



#2

Welcome to the profession of barber-styling!

Congratulations on taking the first step down the path to an exciting professional career choice: barber-styling. An ambitious man or woman can look forward to lucrative and growth filled career, offering opportunities for artistic and creative expression, personal satisfaction, and the mastery of a technical skill. Your success will depend upon talent, dedication, interest, goals, and ambitions. Opportunities abound in the field of barber styling.

The path you have chosen can lead to an exciting new world...

Funwater

Awesome

1.

Are you ever surprised by a rush of pride for some part of your body?

NOTE: It's probably bad form to start out with a question. In fact, I'm sure it's bad form. People-I mean, the learned academic types-will read this and scoff, "Amateur! Only middle school cretins with sharp teeth start an essay with a question! Beginning with a question is for book reports on unread novels, or the horrendous poetry of children of divorce!"

"BAH!" they'll say and slam this zine down, then go sit down with a New Yorker and laugh gently to themselves, because good writing means laughing only on the inside, with six inch voices.

But, I'm not trying to write some poignant piece I tell you (which means you shouldn't expect much from this issue). I'm just trying to talk to you, gentle reader, ask you about yourself, and my

question is:

Are you ever surprised by a rush of pride for some part of your body?

I mean like when you are just sitting there (there = chair, sofa, anywhere) and someone says without warning, 'CATCH!' and throws you some object (ball, pen, chair) really fast at your head and your hand pops up and catches the object like you're some sort of pro, no thinking, pure style. When this happens, do you feel pride for your hand? Do your limbs surprise you sometime?

This happens to me all the time. My hands will make a surprise smooth move, or I'll almost trip and my feet will rush forward and catch me before I look like a fool. And I want to treat my hand to a soda or something, lay my feet up on a pillow and give them a day off. All my parts have made me proud at one point in my life.

Except my teeth, all they do is hurt when I drink cold water.

My brain surprises me all the time (and I'm

not being full of myself because I'm positive yours does too). Mine has this marvelous habit of bringing up images and feelings I know never existed I've never been to Singapore, but I can picture it in my head. It's not an accurate picture-not in the least-but it's a nice one with big cartoon towers and clean streets. I'll read a description of some band and they'll sound awesome and I can play their entire discography in my head without buying a CD. Then I'll buy the CD and it sounds completely different, and I prefer the band in my head to the one in my stereo.

How sad is Zach--21 and just discovering his imagination.

Seven months ago I didn't know what a barber school looked like, or how one worked, but I could evoke an awesome one in my head. As my dad and I looked through the phone book trying to find a nearby school, I built up this wonderful picture of one. It was wood paneled, sepia-toned, smelt of berma-shave and flannel, and completely unbeatable. Barber schools were fronts for speak easies, and all of

them had a fishing hole in the back.

When I went to Quality Beauty College to enroll and found no fishing hole or sepia tones, just white walls and sadness, I chalked it up as me coming on a bad day. I couldn't let go of my made up barber school. That beautiful place in my head still existed, and QBC could be the one.

I had high hopes for my first day. And again, completely imaginary high hopes. In my head, the first day of school I'd come in to 15 old men in white suits pushing brooms and waving gigantic scissors crying out:

BARBER BOY!

We've Got another Barber, Boys!

Clip the hair

Trim the beard

Shave your neck for the new

BARBER BOY!

And I'd quickly learn the song and dance and join in. The school would be taught by those old balding guys, always with a broom in hand and a kind word to give. I'd learn the theory of beard shaving, then we'd all have a song and dance number and go back

to cutting hair. Various jokes and one-liners would be tossed about from classmate to classmate between business cuts and floor sweeps. Everyone would have a name like Bugsy, Gumshoe, Dixie, or Pearl. The guys would look like Jack Lemmon, both young and old, and the girls would look like Jane Russell. We'd cut and joke and then, in fun spontaneous moments, dance with glee, jump over each other's shoulders in a high spirited, divinely choreographed dance singing:
Who'll cut your hair?

Who'll cut your hair?

Darling you gotta come over here

5 dollar a haircut

what'll it BEEEE, dear?!

and the instructors, the old Jack Lemmon instructors, would look on laughing and holding their stomachs.

Instead my class is made up mostly of high school girls from Shelton and the head instructor is a stressed out woman I have to call Ms. Deb.

I need to quit imagining my life as a musical. It always leads to disappointment.



Quality Beauty College is housed in the upper floor of a non-descript two story strip mall, squeezed between Circuit City and Lee's Buffet. A tiny sign dangling in front of the door tells you it's a beauty school, a sandwich board propped up on the sidewalk tells you there's a 6 dollar haircut waiting inside.

Inside you'll be greeted by rows and rows of homemade haircutting stations, gray blue desks with big mirrors attached on top. Each desk has two tired salon chairs set in front of it, and a girl's name written in colorful marker on each upper corner of the mirror. In front of each chair, along with various hair sprays and crafty baskets holding scrunchies and hair clips, is a female mannekin head with a stretched and tangled hairstyle staring out with dead, painted on eyes. 40 stations in the room, 80 decapitated, colored, cut, and cornrowed, heads staring at you.

There's a front desk for taking appointments and an office behind it, and a row of chairs by the door for clients to wait. Some shampoo sinks wrap around a counter in the back lined with dripping

shampoo dispensers. A door to the far right leads to another office, and a door on tback wall leads to the basic classroom-where the new kids go.

Some advertisements for hair dye- frayed, ripped, and made in 1988- act as the only decoration. White walls and sadness is the school's design plan, along with that creepy uneasy feeling of being watched by 160 flat, dead eyes.



I sat down in the basic room next to a blonde girl putting on make up and a brown haired girl with a suitcase for a backpack. They were both dressed glamorously, big earrings and a gold belt and lots of eye make up. All of the girls in the classroom were dressed fashionably, at least nicely. I came in my raggedy gray Bob Dylan shirt with a hole in the armpit, and my only clean pair of jeans, with the worn knees and ripped cuffs.

I don't do well with new crowds. Nervous I'll make an ass of myself, not knowing how to make conversation well, afraid I'm sweating or smell like

ass. So instead I sit in silence, try to climb inside myself, retreat into my mind where there's always a musical happening somewhere.

I gave a blushing hello to the two girls, then pulled out my notebook from the backpack I had cleaned out and organized the night before. Each item in the bag-the notebook, the three pens, the lunch and cometbus omnibus-had been chosen and placed strategically with pure nervous energy. I titled and dated the first page in my notebook, wrote barber school in neat letters on top, and sat ready.

Ms. Deb came in and introduced us to the other teachers-Ms. Linda, Ms. Angie, Ms. Jo, and the owner of the school, Mr. Bill- told us when break and lunch was, gave the number to the school and the personal call line, and was done. I wrote maybe three lines. The notebook was a joke.

The basic class instructor was a pleasant woman with a gravelly voice named Ms. Jo. She seemed already tired to be at school, and it was barely 8:45, so I connected with her. She told us to grab a spot at the mirror which wrapped around three walls of the room gave us a mannekin head with a clamp

to attach it to the counter, and told us we were going to practice combing hair and putting it in a roller set. That was the day's lesson plan.

Barbers seem to be a rare breed these days, at least us up and coming one. In my class I was the only barber, and the only guy. There were two other guys in the entire school of eighty students, and both were studying to be cosmetologists.

They didn't have a separate lesson plan for me. I would have to do the cosmetology stuff because, being the only guy, it'd be silly to have a whole other course. So I'd have to learn pin curls and finger waves and shampoos and roller set ups, then i could go onto beard trimming and actual hair cuts.

In my basic class it's 28 girls all wanting to perm and dye and learn how to pin curl, and me, who just wants to tell stories and give flat tops. I don't style my hair, I shampoo it and let it dry into the day's shape. I have no working knowledge of combs and brushes, it's all theory.

The girls paired up and made friends quickly, and I retreated to a corner of the counter next to two high school girls who called their mannequins bitches

(my bitch has awesome bangs” “you’re combing your bitch too hard”) and made a sneering comments about every thing they overheard.

The other students treated me guardedly, were unsure of my intentions in the school. They probably thought I was\ there to ogle, because I obviously had no talent at hair-styling. I spent a good hour and a half trying to comb the knots out of my mannekin. The instructor had to come by and show me how to hold my comb and how to start at the bottom of the hair and move up. The other students had progressed to putting the hair into curls, and I was still struggling. They gave me a new mannekin to work on, watched me fail in combing out that, and finally had another student comb her out. I tried curling her hair with a variety of rollers, had a student instructor help me out personally, and failed with each color and size of roller.

I ate lunch alone outside the school, reading my book, trying to remember what exactly I thought school was going to be like. I had assumed there’d be a fishing portion of the day, and a history of shaving

cream, at least. There had to be at least one wood paneled room or something.

I had forgotten salad dressing and a fork for my salad, so I ate it with my hands. Ms. Deb came out for a smoke right as I shoved a handful of spinach into my mouth, then pushed the overflow in with my finger. She said hello to me oddly, and I could only nod since my mouth was full. Then I curled over my book to read some more, trying to disappear like a potato bug.

The second half of the day was the same as the first. Me silently flailing trying to get some control over my combing hand, listening to the women around me chat amiably about how excited they were for school.

“I’m curling hair all day, and it’s school!” one girl said, “ This is what I’d do for fun!”

the girl next to me muttered mockingly, “this is what I do for fun. What a retard.”

Her friend laughed then said, pointing to her perfect mannekin, “look at my bitch’s roller set.”

I watched the clock ache its way to five.

Lindsey went to Goodwill with me that night

to get school clothes. I felt like such a slob, my whole wardrobe was t-shirts and jeans ragged and faded by wear. I wanted to look nice for school because I was so nervous about it, wanted to make a good impression. But I didn't have a lot of money. So Lindsey and I walked around picking out nice plaid shirts and polos and me asking, "does this look professional? Does this look nice?" and she assuring me it does, that it looks very barberly. A Goodwill employee was hanging up clothes while we were looking, and she came up to me with a nice gray shirt and said, "You're looking for something nice. Like a dress shirt? Here's something." I thanked her and took the shirt, embarrassed but strangely happy.

Later that night, I made myself lunch for the next day. I had it all packed up nice with the sandwich on top of a tupperware of salad with a seperate tupperware of dressing, a banana, an apple, and a small slice of cheese. And I looked at the whole set up and the lunch box and thought of me in a nice polo shirt and crappy jeans and suddenly I felt intimidated and shy again about going to school, like it was high school and that everyone was secretly

laughing at my dorkiness. All those young girls in fancy haircuts and I'm the fat kid who doesn't belong there and dresses like an old person. And I said, in a small speech in my head, "I like how I look and how I act. I like who I am, and Lindsey likes who I am and that's all that matters."

Then I realized that's the same speech John Candy gave in *Train, Planes, and Automobiles*. And he was a pitiful character.

Outside, the stars were slowly forming Orion, winter coming up fast in the September sky. Skaters were meeting at the O'bee bank parking lot for the ten minutes of skating before the cops came. Trees shivered with scurrying raccoons, a possum made it safely across the street. At the Mega Foods far across town a girl walks out the front door after an eight hour shift to find her boyfriend waiting for her, and they drive off together for milk shakes and a video. Powerlines crackled in empty lots above drunk teenagers, a daughter kissed her father goodnight and turned off his light, finches nesting in the tiny house outside tucked their head into their chest and drifted to sleep. All these divine things, happening outside and

around me, and I stood in my kitchen, sad and lonely,
worried what the girls would say about my slice of
cheese.

2.

I slowly got better at combing hair. After an eight hour day of combing and parting, I could finally, somewhat, hold a comb correctly and could badly, jaggedly, part it into tiny chunks of hair. And after four hours of diligent, ham-handed, practice, I could put the mannequin into an ugly, loose, roller set. I called Ms. Joanne over to approve my roller set and check it off my worksheet. It looked terrible, she told me, but she didn't care really how badly the thing looked because, being a barber, she said, "you'll never have to do this again." Then she made a single X through a single box on my worksheet told me, "take all the rollers out and do it again." and walked away.

When I was in fourth grade I got really into Louis L'Amour novels. My dad had a huge collection of them and I'd pore over the pile reading the back page descriptions and decide who I'd like to be, then read my way there. I read Hondo and then the next

couple weeks at school would try to be a tall man, with lean shoulders, and a hard, carved face, and only three feet tall. I'd try to sleep with my eyes open in case cattle rustlers came. I'd think the girls in my class were handsome, and think of ways I'd protect them and their sons from the crooked sheriff taking their cabins.

I never outgrew this. I never stopped comparing my life to the books I read, warping my world to fit into their pages, the books just got bigger.

And it's an amazing experience the first time you make the connection between life and book. When you read the description of a pious, painfully shy gray woman in a Tolstoy story and realize that same kind of woman works at the post office. And when you can watch the rain out your window and recall a description of this same scene in your favorite book. When this happened to me, when I read an author describe what I saw every day, but the words made it become magic, I was changed. I stopped being the characters in novels. I started being the writers.

"I'm a writer!" I'd say to myself, scribbling

nonsense in the back of class trying to appear half-mad, my poet's eye in fine frenzy rolling. And I'd go to the store and ache over what to write in, what to write with.

"Do writers write with pencil?" I'd think and picture Mark Twain-because I wanted to be Mark Twain- and realize, "I need a type writer!" But because I had no actual money (I was 15) I just used the family computer instead.

And then I'd read some writerly magazine where some silly author says, "nothing good can come from a computer. Poetry can only come from your hand making the words on the page." And I'd say, "Dammit" and fret over whether I should use pencil or pen.

And I'd work on getting my heart broken, because bone-shaking sorrow is the only place true art comes from. And I'd so easily believe my heart broken, at the age of 17, because I was reading Proust. And I'd work on becoming deranged, to get that poet's eye, to become that writer I read about. And all the while, I wouldn't write anything.

I had milestones, evaluation points to

determine whether I'm a writer or not. Certain ages other writers created major works. Joyce wrote *Dubliners* by the age of 25, so I'd have until then to write my book of short stories. Coleridge revolutionized poetry by age 26. But Vonnegut didn't write anything till his mid-forties, so I have until then. And Proust waited till his sixties. Then again, I'd think to myself, Rimbaud had created master works by the age of 15, so I'm already a failure.

All this preparation, this development of the artist, led me to right now, staring at my worksheet in beauty school, about to cry in public. Four pages filled with tiny boxes next to titles like, "thermals" and "pin curls", and only a single box crossed off. "I have to do a roller set THIS many times?" I sobbed to myself. But at least, I realized, while going through this hell of repetition I could explore my writerly inner life.

Another let down discovery of barber school: I had no inner life.

I was expecting that during all this boring downtime I'd be exploring the depths of my mind,

composing poetry and melodies, going on in depth inner journeys, having startling discoveries, strange visions, planning my solo album. Instead, for the first week, Salt n Pepa blared in my head. For eight hours, every day, for a week, “Shove it” played in a loud, endless loop in my brain. I don’t know how it got there, but it got to the point where I had to mentally keep myself from shouting, “Push it REAL GOOD!” while brushing out my mannekin.

When that phase ended and the song fizzled away, my brain started narrating what I was doing, but in this head rattling holler.

“I AM PICKING UP A COMB!” my brain would yell.

“I AM MAKING A PARTING! I AM PICKING UP A ROLLER!”

This was the depth of my inner life: annoying announcements and “Yo! Mtv Raps!” I was disappointed in myself, but now also worried that I was becoming a serial killer. Only serial killers have brains that scream, “YOU ARE DRINKING WATER.” While they drank.

And amid all of this yelling, R&B,

expectation, and non-writing, I ended up making friends. Perhaps, partly, it was due to Lindsey visiting me, showing that I wasn't there to ogle beauty school girls. Or partly cos I loved and watched the same TV shows the rest of the students did, and, when someone mentioned Gilmore Girls I cried out, "Lorelai is a bitch and Luke deserves better!" which is a bad way to enter a conversation, but at least I entered it. But it was mostly due to the girls all being incredibly nice, willing to befriend everyone, even someone who, when they're talking to him, is thinking in his head: "YOU ARE TALKING TO A PERSON! YOUR ARM ITCHES! YOU ARE ITCHING YOUR ARM!"

The weeks passed, the boxes got checked off, I discovered a hidden talent for pin curls and braids, found out I could crank out a couple braids in a couple hours and spend the rest of the day sitting in my barber chair reading ghost stories.

In the fourth week I had progressed past all styling exercises and was now into hair cutting. Ms. Jo gave me my cutting case- cutting shears, thinning shears, and two combs, in a velvet case- and let me

borrow some school clippers to practice buzz cuts. I stationed myself in the front of the class, with a box of castaways- abused, lipsticked and half-shaved mannekins. I felt connected to all the abandoned, ugly mannekins, like we were all friends on misfit Island, and then I shaved their hair off.

When the girl students got past perms and thermal styles they had to learn manicures and facials and needed someone to practice on. I heartily volunteered. There was always a girl who needed another facial or manicure to check off, and I was always there. They'd take me to the facial room and practice their face massage techniques, and afterwards i'd take an hour nap before lunch.

I worry, or wonder, sometimes if my ten year old self would be proud of me. If the kid who had all the dreams of what adulthood would be like would be happy with how his own adulthood ended up. I used to spend my day practicing my cowboy gait, pretending to be an outlaw's son, knowing i'd grow up to be a cowboy, or at least able to shoot lightning out of my hands. And now I spend two hours each morning getting pampered, my nails pared, my face

moisturized in the dingy building behind Lee's Buffet.
And then I forget all those worries, relaxed by my
avocado face mask, and fall asleep.

3.

When I received my box of barber supplies on completion of basic class this is what I did: count each comb one by one just to hold them, try on my barber shirt and drape a friend with my cape, turn my clippers on and off and run them along my arm, cut the tips off of my new mannekin's hair, then leave school early to go show Bryce . I was spinning and brimming with excitement, I was going to be a barber, and I ran to the bus stop so I could get somewhere to show someone.

I hung out at the barbershop that afternoon, showing Bryce all my new supplies and telling him beauty school stories: about the month of eight hour days combing, and how stir crazy it made all of us, about the two girls next to me kicked out cos they wouldn't quit mocking people, and how everyone started mocking them afterwards and I had to come to their defense, about the big scandal and scare when

someone put acetone in Brooke's pepsy can and she was sent to the emergency room, and the visit from the police afterwards when they told us poisoning someone's drink constituted attempted murder. It all made for a good story, but that was unimportant right then, all I could think about was that I was at a barbershop telling stories, and soon enough, I'd be working there. At five I grabbed up my box, hugged it to me, and walked to the bus to go to my screenprinting class.

I took screenprinting because I thought it could really help out my writing career, if I could screen my own covers then I wouldn't need to send them somewhere else, and my dream of one day starting Funwater Press would become closer to a reality. I had big plans to print the first cover of my first zine in this class, but tonight, instead, I decided to make a sign for my beauty school station. I put my barber box on the big group table then went off to draw a barber pole and a word bubble with "BARBER!" written all big in it.

I rode back downtown after class and went

to The Reef to wait for the last bus to Tumwater. Patsy Cline melted out of the speakers, hip twenty-somethings repeated old jokes in their booth, an old drunk man ate breakfast at the bar. I ordered coffee and a slice of pie, pulled out my journal, and began to write.

This was my teenage fantasy. I dreamed of the day I'd be a late night writer in a diner, sipping coffee and penning something pretty. And it was happening, I was seriously writing, not just doodling circles across the page, and soon I'd be eating pie! I grinned stupidly as I started an essay about roadkill.

The waitress brought me over some pie and coffee. I grabbed my barber box from the center of the table, apologized for it being in the way, and situated it in the seat close to me. She paid it no attention, asked if I wanted cream, and walked away. I wrote until 10:30 with the box burning next to me, then walked to the bus.

he late bus was crowded, warmed by murmurs of several quiet conversations. I took a seat near a chattering group, kept the box in my lap and, uncomfortable, cleared my throat and moved it the

seat next to me.

I felt like I was a kid again. Specifically when I was in second grade and got new shoes, and the next day at class kept putting my feet on my desk to untie them then tie them again. Halfway through the day Kyle Born got mad at me.

“Quit tying your shoes!” he yelled, “you just want everyone to know you got new ones!”

I just wanted someone, anyone, tonight to ask me about my box. Ask me what was in it, so I could cry out, “It’s all stuff for barbers! Cos I’m going to be a barber! I have this box because I’m going to be a barber!” But no one did.

I got off at Safeway, then walked down Cleveland Ave. home. Downtown Tumwater shone brightly across the valley from me, the freeway roared along the length of town, I had my box tucked under my arm, and I was happy. The streetlights at O’bee Credit Union stretched my shadow across the street and up the trees on the other side of Cleveland, and as I continued home, my shadow walked along with me, fifty feet high.

4.

On Saturday I began the advanced class on the salon floor. I received a white roll cart to put all my stuff in, then assigned a station to set up and wait to cut someone's hair. My friends from basic all got stations in the back of the school, but I got assigned to the front, next to Ms. Deb's office, the appointment desk, front windows, and the waiting area. I felt like a satellite of my basic group, alone and away from my friends and being watched on all sides.

I shared a station with a girl named Stephanie. She had been in the school for a while, and her station was all pretty with her name in cursive on the mirror, baskets filled with combs and gels, a tiny cupboard to hold her hair clips, and her mannekin, made up in make up and a fancy updo. I arranged my cans of shaving cream and disinfectant, then placed down my mannekin. Because I was a barber, I received the "Magnum" model, a male mannequin with shoulder length hair and a three foot

long beard to practice shaving on. He looked like an overgrown Jesus, a pile of hair with just eyes peeking out. Stephanie's side of the station was inviting and professional, my side scared people.

My first day on the floor felt like a constant test day, like I'm waiting for an interview or an important match. Eight hours of mild panic and my heart in my throat. Each movement by the window, each passing car, could be a guy coming in for a haircut and I'll be asked to do it and it'll end up badly. Each time I saw a guy come in, or heard the click of the intercom, my heart would begin beating so fast it was all I could hear and I'd chant in my head, "please don't call me up, please don't call me up." Everyone around me seemed unphased by the fact that they may have to cut someone's hair today, and kept busy putting their mannekins in updos, perm wraps, or rollers. I could do that too, but putting Magnum, so proud and bearded, into a french twist seemed so embarrassing to him and me. Instead, I just stared at him silently, getting gradually creeped out, waiting until I'd have to do my first haircut on a stranger.

Around 1:30 a guy named Donny came in with his mom. I saw them walk up to the desk, my heart pounding, and then my name was called over the intercom and I started shaking. I had to cut his hair, the student at the front desk was looking straight at me, I couldn't pretend to be at the bathroom or something. I walked up to the desk and got the appointment slip that said, "Donny, Haircut". I walked to Donny sitting next to his mom, looking at hairstyle magazines, and introduced myself.

"Hello, I'm Zach and I'm going to cut your hair," I stammered, "Please follow me to my station."

Donny stood up, I turned around, and my station was right behind us.

"Here it is," I laughed. He sat down, unsmiling.

Donny had overgrown and matted hair, in no seeming style, covering his eyes and ears and beginning to form a mullet in the back. He had facial hair in tiny patches along his cheek and then a long strand just below his chin. The oil from his scalp was starting to clump parts of his head into untrained dreadlocks.

“How would you like your hair cut?” I asked him.

“Just a trim.” He said.

His mom came over with a hair magazine and showed him a picture of a young fashionably cut man in a suit and tie, with his sides cut short and sharp, and the top of his hair expertly gelled and styled.

“What about him?” she asked, “Doesn’t he look nice?”

Donny looked at the picture, “He really does.”

“Do you want that haircut?” I asked.

“Yeah,” he said, “just cut a little bit.”

His mom turned to another page she had bookmarked, another young professional in a gelled, styled, and short, haircut.

“See? Doesn’t he look nice? Wouldn’t this look nice on you?”

He studied the picture closely, “Man, he does look good. That’s a nice haircut.”

“Do you want that cut?” I asked.

“Sure yeah. Just a trim.” Donny said.

Still confused, I looked at the picture, then put a 1/2” guard on my clippers and turned them on.

“Don’t you want to put a cape on me?” Donny

asked.

“Oh gosh!” I quickly grabbed my cape and draped him. He shook his head. Then I grabbed my clippers again, and ran them up the bottom of his head.

“What are you doing?!” he cried out, leaning forward sharply.

“I’m cutting your hair like the picture.” I said, ready to faint.

“No! I just wanted a tiny bit off! I don’t need a haircut. You should call a teacher over.”

I called over Ms. Jo. She explained that this was my first day, and he said he could tell. She looked at how much I cut off and told him I’d have to keep cutting it short so it’d look nice. He grudgingly accepted.

I finished his haircut, cutting the sides like the picture and leaving the top long. He made a couple more jokes about my lack of experience. I swallowed them and kept cutting his hair. At the end I asked if he wanted his beard-the 10 strands of hair tangled and growing on the bottom of his chin- trimmed.

“No,” he said, “I’m growing my beard out.”

His mom loved the haircut because it was short, and

he kept telling her he really didn't need one in the first place. They went to the front to pay, still discussing it, and then left. I collapsed into my chair, embarrassed and upset.

Ms. Jo came over again, "They won't all be that hard." She said, "He was a special case. But that's a good first haircut, huh? They can only get better from here."

After my pep talk, I went back to staring at Magnum and his beard spilling over the edge of the station. I could handle this.

5.

I had big, grand plans for this issue. Big grand plans long before I started writing it here now, before I had even started writing the first Funwater Awesome.

I'm going to beauty school. As a writer this will be great! I'd think, believing that a good story was all about the set up, and what a great set up this would be.

It is not a good idea, when writing a personal zine, to have grand plans. It causes your to life to become exposition only. You'll wake up every morning and think, "I hope today makes a good story!" It's unfair to put so much expectation on your day. unfair to you, unfair to the day.

When I was twelve, my grand plan was to be able to shoot lightning out of my chest. It was not a daily goal, just something I knew I was shooting for. If I had been writing a zine back then as well, I'd be constantly depressed. Every night back then d would be spent sitting in front of a computer thinking,

No super power today. Which means no story. Way to go, failure.

This is what I did with school. I brought my journal along with me like a painter bringing an easel to a sunset, set it up at my station ready to capture the poetry of this place.

A rundown of my day, the palate of my poetry.

At 8:30 I'd arrive at beauty school and clock in. All my cosmetology friends would go into the classroom for the morning theory class. I'd go to my station on the salon floor, listen to my walkman, and read the barber textbook. It would tell me something like:

*When shaving a man, do not breathe in his face.
This is unhygienic and annoying to the customer.*

Or

*A good deal of barbering is the appearance you give.
You want to be a trustworthy, respectable professional. This means showering often.*

And I would think, *How interesting!* And I'd write it down in my notes, in preparation of test day.

Some days I would work in my workbook, as a change of pace. With questions like:

Q. By being honest and conscientious when an injury occurs, what will you protect?

A. Your reputation.

And after a week or two of this I would take a test, where “showering often” and “your reputation” became multiple choice answers.

After an hour of theory all the other students would filter into the salon floor and the school would be open for business. We’d plug in our clippers and fill up our water bottles, the radio would be turned on and the two students working the front desk that day would call up different classmates to tell them they had appointments.

Then we would all wait, wait for someone to come in for a coloring or a haircut, or until it was time to go home.

A requirements sheet was given to us every Tuesday, the duties and services we were expected to do that week. It was always the same, a computer printoff with boxes for haircuts and styles and

shampoos. I was given the same requirements as the cosmetology students, except where it said “perms” I crossed out and wrote “shaves”.

I had tallied and divided the sheet to figure out I needed to do one style, one shampoo, one haircut, and one shave a day to fulfill my requirements. So in the morning I'd bring Magnum over to the shampoo bowl and wash his long, luxurious hair. Then I'd call over Ms Jo to check my job. She'd look at his hair and then put her signature on the sheet. Then I would dry his hair and braid it and call her over again. I'd put Magnum away and pull out Bridget, my female mannekin. I would practice shaving on her, using the correct hand movements and positions while Ms. Jo would watch and then check off my shaves box. I could get $\frac{3}{4}$ of my daily requirements done in about half an hour, and spend the rest of the day waiting for a haircut to come in.

The other students would be completing their worksheet as well, but doing perms and colors along with styles and cuts. So the school would fill up with all the different smells of all the different services

being performed. Bleach for the coloring, ammonia and other strange chemicals for the perms. I'd spend a good part of my days trying to come up with the right description for the awful smells wafting and combining around my station.

I also passed the time by reading. This was risky activity as reading was not allowed on the salon floor. I brought War and Peace just to have the longest, heaviest book to work through, and I'd read it sitting in my barber chair, until a teacher came behind me and said, "Should you be reading right now? Get to work." And I'd stash War and Peace away and stare at Magnum, working.

When it was an especially slow day I'd finally attempt to write. I could usually write for long periods of time, but could never think of anything to write about. Perhaps the smells were getting to me, perhaps it was Roxy Radio blaring out the same seven hits each hour, perhaps it was only my own failure, but nothing good could be written. I looked through my notebook after school ended, to see if there was anything I could use for the zine(as I had hoped). Instead, it was filled with pages of statements like:

“My hairdryer broke and then I fixed it,
though all I did was bend the nozzle up. I hope
halfway through a thermal [style] it doesn’t erupt into
lightning and flames and burn up Magnum.”

Or

“I thought my friends Chris and Jeremy were
coming in. But it was another Chris and Jeremy.”

And

“I’m sleepy. And that is all I am.”

Sheer poetry I’d write! And then a teacher
would come up behind me and tell me I needed to
stop writing and get to work and I’d put the notebook
away and stare at Magnum and his bountiful mane.

I thought that maybe I should just think and
meditate, like a monk. I could use these six months
of idle time to explore my mind, or to work on my
stillness. But again, the smells and radio got to me
and as soon as I’d achieve some mental peace the
song would change and I’d scream, internally, “Are
they playing fucking Gavin Degraw AGAIN?!” And
shatter any stillness I had.

I developed new lonely ways to cope with

my day, to wile the hours away without doing the monotonous schoolwork. I'd fill up my water bottle often-so my clients(and Magnum) would have fresh water spraying their head- but would take the longest possible route to get to the sink. I'd walk around the entire outside perimeter of the school-leaving out the front door, entering through the bottom back door- to get to the dispensary sink 15 feet away from my desk. A single water bottle fill up, if done right, could last a half hour.

I'd fill up my back pocket with quarter sized zines to read in the bathroom. With so few men in the school, the men's room was almost always empty. It became like a prayer cell for me in there-silent and lemon-scented- and I'd spend an hour in the last stall reading *America? 13* and *Ghost Pine 6* and thinking, *I want to do this.*

Sometimes I'd just sit on the toilet and stare at the graffiti for half an hour.

I'd wash my combs repeatedly, one by one, walking in shuffled steps back and forth between the dispensary and my desk. Anything to get out of staring into Magnum's eyes and knowing I'm not

straightening his hair well enough, no matter how many times I washed his hair and tried.

I realized one day, on my seventh comb and umpteenth walk to the dispensary, that this new existence I was subversively living was no better than actually doing the school work. Sure, I found a way to slack off and leave my desk, but it was by washing combs, all day, over and over. And pooping. And so, resigned, I would sit and stare at Magnum or myself in the mirror, and let the hours pass.

On the third or fourth day of this, I developed an eye twitch. I felt it first, a rapid trembling in my left eye, so I stared at myself in the mirror, waiting, and saw it happen again, my eyelid twitched and trembled like a cartoon blind being pulled up too quick.

Who'll come to a barber with an eye twitch?!, I worried, they'll think I'm a serial killer! Who else's eye twitches like this?!

I'd try to control it, try to calm myself and my eye, then I'd hear my name called over the intercom and feel lefty twitch like crazy. I'd go say hi to the guy who's hair I was going to cut, and lead him over to my

station, my face acting normal. Then I'd look at him in the mirror and ask, "What kind of haircut would you like." And my eyelid would flutter and shake and I swear he looked unsettled, thinking of all the legs and arms I had locked up in my freezer. It didn't help that War and Peace started to get really good, and I got swept up in it, so even after my eye would calm down and we'd be starting up small talk, in my head all I could think about was, *Andrew Bolkonski is dead! How can we talk like this when ANDREW BOLKONSKI IS DEAD!* and these thoughts would spill over into real conversation, and I'd tell some stranger, while running clippers over his head, that the Russians burned Moscow down so the French couldn't control it.

bonus short story!

Alex and the Giants

Ten Times Laramie went skipping across the rocks thrown out across the water, all ten men bounding rock to rock as one. And Alex tried to jump too, because it's been so long since he's seen Ten Times Laramie, but fell in the water and became a lobster, clinging to the underside of a rock, with red hardened claws, and brine-soaked thoughts and Alex

"Alex, wake up!"

Alex rubbed the blur out of his eyes until his mom came into focus, standing by the bed above him, and whatever dream he was having dissolved like fog in the back of his head.

"What time is it?" he groggled, his mouth still

asleep.

“It’s early,” she said, “now get your shoes on. We’re leaving in thirty minutes.”

Alex sat up and looked around. Outside, the outlines of grass and trees were forming in the light edging up the sky. Inside his bedroom the only light came from the lamp his mom turned on, It shone warm and yellow in a small circle around him, turned his bed into a butter slab island. He thought of diving into his bedroom and swimming to the closet for his clothes, holding his breath, tossing on his shirt, shoes, pants, and socks before he needed air again.

Then he leaned back into his pillow and went back to sleep.

“ALEX! Why haven’t you gotten up?!” his mom cried out, flicking on his bedroom’s main light. He shielded his eyes with his arms and sat up again.

“The car’s running, honey!” she said, tossing his boots onto the bed, “ C’mon, get going!”

Alex ran out to the car in a pajama shirt and his sweatpants tucked into untied hiking boots. His dad

was in the driver's seat and Jerianne was sleeping in the back, his mom trailed behind him, the steam from her mug rising and mixing with the exhaust from the car.

"Ahoy, young Alex!" his dad said as he jumped into the backseat, "Are we ready?"

"Yes!" He said.

"Then we're off!"

The incoming morning turned everything bright gray and Alex stared out the sliver of the windshield he could see from the backseat--the sleeping houses and closed banks, and the curves of the road straightening as they neared them, caught between the car door and the back of his dad's head.

If his dad was a pirate, he'd be the fiercest of all them all. Peg-legged and hook-handed, muscles tighter than ship's twine, sharpened whale bones for his teeth. And Alex would be his first mate. They'd walk the deck together, discussing which town to ransack and which to defend and how to spend the booty of all their plunderings while the crewmen ran around shooting people and scrubbing the decks and all those pirate things.

“Keep shooting people,” the crew would whisper amongst them, “Captain Whaletooth is the meanest pirate this side of Georgia.”

Captain Whaletooth is a silly name.

His dad turned on NPR and some sweet voiced man read the headlines.

Captain Strongjaw?

They pulled into Mega Foods.

Captain Fierce?

“Go grab some doughnuts and some juice.” His dad, Captain Fierce, said, “I’m going to go fill up the car across the street.”

“Okay, Dad.” Alex said.

“Captain Fierce is the meanest pirate this side of Georgia” the crew continued, after doughnuts and orange juice and getting back on the freeway, “stay on his good side, or else his first mate (Alex Attack) will throw you off the side!”

Alex’s exploits were legendary. He once fought off a five-headed sea snake with just a dagger and his wits. He could turn a Cyclops sniveling with a kick and a sneer, turn a south wind northward with just a few stern words. But, to be honest, he was a sweet, nice

guy, enjoyed a good joke and a cold soda, cared for the crew and would help any of them out of a pinch. He got that from his dad.

“Stare hard, retard,” Jerianne said.

Alex broke out of his daze and glared at his sister, laughing at him.

“You smell like foot cheese, dog puss.” Alex snapped back.

“Alex!” his mom scolded, “be nice to your sister!”

If Alex was a pirate, then Jerianne was a dish wench. A servant girl scrubbing toilets in the back of her mom’s tavern. His mom owned Scurvy and Scalawags and every time Captain Fierce and Alex docked back at home harbor, they’d stop in for dinner and to visit. He’d have a hearty pirate’s meal and his sister would have to clean up all his dishes afterwards.

“Are you excited for school, Alex?”

Alex entered the car’s conversation again, “You know what? I’m really excited!”

“We’ll need to get you a backpack,” his mom said, half to him and half to his father.

“he doesn’t need a backpack, It’s gonna be

a waste of money.” Jerianne said with the tone of an expert, “you don’t learn anything *important* until the fifth grade.”

Dirty, smelly dishes! She’d have to clean up every one! Beer steins stained with lip prints, tables caked with tobacco spit! All the vomit and food stuff and snotty napkins thrown on the floor, she’d clean it on her hands and knees with a smelly rag! And she couldn’t afford new clothes, she’d wear the same ragged dress she’d had since birth, the worn bits patched with the same rags she cleaned with!

Alex and the Captain would eat their five course meal and then sit back, and let out hearty burps, and she’d come shuffling in, and grab all his plates. Then he’d get up and head back out to sea.

With all these happy thoughts Alex helmed his ship-buckled in the backseat - all the way to Anacortes. Driving down the main road with Alex’s head filled with sea foam, the family picked a good restaurant and found a spot to park and Alex jumped off the side of his boat to chase after a gang of merpeople who stole a town’s

“Alex! Mom told you to we’re here! Get out!” Jerianne said, standing outside his window, then stuck a

finger in her ear and, mockingly, cleaned it, saying, “errr EEE, err EEE!”

Alex sneered, “Go lick a plate, dish wench!”

“ALEX!” his mom scolded, her voice breaking with held back laughter.

In the restaurant, Mom, Dad, and Jerianne all stooped over their menu in the same way, eyes scanning over the list of breakfast, brunch, and lunch options given cute, local names for charm. Alex sat at the end of the table staring off into the aisle between bar and booths, sipping his water with what he hoped was an air of wistful mystery. His menu sat closed in front of him. He already knew, before sitting down, what he wanted.

If Alex was an old man, he’d be the kind who came to the same diner the same day each week and ordered the same breakfast every time. He’d be good friends with the waitresses and they’d greet him as he came in with, “how’s it going, Alex?” And he’d offer some old man wisdom like, “you know how it is.” And they’d laugh and usher him to his seat.

“the usual?” one of the waitresses, Sally, Alice, or Miranda, would ask as he sat down.

“You know me,” Alex would say, then stare off, sipping his coffee with wistful mystery.

The waitress in the here now had a name pinned to her shirt that Alex couldn’t pronounce, “What’ll it be?” she asked the table.

“I’ll have the seafarer’s scramble,” his mom said.

“Could I get the Whale of a Platter?” his dad requested.

“I’ll have the schooner Omelet, with no tomatoes.” Jerianne said.

“I’ll have the biscuits and gravy.” Alex said, the words heavy with importance.

“The usual,” his dad said to him and Alex nodded.

“And could I get a cup of coffee?” Alex asked.

“No coffee.” his mom said, “and could you make that a half order?”

The waitress nodded, scribbling, then walked away.

“If you had your own restaurant, what would it be like?” his dad asked Alex, while his mom and

Jerianne talked, over brochures, about what they wanted to see today.

Alex hadn't considered this before and looked to the ceiling lights, thinking. "I don't know," he said, "But you know what? It'd probably have a slide."

"Well yeah." His dad said, "At least one."

"Yeah!" Alex said, his restaurant forming, imaginary plank by plank, in his head, "You know what? We could have slides going to every seat! Like that's how you sit down, by going down this big slide!"

"The restaurant could be underground, and above ground would be all these portals." His dad offered.

"What's a portal?"

"Like an entrance, or doorway."

"Okay."

"So there'd be all these circular portals on the wall and those would be the tops of slides, so you'd go to one, then slide down into the restaurant and your seat."

"Yeah yeah!" Alex said, "and you couldn't choose which slide you went down. They'd all be numbered and you'd have to just pick a number."

"That's a good idea," his dad said.

“So you are just gonna have lunch and you get on a slide and all of sudden you’re sitting next to the mayor! And you eat lunch with him.”

“It’d be an experience.”

“You know what?” Alex said, “It’d be an experience.”

His dad tapped his mom on the wrist, “Hon? Do you have a pen we can borrow?”

She put her purse on the table, and rooted through it, but came out empty handed, “sorry”, she said.

“I have a pen,” Jerianne said, hand fumbling in her pants pocket, then handed them a small purple marker.

“Thank you. Okay,” He unrolled his napkin and placed it between them, then wrote on the top “Alex’s and Irving’s Restaurant.” Then he drew a big dome with a door and see through walls, and on these walls little circles with numbers above.

“So that’s the top floor, you draw the restaurant.” His dad handed him the napkin.

Alex swooped and swirled the marker, creating slides with sharp turns and loop-de-loops, gentle ascents

and steep falls that all ended in a completely vertical drop into the hastily markeded chairs and tables below them.

“I’d eat there.” His dad said.

“The food should come out of tubes on the table.” Alex said.

“I think you’re right.” And his dad grabbed another napkin. They drew plan upon plan: food tubes, bouncy floors, a gun like a garden hose nozzle that dispensed any condiment you thought of, musical chairs that played different notes depending on how you shifted.

“Could you have a dessert wall?” His mom asked, looking over.

“What do you mean?”

She leaned over and drew on the napkin as she explained it: a wall made of graham crackers that you could bite into and different parts would have different fillings, each bite a surprise. They all agreed it was a fantastic idea.

“There should be a live band for each booth,” Jerianne said and they handed her the napkin.

By the time food came all the napkins were

filled. His mom took each one and folded it and put it in her purse to make room for their plates.

If Alex and his family owned a restaurant, it'd be a rousing success.

They got back on the highway after lunch and headed towards Whidbey Island: passed the fruit farms and the billboards for whale watching ferries, crossed the bridge that made Alex and Jerianne both hold their breaths and clutch their chests, then turned into the Devil's Gate Park.

They joined a line of cars headed towards the campsites. People crowded the entire camping area, bikes and foodstuffs bleeding into each other's lots. Alex's family picked a spot between an angry family in a small RV and a college aged couple with only a lawn chair and tent.

Out of the car, his dad opened the back door, Jerianne unfurled out of her seat and door, in a swirl of brought along blankets, magazines and pillows, his mom put her book of crosswords on the roof of the car, and stretched her legs and arms, and Alex went around to the back to help his dad out. He grabbed one end of a

cooler and tried to hoist it onto his shoulder like it was a knapsack. The cooler didn't move and his dad told Alex that he would grab that. Alex grabbed the bag of bottled waters and oatmeal for tomorrow and, only grabbing one handle, spilled it across the trunk.

"Okay Alex," his dad said, putting down the cooler, "How about you go explore for a bit."

"Wait! He doesn't have to help?" Jerianne said, breaking a stretch, "That's typical! He never has to do any work."

If Alex were stronger, he'd set up the entire camp by himself, and then pick up the car with one hand.

He walked to the cooler, hoping some strength had magically come to him while he stood there, and tried to pick it up with one handle. It didn't budge.

"It's okay, Alex," his mom said, "How about you go search for some twigs for the fire?"

"Oh whatever!" Jerianne said. She skulked to the trunk and grabbed the tent bag, then stomped to the campsite, it slung over her shoulder.

"Stay in eye sight!" His mom called out to Alex as he ran into the woods in between parked cars.

His eyes to the ground, head scanning the forest floor like a hound, Alex looked for twigs and kindling. Then, a few steps from the trail, Alex found a premiere walking stick stuck in the moss growing in the split of a dead log. Smooth and soft in his hand, long and straight and whittled by some unknown someone, it felt perfect for Alex the bush explorer, and it'd double as a perfect sword for Alex the forest warrior. He abandoned the search for kindling, now skulking through the woods, using his stick to tap on each tree he passed, going in larger and larger circles through the campground trees, his mom kept always in sight.

Early this spring he and his dad were working in the garden. Alex, on his hands and knees, poked holes into the soil and his dad followed behind planting seeds. At the end of the row Alex poked the final hole and, bringing his finger out of the dirt, found a centipede clung to its tip. He lifted his hand and stared at the bug, then wiped it off back into the dirt.

"You stuck your finger right through the roof of his home." His dad said, smiling.

Clarence the centipede, in glasses and a small scarf, sat in his fine wooden chair, in his fine woodpaneled hole of a house, smoking a pipe and reading the newspaper surrounded by shelves of centipede books and a fine centipede painting on the wall.

“Quite a slow news day,” he said, ruffling the paper, “Perhaps its time to make some din--.”

When a big fleshy mound comes down through his roof and crushes all his things to dust, breaks his glasses, throws off his scarf, and he clings desperately the mound because he doesn’t know what else to do, is lifted into the air and dropped back down at a speed no centipede should go, then shoved face first into dirt.

“I destroyed his home,” Alex said, soberly, staring at the ground.

“I was just kidding, guy!” his dad said, “He can find a new home, no problem.”

Alex lowered his head to the ground and watched the centipede scurry back into the dirt.

“I wonder how those little guys see us.” His dad said, sitting down in the grass by the garden.

“I was thinking that too!” Alex said, sitting cross-legged in the garden’s dirt.

“Imagine if you were as small as a bug, could only see things at an ant’s eye level.”

Luckily, Alex had imagined that before.

“That overturned water pale is as big as a hill to them. Do they plan picnics and day trips on top of it?”

Alex stared thoughtfully at the pale overturned between the leaking garden hose and shed, “You know what, maybe all that water by the hose is like an ocean to them.”

“Probably.”

“yeah, probably.” Alex said, excited.

“And us,” his dad continued, “Big pink things with big, gray blocks on our feet that are constantly stomping through their neighborhoods. I mean, they can only see the tips of our shoes, right? Do they even know there’s a person attached to them? Are we just strange things like moving trees, just part of their landscape?”

“What’s a landscape?”

“Like all the things around you. The trees and hills clouds and things are all part of your landscape.”

“Okay.”

“So they have their hills and their oceans as their landscape,” he pointed to hose and pale again, “and their houses in the dirt, and once a year these strange things arrive and huge holes appear in all their houses and it rains a lot then trees show up and us strange things move around and make it rain and let some trees stay and rip other trees right out of the ground.”

“Like weeds?”

“Yeah! I wonder if they have us figured out. If they know when we’ll come and water them and when we’ll poke all the holes. Do they predict us like we do the weather?”

“You know what? Probably!”

His dad laughed, he seemed to be getting as excited as Alex, “It makes you think about our landscape, doesn’t it?”

“About trees?”

“Yeah! Are they just trees? Or are they really the bottom of something humongous?”

His dad picked up the seed bag and went back planting. Alex sat there, head craned, looking up.

Alex thought of this conversation all the time, was thinking of it right now as he banged his stick against the tree trunks, searching for the hollow tone that promised a hidden castle inside. Each branch breaking under his foot, each bird call heard overhead, signified some secret of a larger thing. The rabbit flushed out of the fern by his careless stick would, if followed, lead him somewhere majestic, would tell him amazing stories, if he knew its language, and he could learn its language, because all things were possible. All parts of here: the forest, the camp site, the car, the sky, the trees, the ground, the air, the animals, the stick, the sounds, everything, promised-pointed to-something greater. He only needed to find it.

In this trip now he found no hollow, castle holding trees. But he found a leaf that looked like his grandfather, and a colony of ants that seemed to be following his advice and picking up the things he deemed worth grabbing. He found a rabbit and followed it until it went into another family's campsite and he had to turn back before he could be led to any secret rabbit city. He found odd-coloured rocks, and saw a humongous cloud shaped like a hand, and heard

leaves rustling that sounded like a giant water fountain. Then he went back to his family to tell them all about it.

“You’re back,” Jerianne said blankly, back at the campsite, as she and her mom set the picnic table with plastic dishes, “and you forgot the twigs.”

Alex walked past her to his dad starting a fire with logs he brought along, and sat down next to him.

“See anything exciting?” his dad asked.

Alex didn’t know where to begin.

After dinner and it was twilight, and they washed their dishes under cold water from a faucet by the road. Traveled as a family with two toiletry bags to the restrooms, and brushed their teeth in the sinks, their faces reflected in the scratched and foggy mirrors. A wooden sign to the side of the restrooms pointed to a nearby beachhead trail and they took it, half running as a family down the steep hill it wove through until they reached the beach and watched the sun set there, the trees across the water lit up for a moment, then slowly the light lowered and they were reduced to outlines, imagined forests, imagined water. With flashlights lit

they worked their way back up the trail, only gray light remaining in the day, and back at the tent it was night, dark completely, and Alex was tired. His dad lit the fire again and Jerianne and Alex leaned against their mom, all of them sitting on the picnic bench, watching him work.

“Tell us a ghost story, dad,” Jerianne said later, as they settled into watching the fire.

His dad leaned back, his head turned to shadow, “Let’s see if I can think of one.” Then, leaning forward, his face lit up again, he began telling stories.

The first one he told was of a phantom cat he knew when he was a kid, hissing heard in his bedroom, but never any cat seen. Watching a bowl of water left in the kitchen being lapped up by some invisible thing, pawprints leaving a dented trail in his houses’ thick carpet, always trailing behind his own footprints.

Jerianne let out a scared sob and her mom said, “no more stories.”

“No! More! I’m fine, tell more,” she said.

Alex curled into his mom’s side, for sure he was hearing a cat’s hiss somewhere behind him.

His dad went into another story, about a man in

gray who haunted some London theatre. A floating man in old-time clothing who'd show up before a successful play. And Alex knew this man, for some reason, was flitting in the forest to the sides of him.

With each of his dad's stories, the campgrounds became more populated, until each unseen campsite housed a ghost. Unseen spirits flew in dense circles around his family's tent, and Alex was nervous, but not scared because as long as he kept his back completely against his mom and faced the fire and his father across it, he was safe. The flames lit up their campsite in a warm circle, and all ghosts were kept outside it, held at bay by the fire his parents made.

"You're falling asleep, Jani," his mom told his sister.

"I'm awake," she said, eyes closed.

"Let's go to bed," his mom said.

Alex's dad stood up and grabbed the flashlight off the picnic table, "do you have to go to the bathroom?"

"I'm fine," Alex said

"Let's go anyway, just to be sure," he said.

Alex grabbed his walking stick and off they

went.

Besides the spot of light ahead of them revealing the trail, Alex could not see a thing. The camp restroom was just two faint yellow squares ahead in the night blackness, till his dad and he snaked through the trail closer, and the walls and roof of the place were slowly lit up and revealed.

Inside was an unnatural brightness that made them squint. Alex walked to the shortest urinal and his dad headed toward a stall.

He did need to pee, it turned out, and when he finished and flushed his dad said from the stall, “wait here until I’m done.”

Alex leaned against the wall, but it smelled and he got bored and went outside just by the door.

Alex stood outside there until he saw some small thing flashing light by the trees nearby him. He walked forward, tapping the trees, and saw, getting closer, it was a soda can left on the ground just past the trail sign. He walked forward to pick it up, then tripped and was flung, flying, into the dark.

He tumbled down invisible stones and roots and sticks forever then hit the ground hard. His leg snapped on contact, his sight turned red, and then he could see nothing again. He tried to get up but he couldn't move one leg and as he raised himself, it gave off such a pain he saw red again and he collapsed back onto the ground.

He was stuck here. Freezing, alone, uncomfortable, this was now his home.

He'd have to learn how to survive on his own. Alex the mountain man: who could live for days off of ferns and mud. He could climb trees like a squirrel, could sing like a bird, rode on deer's back. But every now and then he'd stumble out of the forest, caked in grime, hair and beard matted, and scare some camping family, they'd think he was half wolf. But they wouldn't be his family, and Alex would snort and yelp and run back into the forest. He was half wolf. And at night, he'd howl out for his family, but they'd never find him.

Alex didn't like that story. He tried to get up again, ignoring the dull throbs of red pain, but he could not move.

Alex stayed on that spot of ground, paralyzed and frozen, until the dirt crawled up and came over him and

he became a tree root. Fully in the shape of him, but now he was wood. And he'd soak in the sun all day, caught in that spot, but he still had eyes, and he'd watch every person walking over him, hoping one would be his dad, or mom. But they never came by, and he spent the rest of his life there, waiting.

Alex Attack, the pirate, after being stranded on that strange island, and fighting strange island cave people, and finding strange island treasure, was a changed man. Now peg-legged, crewless, shipless, his main goal of the day was to find coconuts and start a fire. He grew a beard because there was nothing else to do.

There were no more legendary exploits, only island beaches he'd sit on and pine for Captain Fierce, who he'd never see again. And he'd eat a fish caught off the shore, burnt in his fire because he never learned how to cook, and he'd pine for the Tavern and his mother, and Jerianne.

He missed Jerianne.

He opened his eyes, looking for someone, but could only see night blackness, and he started sobbing.

Which is when it happened. In all the trees

above him, large forms started glowing till he could see each of the tree's branches and needles and the forms themselves took shape. Giants glowing, curled up sleeping in the trees. There were men with legs as big as the trunks they were laying in, and stocky arms, wrapped around their wives, in nightdresses woven out of grass. They had rough faces as if carved, and giant closed eyes, black hair rustling in the light wind. He rubbed his eyes, the light was so bright, and they were still there, floating, in each tree as far as he could see, humongous beings, calm, peaceful, sleeping above him. And now, listening he could hear their snoring, a deep, slow creaking of breaths.

The light from their bodies warmed him. They were there, he was okay. Each one was content, small smiles on their sleeping faces, each of their barrel chests rising almost in unison-strong enough to protect him, always right over him, watching from the trees.

In the spaces between their breaths, he heard it, his name, bellowed over and over, starting faint, growing louder. He called out and joined his father's voice, bouncing between branches and giants, echoing through the trees.

6.

Present Day, Bryce's Barbershop

My clippers broke down and died today, right at the end of a haircut. Slowed down and sputtered to a stop and luckily I was done cutting, because they would not start up again. I needed new clippers, I needed them quick, so soon I was taking a bus up to the West Side, to West Coast Beauty Supply, in the same strip mall as Quality Beauty College.

I love the west side of Olympia, especially the stretches of apartments surrounding the mall. There's so many people living there in the same situation as me, barely an adult in mind and heart, but far too old to be living and thinking like that. Awful, drudging jobs at Target and Arby's, beat up Nissans with punk and metal bumper stickers, and a bookshelf in their living room just for PS2 games. When I was a kid, I knew I'd grow up and move to the west side. Now that area's memories are mixed up with the strange and stressful memories of 7 months in Beauty School.

I took the 47 bus up like I used to, and got off

at Abalon Pointe apartments. Two guys in an old black Toyota were pulling out of the apartment as I was trying to cross the driveway, blocking my path. They had thin stubble, sleepy eyes, well-gelled hair and Linkin Park screaming and rapping out their stereos.

“We got you covered,” the driver yelled out his window to me, then backed up, clearing me a path.

“Thanks,” I said and walked past. West Side!

I waited at the crosswalk and noticed that the “Looking for Lucky” lost dog poster, that had been on this streetlight since November ’05, was gone. Hopefully they had finally found Lucky, or maybe just given up. I missed the sign though. Then I walked across the street into the Outback strip mall.

I passed by Candy Bouquet and my heart panged. The entire store is closed down and emptied. Once was a store with rows and rows of candy and gummy flowers, just a short parking lot away, and I’d visit it daily and the owner would give me coffee and free fudge and sparkle candy for Lindsey. Now it is dark, clean lease space, with the big Candy Bouquet

sign still there, but unlit. I missed it too, then cut across the landscaping and entered West Coast Beauty.

The employee who loves Tool was working at the counter. I went up to him and bought my clippers, filled him in on my life since last visit and he filled me in on his, we agreed downtown was great as was drinking alcohol, and then I left. I walked past the Copper Tan store and the chiropractor with a giant, plastic healthy spine, and Lee's Buffet with their steamed up, greasy windows. As I passed the backside of the beauty school I averted my eyes so to not be caught into conversation by some old teacher on a smoke break, then walked to the mall across the street to visit my old friend Lori.

Lori was one of my best friends in Beauty School. She saved me, kept me sane, and gave me a facial and a haircut every Tuesday. Whenever I got too depressed or bored and started feeling angry and resentful toward Magnum, I'd go and visit Lori and Linda's station (Linda was equally amazing, but we'll talk about her later, right now it's all Lori). I'd tell them I was bored and Lori would tell a dirty joke and some gossip and I felt better. Then she'd offer to cut my hair, and could easily stretch a haircut to two hours, and

I wouldn't have to work for a while. It was fantastic.

Lori grew up in New Jersey and would say strange things like gitchy and skeezed. She used to be a bodybuilder, and a manager at JC Penny, and just seemed hardcore. And she had this huge amazing hair, with like 15 different dyed colors in it, undercoats and highlights and it went to her waist in big loose curls.

Linda was her station buddy, and equally funny and refreshing. She lived in Poulsbo, but stayed down here at her sister's house during the week as she went to school. She had a house in a town by pretty water, and painted nice flourishes and flora on her walls and the walls of her friends. She was classy and refined and loved British history. I'd go over to their station and say, "Linda, tell me about the Battle of Hastings," and she would, and I wouldn't have to work.

Both of them had this black humor, heightened by having to spend every day at QBC, and it strengthened and darkened the more time they spent together. The drudging whiteness of beauty school drove them absurd. Lori would ask random,

brashly personal questions and watch the squirming. Linda would mention loose leaf teas and skull fucking within the same conversation. Talking to them made me feel less alone, assured there were other people who thought this school and this situation was awful and absurd, and could articulate these complaints and joys so well. They were like sunlight cut into a cardboard box.

Lori now works as a stylist at the Regis in the mall. She was doing inventory for the store, scanning shelves of shampoo bottles, when I walked up to her.

“Hey hey Lori!” I said.

“Look who it is!” she said and hugged me, “How’ve you been?”

It had been months since I’d seen Lori, and over a year since I’d really talk to her. During school, we spent eight hours each day together, then we graduated and detached to our own separate paths, our own circles around town. So we caught up. I told her about barbering and being downtown, she told me about working in a mall salon. I told her about Lindsey, and where we’re now living. She told me about Matt, and how they were in our neighborhood last weekend,

looking for houses. Our separate circles crossed like a Venn diagram.

After our own catching up, Lori updated me on all the beauty school buddies she's seen since graduation. Rachel is now manager of Regis, Becca passed her beauty test, Liz works at Home Depot, Ms. Angie's back at QBC, and Ms. Jo and Lori plan on going out for drinks.

"I've seen your workplace. You've seen mine. We know what we are up to. Now we should actually hang out," Lori said.

I left a little bit later to catch the 47 back to work, then spent the rest of the morning missing my friends.

6 weeks into beauty school, per some school rule I had no clue about, we had a change of stations. This saved me. I was moved from my lonely outpost in the front of the school to a crowded middle row thoroughfare, surrounded by friends. I got to share a station with my friend Katie, who liked to talk Gilmore Girls with me, and we quickly made plans to turn our station into a powerful source of inspiration, with plants

on the counter and poetry on the mirror. Lori and Linda were two stations away.. Je'Lea and Meghan were right behind me, Thao and Buppha on my left. I had people to talk to again. My eye twitched less noticeably.

Katie was one of my first friends, because of the Gilmore Girl connection, and one whom I felt most comfortable around, Hence becoming station buddies. She lived in Centralia, went to school in Olympia, and worked at Starbucks across the street in the mall. She often worked 30-40 hour weeks there as a shift manager, and as the monotony and rules bloated and burst over the school, she found less and less reasons to show up at our station. She'd call in absent so she could spend the day baking, and take the next day off so she could wash dishes and clean up her mess. It made the days she was there-which were still quite a few- feel especially special, and we'd blather happily for hours, and grumble about school, and compile pages of calendars and hours, trying to calculate how soon we could be done with beauty college, and how many days we could justifiably take off. Our inspiration station ended up having a book shelf, a tea bar, a jar of cocoa she made me as a christmas gift, and an African Violet

she brought in and I named Leroy.

Je'lea sat behind me and grew to be another of my closest friends, though at first just intimidated me. On our first day of basic class, when I was grasping how to hold my comb, she came and sat next to me with a black suitcase filled with beauty supplies. She always dressed in clean business colors and put make-up on in these intricate layers and swirls that made her look like Osiris. She won me over, though, with her constant, bawdy jokes, and unfailing friendliness, and strange, hypered, business drive.

Each day Je'Lea was making money in at least four different ways. She was an Avon sales lady and would have appointments through out the day with other students at her station. She also sold an all-natural energy drink-that boosted health and battled disease-in a similar way. In the evenings she waitressed at an upscale restaurant in Yelm and made lobster dinner tips. She even made jewelry on the side and would bring to school a briefcase full of her pendants and earrings and limited time sales.

Je-lea found out I was bussing to school, and

that I lived somewhat on her route here from Rainier, and offered to drive me to school. So, instead of walking drearily to the bus and its 40 minute commute to the west side, I would sleep in, then wait her phone call to tell me how bad traffic was and when she was expected to arrive. She'd pull up in her bright yellow sports car and we'd drive down the freeway at 90 miles an hour, her dashboard scanner beeping as we neared cop cars or battery stores, hip hop blaring and it's not even 8:30, and Je'Lea could never understand why I was so happy every morning.

Meghan sat next to Je'Lea and acted as the school counselor of sorts. She came each day from Montesano, and we all seemed to go to her with personal problems to vent and school issues to grumble about, and she'd listen closely and sympathetically and offer some sort of "Damn right!" statement. Even teachers would sometime sit next to her and complain about their day, I don't know what it was about her.

She welcomed me to lunch on the second or third day of class and I ate on the green outside of Toys 'r' Us with her and her friends and it made me

feel all liked and special. I never vented anything too personal to her, but I did talk about video games and rock and roll songs a lot. She liked to draw and would fill any nearby scrap of paper with studies and sketches and dense, abstract designs. She even covered her mannekin with swirls and stars and lipstick doodles. For Christmas I bound her a sketch book, and she showed it around the school and told people, “Zach made that!” and again made me feel all liked and special.

Slowly during my sludging months there, the school became some sort of wonderland. I didn’t notice it then, only realize it now, writing at home sad and pineful because I saw Lori today. And as I try to write about my friends, a stream of names and happy memories comes rushing in. Each part of the school is now a source of a strange nostalgia for me.

Like hanging out in an empty basic class with Kevin talking about punk singles and him explaining how to read runes.

and sitting at the front desk with Joy, silent with heads bent, both of us burrowed in books.

Alisha, when seeing I liked to read ghost

stories, lending me a book she loved about miracles and angels.

Giving an old man named Ray an awesome hair cut and he telling me about the rules of the sky when flying an airplane, and what Tumwater looked like before the freeway.

Buppha racing me through our requirements sheets, waving hers at me everytime she got something marked off, and I furiously pincurling Magnum, trying to catch up.

Kanani and I sitting in dispensary reading Lucky and Glamour.

Working the front desk, and talking to a woman about ancient Chinese poetry as she waited for her haircut.

Giving a nice guy a sweet fade and him tipping me with his rap demo.

Waiting in the empty lunch room with Linda, steeping our morning tea.

Staring at a wash of green trees and white sky melting together in the morning fog, all of it reflected in my hand mirror.

Staring at my desk blankly, and Lori tapping

my shoulder, telling me it was time for lunch.

Linda and Lori, while Meghan was home sick, recreating her mannekin exactly on a spare model, down to each small make up swirl, then shaving all of the spare's hair off and switching the two.

Meghan's reaction.

Whenever Thao would walk by my station I'd sing, "Thao, Thao, Thao!" and she'd hold her arms out, as if expecting to catch her voice, and sing in a deep, slow melody, "ZHACH ZHACH ZHACH".

The time in Morning theory class when I got half the class to harmonize with me, making a messy chord for ten seconds during a lecture.

Linda and I writing a series of mini comics about a cat named Katmandu who can't stay out of rehab, distributing them around the school in between cuts.

Ms. Angie letting me write for hours at my desk because she said journaling was important, and she herself kept one.

Josh describing to me his brother's barber shop in Tacoma, awesome, elegant chairs and black and white tile floors. And each day afterward he lined up

his clipper blades across his station, atop a folded white towel, a small Tacoma barber shop in QBC's front row.

Lori bringing in her portfolio of bodybuilding pictures and us looking at her glory-muscled, oiled, and tanned- days all through morning theory class.

Grabbing the sugar cubes, bags, and cups from my bottom station drawer for afternoon tea with Lori, Linda, Katie, and I.

Ms. Jo showing me her old children's book with the marvelous binding and illustrations. And talking about her husband Terry drywalling, and how the simple things like bookbinding and drywalling, in the right hands, being elevated to art.

Linda dressed as Captain Sparrow for the halloween party, teetering back and forth, embarrassed because she was still a little drunk from the night before, and at the end of the day would be getting on a bus full of friends and liquor headed for Portland.

Seyha saying, "Bitch is over. The new word is hoodrats."

Finding out Thao was a Vietnamese pop singer, and her CD she brought in and its rich pink cover with her cursive name and soft-focused, airbrushed face.

Listening to her album on her tiny pink iPod, not believing this is Thao sitting in the dispensary next to me, and this is Thao 5 years ago singing about heartbreak and held hands, backed by guitars, synth strings, and a drum machine.

Lori detailing her planned trip to Aruba while getting her hair colored and washed at the shampoo station and us gobbling up the story, excited some one was leaving, even if for two weeks.

Her bringing me back a baby blue pen with palm trees and ARUBA written across it, because she knew I liked to write.

Buppha with her head on her desk, sighing at 3:30.

Alysha and I at the front desk doing reception and playing free cell.

Linda coming to school with a giant forearm bruise, because the night before she was rollerskating on her living room's carpet.

Snow Day and the whole school is empty except Ms. Jo, Lori, Kevin, a few others, and me. I'm playing Willy Nelson out of a stereo under my station. It's pure white outside, and I feel pure white inside, and

at lunch Kevin shows me his bag of runes and the pages of his current rune lesson.

You live in a town like Funwater long enough and each street becomes family familiar, each store you walk into feels like putting on an old coat. I've got history here, it comes at me from all sides as I walk to the bus. I can't walk by West Coast Beauty without remembering Katie and I shopping there, buying D:FY hair spray and molding gel for our station and ogling over the high end cutting shears. I can't walk by Candy Bouquet without thinking of Linda describing sea foam to me, and how excited I was to go there at lunch with her and taste it for the first time. Circuit city reminds me of the breaks Lori and I would take from school to run down to the store, shoot nazis at the PS2 demo booth, then run back up recharged. The bus back downtown reminds me of riding home with Kanani, after convincing her the 47 was far faster than the 44. I'd lean back and listen to why Bubble Island was better than Chopsticks Bubble Tea, why busses and living in Lacey sucked, and the steps she needed to take to begin

her hip shoe fashion line.

Live in Funwater and soon enough all city blocks fit exactly as they should, and you walk sunk into the sidewalk like its your home's soft carpet, and soon enough even awful strip malls pulse with some half-known story.

7.

In March I finished the first issue of Funwater Awesome. I brought a batch to school and taped a sign to my mirror that read, “FUNWATER AWESOME AVAILABLE HERE!” Two classmates bought my zine, and a few borrowed a copy to read at their station, but most just asked what a zine was, thumbed through mine, and told me it was cute.

I brought a few to Frank at Danger Room Comics and he let me pick the best place to display it on the store’s zine shelf. I brought some more to Last Word Books, and stood there marveling at my zine taking up two spots on their rack. It made me so giddy at school that first day, imagining someone I’d never met liking something I wrote, buying something I made.

I could now not feel like a fake when I said I’m a writer.

When I told a person, “I like to write”, and could see by their expression they’re thinking, “He

writes fanfiction about Babylon 5 in a notebook kept under his bed. He ain't no true writer." I could tell them, "Bitch, I'm published! SELF PUBLISHED!"

Though I was riding the high of zinedom, Quality Beauty College had descended again to a hell hole . To curb lollygagging, loitering, and slacking off, the head teachers had enacted grand, sweeping changes across the school. In a month they planned to change their entire teaching method. Instead of being able to dance around your requirements sheet, doing whatever suited you at the moment, they'd create stations throughout the salon where you had to focus on one single task until your required state hours were completed. This meant that if you were sent to the pedicure station, you'd have to wash and massage feet for weeks until your hours were done. They had a haircutting station, and a perm station, and a station where, for days, you could do nothing but mix hair dyes and one where you could only wash hair. If, for example, no one came in for a pedicure during your stay at that station, you were expected to wash and massage a plastic foot, 8 hours a day, until your hours were done.

They also changed the general feel of the

school, outlawing all our various ways of escape. Nothing was allowed on the salon floor except for hair supplies. No pictures were allowed at your desk, no books, plants, doo-dads, cups, or bottles of water. They did surprise raids of student's cubbies, stealing their Cosmopolitans because no magazines are allowed on the floor; clocking people out for the day for taking 15 minute breaks instead of the 10 we were allowed. . They turned off the radio because they were suspicious of the seditious conversations we were having at our station, so the place became silent, with the teachers walking by slowly eavesdropping on all our words. Students compared it to prison, or-at the most extreme-a nazi prison camp. That seemed insensitive and irrational to me. I compared the place-in a conversation with Kanani one morning-to the opening scene in Running Man, where they walked around with collars around their neck set to explode their heads off if they crossed the invisible line.

They fired Ms. Angie, for unclear, unfair reasons. She was one of my favorite teachers and, like Ms. Jo, taught me things actually pertaining to barbers. She had years of experience in salons and barber shops,

and gave anecdotes and specific tips not found in any text book or lesson plan. We were all crushed by the announcement of her leaving.

Katie and I had our stations moved again, this time against the wall of Ms. Deb's office, and I became the focus of these new laws. One morning before school, Ms. Jo told me, the teachers had a staff meeting to discuss problems with the school. I was brought up by Ms. Deb because, she said, I was doing nothing all day but read books. Ms. Jo defended me, telling Deb that that's what barbers do, read all day, and I never loved Ms. Jo more than right then. Ms. Angie warned me that Ms. Deb and Mr. Bill were upset, and that morning they gave me a garbage bag to put all my books into, along with my stereo, tea cups and tea bags, to take home that afternoon.

I still had Magnum, but our constant closeness and his judging, unbreaking stare caused me to buckle. I started poking holes into his nostril, mouth, and all other openings, and scooping out the inside of his head with my rat-tail comb. I spent hours with my comb twirling in his nostril like I was mummifying him, styrofoam shavings dropping out of his mouth, eyes, and

ears, and then I would squeeze a bottle of hairgel into the openings, and watch Magnum drip clear, triple hold snot.

I wrote on Bridget, my female mannekin, leaving little messages hidden underneath her hair. On one of her last days here, Ms. Angie came by to watch me do a clipper cut. She told me that she wanted to leave me in good hands, and couldn't leave until she knew I could do a good fade.

She grabbed Bridget, "run a ¼ " guard up her sides and back," she told me. I turned on my clippers nervously, and ran the guard up Bridget's head, revealing, "ZACH IS AWESOME" on one side, and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" on the other. Ms. Angie didn't say anything, just made sure I blended well.

a wedding party came early morning one Saturday to get updos: a bride, her maid of honor, and the flowergirl--with the photographer and his wife there to capture the whole experience. I came in at 8:30 to happy glowing women getting their hair curled and sprayed, and the photographer kneeling around them

trying to get it from every angle, joking with them and his wife. He had never been to a beauty school before, and was amazed by it all.

“Look at all these heads.” he said, taking pictures of the mannekins, “Isn’t it eerie, all these heads?”

I was so jealous of him then. I wanted to still find this place new and strange, but I couldn’t. I wasn’t some outsider author like I first saw myself, I was a beauty school student. I knew all the mannekin’s names.

This wasn’t what I imagined the writer’s life to be. Writers were the rock stars of print, and when I was a teenager, saying “I’m going to be a writer” I immediately felt cooler, like I was going to be lifted out of Funwater, with its endless banks and gas stations. I’d join the gifted people who saw the world differently-- wrote sights down as sounds, turned colors into smells, wrote trivial things into shimmering importance. I could turn Funwater into Asgaard, my life into a saga.

And now I sat here, jealous of every person that passed by outside, squeezing the cheeks of Magnum to make him cry big, goopy tears.

I strained to hear what the wedding party was saying, mentally escaping to their reception dinner in Seattle. Then they left and I was still stuck here. I couldn't go to their wedding.

I grabbed a scrap of paper , stared out the window, and wrote down all the places I'd like Lindsey and I to see. I made a map and an itinerary all in my head, made up hotels and diners and engine problems. I wrote myself out of the school and onto an eastern road going to a Vermont made up all in my head(i have no clue what the place looks like)where Lindsey and I ate hazelnut pancakes in a diner straight out of *Welcome to Mooseport*, and bought a spot of land to start a homebrew soda empire. Then I stopped, wondering what exactly was keeping me here right now, why I wasn't actually driving out of this town. I couldn't tell if I truly wanted to be making soda in Vermont, or whether it was some flimsy escapist fantasy. This was once fantasy, I can find the diaryland entry I wrote in high school where I said, "wouldn't it be cool to be a barber?" And now I'd be graduating in two weeks, going up to Fife in three to take the State Practical Exam. I can remember thinking how cool it'd be to do zines, and now I have one sold

downtown. I can't tell the difference between fantasy and a five year plan.

My thought was interrupted by a call up front to do a haircut. I brought the guy back to my station, draped him and started cutting. I asked him if he'd ever been to Vermont, because I heard it was pretty there. He hadn't.

I went to lunch after the haircut, left my Vermont escape fantasy , and joined the quiet, intense conversation being had by the other students in the lunchroom. We were all pissed off at the school rules and the firing of Ms. Angie, and now we huddled together, ate lunch, and planned a revolt.

8.

My last two weeks at barber school rushed to an end like paper in a fire. We held seditious conversations at lunch and morning break, planning the best way to protest. It was decided to do a school wide strike next Saturday, when three different schools were having a prom and we knew it'd be our busiest day of the year with all the girls coming in for up-dos.

That Saturday I slept in, happily on strike, hoping that everyone followed through and it wasn't just a handful of us skipping school.

Je'Lea and I pulled up to the parking lot Tuesday to see a group of classmates grouped around Linda's car where Linda, Meghan, and Lori sat inside. We were quickly filled in on the details of the strike. Apparently, only two students, out of 70, showed up that day. It was a busy Saturday, and the teachers melted down, rushing around having to do up-dos and haircuts themselves. Linda, Lori, and Meghan were all called Saturday evening and told they were expelled from school for organizing the strike and not allowed,

even, on school grounds or Mr. Bill would call the police.

The school was quiet and disordered. Ms. Deb would not come out of her office, fuming inside. Ms. Jo said Saturday sucked, but could understand why we were angry. Each of us went into Mr. Bill's office, one by one, and took credit for helping organize the walk out. There were no leaders, we were all angry. Mr. Bill told us, red-faced, slightly shaking, that the three would remain expelled because an inside source told him they were the leaders. That afternoon, Liz D. left the school crying. The rumor passed that she yelled at Mr. Bill, he screamed back, broke a door and expelled her as well.

We ate lunch with the QBC Three at the Capital Mall, and they updated us on the legal action they were planning to take. Lori's lawyer said Bill had no leg to stand on. A Fire Inspector came that afternoon and pointed out to Deb and Bill all the school's fire hazards and broken regulations that needed immediate fixing. It was rumored Je'Lea called him in.

A School administrator came in Friday

afternoon to mediate a conversation between students and instructors, where we all voiced our complaints (I complained about not having water). Lori sent in the letter from her lawyer and soon the three of them were enrolled again into school.

I completed my hours the following Saturday and in a fit of excitement shaved all of Bridget's remaining hair off and had my classmates sign her scalp. Lindsey picked me up and we packed all of my school things into the back of her car and headed downtown. I wanted to spend the afternoon reading comics and so we stopped into Danger Room. Their display shelf was being stacked with King Cat Comics and a folder of Will Schaff prints and I ran toward them excited.

We're thumbing through the comics after I screamed, "Look, Lindsey, Will Schaff!" and this guy on the ground says, "I'm really glad you like them. I'm putting all this stuff out."

The man on the ground was Zak Sally, founder of La Mano Press and author of Recidivist, a fantastic collection of comics. We talk about our shared names, and I thank him for putting out Diary of a Mosquito Abatement man and tell him how pretty all his books

are.

A couple minutes later, Zak Sally overhears me talking to Frank about how I graduated Barber school. He comes over and asks me if I'd cut his hair during the Q&A he was giving at the comics shop that night. I agree and leave Danger Room, walking three feet higher than when I came in.

When I come back that night Zak has Funwater Awesome in his hands and introduces me to the people gathering as Zach, the barber, who also writes zines.

I cut his hair that night in a cleared off space of the comic shop, in front of a crowd intently listening to Zak answer questions about his drawing style, and starting your own publishing company, and I nervously try to not to poke him with my scissors. I'm cutting around his ears and he's talking about zines, and how he tries to keep La Mano very much in the same spirit. He says, "I like books and all, but-and you know this Zach-there's just something really nice about putting together a zine, knowing you can just go down to Kinko's and do it yourself."

I nod in agreement and explode inside.

He pays me afterwards in comics and prints,
we talk about binding issues and paper, and he tells me i
gave a kick ass haircut And I realize that this is my first
professional haircut, that I'm now truly a barber, and I
have no clue how i ended up here.

