorders in order to keep up with the pressure to be perfect, however developing such habits can often lead to taking the dream of dancing away from them when disorders put their bodies and lives in danger. In the reverse, many other dancers are capable of developing a healthy lifestyle that helps them to continue pursuing a career in dance and also offers them new opportunities for success. The culture of different dance organizations, companies, and teams often shape this dynamic.



Collin Sarvis has been a dancer for 19 years; almost 10 of those years were as a part of competitive teams. After dancing competitively at studios, for her high school, and with an all-star program, Collin auditioned for and secured a spot as a sideline dancer for Clemson University, a spot she would hold for her four-year college career. In high school and in college, Collin drew her attention to and looked up to America's sweethearts, the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders. "I had posters of them on my wall," Collin admits with a giggle. But the adoration she had for the team didn't stop at being a spectator. "My senior year at Clemson I looked up their audition dates and started training. I

Many dancers fall victim to harmful habits like eating disorders in order to keep up with the pressure to be perfect ...

had dreamed of being a part of that organization, I wanted to give it a shot. I thought, 'if nothing else, I'll be honored just to have participated in the process of the selection of their squad.' After travelling to Dallas for the auditions though, to Collin's surprise, she was selected for the team.

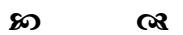
Over the phone, Collin tells me with almost childlike excitement every detail of being a DCC. There's a satisfaction in her voice in the telling, she knows that as a result of her hard work she has made her dreams a reality. She and I talk about everything from their halftime performances to moving her life to Dallas, and eventually we get to what's expected of the team in order to maintain the near perfect bodies that women across America strive for and that men dream of. In my conversation with Collin, there is refreshing perspective for the reasoning behind demands for images of professional dancers, perspective that doesn't get anywhere close to as much attention as the arguments for the negative effects of the intensive expectations.

"The expectations that our coaches have for us as far as physical appearance and shape go are justified by our performances, our last halftime routine was seven and a half minutes long and then of course you're dancing on the sidelines for the rest of the game. You honestly have to work out outside of team practices to have the stamina enough to dance through the duration a game, which is a few hours. And usually in a team setting, you don't want to be the rookie that can't finish a workout like the veterans are able to—the older members of the team are role models and positive examples as far as their exercise habits go, in that sense."

The pressure to keep pace with team veterans and the necessity to be physically capable of finishing routines strong are not the only driving factors in the expectations for the physical shape for a Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader. As Collin explains to me, there are no team workouts outside of practices. While the team members are provided with the necessary resources if needed to maintain healthy dieting and exercise habits such as dieticians and personal trainers, each individual member is responsible for making sure that their weight and shape is in line with what is expected of them. Weekly weigh-ins are conducted, and if a dancer is not within the healthy weight designated to her, there is a chance that she will be "benched" or prohibited to dance at the next game, or until she can get back within her target weight range.

Collin explains that these expectations both positively and negatively impact her. "I feel better when I eat better and care for my body, I just feel better about myself. And I love to run, it's very therapeutic. I don't know anyone on my team that achieves their weight and physical shape in an unhealthy way. I think that what they expect of us in that regard is admirable. My teammates are great role models for having beautiful bodies from living a healthy lifestyle."

Where Collin finds her difficulty are the physical expectations for her appearance that lie outside of weight and physical shape. "Not only do we have to have our hair and make-up done for performances and appearances but even practices, too. I mean technically, if we're anywhere in public we have to look that presentable, nails done too. I think that's the hardest part for me, there's always this pressure to look perfect."



Artwork by Heather Clark

"It's like this vicious cycle ... to get addicted to the 'success' that losing the weight brings ..."



Amanda, a lifelong dancer and fourth-year dancer for an NBA team, offers a different perspective with respect to weight expectations.

"We diet like crazy, I know girls that weren't healthy in it either ... it definitely causes eating disorders. We usually prepare our bodies for the auditions and then it's a huge sigh of relief once you make it, but then you realize you have a photo shoot or opening night or something else and it doesn't actually stop, there's always something. Every food or drink that I pick up, I think about. I know a girl that's bulimic and it's very apparent but we don't know how to address it because we don't know her very well, she commutes from out-of-town for practices. And we think ... 'Do we tell our coach? Do we try and approach the girl?' It's hard to get anyone to change that has been doing it (developing unhealthy habits) for a long time, especially if they were doing it while they made the team because they associate the success with that."



The grace, synchronicity and sheer perfection from groups of elite dancers showcase aspects of the art that never cease to leave a crowd with jaws dropped, appreciating their beauty and also the physical and technical challenges of the performance. This difficulty can be seen across multiple styles of dancing, and not just from acclaimed ballets. Watching a performance by Alvin Ailey or the University of Minnesota dance team, Denver Nuggets dancers, or even high-school aged performing groups from schools and teams like Westmoore High School Poms or PACE All-Stars likely elicit a similar appreciation for the difficulty required of and mastered by the group that executes the routine. Performances and companies like these inspire dancers and non-dancers alike. For many dancers, it fuels their existing passion for the art form and gives them something to aspire to.



“Also during my freshman year of high school, but prior to my departure from the company—one of our dancers who was aspiring to go professional with the ballet . . . she was . . . gosh, she was a really bad case. She was bulimic. But it was . . . so much worse than anything I had ever come into contact with. It got to the point that one day she left [ballet] class because she had eaten breakfast and went to throw it up, and someone finally heard her. They went to go check on her, and she was throwing up blood. She told our instructor, and they called for an ambulance to come pick her up. Then her parents took her out of the company and she went home for the remainder of the season.”

“The craziest part was we all thought she might quit after something like that . . . but pretty soon after the fact, she ended up attending a different school for the arts in North Carolina and then went on to dance for several different companies. There’s no way she was better before she started dancing again . . . it was too short of a time for her to recover, to break a habit of that extent. It’s like this vicious cycle . . . to get addicted to the ‘success’ that losing the weight brings . . . getting parts in productions and associating that with the size you bring yourself to, that you’re somehow getting the parts because you’re making yourself vomit . . . or whatever. I don’t know. It’s tragic.”

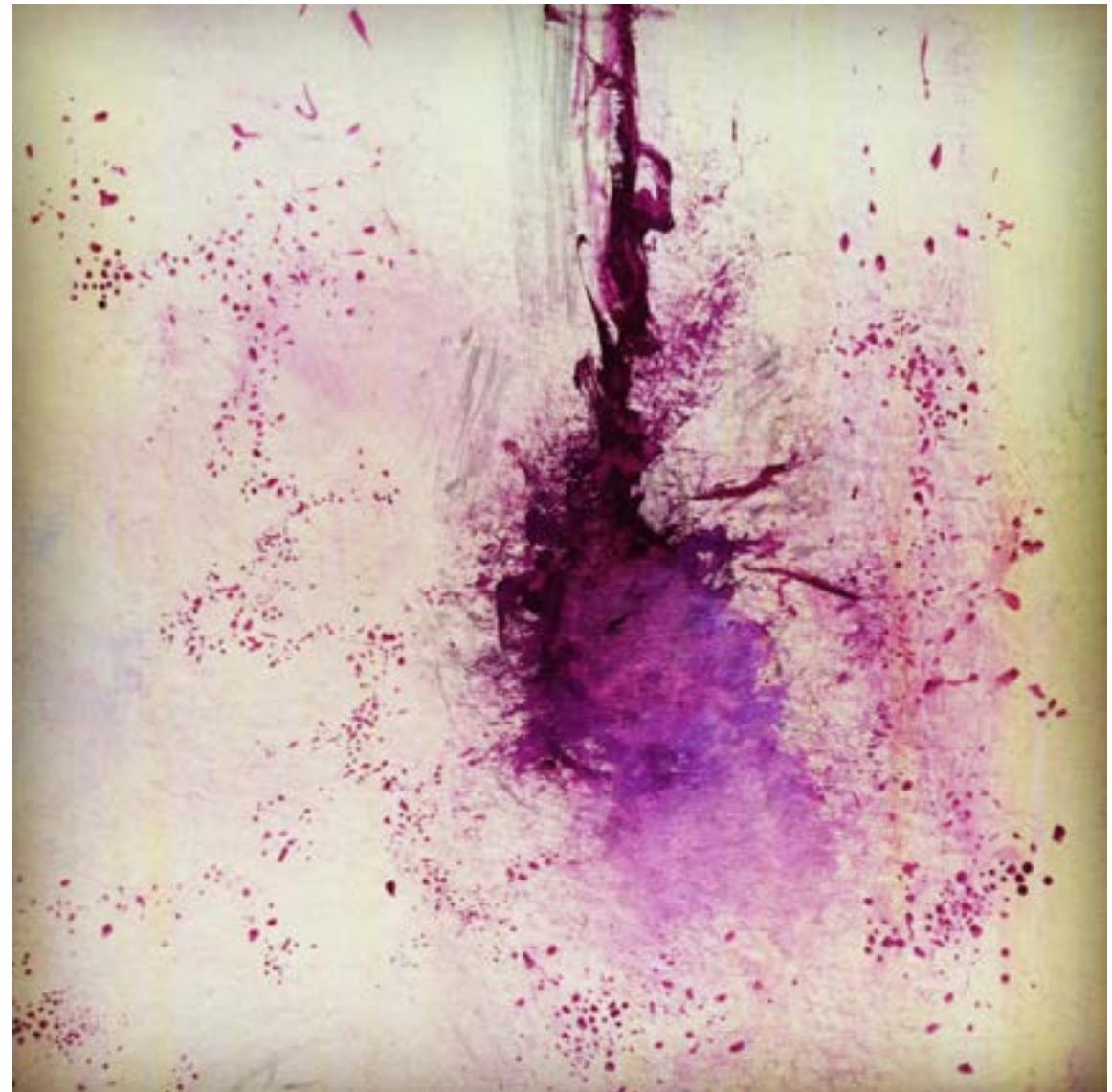
¤¤

I was allowed to compete at nationals in Atlanta that weekend.

My coach never told my parents.

I never told my parents. I wonder if there is a part of my mother that always knew, though, and out of fear, never asked. I got better, but it took a long time. Sometimes I feel like that part of me never fully left. That it’s always there, lurking under the surface, waiting for a spark that will make it come alive and manifest itself in me again.

It will say to me, “You can be more perfect, let me show you how.” ¤¤



Artwork by Joni Hayward



EIGHT HOURS

By Bryn Newman

It doesn't matter where the eight hours were spent. I was trapped in an in between, lost in vast blackness. Because that's all that night was, blackness. And until not long ago, that's all it remained. The memories never come back to me, and they never will. Parts of me still aren't back. Parts of myself lost forever.

When I woke up I didn't know where I was. The room was bright. It wasn't Adam's¹ room. It wasn't my room.

Who the fuck is that on the couch?
What happened?
Is that throw-up on the bed?
Where are my pants?
The stranger stirred. He got up and poured a cup of water. He asked if I knew the boys from San

¹ All names have been changed.

Clemente and I said they were my good friends. I noticed my phone, shoes, and chapstick in a neat pile by the foot of the bed. That's strange.

I found my acid wash jeans behind me, immediately got up and wiggled into them, put on my shoes, and the stranger walked me out. I knew I was in a fraternity house, but I was so disoriented I couldn't tell which one I was in. I was let out a side door and I walked across the street to my apartment.

I got into the shower and tried to wash the throw-up out of my hair. Instead of cascading refreshment I felt a wave of panic wash over me. My stomach dropped as an image filled my head of me laying down looking at a dark figure above me, I couldn't move. Then the image was gone, just like that. Back into the blackness.

It was just a dream.

I crawled into bed and I stayed there for hours. If I tried to eat it came right back up. Tears streamed down my face as I hugged the toilet bowl begging for it to stop. This was the hang-over from somewhere worse than hell.

¤ ¤

Two days later my roommate was told by a friend in another fraternity that I had had sex with his friend Mark. I was on my period. Sex didn't seem plausible. I remember my roommate telling me the news. She seemed calm, her face concerned. She waited for a reaction. I stuttered rape, and looked at her for reassurance. I burst into tears. I exploded.

I put my forehead against the wall, my face was contorted with anger, shame, confusion, and regret. I was in shock—convulsing and sobbing. My roommate and I had no idea what to do. I picked up my phone, hands shaking, and called Planned Parenthood. It was the only place I could think of calling. I told them what happened and naively asked if I could get tested for rape. The woman told me if I had already showered it wasn't possible, but she wanted me to come in and get tested for STD's. I was stunned.

How could this have happened to me?

I wasn't convinced that I just had to live with this. So, I looked up sexual abuse hotlines and called the first one, Moving

*I put my forehead
against the wall,
my face was
contorted with
anger,
shame,
confusion,
and regret.*

to End Sexual Assault (MESA). A representative told me that evidence could be collected up to 72 hours after the fact and she would meet me at the closest hospital to walk me through the process.

The next four hours were torture. The first forty-five minutes of that, even worse.

The women from MESA made me feel awkward, the so-called soothing tones and comforting words drove me more insane than the thoughts running through my mind. I didn't want to be comforted. My way of coping involved immediate sarcasm and distancing myself from the emotions I was feeling. I wanted to pretend none of this was happening.

What will everyone say?

What will I do?

Will any of the guys still be my friend?

Should I tell my parents?

How do I even begin to explain that I got too drunk and woke up in a stranger's bed?

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. After we waited four hours in a secluded waiting room, a nurse popped her head in and called another young woman. In Colorado, 1 in 4 women will experience a completed or attempted sexual assault during her lifetime. According to the advocacy group 'One in Four', 42% will not report the crime. I shouldn't have been surprised when the nurse wasn't expecting me.

Finally, at one in the morning, there was a knock on the door. The second late night SANE nurse had arrived. It was time for my exam. Together the strangers and I headed down the fluorescent-lit hall. I was raw, cut open and completely drained. They kept saying this exam would be the hardest part.

I was sent to the bathroom to pee in a cup and remove my tampon. When I returned the SANE nurse examined my skin for any marks, bruises, or tenderness and photographed any of these injuries she found. She then collected samples. She swabbed my mouth, made me cut my nails off and place them in a folded piece of paper, pulled strands of hair from my scalp, and did a pelvic exam. She also collected all of my clothes from that night. I was then given two treatments for Chlamydia and Gonorrhea. One of which was pills and the other was a painful shot that was injected into my right arm. They kept telling

me I was being so strong. I was at the point where I didn't feel a damned thing.

I was told the police officer had shown up. If I filed a report the tests and treatments were free. After I put fresh clothes on, I followed the officer back to the private family waiting room. The MESA rep kept telling me I didn't have to give them any information I didn't want to, but I wanted the truth, I was frightened, and I didn't know what else to do.

I told him what I knew and it wasn't much. I explained that I went to a party at a good friend's house and by 11:30 pm, I blacked out. Not one glimpse could be recalled. I then woke up in a bed covered in my own vomit and was told two days later a frat guy "fucked" me. I told the cop that we found out who he was and what fraternity he was in. But when I called the boys prior to going to the hospital they didn't know a kid who matched the description I gave them. I also told the cop that the fraternity was located across the street from my apartment building and I had no idea why I hadn't gone home or stayed at Adam's house.

That night, I was driven home for the first time by a police officer.

When I finally crawled into my bed eight hours later, the sockets of my eyes were aching to the point where I felt like my eyeballs were going to fall out, right into the hands I was crying into.

I always said that would never be me, I read the articles, I heard the stories. I was always safe at that house, why was this time different? Where were my friends? Why didn't anyone notice that I disappeared? Why didn't anyone call looking for me? I never meant for this to happen.



September 11th, 2012 3:09 am

My hospital band rests on my wrist as a label symbolizing today, my trauma, my gut feelings, my truth. Yet, what is the truth? Everything I should know, blackness. Everything I want to know, nothing. Everything that I wished would have happened, impossible.

I am told it's okay to feel sad, or angry, or fine. I am told it is all right to feel anything. I don't really know how I feel. I am also told that it is not my fault. But maybe it is? I really don't know and I feel as if no one will help me. I am so afraid. So

*Everything I
should know,
blackness.*

*Everything I
want to know,
nothing.*

*He knew more
than me
and I wanted to
know all of it.*

afraid. Eight hours of shame, eight hours of fear, eight hours of numbness, eight hours of emptiness, eight hours in foreign halls, eight hours of excruciating torture. Now, as I lay in the safety of my own bed, even a slight shadow causes my heart to drop, I can't sleep when that's all anyone said I needed.

I will never feel whole, ever again. I am afraid I lost someone who I thought I was. I don't understand what happened. I can't bear to show my face. I can't run away. All I want is to escape.



I slept through my alarm the next morning. I wanted to sleep forever. I didn't want to write my papers, study for my tests, or even attend class. I dreaded walking out of my apartment or anywhere near the fraternity. Even in class, I wasn't there, my body was sitting in those desks, but my mind was somewhere else, lost into yet another sea of blackness.

I told my brother what happened, or at least what I knew. He hugged me. For the first time, I felt someone actually cared about me. He told me he wanted to hurt the kid, he wanted to make it look like he was mugged, he wanted to protect me like he would have that night if he had stayed another hour—he could barely stand being in the room he was so angry about the whole situation. He said there was no way a blacked-out guy would have remembered to put on a condom. So we found Mark's phone number and decided to ask some questions.

I couldn't manage to speak to him.

I asked one of my roommates to do the talking.

She began the conversation as follows, "Hey Mark, this is Bryn's roommate and we have some questions about what happened the other night."

He nervously told us the same story we had already heard. But added, "Well Sean introduced us on the stairs and we were all dancing, I barely remember the walk home."

I gasped, trying to refrain from making any noise, tears silently fell down my cheeks. I didn't remember meeting him on the stairs, let alone any part of walking home. He knew more than me and I wanted to know all of it.

My roommate continued, "We just want to know what happened because in the state of Colorado, when a girl is not mentally or physically able to consent it is considered rape."

"Are you going to the cops? Please, this isn't like me, I don't even do this sort of thing, please don't go to the cops," Mark pleaded on the phone.

I heard the stammer in his words. My empathy is often my worst enemy.

Why did I have to drink that much?

Why did I let this happen to myself?

My roommate ended the conversation saying, "Please answer any other phone calls from this number, we might have more questions."

I wanted to curl up into a ball and disappear.

I had already told the cops this boy's name and what fraternity he was in, there was no way my brother could settle my score. But all I wanted was for Mark's ribs to break and for his nose to bleed.

Going to the cops was the right thing to do, right?

¤ ¤

September 11th, 2012 10:17 pm

For the first time in my entire life I wish I was invisible. And for a few moments here and there I feel like I'm not truly here. I am finally that kid that has to avoid a certain path to school, afraid that I might see something I do not want to be confronted by. Him. I am afraid to interact with my friends because I fear they will mention it. I take responsibility, I made a mistake, but that doesn't mean this should have happened. This doesn't mean I have to feel guilty, and sad, and angry, and bad. I barely even have had a moment to grieve.

And him. He is a ghost of my regret, my shame, my terror, but he says he did not mean to harm me. Yet, in every sense he did. He harmed everything. I ruined everything. I've been told kick turns are good—touch the rock bottom and kick back up to the surface, to the light. I never wanted to reach this point.

¤ ¤

On Wednesday, September 12th, 2012, I met with a detective from Boulder Police Department. He asked me to tell him what

happened. I repeated the story and I still cried. He went over my options. He told me that I had complete control. I could close the case or I could keep digging. I was afraid I might lose friends if I pressed charges. He asked if these friends would still be there for me ten years from now. He was right, but a part of me didn't want to follow through with pressing charges.

I just wanted this to be over.

He gave me a tape recorder and told me to call anyone who might have more information than me about the night. I wanted answers and for some reason I thought the police would help me get them.

I made the calls later that evening. I just wanted this kid to admit that he remembered something. I wanted him to come to the realization that fucking a drunk incapacitated girl was disgusting. I couldn't fathom that he didn't remember anything, there had to be bits and pieces—he had put on a condom for Christ's sake.

Mark had tried calling me multiple times. I ignored the calls, and listened to his voicemails begging me to meet with him in person. I had refused to respond, but now I finally had to call, I had to hear his voice.

He repeated that what happened was unusual for him. He told me that wasn't like him, "If you got to know me you would know this isn't me."

"Can I take you to coffee?"

"Can we talk in person?"

"No," I said. I couldn't bear to see his face.

I told him I was in the middle of my period, there was no way I would have willingly had sex with him. I told him my tampon was missing. I asked if he remembered me going to the bathroom. He said he doesn't remember a thing—not even the walk home. He asked if I was going to the cops. I told him I already have and I had to do it, it's protocol when you go to the hospital and go through the medical examination I went through.

"I don't want to press charges, I just want the truth." I hang up.

I muster up the strength to call Sean, my friend who allegedly introduced us. He explained that we were on the stairs dancing with his friend. He introduced me to Mark and then I fell into the middle of the dance floor, off the stairs, straight onto my face. He picked me up and brought me upstairs to

make sure I was okay. Apparently I wanted to keep partying. He said he was going to leave and asked Mark if he would make sure I was okay. Then, when he walked outside he saw me walking with Mark and he asked if I was good and where I was going. Sean said I then told him, "I'm fine. I'm going home."

Sean tells me his friend seemed really blacked out too, and he tried to make sure that I was okay before we parted ways. He ended the conversation with, "Whatever happened shouldn't be turned into a big deal."

I said, "Thanks," and hung up.

¤¤

September 15th, 2012 2:17am

I was told that I fell flat on my face that night and it feels like I haven't gotten up since. Dead weight. Heavy with regret.

All I want is the truth.

¤¤

Over the next few weeks, I continued trying to live a normal life—go to class, go to work, meet with a counselor, listen to the same bullshit.

Sean called me a few times and asked questions on Mark's behalf about the investigation and told me I should drop it. I told him that I wish I hadn't and I swore I wasn't pressing charges.

I told Sean, "I wish my brother could have just beat him up and this would have been over."

Sean agreed, "Mark deserves to learn a lesson and getting his ribs kicked in probably would have been better than going to the cops."

I am crushed because I agree. For my situation the cops only made things worse—they drove Adam away from me.

"You took it too far, fuck frat stars but you shouldn't have gone to the fucking cops," Adam drunkenly screamed at me, "The kid's frat is getting shut down, all of his brothers hate him, and he's moving back home."

"You took it too fucking far."

I never found the answers I was looking for, and I never received the apology I wanted.

I never meant for this to happen. But I just stared, mouth gaped open. My world was in pieces.

¤¤

Eventually it was all over. The days slowly passed and I started walking in front of the fraternity house again. I told the detective that I didn't want to take it any further. I never found the answers I was looking for, and I never received the apology I wanted. But as time went on I grew. I realized my true friends were the ones that pulled me aside and said they were so sorry that this had to happen to me. I took a drastic step back from drinking and I learned my limits.

In the end I was not happy with my choice to go to the cops, but I am happy I did something. I live on a college campus that sees what happened to me as a normal incident. Blacking out and hooking up is casual to them. These boys live in fraternity houses where girls are slipping out every morning of the weekend. These boys don't see it as disgusting, they high five and encourage the other guys to do the same. They are so determined to keep up, the line is sometimes crossed. And the girls stay quiet, because if they speak up, "They took it too far."

This subject is atrociously taboo, and it pains me to see girls live in a culture where they are made to feel dumb for drinking too much and getting taken advantage of. I am shocked that as a society we don't prepare young girls with people to call to seek advice from if something like this happens to them. I am appalled that men live in a world where they are not taught the manners to bring an incapacitated girl home to her roommates. I am not encouraging girls to not contact the authorities. I am encouraging girls to stand up for themselves. I am encouraging girls to find the strength to do something about their situation. I am encouraging girls to walk away from the shame and find the courage in their hearts to stand up. ¤¤



THE AUTHOR AT RIGHT IN A BOULDER COUNTY GYM

I LIVE TO FIGHT

By Joel Perez

Thud goes the sound of the glove as it rushes towards my face and finds its mark right on my jaw. An eerie ring lingers within my ears and the pain of the punch instantly stabs at the mark. My eyes, hit by a flash, squint as they brace for the coming onslaught of punches. The blows glance off my head, yet another hook sneaks its way past my arms, landing once more on my jaw. It reminds me of the time my brother caught me with the same hook, only I fell to the floor wrenching at the dry pain that followed.

There was no doubt in my mind my jaw was broken—I could barely open it. The act of breathing alone became work. Yet I withheld my composure and continued to fight, or rather, defend. Bobbing, throwing anything I had, weaving, dancing about the ring, forcing a breath from within my exasperated lungs. I knew I should have run more.

The beeper rings to signal the end of the round. My arms weigh a ton and instantly drop to my sides. I stagger my way back to the corner. My trainer, a withered ex-amateur

champion, walks over to me, gives me some water and instructs me for the next round. My body yearns for me to throw in the towel. It's been only a couple rounds and I can barely work in half a breath.

After watching my first Rocky movie as a small boy, I have been a fan of the sport, punching the fluff out of my pillow, using my little brother as my punching bag, and pleading with my parents for a pair of gloves. My parents, also fans of the sport, knew well enough the damage a single punch to the head could have on me. And because of that, fighting competitively was not one of my options. After a while of pleading I finally settled with watching it on TV. I tentatively watched the fighters' footwork, mocked their every move, wondered about the feeling of walking into an arena packed with cheering fans just to see me. When no one wanted to fight me, I fought with my shadow and did as many pushups as I could, though working my body then was just an empty dream.

"BEE BEE BEE!"

Lungs still filled with fire, I can see my opponent charge me, starting right where he left off the last round. A barrage of uppercuts and hooks come my way, aimed at my face.

"Move your head, Joel!" my trainer yells.

I duck, step to the side and throw a solid jab to the body following with a jab landing right on his nose. There's nothing like the feeling you get when a punch lands cleanly on the mark. The power surges through my body seeing my opponent wince and stagger from my might. He stumbles back to the ropes and covers up. Adrenaline surges within my body. I rush him, his back against the ropes, and work his body with hooks and uppercuts, chopping away at his base. Occasional crosses to the face land clean as well.

I'm weary of unleashing all I have for the opportunity to knock him out—I'm running out of fuel and I still have a round left. I back up, letting both of us recover before I again jab up and down. My jaw aches with every pulse, and now I am terrified. I can already feel the pain that's waiting for me while I anticipate his next hit, aware of the suffering that will follow. Surrounding the ring, other fighters pause their workouts and stare. I can hear their comments.

"Oh, he's tired."

"See how fast he is?"

There's nothing like the feeling you get when a punch lands cleanly on the mark.

"Damn . . ."

I begin to think about how my family would react watching me fight. I yearn for the day when I walk into the ring, crowded with people surrounding it, and I can see my parents, brothers, sisters, and friends. I want to fight for them. I want them to be able to come to me after the bout and congratulate me with shouts of joy and excitement.

4:30 in the morning and my alarm awakes me to a chilling sunrise. Sleep drags me back to my bed but I know that if I let it overtake me I'll regret it. I trudge my way over to my drawer and slip on a pair of shorts, put on my sweater, grab my shoes and head out the door. Instantly the sharp air fills the walls of my lungs and I begin my jog.

A lot of times I think about my future when I run. School, work, relationships, and sometimes even the sliver of consideration for going professional finds its way in. It's what keeps me motivated, makes me sympathetic to the pain. I return to my house and get ready for the rest of my day, while most of my enemies still sleep soundly.

*In the heat of the skirmish,
he sneaks a blow
once more into my jaw.*

This time the pain is unbearable.

What seems like 10 minutes ends up being just 2 and a half as the 30 second warning initiates. I gather up the little energy I can scavenge and swing. By this time fatigue has overwhelmed my muscles and technique no longer restrains my movements. It is in these last seconds of the fight that full out brawls ensue in an attempt to score the last winning round. This fight was no exception. Devoid of the possibility of a fatal blow, my will rallies me forward to finish the round. In the heat of the skirmish, he sneaks a blow once more into my jaw. This time the pain is unbearable. My knees buckle and my hands can no longer muster the strength to defend

myself. Blow after blow, my opponent lands clean shots to my head. For a moment a numbing pain resides within my skull, where each contact no longer affects the already stinging dullness.

*Yet technique and timing
will beat speed and power
nine times out of ten.*

*Anyone can throw a punch—
very few can box.*

It always fascinated me that people think of boxing as a “sweet science”. It’s easy to assume it is a primitive sport. Two people within an enclosed ring hammering their fists into each other’s faces and bodies, with the sole purpose of “knocking out” the opponent, rendering them unconscious. Yet technique and timing will beat speed and power nine times out of ten. Anyone can throw a punch—very few can box.

When the final bell rings I stagger my way to the nearest ropes and lay my whole body against them. I desperately force as much air as I can through my nose. I struggle to pull my mouth piece from my mouth. I slowly try to take it out, but as soon as I expand, a sharp stab inflicts my jaw. At that moment I feel as if it’s broken. Saliva strings down to the floor from my opened mouth. I slowly gather myself and take my gear off. The pain in my head won’t subside. I put on my street clothes and give my farewells to my trainer and the fighters. I pick up my gym bag and head out into the night.

The pain in my head gives rise to skeptical thoughts. Am I committed to this sport? Is this really what I like to do? Train hard only to go home to an irritating headache and aching jaw? Are my parents right? Many times my parents have warned me about the dangers of the sport and how I could end up. I watched a documentary once about the effects of boxing on the brain, and it definitely opened my eyes even more to the possibility of how I could end up.

To this day my memory lacks at moments, but I live only once, and to live in security without any risk is hardly a life worth living to me. I’m in it for the glory, the proud feeling to say, “Yeah, I’m a fighter.” In life, I’m no more than a spoke on a wheel, another student, another number, passing unknowingly through life and its hardships. In boxing, I’m someone to watch. All eyes are on me and the opponent. All eyes waiting for one of us to knock the other down, cheering at every punch.

I want that. ☰





CLOUDS

By Kelly Givens

Walking into the tattoo shop was nerve wracking and exciting all at the same time. I couldn't believe this day had finally arrived and I was ecstatic. I sank into the leather couch as I waited for the tattooist to call me to the back. I flipped through his portfolio and thought for the millionth time if this was exactly what I wanted. A tattoo is forever. My stomach started to knot with anticipation. Impatiently, I began bobbing my foot to the music playing over the speakers. The electric guitar riffs combined with the drums and bass line created a rock and roll atmosphere. I was having a hard time relaxing without singing along. Twisting my hair between my fingers while humming softly to myself, he finally called me back. I took my T-shirt off and sat with my back to the tattoo artist as the needle started up; it sounded like a swarm of angry wasps. The potent smell of A+D ointment and rubbing alcohol filled my nostrils. The moment the needle touched my skin, I started to remember why I was getting this tattoo, and I realized there were both tragic and joyous memories that led me here.

∞ ∞

Sara was a beautiful girl, a strong athlete, and an amazing straight-A student. It took us a long time to realize she was sick. It started off slowly; she skipped meals and just insisted she wasn't hungry. Since it wasn't every day we didn't notice right away. She stopped bringing food to school and she was gradually getting thinner and frailer. I don't know how her parents found out. Maybe they also realized she wasn't eating. Maybe they caught her throwing up after the rare meal she did happen to eat, but as soon as they recognized that she was anorexic they took her to the best doctors they could find. It didn't matter who they took her to see; she wasn't getting any better. If anything she was getting worse, she was 5'9 and around 100 pounds. The final hospital they brought her to was her last hope.

I remember the last time I saw her. She was lying in her hospital bed, propped up by fluffy, cloud-like pillows. Her black curly hair limply hung in ringlets around her gaunt face. I sat next to her and we gossiped about our friends and the boys we had crushes on. All I wanted to do was cry and tell her that she's beautiful; I didn't understand why she couldn't see that. But I needed to be brave for her. I delicately touched her skeletal hand and asked her how she was feeling. She told me, "I feel strong for the first time in a long time. I'm okay." We must have talked for an hour or so after that comment before I left. I told her I loved her and I'd be back later that week. She smiled sadly at me and told me she loved me too. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up and I hesitated, just for a moment, before I walked down the hall. A strange feeling washed over me, I felt like bugs had crawled under my skin. I thought something was wrong, but I couldn't put my finger on it. So I ignored it and walked out of the hospital.

Two days later, her parents called my house and talked to my mom. I was at school at the time. When I got home, my mom's face looked red and puffy, like she'd been crying. She asked me to come sit next to her on the couch; cautiously I sat down. She stroked my face and played with my hair for a moment, her brown eyes looking at me like she was trying to keep my image in her mind forever. "Mom, what's wrong? What's

*I knew her
songs by heart;
I couldn't
stop singing.*



going on?" She couldn't speak for a few more seconds, but it felt like an eternity. "Sara's parents called today . . . Somehow she snuck out of her room and went to the roof of the hospital . . . Honey, she jumped; she committed suicide." She choked on her words and started to cry. I sat in stunned silence for a moment before I stood up; I immediately fell to the ground as painful sobs escaped from my throat. Suicide? How could she do this? Why did she stop fighting? I couldn't believe this had happened, especially to someone who used to be so strong.

One of my best friends died and I was exposed to my own mortality. Death consumed my thoughts; my mind was sucked into a tunnel of pain and fear. I didn't understand, she said she was getting better; she said she was feeling better. Was she just trying to give me hope so I wouldn't suspect what she planned on doing? Was she feeling better because she decided this was what she really wanted?

Singing was my coping mechanism so I didn't drown in my sorrow. Day and night, I listened to music and sang until my throat was raw, until I could no longer make a sound. Evanescence music would play in my room, some songs on repeat. The haunting lyrics and melodies echoed around the room and in my head. I knew her songs by heart; I couldn't stop singing. It was the only way I could think of to simultaneously ease my pain and honor Sara's memory.

Singing had always been a way for me to relieve tension, heal, and cope with difficult situations. Everyday eventually got a little bit easier. I never would have gotten through her death without my music. It allowed me to grieve without my misery swallowing me whole.

¤ ¤

Backstage is chaotic. The blinding make-up lights and calamity of noise drowns out my own thoughts. Girls on both sides of me, chatting away and doing their hair with smoking curling irons. Guys and girls alike searching for lost shoes and miscellaneous accessories before heading to the stage. Closing my eyes, I try to quiet the cacophony blaring inside my skull. I picture my sister and me laughing together and Sara's smiling face; once my headache subsides I carefully finish applying the last of my mascara with a bittersweet smile on my face. I grab my bright red heels and run up the stairs in my black and silver dress to the stage door. Opening it as quietly as possible, I slip inside as I hear the lyrics to "Prime Time Blues." The mixed a capella jazz choir entralls me and I get lost in the music, the glamour, and the lights. The other girls file in behind me one at a time while the other choir finishes their last song. The curtain closes to roaring applause from the audience as the light focuses on a filler act in front of the red curtain.

We grab our microphones and tiptoe on stage as quietly as church mice. Anxiety hits me right as the applause goes up for the filler act. Will they like us? God I hope I don't screw up. Don't forget about that key change after our scatting break. There's one moment of utter silence—that second before the curtain opens. My hands are shaking, my smile in place, and my adrenaline screaming in my ears. Once the lights begin to come on we begin our a capella rendition of "I Got Rhythm." Jitters gradually disappear while the opening notes tumble from my lips. I can't even see the audience but I know there are hundreds of eyes staring at me, and the rest of the girls. If I were watching the performance instead, I would be tapping my feet and bobbing my head along with the beat. The two and a half minute song comes to an end; the audience explodes into applause and rises to their feet. Satisfaction, pride, and joy radiate off of us like

heat from the sun. I feel like I could float on cloud nine, I'm completely euphoric.

¤ ¤

*This magnificent
piece of art was
now a part of me.*

The tattooist finished and I realized how much this would mean to me for the rest of my life. My flesh was tender and I could feel the blood pounding into freshly inked skin. I stood looking over my shoulder at the treble clef and bass clef that will forever be a part of my life and permanently on my body. The ebony stood out against my pale skin in a graceful heart with filigree delicately twisting and turning within the center. It was beautiful and I could not put into words how happy I was with it. This magnificent piece of art was now a part of me. It was something that I wanted, and needed, to get for myself; it will always be mine. Singing is something beautiful that I will always treasure and rely on to get me through the rough patches that will undoubtedly come up throughout my life. It's for Sara, for every time I perform on stage; this tattoo is an exquisite reminder that I will always be able to overcome whatever the world throws at me. ¤



MEMORY WORK



By Kathleen Childs

“Nancy’s Favorite Things: Sunsets, Sunbathing, Antiquing, Santa Claus, Ladybugs, Cats, Gargoyles, Maine, Florida, Steven King Novels.” I knew I’d get emotional, but I didn’t think the tears would actually sting my eyes shut. I start reading again. Short poems. Promises of peace. Bible verses. A slowly bleeding message painted onto felt by his partner in blue ink. “I’ll always love & remember you—you could always make us smile. Always my love—Chris.” An old photograph’s protective plastic covering glints in the mid-afternoon sun. Each one of these grave-sized rectangles is a person. I might not have really internalized that yet.

80 82

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt is the largest piece of folk art in the world. More than 48,000 hand-sewn three foot by six foot quilts form thousands of twelve foot by twelve foot collages that tour across the country. Started in San Francisco in 1987, the project quickly spread nationally, as family members and loved ones sought to pay tribute to the lost. The combined panels now cover 1.3 million square feet.¹ Nearly thirty acres. Despite the staggering size, the quilt only represents 13% of the 641,976 estimated AIDS deaths in the United States.² The last time the whole project was displayed as a unit was in 1996. Now, it's far too big. All 48,000 panels were displayed in Washington DC this summer in conjunction with World AIDS Day, but it took 60 displays over 31 days to show it, with sites including the Washington Monument, National Mall, the Smithsonian Institute, and many smaller venues ranging from churches, museums and libraries.

Our quilts arrived Friday evening. UPS said they'd be there Monday, and Leanne Haug thanks God for small favors. She'd have gotten them out, but she really didn't want to be working all night. Leanne's been entrusted with the memories of 200 human beings, and after the months of paperwork and university bureaucracy, she takes the task with the lighthearted morbidity of a combat veteran. Leanne talks about the project with excitement, but there are tones of resignation when she tells me she's not going to be sleeping much this week. On Saturday, ex-board officer Matt is there to help, and it's appreciated. The previous crop of graduating seniors left Queer Initiative's current administration (which is to say Leanne) without a real road map. The nondescript three foot by eighteen inch cardboard boxes we load into my truck don't seem too heavy—but definitely not a suitable task for one person.

"Can you get one of us with Tim in it?" Kay McBride's gotten all her siblings together one last time. They're not all in great health themselves, and this might be her last time to visit the ashes sewn under a photograph of a kind-eyed man in his late thirties. If the scene weren't so somber, I'd feel self-conscious standing on this black fold-out chair handing cameras back and



¹ "About the AIDS Memorial Quilt," *Fact Sheet-- The Names Project*, web.

² "Basic Statistics and Surveillance," *CDC HIV/AIDS Statistics*, web.

forth to try get the three sisters and their brother all in frame.

80 82



March 17, 1989
Timmy,

From the time you were born a beautiful tiny baby, I have loved you, an obedient and caring boy. You didn't carry your responsibilities lightly. You gave love and happiness to me in big and little things you've shown me you enriched your own life and the lives of those around you.

Now you rest, gently in God's hands.

I will always miss you as I know that you are ordered and sure, every thing is ordered with wisdom and the unbounded love of our Heavenly Father.

Grant us in all things to see his hand.

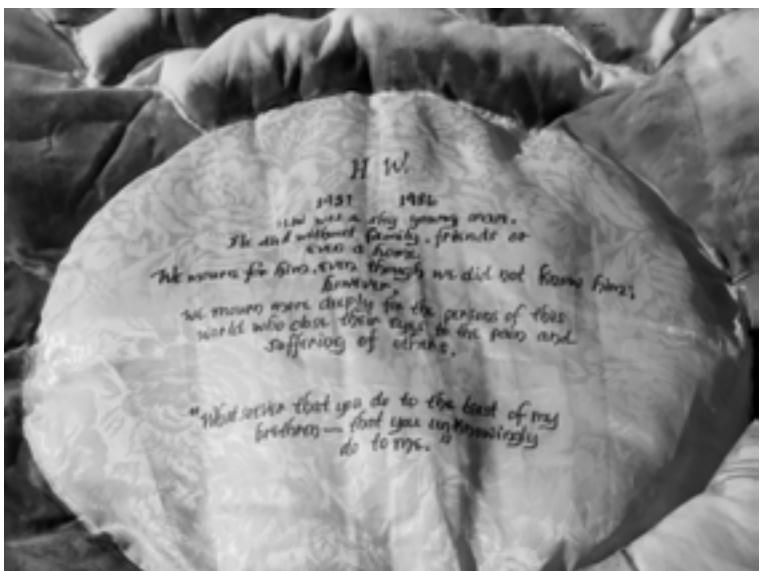
The Lord watch between you and I, when we are absent one from the other.

With love,
Mommie

80 82

“I’m sure it’ll all come back to me when we actually do it, but there’s a specific way you have to fold the quilts.” Leanne lifts up the corner of a quilt, and points to the five digit number on the underside. “This will end up face-up, so they know which quilt is which when we send them back. If Matt shows up, he can teach you how to do it, hopefully you’ll tell everyone else.” She was here to begin setup at eight, and rushed over from her brand new software engineering internship to make sure the five o’clock take down goes according to plan. She’s fading wearing black jeans and checkered vans under a herringbone blazer, dirty blonde hair pulled into a tight ponytail. Overall, the first day has been a success. Six quilt blocks rest on the Norlin quad, and someone managed to requisition a tent for the volunteers minding the memories. Curious students stopped to examine the quilts, and a few locals came to pay their respects, but not many people took fliers about AIDS prevention or the free condoms. “I’m just happy to have gotten things out. As long as we have people to take down, we can set more out tomorrow. For today, I’m just glad it all seems to have gone okay.”

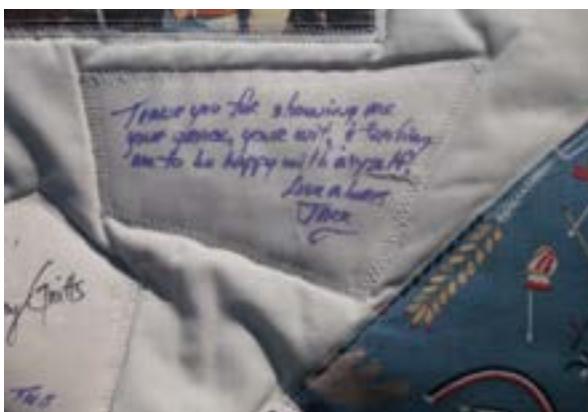
Anyone is welcome to enter a panel, and several celebrities have been memorialized several times. Freddie Mercury, singer and frontman of rock group Queen has twenty-five, actor Rock Hudson sixteen, top-ranked tennis professional Arthur Ashe nineteen, artist and activist Keith Haring, nineteen. The vast majority, though, are made by and for family, or in some cases the community that’s all one has left. Men who have sex



As I'm taking pictures, a middle-aged woman approaches me. "Have you lost someone yourself?"



A quarter mystery pattern, each white triangle with a different signature.



with men still account for 61% of all new HIV infections³, and Black and Latino people are overrepresented in all HIV-Positive populations. As such, the AIDS Quilt becomes a powerful statement of defiance and a rallying point for the gay community. According to the project’s founder, Cleve Jones, the quilt “worked on so many levels for people. It was therapy. It was something to do with your hands. It was a way to encourage people to talk and share memories. It was a tool to use with the media to get the media to focus on it. It was a weapon to shame the politicians for their inaction.”⁴

Wednesday afternoon, a small CU Gay Literature class stops by the quad. The professor’s never taught this course before, but encourages his students to share thoughts or stories. Most stand around quietly, and I can’t tell if they’re feeling reverent or bored. As I’m taking pictures, a middle-aged woman approaches me. “Have you lost someone yourself?” I answer that thankfully I haven’t, no, I’m just helping out and taking pictures, but she suffers from a chronic illness herself, and her online discussion group let her know the quilt would be here. Watching and reading seems to fire her up, she volunteers to help if we host the AIDS Quilt next year.

That’s an idea that excites Leanne when I talk to her on Thursday evening. This week she’s been hurting pretty bad for volunteers. Today, she left her job early to help put away the quilts, only two people had signed up to help. “You know, what I’d really like to do is start doing the quilt in the spring—it’s just too busy at the beginning of the school year. Everyone’s busy,

and no one knows what’s going on.” I assume Leanne means herself. She mentioned last night that she was feeling overwhelmed organizing the quilt’s volunteers. She continues: “I called BCAP [The Boulder County AIDS Project] to ask if they had anyone who wanted to volunteer, or any educational material, but they never got back to me.” An older man approaches as several of us collapse the tent. “You don’t have many quilts out.” I start to explain that the nine that are out today are only part of the 25 we have,

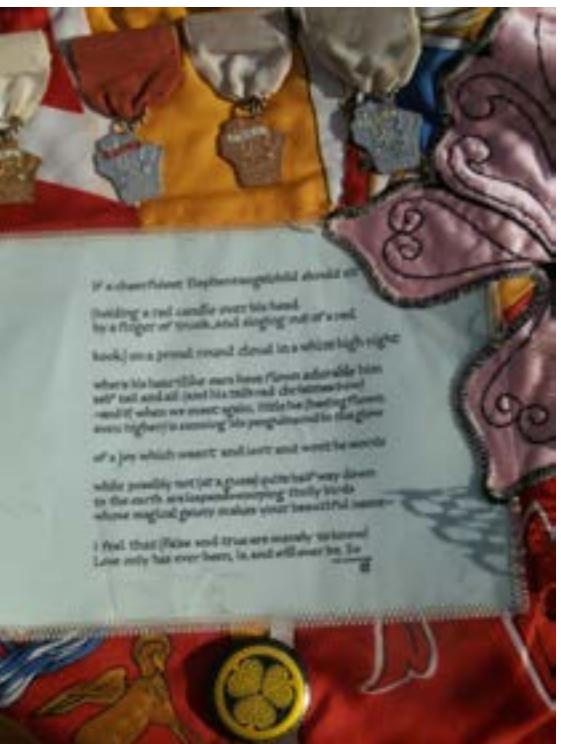
3 “HIV in the United States,” *CDC HIV/AIDS*, web.
4 “The Age of Aids,” *Frontline PBS*, web.



we're rotating through the collection, but he cuts me off. "I like it this way. I was there at DC this summer and it was too much. You couldn't stop and really read."

¤¤

Please take care of my Dog." Newspaper clippings and Louisiana State University Diploma. A quarter mystery pattern, each white triangle with a different signature. Terry Caoette's name in plaid on plaid with a single yellow wax rose. J. Timothy Atkinson: Sweet Sensitive, and Ever Sincere. Steaks in a lavender's paint sparkle like nebulae. I take off my shoes, hoping I can stay grounded. An e. e. cummings poem: "if a cheerfulest Elephantangelchild should sit" nestled under butterfly wings. Dozens of rainbow handprints. Jerry Payne's first second and third prizes at the Denver Rose show. The cool grass cushions me as I recite names like liturgy. "Looking back through the tears; I still smile Remem-



bering with all the Love in my heart . . . It hurts good—Love, Jerry."

¤¤

According to the Names Project, it would take thirty-three days to look at the entire quilt, taking in one panel a minute. I've certainly spent twelve hours transporting or reading our twenty-five, and I've barely kept it together. I'm breaking down watching these traveling graves. The other regulars seem equally exhausted. Leanne and consummate volunteer Kae wax nostalgic about showering. I swear the week's never going to end. Can I even imagine the task of fighting the disease itself? Even here, there are so few of us helping. Under-publicized, underfunded, understaffed.

Fall announces itself with a mortal chill and the threat of snow on Friday, the last day of display. The quilts stay inside, displayed in an obscure corner of the University Memorial Center's basement. Traffic's much lower, and the sentiment feels a little blunted, even closeted. Some quilts hang like gallery-pieces, but several others are spread out on the linoleum, as though the bones lie underneath the building's—our community's—foundation. ¤¤

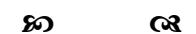


THE ROAD GOES ON FOREVER

By Matt Anderson

GUN IT. My life flashes before my eyes as we charge past an eighteen-wheeler, bracing myself for a collision that would certainly kill us all. A dusty car with dimmed headlights heads down our throats—the machine emerging out of the ghostly cloud of snow hovering above the two-lane highway. The wheel of my truck, and my life, are in the hands of my buddy Belush. OH SHIT. He frantically swerves back into the right lane as we skid across the icy road with no more than thirty yards between the oncoming car and the massive eighteen-wheeler behind us. The glaring eyes of the monster hunting us down illuminate the rearview mirror as the back tires at last catch traction somewhere within the deep powder. We drive onward through the wild blustery night. ROMPING. My brothers and I are all alive. The Lord wanted us to live that night, for we were on the road to New Orleans to celebrate the beginning of the Christian season of Lent, dammit. MARDI GRAS 2010.

Take it easy,
Take it easy
Don't let the sound of your own wheels
Drive you crazy
Lighten up while you still can,
Don't even try to understand
Just go ahead and make your stand
And take it easy



VACATION. Windows down, we slow our roll through the Baton Rouge-NOLA traffic, taking a load off to *The Band* and crack'n cold Shiners. Warm welcoming rays beam down upon my scarred right forearm that casually controls the wheel while my other arm hangs out the window. I'm cool as shit. Despite having been driving for over twenty-four hours and through the worst snowstorm to ever hit North Texas, the traffic does not bother me. I leisurely breathe in the thick gulf air and observe the diverse peoples on Highway 10, taking note of license plates and bumper stickers. Alabama. Arkansas. Texas. Mississippi. Georgia. LOUISIANA. The Saints had just won the super bowl and countless golden fleur-de-lis were stuck on the back of cars, distinguishing locals from the elated invaders flowing into the city. Although I am a die-hard Cowboys fan, I was glad to see the Saints win for the city of New Orleans after the devastating blow of Hurricane Katrina. WHO DAT. Proudly displayed on the back of my black FJ Cruiser is a Colorado Buffs tire cover. Having driven all the way from Boulder and trucked through a record blizzard makes us bad ass. More badass than any other Mardi Gras travelers on the road to NOLA that weekend. This makes us "very dangerous people." RUN RALPHIE RUN.

Down south in New Orleans, the prettiest girls I've ever seen
Sparkling eyes, lips so sweet, we make love to the Rumba beat
Ship's at anchor, my suitcase packed, got a one way ticket, ain't
comin' back
Life's a pleasure, love's no dream, down south in New Orleans



*I am in
a great deal of
pain when I
wake up in my
truck the next
morning.*

TAKE A PULL. No time to waste and no place to stay, we park our asses on top of the tallest parking garage near Bourbon Street and pass around a handle of Evan Williams Black. Rae pops the cap off of the handle saying, "Thank y'all for letting me take part in this trip with y'all, this is gonna be a good time now, oh yeah." The three of us had picked my buddy Rae's black ass up in Dallas after we dropped my dog off at my parents' house along the way. Rae is the man. In a town like New Orleans, it doesn't hurt to have a "brotha" at your wing either. He takes a pull of the whiskey and then passes it to Belush, who grunts out some primal rebel yell before throwing the handle back into the New Orleans skyline. Nobody knows the little bearded man by his actual first name, Ryan (I think), but rather by Belushi, the name of the lovable Animal House character. Not only does he have an extraordinary resemblance to the John Belushi, our Belush is a terrible drunk as well.

I grab the handle from his hands saying, "Leave some for the rest of us, Cowboy."

"Yeah, Belush, take it easy there. You're already down'n it like wuter," Mac chimes in with his Baltimore accent. Wuter? Really? Such a stupid ass accent. Mac, who was the ring-leader behind this spontaneous idea, defines what it means to be a Balti-Bro, rocking long hair that just yearns for a lacrosse helmet to flawlessly flow out the back of. "Boys," he says before taking one last pull, "Let's get after it." LE GO.

Well you get down the fiddle and you get down the bow
Kick off your shoes and you throw them on the floor
Dance in the kitchen 'til the morning light
Louisiana Saturday Night



THROBBING. I am in a great deal of pain when I wake up in my truck the next morning. Looks like we're parked outside a Holiday Inn. Rae is passed out in shotgun and little man Belush is curled up in the back. Where's Mac? I open my door and gracefully roll out. Where the fuck is my phone? Rae and

Belush wake up as I drop the biggest F-bomb of my life. FUCK. My iPhone's gone. It was cracked to shit anyways, but I figured it would be more loyal to me than this. Get over it. A loss is a loss.

"Yo Rae, where the fuck is Mac?"

"He's in the hotel with some girl, remember?"

"Oh, right. She good look'n?"

"I'm sure she looked great last night," Belush chimes in from the back. Rae gives Mac a call but his phone is off.

"Let's go inside and look for him, maybe they'll let us shower." Fat chance, considering we didn't know the room number or the name of the girl he was with.

"Well, there is a pool."

"Good call, Belush. That's exactly what I need right now. I feel like ass." We take a dip into the pool, followed by a detox in the hot tub. Life is good. Or better than it was earlier this morning, at least. Two hugely obese black men jump in to our bath tub with us.

"How y'all doin' this fine morn'n?" We reply that we're feel'n good, feel'n alright.

"What's that you're sipping on?" asks Belush.

"Some daiquiris der, start the day off right," the less obese of the two replies. "There's a drive through daiquiri stand just a block down." I love New Orleans.

Finally Mac shows up—I guess he spotted us from the lobby. "Enjoying the pool of my 5-star hotel, I see." Belush MAD.

"Shut the fuck up, Mac. We slept in the truck, you ass-hole."

"Calm down Belush, I didn't get a bed either. Slept on the floor with some chick bigger than you. Let's get the fuck out of here, though, before she finds me."

"Drive-through daiquiris, anyone?"

NEXT QUESTION.

Good morning America, how are you?

Don't you know me? I'm your native son

I'm the train they call The City of New Orleans

I'll be gone five hundred miles when the day is done

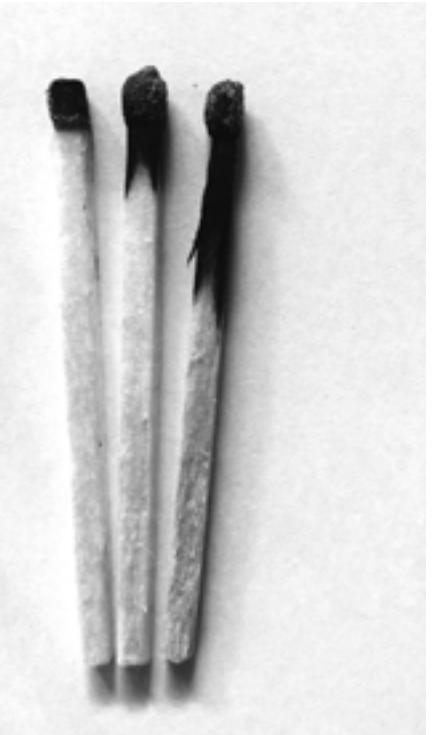


Photo by Joni Hayward

CELEBRATE. The four of us drink our tropical beverages as we stroll down the Endymion parade route. Everybody loves a parade. This place has more life than anywhere I have ever been. Just a bunch of colorful people having a good time together in the streets of uptown New Orleans. Green, gold, and purple beads paint the brilliant sky. Sounds of jazz ignite the crowd, people are dancing, laughing. I wished I had as much rhythm as Rae. On that glorious day, I was reborn. Some beads hit Belush in the back of the head when he was turned away from the floats. Belush MAD. The little man's drunk already. STANDARD.

Born on the Bayou

Born on the Bayou

Born on the Bayou



BRO. Rae was by far the most skilled at peeling crawfish. He has to be part Cajun – last name's Toussaint. The four of us shove the free crawfish down as quickly as we can, surrounded by strangers, most of whom were guys from southern fraternities. Lot 'a dudes. Mac brought us here. He is friends with some guy who works for Brobible, which is a really douchey website for bros, and got us invited to a sponsored crawfish boil.

Luckily, the party was also sponsored by PBR, my favorite shitty beer. They had free PBR hats, free PBR shirts, free PBR koozies, and most importantly, free PBR. Those PBR hats would not leave our heads for the rest of the trip. Belush would not take his off for the next few months. SPONSORED. At this point everyone at the crawfish boil was good and drunk. And a PBR drunk is a happy drunk. We share our story and naturally, everyone loves us. The bros of the crawfish boil had become our fellow journeymen as we joined together in drunken anthem. SING IT.

So rock me mama like a wagon wheel

Rock me mama anyway you feel

Hey mama rock me

Rock me mama like the wind and the rain

Rock me mama like a south-bound train
Hey mama rock me

¤ ¤

TITS. We are on a balcony overlooking the sea of people on Bourbon street. Mac and Belush toss out beads to select women down below. Belush HAPPY. On top of the balcony with us are a bunch of fellow college-aged ragers, including some beautiful Austin ladies. It was the place to be. It was by chance that I had run into some buddies of mine who go to the University of Texas that were nice enough to invite us up to their balcony. We are the Kings of Mardi Gras. O RAGE.

I see you, heh, on down on the scene
Foxy

You make me wanna get up and scream
Foxy lady

¤ ¤

THE BOOT. I have no idea how long we have been at this bar. It could have been days because time seems stagnant. Still without a phone, I feel the need to find my brothers. I look over and see Rae occupied in the corner. He's got a big smile on his face, grinding with some thick white girl like it's a high school dance.

"Yo Rae, where are the other two drunks?" I spoke too soon, as we watch Belush shove a bouncer outside the woman's restroom. The little man is covered in flour and drenched in water. He had been antiqued. We later found out that he had been getting nice with some girl in the women's restroom when the bouncers tossed flour and water over the stall door. GOT'M. Rae and I quickly run over to save his dumb ass, grabbing him and pushing him out the door. The bouncers had been beating the shit out of anyone who was fucking around at the bar that night. Rae calms down a D-lineman sized bouncer standing outside the door—they're brothas. I tell Rae we should head to the truck.

"But where's Mac? It's 6 AM and he's not picking up."

*The little man is
covered in flour
and drenched
in water.
He had been
antiqued.*

¤ ¤

Rock me mama like a south-bound train
Hey mama rock me

¤ ¤

THE BOOT. I have no idea how long we have been at this bar. It could have been days because time seems stagnant. Still without a phone, I feel the need to find my brothers. I look over and see Rae occupied in the corner. He's got a big smile on his face, grinding with some thick white girl like it's a high school dance.

"Yo Rae, where are the other two drunks?" I spoke too soon, as we watch Belush shove a bouncer outside the woman's restroom. The little man is covered in flour and drenched in water. He had been antiqued. We later found out that he had been getting nice with some girl in the women's restroom when the bouncers tossed flour and water over the stall door. GOT'M. Rae and I quickly run over to save his dumb ass, grabbing him and pushing him out the door. The bouncers had been beating the shit out of anyone who was fucking around at the bar that night. Rae calms down a D-lineman sized bouncer standing outside the door—they're brothas. I tell Rae we should head to the truck.

"But where's Mac? It's 6 AM and he's not picking up."

"Let's just get the fuck out of here, we'll find him later." The three of us walk down the street as the wise sun rises before us, telling us our ridiculous night must come to an end.

"There she is—my baby." We walk up to my truck and find Mac passed out with a fat chew in his lip. We were all home. The four of us sleep it off for a few hours, wake up, and drive.

THE ROAD.

I was a highwayman, along the coach roads I did ride
With sword and pistol by my side
A place called Boulder on the wild Colorado
I slipped and fell into the wet concrete below
They buried me in that great tomb that knows no sound
But I am still around
I'll always be around

NEVER ENDS. It is Monday, February 20, 2012. I am on the road again, headed back to Boulder from New Orleans for the third consecutive year. The pilgrimage must be made every year now, for it has become a part of who I am. Each Mardi Gras experience is unique from one another, and I have made the journey with different people every year, Rae being the only other one of my friends to be at my wing for all three. I would die for Rae. My friends who have never been along for the ride do not understand. They see no sense in spending the same amount of time on the road as in New Orleans. PUSSIES. Mardi Gras needs no plan, you see. You lose your freedom when you have one. Last night was the first night I managed to find a bed to sleep in while in New Orleans. DON'T CARE. The Road is nothing without impulse. Sameness is suicide. You must be open to meeting new people on the Road and build upon the friendships you already have. BROTHERHOOD. A true traveler is flexible and above all open to growth. I am a highwayman. The Road I'm on goes on forever and the party never ends.

HAPPY MARDI GRAS Y'ALL. ¤



DEVOTION OF A ONE-EYED MATADOR

By Hannah Beckler

In Zaragoza, Spain a 1,200 pound Miura fighting bull lowers its horns. The massive muscles in its neck quiver and the nostrils flare. It charges—blood clotting like beaded sweat on its ashy black hide—towards the awaiting shadow of the *torero*, the bullfighter. Assuming the traditional languid stalk, the matador, Juan Jose Padilla, is scaled resplendent in gold and fuchsia. The bull thunders towards him with head lowered and horns ripe with the anticipation of gory penetration. Each hoof drives the animal forward. Padilla grips both of his *banderillas*, the wicked harpoon-like instruments designed to coax the bull's confusion into terrifying rage by stabbing them into the flesh of its neck. It is a moment of Hemingway-esque timbre. The bull surges within inches of Padilla. He arches upwards with the tension of a striking viper. Just before the bull's horns reach him, Padilla jumps and brings both *banderillas* down at once. He spins around to face the bull, stumbling backward, toe to heel. Caught up in the momentum of the animal, he falls.

The blue sky wheels above him in a kaleidoscope of his final binocular vision. He lands heavily on his side. The bull is on top of him, churning the dust under heavy hooves. It dips

its mammoth head in a deceptively gentle arc to drive its left horn through the bullfighter's jaw. With a savage upward tug, the horn crushes through Padilla's bone and exits through his left eye-socket, leaving his eyeball to dangle glistening on his blood soaked cheek. Panicked, the bull presses on, dragging Padilla several feet through the arena sand. The skin of his cheek stretches away from his skull and tears with delicate elasticity.

With a final shake, the bull dislodges its horn from Padilla's head, leaving the matador's body lying prone in the dust. He springs up and staggers towards the other toreros. The golden embroidery of his jacket is soaked through with blood to a now a nauseous violet. Pressing his dislodged eye against his cheek with his finger, Padilla begins to scream.

“My eye! I can't see! I can't see!”

Other bullfighters spill into the sand and rush to Padilla's aid. They lift him, bearing him towards the infirmary. Meanwhile, the bull lingers at the edge of the arena. Another matador, Miguel Abellán, steps in. Abellán kills the bull with his eyes glazed in a trance-like state which months later he will swear he can't remember. Tears run down his cheeks. He himself has survived twenty-seven *coranadas*, gorings, yet what he has seen tonight has shaken his very understanding of the *Fiesta Brava*—the wild feast.



The modern *Fiesta Brava* or the *corrida de toros* traces its roots back through thousands of years of human cultural evolution to a prehistoric reverence of the sacred bull. Painted with large horns and the broad sweep of a powerful neck, ancient aurochs are depicted in cave artwork as distantly as thirty-five thousand years ago. In Mesopotamia, the bull was a lunar symbol, and in ancient Egypt, the mortal embodiment of Osiris to be embalmed and entombed within monolithic sarcophagi. From ancient murals on the walls of the palace of Knossos to references in the old testament, the bull has become one of the most important bestial symbols of the western canon.

It is no great surprise then, that the mythology surrounding bulls was adopted by the Romans and brought to the Iberian peninsula during the conquest in 17 BCE. The Romans fought the animals in gladiatorial arenas as well as sacrificed them in

*The Romans
fought the animals
in gladiatorial
arenas as well
as sacrificed them
in ritual
tauroctony—
the killing of a
sacred bull.*

ritual tauroctony—the killing of a sacred bull. In 711 CE, the Moors advanced from North Africa to conquer “Al-Andalus” (Spain) and in the process irrevocably impacted the evolution of modern bullfighting.¹ Now, nearly a millennium and a half since the beginning of its cultivation, bullfighting remains an important—if hotly contested—aspect of Spanish identity.

*Groups such as PACMA
or PETA openly condemn
bullfighting as a spectacle
of cruelty and suffering,
an atavistic ritual
that cannot hope to survive
this new enlightened
era of Spain.*

Is bullfighting a dance, a sport, a torture? A relevant homage to a rich artistic legacy, or an obsolete relic of medieval cruelty? In this complicated debate, evidence leads in every direction. In 2010, Catalonia outlawed *las corridas de toros*, in a move both lauded as a progressive move towards animal rights and criticized as yet another blatant act of Catalonian separatism.² In Madrid, however, bullfights are protected and subsidized as “cultural heritage.” In many Spanish newspapers, bullfighting reviews are printed in the cultural section alongside theatre critiques and art exhibition announcements. Meanwhile, vocal *anti-taurinos* groups such as PACMA or PETA openly condemn bullfighting as a spectacle of cruelty and suffering, an atavistic ritual that cannot hope to survive this new enlightened era of Spain.

1 Shubert, Adrien, “Death and money in the afternoon: a history of the Spanish bullfight,” *Oxford University Press* (1999)

2 Noguer, Miguel, “Cataluña prohíbe los toros.” *El País*, Accessed June 28, 2010.

*To most aficionados,
this is not a “fight.”
It is a dance. It is the
Fiesta Brava—
a complex art form
complete with flourish and
a certain vicious beauty.*

Yet, despite the controversy, bullfighting remains entrenched in the cultural symbolism of the collective Spanish ethos. The misleading English translation of “bullfighting” implies something altogether brunt and unsophisticated. To most aficionados, this is not a “fight.” It is a dance. It is the *Fiesta Brava*—a complex art form complete with flourish and a certain vicious beauty.

The ceremony begins with the *pasello*. The three matadors, six *picadores* (lancers) mounted on blindfolded armored horses, six *banderilleros* (flagmen), and three *mozos de espada* (sword servants) parading in dignified procession around the arena. Once the *pasello* has finished, the six fighting bulls are run through the arena, mammoth and snorting saliva foam. These animals are all over one thousand pounds with an overdeveloped complex of muscles over the shoulder and neck which gives the animal its distinctive profile and monstrous strength. The breed has been specifically selected to exhibit extreme aggression, energy, strength, and stamina. The only sacrifice made for the safety of the toreros in the bulls’ breeding is their separation from their mothers. The cows are more intelligent and will teach their offspring to fight, and for a ceremony dependent on novice bulls, an animal taught to aim would have an entirely unfair advantage.

Traditionally, each of the three matadors and their respective teams have two fights divided into three parts. In the first third, called the “act of lances,” the bull enters the ring and

is tested by the matador and the *banderilleros*. Using spinning capes of yellow and fuchsia, the *toreros* antagonize the charge. Inches before impact, the *toreros* step away from the rage of the animal and simultaneously sweep the cloth over the body of the bull. The purpose of each dance-like pass is to identify which horn the bull leads with. Once the matador is satisfied, the *picadores* enter the ring on horseback. Their role is to stab the bull just behind the corded neck muscles. The *banderilleros* then return to the ring during the second act to each sink a decorated barbed pole deep into the bull’s neck between the shoulder blades. If successful, the resulting combination of blood loss and muscular injury will force the bull to hold its head lower during the last stage of the fight.

Finally, the matador steps alone into the arena. This is the final stage, the *tercio de muerte*, the act of death. The matador, using the traditional red cape, will initiate the passes, *la faena*, in which he will coax the bull into charging the cape a hair’s breath from his own unarmored chest. The *faena* will end once the bull is sufficiently exhausted and the matador is prepared to perform the final act, *la estocada*. In these last few seconds the matador will face the charge of the bull and flourish his sword above his head, thrusting it through the animal’s shoulder blades to stab deep into the aorta.



*The eye is back in
its proper place,
but sightless—*

Juan Jose Padilla does not finish his fight nor perform *la estocada*. His fellow *toreros* bear him to the infirmary, his head lolling on their shoulders and drenching their uniforms in blood. Goring is so common that every arena is legally required to have a surgeon on site. Padilla is tracheally intubated and loaded into an ambulance.

“Pronóstico muy grave,” the staff surgeon tells reporters.

Padilla arrives at the hospital at 7:52 p.m. with multiple fractures to the left side of his face, a protruding eyeball, a detached ear, and a hemorrhage at the base of his skull. An operation lasting five hours is performed to save his life. Surgeons try to rebuild his cheekbone, eyelid, and nose with mesh and titanium plates. The irreparable damage, however, leaves him with a split facial nerve and total paralysis of the left side of his

face. The eye is back in its proper place, but sightless—the optic nerve has been elongated and lesioned by the horn. He is now also deaf in his left ear.

On October 19th, less than two weeks after his goring, Padilla speaks to the press with his face uncovered. The entire left side is amass with bulbous swellings and blooms of mauve and purple bruises. His mouth curls downward in a permanent grimace. His voice is slurred and slow.

"I have no rancor toward this bull or toward my profession," he says, "I will return to dress as a torero."



Why? Why return to the sands of the arena so recently bloodied? Before the goring in Zaragoza, Padilla himself had been severely wounded by bulls thirty-seven times, including a goring through the neck that almost killed him. Yet, whether for courage or insanity, Padilla and most *toreros* remain inexplicably drawn to the *Fiesta Brava*. To them, *la corrida* represents an ancient ceremony, an art form that grasps at the very fibers of human mortality. It is not simply man against beast. It is a celebration of death in which man stands before a creature of his own manifested mortality. When done well, it also becomes a celebration of life. The matador charged with honorably killing such a powerful creature will dance with it to its death, risking his own life in turn. It is for the love of bulls, they say, and for the pure love of the art itself.

Supporters of bullfighting argue that this death is less cruel than those suffered by cattle raised en masse to slaughter in distant mechanized factories.

He appears gaunt, skeletal, in his white "suit of lights," the traditional matador's garb, decadently embroidered with real gold.



It is *Feria* in Jerez de la Frontera, Andalucía. Juan Jose Padilla strides into the arena to the adulation of the crowd. He has endured a fourteen-hour facial reconstructive surgery, daily electroshock treatments to catalyze nerve regeneration, and has lost nearly forty pounds, but now, five months later, he stands again in the center of the ring. He appears gaunt, skeletal, in his white "suit of lights," the traditional matador's garb, decadently embroidered with real gold. Yet, his eye-patch looks menacing and his permanently grimaced face is a portrait of fearsome pride. He lifts his arms wide. His grizzled bellow of "Jerez!"

³ Brandes, Stanley, "Torophiles and Torophobes: The politics of Bulls and Bullfights in Contemporary Spain," *Anthropological Quarterly* 82 (2009): 779-794.

⁴ Minder, Raphael, "Animal Welfare Activists to Protest Bullfighting in Spain." *The New York Times*, August 20, 2010, Web.

sends ripples through the crowd. This is his home turf, his *tierra*.

The bull is enormous. It charges the *banderilleros* who each cape it in turn, sweeping the heavy pink fabric of their *capotes* just inches from the horns. The *picadores* then stab their lances deep into the flesh of the bull's neck. The potent smell of blood is nauseating to the unaccustomed. The second act begins and the bull, wild with pain and rage, barrels forward. This time, Padilla dismisses his assistants and signals that he will place his own banderas. *iAy Padilla, qué fuerza!* This is the same way Padilla lost his eye five months prior. He sprints towards the bull with his barbed weapons held aloft. He leaps and sinks the banderas into the animal, his back arching with the force of the recoil. The bull bellows in pain.

The third act begins. Padilla stands alone before the bull. He circles it, slinking forward. With his red cape he goads the bull until it thunders towards him, punctuating the beat of its assault with a tossing thrust of its foot-long horns. The crowd seizes in anxiety as the bull bears down on Padilla's blind left side. He spins. He has no trouble guiding the bull away from his body.

*¿Vale la pena?
Is it worth it?*

Over the next seven minutes, Padilla and the bull continue to make their passes. The bull shudders with the force of each ragged breath. Blood runs from its nostrils and mixes with the dribbles of saliva at its muzzle. Padilla holds his body high, yet before this creature he appears more frail than ever, the twisted scars on his face more vivid. Together they look startlingly mortal. The passes continue and the two spiral deeper into intimacy. Padilla carves his cape around his hips, leading the fatigued bull ever closer to him. He draws his sword.

Next comes the moment that swallows description. Appalling, sublime, insane, enraging, and alive. Padilla levels his sword at eye height. The bull is only four feet away. He jumps, hovering his torso over the bull's horns and plunges his sword into its heart. The bull collapses mid-stride, blood spews from its mouth, and with a final ripple of taught muscle, it dies.

The crowd erupts. Padilla drops to his knees, from relief and exhaustion, and kisses the sand. He has achieved his goal and returned to his art. For such an honorable and brave fight, Padilla is left with both ears from his bull as trophies. Clenching the ears in his upheld fists, Padilla is lifted upon the shoulders of his brother. He is held aloft like a torch, awash in the exaltation of his triumph. In his face there are no shadows of hesitancy, doubt, or fear. His return in itself is a testament to his blind devotion to the continued future of an art steeped in tradition. A faith that has been left unchecked by the growing opinion that bullfighting should be sedimented in the past as an obsolete relic of bloodier times. Padilla remains staunchly resolute. The *Fiesta Brava* continues.

¿Vale la pena? Is it worth it?

"Yes," Padilla says, "I now have a chance to prove that I can dance better with the bull with one eye than with two." ☙

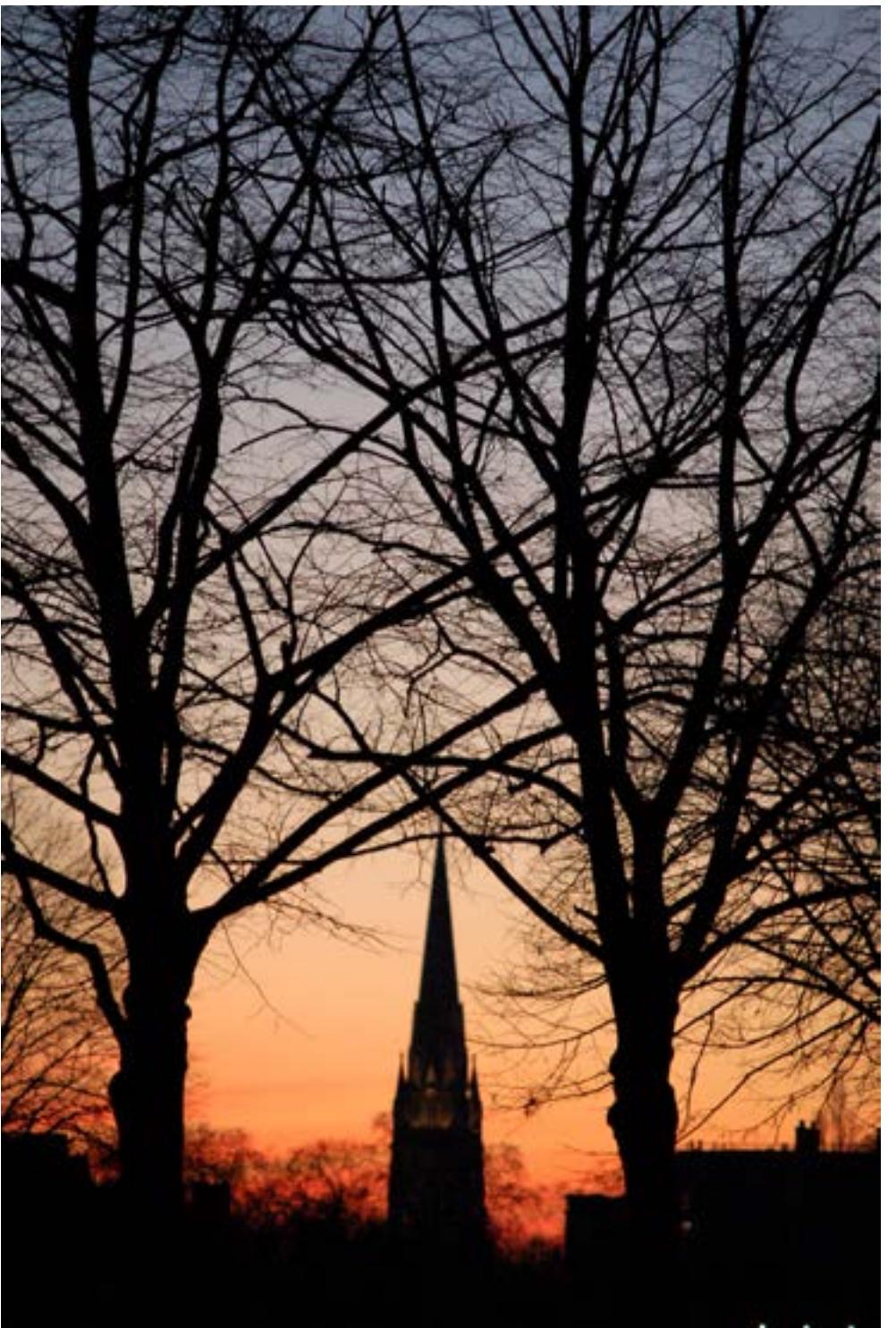


Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

WHAT HE LEFT BEHIND

By Mariah Hermsmeyer

The sound of the curtains scraping across the pole vibrated in my skin. The muscles in my back clenched as I felt compelled to step further inside. I watched my family and relatives disperse around the bed, taking positions in clumps, bracing themselves. I held my breath and strained to exhale. My eyes wasted no time to gaze upon the body, his distorted face—loose at the jaw but petrified in the eyes. There was something familiar about his eyes—the rotten yellow flesh, the faint grey irises, the stagnant pupils staring blankly behind me—but they didn't look like his own. They looked fake—replaced by something inhuman, something I'd dissected in school. I followed his empty gaze to the ceiling. Rows of cheap speckled plaster squares held up by metal frames and cold fluorescent lights shed a pale blue hue over the room. I thought about the wires and pipes hiding behind those squares, powering the machines that tried to keep him alive. As frantically as that energy flowed to awaken the fading vessel where all wires met, it wasn't enough. I wondered if that was that the last thing he saw before it all went dark—if

the loud echoes of the screaming machines were the last things he heard. Or had he disconnected already, his body just making it official? What were his last thoughts, his last pleas? Was he scared?

His body was stiffly arranged on the bed—legs straight, feet erect, arms limp at his sides. I could tell a nurse had prepared him for us—his sheets were nicely tucked in and aside from his horrific face, his body looked at peace. I wondered what tangled unnatural position he was in before as a doctor sat on top of him shoving his palms to his chest, breaking ribs to try and awaken his heart while alarms and nurses panicked around him. Did they panic? Or was this just another arrest, another loss, another night at work?

I looked at my grandmother standing at the head of the bed. Her eyes were red and wet and her head bobbed with small whimpers, but she seemed more composed than before. Only a few minutes ago she was frantic when his fate was uncertain, but now that it was over, she looked relieved. She wiped a tissue under her eyes to clear the smearing mascara while her shoulders relaxed and her breathing settled. The last time I visited them she was scrambling around the kitchen cooking and cleaning, rushing from room to room to care for him when he grunted in agony. She would reenact in great detail all the restless nights, the grim doctors' visits, the helplessness she felt. She always looked tired and on edge, inches away from a total meltdown. It was painful to watch. She was so much younger than him, I wondered if she regretted giving up so much of herself in those last years. Did she really love him that much, or did she feel obligated to care for him? Was it to keep us, the family she loved but had only married into? The man she fell in love with was long gone, replaced by a grumpy sick patient with no energy left to give compassion—I wondered where she found the motivation to stand by that. But it doesn't matter anymore—she upheld her vows and can finally move on.

I thought I should touch his hand at some point as we all stood there. It looked the same—thin leathery skin patched with different shades of reds and purples, blue veins now motionless protruding from underneath, his nails untreated, yellow, and chipped—but his fingers looked different—longer and empty. The rings he had always worn were gone; the thick turquoise wristwatch he loved so much had been replaced by a thin plastic

*The man she fell
in love with was
long gone, replaced
by a grumpy sick
patient with no
energy left to give
compassion—
I wondered where
she found the
motivation to
stand by that.*

strip with his name on it. I reached out my left hand and dipped my fingers behind his thumb. His palms were still coarse, provoking memories of him holding my hand and lifting it to his lips, but the cold chill was unsettling. In my head I imagined him springing back to life, gasping for air and clenching my hand in terror. I drew my hand away quickly, now apprehensive, and resumed my position at the foot of the bed.

My aunt was clutching onto her two daughters, the three of them forming a tripod of support. They sobbed together, truly mourning and grappling for intimacy. The daughters never looked away from the body. Their confused innocent eyes surveyed it like they were looking for something—for someone. I could tell they saw something was missing, that they felt the emptiness, but maybe they were struggling to find the words to ease their minds. I wondered if this would rob them of their innocence, or if they'd fight to keep it.

The loudest wails in the room came from my uncle and his two children. I expected him to cry—he'd always been sentimental—but I was surprised by the painful weeping of my cousins. The boy was the hard type, rebellious and aggressive as the result of a traumatic childhood, but I guess I understood his tears. The man on the bed had been one of the few people that believed in him. He'd watched over him and his sister as children when their single father was struggling to make a living and their intoxicated mother abandoned them. He'd treated my cousin as an equal when most of us looked down at his addictive and destructive behavior. The girl was no better, but her charm blinded it to those around her. She was manipulative and co-dependent, destroying herself whenever left alone. When she looked at me, her eyes communicated that this was too much, too soon since her last attempt. I knew she shed tears for the loss of a mentor and fear for herself, but I could also see the selfish glow of an excuse welling up in her eyes, eager for the attention this night would bring.

My brother stood properly a few paces away from me, his head bent, shoulders hunched, hands folded—like an altar boy waiting for communion. To someone else he may have looked strong and composed, but I know his eyes—they were withdrawn, unsure, maybe even frustrated. When I looked at him he looked back sincerely, the corners of his mouth flexed—a signal we've adapted but I can't explain. It's always been said

that he was the most similar to the man in front of us—handsome and charming, always prepared with new stories of his adventures, always the center of attention. Maybe he was finding the words for this moment to ease the tension later. I wondered if this is what his final night would be like. If he'd carve a similar path, or if he would be like our father, a figure that seems more like shadow on the wall than a physical man. My father was next to him, standing the same way, staring at the floor. I saw his hand twitch in a gesture as if he were speaking, a habit of his when deep in thought. I wondered who he was talking to in there and about what. Was he thinking about his own father? Was he thinking about work? His face was cold, but I knew his chest fluttered with a warm heart. I wondered if he would speak at all tonight, or if he'd remain a shadow until morning. The drooping of his cheeks suddenly struck me—how drastic his wrinkles have become—how little hair was left. A knot jutted into my throat, a wave of nausea overwhelmed me as a flash of him lying on that bed gripped my stomach and blurred my vision.

I braced myself by finally looking at my mother across the room. Her head was slightly tilted down, her hands clasped together resting on her stomach, her body gently swaying from side to side. Her soft eyes floated between his face and her hands. She was praying. I tried to picture the heaven she believed he was heading to: a place of peace, free of darkness, full of light and filled with love. She'd be envisioning his welcome at the gates, a handshake with Peter, the reunion with lost loved ones. Her mother would be there. I could see the smile on her face when she lifted her head and closed her eyes. The beauty she saw in these moments. She'd made a life of sitting at the bedside of the suffering, feeding them the hope and comfort of God's grace, easing them from pain and panic, replacing the fear of the unknown with the certainty of relief. The ordained minister was at work—the stable believer bringing peace to those around her with her presence—but I worried about the orphan underneath it all. The unstable woman I knew at home. I worried she'd need comfort that her distant family would struggle to give. But I knew she had God. It had been years since I broke the habit of praying, but in case anyone was listening, I thanked Him for being there for her when I could not.

I looked back at his face, trying to undo the sagging and discoloration of sickness and age to get back to the man I knew

*Is there
something
darker—more
frightening—
waiting for us
at the end?*

as a child. I'd watched him transform from an old man to an elder—watched the life in his eyes vanish to the very end. An old man is still present, still engaged, just aloof. An elder seems isolated with no energy left to interact. Their bodies are still, but their eyes still move. They can hardly feel, hardly hear, hardly speak, but they watch, as if everything they see is beautiful. They often look on the verge of tears—tears of joy or sadness, I don't know. As a child I just thought they were empty with no thought, disappearing into nothing when they fell silent, but now I wonder if there's something they're hiding from us, like adults hide the stress and cruelty of the real world from their children. Is there something darker—more frightening—waiting for us at the end? Hallucinations, crippling regret, paranoia? Or do we just fall into a state of ignorant bliss? Did he feel his body decaying from the inside? I wonder if that's why we lose our senses as we age. It would be too painful, too terrifying, to feel what's really happening to us.

As I walked out of the room I took one final glance behind me. Everyone was saying their goodbyes—his children leaning over to kiss his cheek goodnight one last time. Their eyes fought to look into his, their heads turning to meet a gaze that couldn't be returned. Farewells were spoken, but the words felt empty in the silence of no response. It was their heavy sighs of resignation that lingered the longest. One final breath, one final moment, and then we looked away forever. ☙



Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer



Photo by Ryan Matthew Long

STILL ON THE FENCE

By Dominic Haury

The first time he fell off the fence he was twenty-eight. Charles Haury III is a father of four, an accomplished entrepreneur, a former husband, and the oldest of eight siblings, but I just call him Dad. He wasn't different from many other southern Indiana natives, besides the fact that a sickness dwelled in him. A sickness that would come to torment him for the rest of his life, and it only needed a trigger, something to let it loose. That trigger was the birth of his youngest daughter, my little sister.

Charlie truly wakes up a different soul every day. When you hear therapists trying to explain certain mental illnesses, it sounds and reads like it came out of a DIY guide. A therapist takes an inventory of symptoms, develops a diagnosis, and comes up with a treatment plan. The sad truth of it all is that after years of treatment some eventually find out there's no curing, only coping.

Charlie grew up in the mid-sized town of Evansville, Indiana, in a lower to middle income household with the traditional nuclear family of eight kids, a mother, and a father. As the oldest, and presumably most responsible, Charlie bought his

first house as a project to flip at the age of seventeen. Selling the house a year later, he made a \$20,000 profit. Most eighteen-year-olds would squander that profit in one way or another, but Charlie was a different type. He put it in stocks—all of it. Buying houses for most people is a huge undertaking; a long drawn out process that often ends in some form of cognitive dissonance. Extreme personalities like Charlie, though, when in their manic states—that is, one of radical and swift decision making—buy them like a five cent bottle of Cho-Cola at the nearest fueling station. Cognitive dissonance and a state of depression eventually ensued, but not until the papers were signed and the house was his.

As an eighteen-year-old college student, he started a painting business—Collegiate Painting. As the owner and operator, it makes sense he had a high turnover of employees because of his unpredictable daily mood swings. Nobody could really understand that he was always on the fence.

While in his early thirties, during the days immediately following the birth of his youngest daughter, he lost it. The demons inside had escaped, and the situation came to fruition like a rabid animal with foam dripping from its mouth. He fell into a deep depression. His wife, Berny, took on full responsibility of the house and all four of us. She was tossed into the life of a single mom overnight as Charlie occupied the bedroom as a permanent residence.

I couldn't recall what type of meds he took, so I called my dad the other day to ask a quick question—should've known there is no such thing with him.

"Hey dad, what type of medicine are you taking right now for borderline?" I can tell right away, I'm lucky to have caught him on a good day.

"Oh, nothing works, therapists misdiagnose borderline everyday. They've always just given me depression meds, like Prozac and Klonopin. I'm hooked on that shit right now."

He continued with his usual rant about the trigger and abandonment, a loss of self worth, inability to be alone, black and white thinking, and the fact that he was never validated by his father. They are all common themes within the world of Borderline Personality Disorder, being played over and over in his mind.

He isn't capable of seeing things from anybody else's point of view. Inconsistent moods as a symptom are, in his case,

When a doctor diagnoses an illness, patients can accept it, move on and try to help themselves, or they can use that diagnosis as a crutch; a vessel to which they attach themselves, in any harm they might smash through, and blame it on the sickness.

an understatement. The "black and white thinking" that's come to define BPD was and is his defining attribute. As the popular book on BPD by Jerold Kreisman and Hal Straus says in the title "I Hate You, Don't Leave Me." That suggests a constant push and pull of everyone closest to Charlie, and it was and remains the story of his life. The authors pinpoint Charlie's problem, but don't offer any solution. "Ask an experienced mental health clinician about the disorder, on the other hand, and you will get a much different response. She will sigh deeply and exclaim that of all the psychiatric patients, borderlines are the most difficult, the most dreaded, and the most to be avoided—more than schizophrenics, more than alcoholics, more than any other patient." Imagine telling your friends and family everything you can't stand about them, and routinely having to call them and ask forgiveness. This is routine for Charlie. When a psychologist attempts to explain the symptoms of BPD, it often comes with an "in some cases" clause. For Charlie, it's almost always present in some way or another, fear of abandonment at your lowest lows.

"If you don't have a sense of self, you don't know who you are so what's the point of living anymore? It's a terrible thing to have. I'm terrified to go home anymore. All it takes is a trigger. For me it was divorce, when BARNY [he has mispronounced her name since I was seven in an attempt, I'm guessing, to devalue her as a person] divorced me and took all my money, that was it, I died eighteen years ago."

I could hear him making himself angry, so I changed the subject back to medication.

When a doctor diagnoses an illness, patients can accept it, move on and try to help themselves, or they can use that diagnosis as a crutch, a vessel to which they attach themselves, in any harm they might smash through, and blame it on the sickness.



they had just happened yesterday—

“Do you remember when you were standing in that football end zone on that fucking nerd’s shoulders? BARNY wouldn’t let me even come near you.”

“No dad,” his kids often need to reply. “I was only six years old you said.”

He often changes subjects mid-sentence. If you mention certain trigger words such as “dollar, mom, my car, Lauren” (my sister), it ignites something and he is off. A conscious effort has to be made to stand on neutral ground.

The extremes of BPD can create an alternate world where the victims of the disorder have completely skewed views of past events in their lives. It has been said that BPD is much like a tall skinny picket fence. Like fence walkers, patients are ready to topple over onto either side at any moment, suffering either deep dark sadness or unreasonable happiness to the point of insanity. Charlie has terrible balance. On top of that fence he is the best guy to be around, unpredictability being one of his best qualities. You never know what’s coming. But that balancing act can only last so long and when it stops, he comes crashing down. It must be a tall fence, I’ve always thought. Within the Academia of Psychology, the fall from the metaphorical fence isn’t a gradual one.

¤ ¤

What the specialists call BPD is actually more often a combination of disorders. According to Presniak, Olson, and McGregor in their article on “The Role of Defense Mechanisms in Borderline and Antisocial Personalities,” “BPD has one of the highest comorbidity rates with other personality disorders, especially with APD.” That basically means, in most cases, one mental illness comes with the other. APD stands for Antisocial Personality Disorder. Charlie has a smorgasbord of illnesses, and you have to wonder sometimes whether they’re in his brain, or just in his head. The brain is a complicated thing and it is said by some that we as humans know more about the vast universe surrounding us than the human brain. I say that’s a dangerous assumption, and allows many to “blame it on the sickness”, if you will. Charlie is now fifty-six years old, and on a good day is able to make it to the Starbucks on the corner and

*A psychologist
can't and doesn't
know the extent to
which a person
can create his or
her own reality.*

read the paper. Antisocial Disorder can have many facets. In his case, he’ll talk to anyone willing to listen as long as he doesn’t know them.

Now Charlie calls his kids anywhere from once a week to twenty-six times a day. A quick reference to an obscure memory from eighteen years ago, and a self deprecating threat to end it all right here right now usually follows the “Hello” from anyone willing to answer the phone.

“Hey Dad, how’s it going?”
(Sobs)

“Come on, what’s wrong?”

“I can’t get outta bed, I’m alone, I think I took too many pills. That’s it, this is the end.”

His kids know what that means, a half eaten block of moldy cheese, a can of refried beans, and a forest of empty pill bottles are sitting next to his bed. His makeshift curtains, made of the sheets that used to be on his bed, have been drawn for days, and he has just gotten enough energy to call and pour some of the burden of his terribly heavy life onto one of his kids. These days are recovery days—he has walked on the fence recently, happily frolicking, not even bothering to look down, and after a misstep and an argument with one of his sisters or brothers, has tumbled all the way to the ground. It hurts—I’m positive of it. For God’s sake, I’ve got the same genes as him.

What will my life come to resemble? This pitiful man curled up on a beautiful summer day in his bedroom? Is any of this illness a choice? I choose to believe Charlie’s unfortunate life is a product of his own doing. It may seem I’m too hard on him, but as someone who knows about the illness, because I was forced to learn about it, and who has dealt with it for so long, I refuse to believe all parts of it are a human condition. A psychologist can’t and doesn’t know the extent to which a person can create his or her own reality. Thanks, Dr. Luzio. You’ve given Charlie a crutch for life, but I won’t go near it. The view from that fence may be grand, but I’ll stand on the ground and look on if that’s quite all right. ¤



KNIGHTS IN SHINING KNEE BRACES

By Sam Klomhaus

Every year, washed-up former high school athletes at college campuses across the nation flock to courts, fields, and rinks to try and prove to their contemporaries that the line, "I would have played college ball if coach had played me in the fourth quarter of the big game" and its many variations aren't complete and total bullshit. I speak of course about the brave souls who compete in intramural athletics. These long-suffering modern-day gladiators finally have their chance to be kings like they remember themselves being in high school. Also, they can get that idiot down the hall to shut up about his pre-collegiate exploits. They battle to decide once and for all who would have been all-state if they hadn't blown out their knee. They will do anything in their power to recapture the glory. I am one of these people.

In my youth, I considered myself a strapping young basketball standout. People would tell tales of my conquests on the court to this day if I hadn't been the victim of a grave injustice. My coach had an idea in his head about how basketball should be played. I too had an idea about how basketball should be

played. They were not the same idea. Why Coach didn't tailor my team's playing style (which involved a lot of running, something a finely-tuned athletic machine like me had no patience for) to my considerable talents is beyond me. Thus, I rode the bench and missed my window of opportunity. Who knows, if it hadn't been for his foolish miscalculation you might be able to watch me perform amazing feats of basketball magic across campus at Coors Event Center. Alas, it was not to be.

I am on a quest to restore my honor and prove to my friends that I am much better than them at basketball. This is not a serious quest like Frodo bringing the ring of power to Mordor, or the Blues Brothers raising money to save the orphanage. My quest is more along the lines of Kenny Powers trying to get back to the big leagues, and my reward will be an intramural championship T-shirt. I will not rest until I have acquired one. I'll go to grad school if I have to. I may end up a very educated man indeed.

Every King Arthur needs a round table and every future intramural champion needs a team that will accompany him in his rise to the top. When I first embarked on my quest for greatness, I decided that only the best possible basketball players would be allowed on my team. A test was administered to make sure only the most talented would join my team. It consisted of one question, which was, "Do you want to be on my intramural basketball team?" Those who said yes were deemed worthy.

Besides me there was Bryant, a buddy of mine from high school whose Division I football dreams had ended when Jon Embree told him that a 5'11" 200 pound stature was too small to be a college linebacker (Who's laughing now?). There was Nick, who was my RA, and the captain of our team, Dan, who is from New York and therefore must be good at basketball. Kohl, who smokes a lot of weed and has a giant head, and Thor, whose name is Thor, and two kids whose names I don't remember and who didn't actually show up to any of the games.

Fully assembled, we struck out to make the opposition tremble at our might. The Harlem Globetrotters would have wet their pants if they ever found themselves on the opposite side of the opening tip-off as us. We came together with a singular goal: win an intramural championship. As it turns out, winning an intramural championship T-shirt is about as easy as giving a male hippopotamus a prostate exam. This was especially true in

*Fully assembled,
we struck out
to make the
opposition tremble
at our might.*

the division in which my team found itself in: the intermediate division, which was made up of thirty eight different teams. For those of you who cannot comprehend the magnitude of that statement, let me put it this way: there are more teams in the intermediate men's basketball division at CU than there are in the NBA. Therefore, we can infer that it is harder to win an intramural basketball championship at CU than it is to win the NBA championship. Good thing we had a few tricks up our sleeves.

*I will be honest—
we looked like middle-schoolers.
In our defense, the other team had what
appeared to be an NBA player
on their team.*

We prepared for the season by using proven basketball training techniques like sometimes taking the stairs up to our dorm rooms (Only sometimes though. Need to save some energy for the games) and going to the gym and staring intently at the weights in hopes that they would lift themselves. A healthy, championship-winning body starts with a healthy, championship-winning diet, so eating as much shitty dorm food and drinking as much beer as possible were also very important pieces of our training regimen. After much training, eating, and drinking the start of the intramural season came upon us. We realized that our team was missing something very important: a name. So we put our heads together and after much deliberation decided on a moniker. We were the "Pure Ringers." The name resulted from a hilarious encounter between one of our players whose name I will not reveal, just know that it wasn't me, and a girl with a purity ring. Everything was in place. Then the season started.

Dan, Nick, Kohl, Thor and I piled into Nick's 2007 two-door Honda Civic and made the perilous drive from Williams Village to the parking lot nearest the rec center that didn't re-

quire a parking pass. Bryant took the bus for this journey of over a mile. The other two kids went somewhere other than the rec center. We felt optimistic about the game, but uncertain. None of us had played basketball together before. This showed in the game. I will be honest—we looked like middle-schoolers. In our defense, the other team had what appeared to be an NBA player on their team. I think after he was finished demolishing us he drove to Denver to play for the Nuggets. We regrouped after the game, and agreed that the next time a team had a player that good, one of us should try and fight him. I suggested Kohl because while athletic he is useless in a real basketball game. He said that was fine.

The next week, we again piled into Nick's tiny Honda Civic. Bryant joined us this time, which meant one of us had to lie across the other three people sitting in the back seat. My teammates decided that person should be me. It was not an enjoyable car ride. My back went numb, a consequence of having six knees plus both of Kohl's elbows jammed into it. While we were warming up a kid none of us had seen before came up to us and asked us if we were the Pure Ringers. We said we were. He said his name was Sam and he was friends with the other two kids who hadn't shown up to the last game. He said he wanted to be on our team. We said okay. We asked Sam if those kids were ever going to show up. He said no.

The game was no better than the first. The other team didn't have any NBA ballers on their team, but somehow managed to win by a considerable margin. Again we regrouped after the game. We decided to switch from a man defense to a zone defense so we wouldn't have to run as much. Despite our best training efforts, we were still out of shape. Many of our players worked on expanding their lung capacities by smoking lots of weed, and we hadn't been eating enough shitty dorm food. The lone bright spot was other Sam. It turned out that he was actually pretty good at basketball. On the way back from the game Kohl (who was now lying across me, Dan, and Bryant) said he thought Sam was good enough to play college ball. Trying to be modest, I told him that I wasn't quite that good. Kohl told me that he was referring to the other Sam. Then he called me a pussy.

Before the next game we decided that we were tired of losing. We were going to win the next one. We all got out of

*According to Nick,
Dan is our most
consistent player.
Nick is wrong.
I am our most
consistent player.*

Nick's clown car focused on winning. We got blown out by forty. The "highlight" came with thirty seconds left in the first half. I had the ball and was dribbling it up the court. One of their players started counting down like it was the final seconds in an attempt to bait me into heaving a long shot with very little chance of it going in. This is what we in the sports world call "bush league." Especially when you are killing the other team. What the counters didn't account for was my NBA three point range. I got mad and pulled up from twenty-seven feet and drained a three pointer. I turned around and got in the face of the dude who had been counting. If it hadn't been for the gallons of adrenaline surging through my veins I never would have done this. The guy looked like Tiki Barber. I had to be restrained by Nick. It was a good decision. Tiki would have killed me. Also, we lost our most consistent player when Dan went down with an ankle injury in the second half (According to Nick, Dan is our most consistent player. Nick is wrong. I am our most consistent player). It was later agreed upon by the entire team that Dan was faking and just didn't want to get his ass kicked any more. I don't blame him, but that doesn't make him any less of a sissy.

We spent the seasons rigorously training, using the same methods as before, only with less taking the stairs and more beer.

After that debacle there was only one more game left in the season before playoffs, and we resolved to win it. We arrived at the rec center brimming with confidence (Except for Dan, whose turn it was to lay across Nick's backseat). I saw, warming up on the court I was going to play on, wearing the same color jersey as the team we were supposed to be playing against, a kid that I had played against in high school. His name was Omar, and back in the day he attended a school with the worst piece of shit basketball team you will ever see in your life. I once outscored his team eleven to zero in three minutes.

I was giddy. Then Kohl informed us that he had forgotten his tennis shoes. He thought he could borrow the pair of basketball shoes I normally wore around campus, but I had worn my cross trainers that day. This meant Kohl would have to play an entire basketball game in the shoes he had on, which were some kind of moccasin-slipper hybrid. We lost again. Omar destroyed us.

Playoffs rolled around and our mood turned pessimistic. Then the strangest thing happened: we won a playoff game. It was a forfeit because the other team didn't show up, but we weren't in a position to be picky. Some players were unhappy about this. I thought they were idiots. The free win took us one step closer to our ultimate goal of the T-shirt.

Our next playoff game was against the second best team in the division, but we weren't concerned. Our "win" had filled us with confidence. Or we just didn't care anymore. Either way, we weren't scared. We only lost by twelve. It was the highlight of our season. After the end of the season we decided that the league needed a break from us. Someone else needed a chance for glory. So we took the next two intramural seasons off. We spent the seasons rigorously training, using the same methods as before, only with less taking the stairs and more beer.

*Our first game defined
the term "failure."*

We regrouped for the fall 2012 season with a roster overhaul. Other Sam now avoids the rest of us like the plague, so he was out. Kohl transferred to Iowa. Thor walked on to the football team, where his winning experience on the Pure Ringers appears to be very influential on the other players, especially Jordan Webb. And of course the two kids who never showed up didn't show up for the next season. We brought in Kelvin, who is almost as good a three point shooter as I am, Reed, who is also from New York and (he claims) good at basketball, Trent, who has a beard, and Alex, who does not. Our new captain, Dan, accidentally put us in the competitive division, which is the division with the best players. In other words, a more difficult division than the first season. I will never forgive him for this.

Tom was a little lacking in basketball fundamentals, such as the rules and where the basket is located.

Our first game defined the term "failure." Bryant wasn't able to make it to that game and we were left with Alex as our only player taller than six feet. The other team had many players over six feet. You can probably see where it went from there. After the game Bryant told me he had found a job at Target that forced him to work on our game days and because of that he couldn't be on the team anymore. With Bryant gone we needed another post player to help Alex. Reed, who is from Brooklyn and therefore a superior judge of basketball talent, told us his roommate Tom would be a good fit because Tom is 6'4". Tom also plays hockey, which (according to Reed) makes him coordinated, which makes him good at basketball.

The next game did not go well. Contrary to Reed's opinion, there isn't a correlation between hockey talent and basketball talent. Tom was a little lacking in basketball fundamentals, such as the rules and where the basket is located. Also, he pouted whenever anyone subbed in for him. Tom made a bad game even more miserable.

I had a Biology test the next week, so I didn't get to play in the game. Nick had to work, so he was out too. I showed up midway through the second half, just in time to watch the other team put the finishing touches on a blowout. Tom was bitching as usual. This season was turning out to be even more miserable than the last one. For the final game we only had five players, me, Reed, Dan, Trent, and Kelvin. Nick had to work again, Alex had a test, and Reed conveniently forgot to tell Tom about the game. I again saw a player who I had demolished in high school on the opposing team. Strangely, he played for the same high school as Omar from the first season. Also strange was the fact that he too appeared to have gotten much better since high school. We were killed again.

None of us showed up for our playoff game. Not a single person. It was against the team that we had played the week before, and we just didn't have the heart to compete anymore. Currently, the Pure Ringers are on hiatus. We might give it one more try next semester. With football season over Thor can rejoin the team, and he can bring along some of his tall athletic football friends. Until then, all I can do is hope Tad Boyle comes to his senses and lets me onto CU's NCAA team. ☺

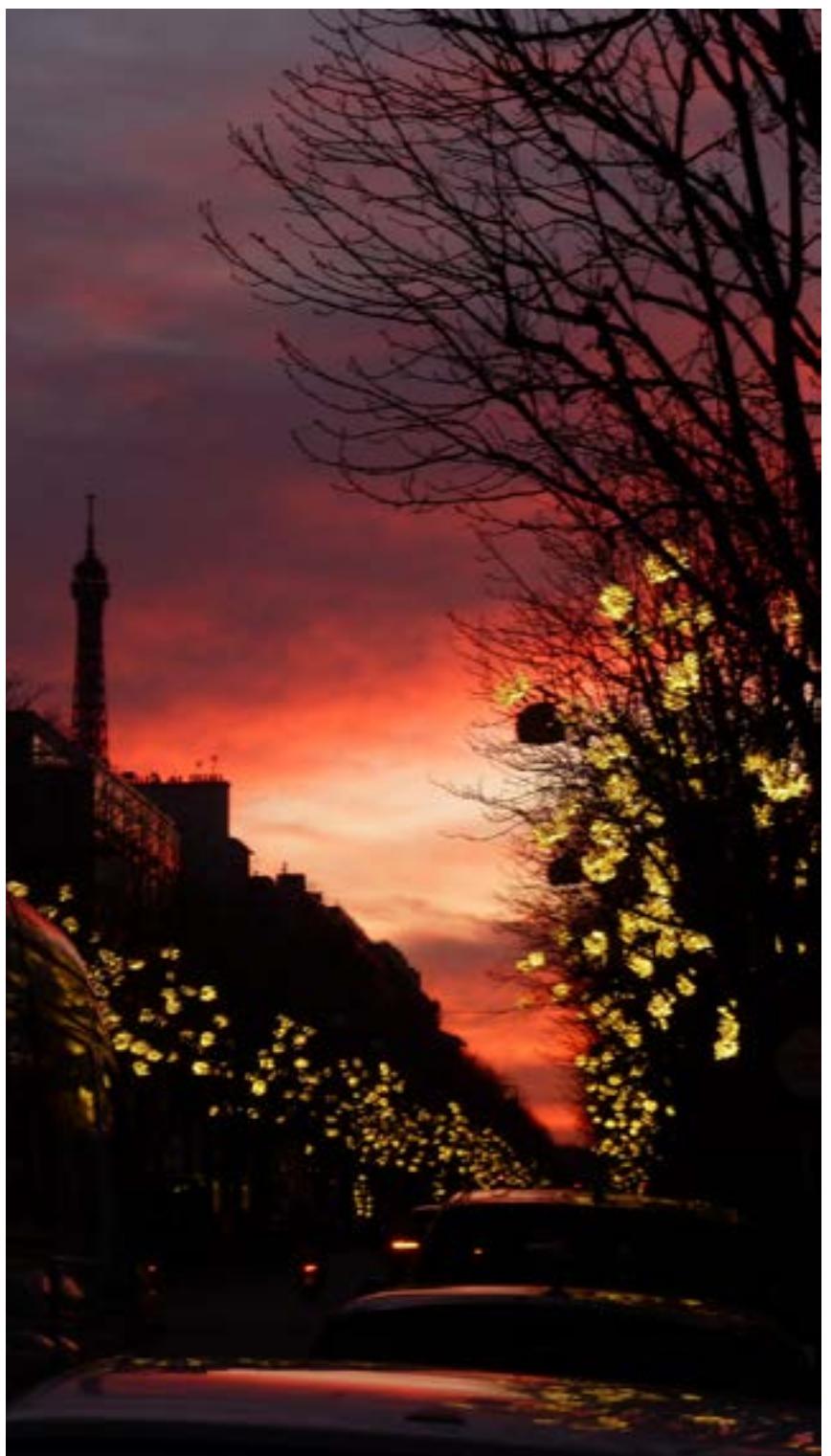


Photo by Bessie Stanisz

CONTRIBUTORS

HANNAH BECKLER is a junior in Humanities with emphases in the interdisciplinary study of literature, as well as Spanish and Portuguese languages at the University of Colorado. She aspires to continue traveling widely and always to write. A founding editor and art director of this journal, Hannah's essays "**MOROCCAN BLUE**" and "**DEVOTION OF A ONE-EYED MATADOR**" were inspired by time spent in Spain and Morocco in the fall of 2011. Originally from Glenwood Springs, her career as a kick-boxer ended when her hands had to be insured as a classical pianist. Hannah still enjoys playing the piano and has recently discovered a love of gardening, where she lives in Boulder with her two cousins.

JESSICA EPSTEIN grew up in Avon, Colorado, before her parents moved to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. A Spanish language and literature major, she studied for 5 weeks in Rosario, Argentina, and has visited Barcelona and other Spanish cities. Jessica studies Spanish and English literatures and plans on moving to Puerto Vallarta after graduation this year. She came to CU, "because my brother and sister live nearby. I like how environmentally friendly this city is, and I like how much people here are concerned about their health." The author of "**MY VERY OWN PIG**" adds, however, that she is "NOT a vegetarian!" She writes fiction more often than non-fiction, and considers Douglas Adams and James Patterson her main influences. "I can write whatever I want," she says, without being considered "rude or impulsive."

AJ MAIER GUSTERN was born in Denver Colorado in 1993. A freshman in Biology, Aj found his major after three life-changing weeks studying primates in Costa Rica. After finishing his bachelor's degree, the author of "**THE JACKET**" plans on learning Spanish and joining the Peace Corps, then going to graduate school to specialize in predatory animal behavior. His favorite thing about writing is how words and their meanings can be manipulated. His least favorite thing about writing is the feeling of beginning to hate a piece he's working on after reading it so many times. Favorite authors include Jack Kerouac, George Orwell, and Jack London.

SAM KLOMHAUS hails from the great metropolis of Silt, Colorado. He is majoring in Journalism and Psychology. He has a goatee (which you should know from reading "**FACIAL HAIR CLUB FOR MEN**") and wears his hats forward. His favorite authors are (in no particular order) Dave Barry, Hunter S. Thompson, Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, and Douglas Adams. Hobbies include playing basketball (if you have read "**KNIGHTS IN SHINING KNEE BRACES**," you already know that), skiing, reading, pretending he knows how to fix things, and writing third-person biographies about himself. When he isn't doing any of these things, he usually spends his time wandering aimlessly around the grocery store.

KATHLEEN CHILDS is a Boulder based writer and composer, who enjoys long walks outdoors, live performances, and commas. Author of “**STEEL**” and “**MEMORY WORK**,” Kathleen is currently a senior in the University of Colorado French Department. Much of her attention is spent considering her local and global responsibilities and minor personal tribulations in a post-colonial landscape. She also considers herself a modernist, but fears that this description of her academic and political sympathies might ultimately be overstating things. Kathleen is thrilled that you are reading this.

MARIAH HERMSMEYER helped create **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** as a founding editor and contributor to its design, layout, and artwork. A Boulder native in her second year at CU, the author of “**CURTAINS**” and “**WHAT HE LEFT BEHIND**” double majors in Environmental Design and Studio Arts. She is also involved in the Biophilic Design Club learning about and designing environments that combine both nature and technology through biomimicry, and is employed at Norlin Library as a Programming and Communications Student Assistant organizing and setting up the art displays and exhibits. Mariah pursues other interests like photography, writing, film, philosophy, psychology, history, gardening, music, theater, and travel in her “free time.” Before graduation from CU, she wants to help form and be a part of the creative community on campus and to study abroad in Europe and Africa.

ABIGAIL NELSON is currently a sophomore majoring in English with a Business Minor at CU. Born and raised in Philadelphia, she has always had a strong passion for the arts. She enjoys reading anything: books, magazines, blogs, even cereal boxes; she admires great writing and aspires to be better at it herself. The author of “**DRUNK WITH SUCCESS**” is a chief editor for the journal, working on all of the pieces in this issue (and learning that editing writers can be like “herding cats”). She loves creating art, expressing herself through drawing, painting, and sculpting. After graduation from CU, she looks forward to graduate school and a literary career in publishing, editing, or journalism.

ALLISON MATNEY grew up in Thornton, Colorado, the youngest of five kids. A French major with a love for language, the author of “**REQUIEM FOR A BABY SHOWER**” discovered during her undergraduate career that writing helped to strengthen her skills in her other studies, while providing an excellent forum to express her ideas and creativity. Although she graduated at the end of the course that spawned this first issue, Allison stepped in to help manage the editing process at a critical moment, and she edited many of the pieces here. She currently lives in Boulder, Colorado with too many roommates and spends her writing time trying to be George R. R. Martin.

CASSANDRA BECK also helped edit several of the pieces in this issue. The author of “**ALGO ES ALGO, MENOS ES NADA**,” is a sophomore at the University of Colorado Boulder. Born and raised in San Diego, California, she has lived in three different states and two different

countries since. She attended middle school in Surrey, England; high school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and now studies Communication at CU. Her interest in literature and writing includes favorite authors Kurt Vonnegut, for his imaginative style, and Cormac McCarthy, for his story lines. Along with her focus in Communication and public relations, she plans to continue writing in the future.

VALERIE ERWIN is a graduating senior majoring in Advertising with a concentration in Anthropology. Author of “**THE DANCER IN THE DANCE**,” a few of Valerie’s passions outside of dancing include being active outdoors, attending concerts, doing ministry for Young Life, exploring new places, and being ridiculously curious. “I came to Colorado curious, wanting desperately to grow and explore,” says the South Carolina native, who lives by a quote from one of her favorite authors, Donald Miller, that says: “I want to keep walking away from the person I was a moment ago, because a mind was made to figure things out, not read the same page recurrently.” Following graduation, Valerie will finish out a season as a dance instructor and choreographer at a local dance studio before pursuing a career in advertising.

BRYN NEWMAN, born in the mountains of Colorado but raised in Florida, finds herself yearning for all things earth and all things sea. Writing remains her most expressive outlet; the author of “**EIGHT HOURS**” sees the arts as her therapy. “All of my stories are a part of me. They are all, in that sense, nonfiction, which is why creative nonfiction is my method of guidance when I feel lost. I find inspiration in writers like Alan Watts and Chuck Palahniuk, who, whether in style or thought provoke me artistically and intellectually. I don’t like to label myself as a writer, because I would not like to lessen myself to that of a one-word description, which is ironic for someone who enjoys words as much as I do. But we are more than just that; as humans we are not just painters or photographers, we are creators. Striving to find the beauty in the chaos.”

JOEL PEREZ is a sophomore at the University of Colorado Boulder and is currently studying for a degree in Economics. The author of “**I LIVE TO FIGHT**” was born in Lancaster, California to Mexican immigrants. “As far as Mexican athleticism is concerned, two major sports dominate: soccer and boxing. Starting from a young age, I loved to watch boxing. It was exiting, suspenseful, and glorious.” As soon as he was old enough to join the nearest gym, he began training and fighting, and has been boxing ever since.

KELLY GIVENS majors in Creative Writing at CU Boulder; “**CLOUDS**” is her first published piece of creative nonfiction. She was born in Denver—premature—in 1991, and graduated from Boulder’s Fairview High School in 2010. Beginning in high school, she has worked on her craft in workshops on fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. In her free time, she enjoys singing, playing tennis, and writing stories in her journal. Her favorite forms of writing are flash fiction and short story pieces.

MATT ANDERSON graduated from the University of Colorado in December of 2012 with a bachelor's degree in History. Since writing "**THE ROAD GOES ON FOREVER**," the avid snowboarder moved to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, "to shred pow and enjoy all the mountains have to offer." Matt's love for the outdoors and regular road trips inspire his writing, which qualify his current movements in the grand Tetons as research. The native Texan plans to spend another season in Jackson before enrolling in law school in the fall of 2014 back in his home state. As any good Texan would recognize, his title comes from songwriter Robert Earl Keen Jr.'s "The Road Goes on Forever and the Party Never Ends"—though in Matt's piece no one is shot.

DOMINIC HAURY also graduated just after taking WRTG 2020, Introduction to Creative Nonfiction, and he says it already helps him as he pursues a career in advertising. Born and raised in Indiana, the author of "**STILL ON THE FENCE**" loves being outdoors, riding bikes, and breathing heavily. ☀