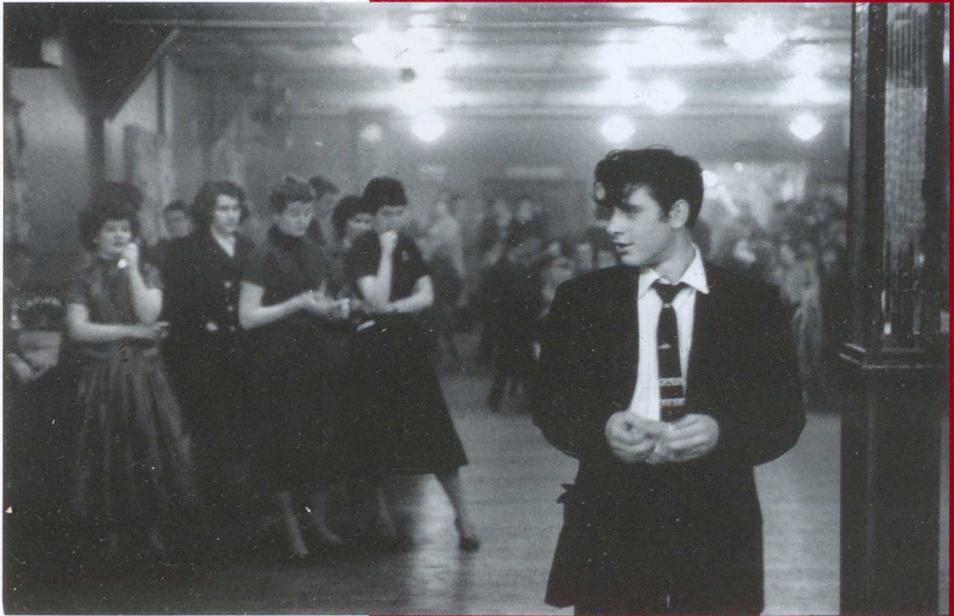


Towers

Spring 2000, Number 80



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The editors congratulate the winners of the 2000 Towers Prizes

Darrel Hedman
Towers Prize in Fiction
October 31, 1979

Andrew Kleimola
Towers Prize in Creative Nonfiction
(Punk) Rock of Salvation

Katrina Elisa Davis-Salazar
Towers Prize in Poetry
Ahulani: Addressing Places (An Inside, Outside Story)

Number 80

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MARK DICKSON

We Regret to Inform You:

Dear Mrs. _____,

We regret to inform you:

the butterfly has slain the caterpillar;

the youthful fuzz

that you once loved to pet

has been traded for pinions

(wing-shaped shackles)

We would like to console you:

ghosts can fly where men cannot;

how can one touch

clouds while crawling

or stars with lucid hands?

(his reach is intangible but vast)

We are proud to assure you:

angels dance on the shoulders of men;

boys chase demons

with idle hands

and clumsy feet

(your son has grown wings)

DARREL HEDMAN
October 31, 1979

Sarah's eyes close as the world around her becomes loud.

"Your wings! Your wings! Why didn't they work?"

The sky is gray. The sky is red. The sky is gray. The sky is red. Matthew jumps off the lowest branch and falls beside her. He grabs her hand, her face, her hair, but nothing is there.

"Why didn't your wings work, Sarah? Your angel wings...."

Matthew runs down the dirt path as fast as his short legs will carry him toward his home. The sky is gray. The sky is red. The sky is gray. The sky is red and everything is so loud.

"Mom! Mom! Sarah... Sarah's hurt! Mom! Mom!"

He opens the front door and trips inside.

"Mom! Mommy! Sarah's..."

The sky is gray. The sky is red.



"Hello, Jen ... Yes is my daughter there?"

"Kelly... I don't think this is helping. You know she's gone. Please, please don't ask for her again, what if Matthew would have answered?"

"I just saw her run through our front yard and head towards your house. Darhat if Don't tell me you haven't seen her."

"Look I'm truly, truly sorry, but she's not here, and she's not going to be here."

"Don't tell me she's not going to be there. Look outside! Look!"

"Okay, I looked and she's not here. "Please, please this is very hard. I don't know why this had to happen either. But it did and I'm sorry. Really I am. Matthew can't..."

"Please! Please! Please tell me she's there! I just saw her! I swear I saw her!"

"Kelly, I'm so so sorr."

Click



It's October 31, 1979 and Sarah runs across Matthew's front lawn with her wings outstretched and her eyes towards the trees.

“Mom, can I go out and play with Sarah?”

“Where’s your father, Matthew?” Her face changes and she shakes her head. “Why is he never around?”

The sun skips off Sarah’s favorite butterfly hair clip as she enters the forest and disappears.

“Mom, please let me go outside.”

Her head quickly turns and her fingers tense. Matthew steps away and cowers as if she is to strike.

“Matthew, I wish.... I wish you would just go find your father.”

Matthew walks down the basement stairs and enters the last room on the left. It is his father’s work room and it is filled with sawdust, rusty tools, greasy shirts, and bloody traps. Nothing is an order. As Matthew enters, he steps carefully in order not to get a nail through the foot.

“Dad.”

“I’m busy.”

“Dad, mom said...”

“I said I’m busy.”

He moves his hands over his clear white bowling ball, blowing in the air holes whenever they come around.

“Mom. . .needs to talk with you.”

“Matt, tell your mom I’m busy.”

Matthew steps out the door and walks right into his mother’s stomach.

“Richard, Your boy needs you. Talk with him.”

“I just want to go outside, dad. “

Richard tightens his mouth down and inhales through his nose.

“And what are you going to do outside?” Richard exhales back through his nose.

“Not playing with Sarah are you?”

The sun peels off a corner of the sky. It’s 2:30 in the afternoon and Sarah begins to ascend her favorite tree.

“How are we today, ‘lonely’?”

Sarah places her butt on the fifth limb. The limb is strong like her Father’s voice, and she waits for Matthew to come to her side. A scar on her forehead finds the attention of her fingers. She touches around its edge and waits for the memory. The trees move below and beside her. She waits for the memory.

“dad, when’s mommy coming home?”

The room spins around. She can't feel her fingers or her toes. The room is gray. The room is red. The room is gray. The room is red.

"dad, when's mommy coming home?"

Her kitten sits in front of her face licking her eyes. There is still life in there. The moon crashes into the burning sun and all balance is lost. The room is gray. The room is red. The room is gray. The room is red.

"dad, when's mommy."

The kitten moves and she leaves everything on the floor. Her dad runs to her side crying, "what happened? what happened?"

The trees move beside her with anger, as Sarah waits for the scar to disappear.

"Hi! Sarah!"

Matthew climbs up "lonely" and sits beside Sarah. She is a little cold and her face is not the same as it was yesterday.

"I like your wings. When didya get them?"

"It's my costume for Halloween."

"I'm going to be a policeman! My gun and badge are in the house. My dad says I can't play with the gun. He says it's not a toy, but a real weapon."

"Your dad is real dumb."

"Yeah mom says that too.... Hey mom says I can go out tricks or treating after supper. When will your mom let you?"

"I don't know. I kinda want to try these wings out first. My dad says they are real angel wings."

The wind puts weight on their faces as Sarah looks into the purple sun. "I'm going to jump off 'lonely,' and fly with the other angels."

"I wish I had angel wings."

"Angel wings are for girls not boys. Boys carry guns and knives and belts."

"I've never carried a gun, knife, or belt."

"You will. Someday you will."

Sarah puts her right hand on Matthew to maintain her balance as she watches the ground grow with distance. She puts her left hand on "lonely" and lets her seven-year-old mind begin to dream.

"Soon I'll touch the clouds, Matthew, and I'll even bring back a piece so you can touch it."

"I wonder if it really tastes like marshmallows."

Sarah begins to breathe, and starts to let go of "lonely." His oily hands wrap around her belly. She wants to twist away but she can't. He's too strong. His voice is

too loud.

“Hang on to my arm, Matthew. Still hang on to my arm. I’m waiting for the right wind. It has to be stronger than him, and stronger than me.”

“The wind is strong! Fly Sarah! Fly!”

Matthew lets go of her hand and she is swallowed by the sky. Matthew can only look with his eyes closed. The sky is gray. The sky is red.



Matthew gets off the bus to walk home. He passes by Sarah’s house and peers in the front window to see if she is home. She’s standing in her underwear with angel wings stretched across her back. A kitten runs by her feet as her father enters from the kitchen. Matthew taps at the window, but Sarah doesn’t hear him.

“Sarah, Sarah look over here.” Matthew sticks out his tongue and rolls back his eyes. She doesn’t look at him. Matthew walks over to the door, and before he can push the doorbell Sarah’s mom pulls into the drive.

“Hey, Matthew, I have something to give your mom. Why don’t I give you a ride up the street and I’ll give it to her then.”

“Okay.”

“Do you think Sarah can go tricks or treating tonight?”

“Matthew...I’m sorry. I’m really sorry.”



Matthew walks inside and the phone rings. He puts down his bag and walks over to the window. He pushes the curtains aside and thinks about the wings.

A gust of wind shakes the window as Sarah runs across Matthew’s front lawn with her wings outstretched and her eyes towards the trees.

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"Dad, mom said..."

"I said I'm busy."

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"And what are you going to do outside?" Richard exhales back through his nose.

"Not playing with Sarah, are you?"



"I wish I had angel wings."

"Angel wings are for girls not boys. Boys carry guns and knives and belts."

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"You will. Someday you will."

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"Hang on to my arm, Matthew. Still hang on to my arm. I'm waiting for the right wind. It has to be stronger than him, and stronger than me."

Where is she? Why isn't she home yet? Everything is wrong. Or maybe everything is right. Please let that be her.

"The wind is strong! Fly Sarah! Fly!"

Matthew lets go of her hand and she is swallowed by the sky. Matthew can only look with his eyes closed. The sky is gray. The sky is red.



Matthew gets off the bus to walk home. He stops by Sarah's house to see if she's home. She is standing in her underwear with her wings stretched across her back.

A kitten walks in front of her legs as her father enters from the kitchen. Matthew taps on the window to get her attention. But she doesn't move.

"Sarah! Sarah!!!"

The sky is gray. The sky is red. The sky is gray. The sky is red and everything is so loud. The kitten begins to lick her eyes. She is trying to breathe. She is trying to form words. Her eyes find his through the redness and through the window.

"Hang on to my arm, Matthew. Still hang on to my arm. I'm waiting for the right wind. It has to be stronger than him, and stronger than me."

"The wind is strong! Fly Sarah! Fly!"

Matthew lets go of her hand and she is swallowed by the sky



Matthew sits down at his desk. He pulls out a piece of paper and a red crayon.

Matthew Henley

Age 8

October 31, 1979

Today SARAH and me played outside. We played in the trees. She had wings. I want wings too.

JOSHUA ROBNETT

Home

The sun baked his shoulders on this side of the wall. David had become accustomed to the courtyard walls, where they tinted the sunlight into tolerable shades of gray. Shielding his eyes with his ticket, he listened to the echo of the highway for signs of a bus engine. He cursed himself for not bringing his sunglasses. As his ticket flapped in the desert wind, he thought that he should have been happier than this; instead he just felt exposed. The sun and wind had left a briny sprinkling on his skin that stung his eyes when he wiped the sweat from them. David hoped the coming bus would be dank with windows fogged with air conditioning.

The prison had been dank; the submarine walls sweat into silent puddles that ebbed into the cells leaving a musk that seeped into hair and clothing. The twin clicks of the bay and cell doors had numbed him at first. Later, he had come to rely on those latches locking to reset his internal clock. No sun shone in the inner chambers; only the scheduled clacking of metal on metal announced meals, work, and sleep. David felt like he had been part of an inevitable countdown until prison's routine had put his undulating mind to sleep.

Seventeen years ago, the countdown ended in a trial and a subsequent sentencing that had left him a trembling open sore at the start of his confinement. Those had been the worst times. It seemed to him that he had never stopped screaming into his pillow for the first six months. Screams of loneliness soon became screams of unwelcome visitors. Sleeping was an impossible goal; the squall of those on the upper decks had infected him faster than he could scream it out.

A bus wobbled in the rhythm of the heat. The earth rocked slightly as he stepped off the pavement and away from the checkered shade that the linked fence had granted him. Two steps. Two steps of scratching sand against the soles of his shoes startled him. The tick-tock of boots on tile had always ticked off the seconds of his confinement. David looked at the new digital watch the warden had given him on the way out. Even though he had never seen a watch like this before, he knew it was cheap and probably wouldn't last very long. Sand had already worked its way into the crevices and it would only be a matter of time before it worked its way into the dark

innards. The bus was running late; it lingered at half the distance, taunting him and drying his mouth.

As the bus hummed and hissed to a stop, he tried not to notice the sidelong fish eyes fearfully peering at him through the green glass. He and the chalky bus driver stared at each other through the door; David squinted at the bus's silver brilliance. The driver begrudgingly unsealed the door in one jerky motion. As he leaned in to give him his ticket, the bus driver looked at the road while speaking to him in a drawled murmur, "Ah just want you to know that I keep a lil' insurance with me on mah runs." The driver patted a conspicuous hump in his blue pant leg. "There's also a plainclothes on board to keep timers like you from bein' recidivized." David could feel his groin tighten as the old impotence squeezed its red face through his memory's membrane. That familiar tightness reminded him of the trial. His organs had cowered against his spinal cord for three months before the verdict had been finally read. He knew from the beginning that he was going to jail. He had also known about the swirling masses that waited for those new arrivals that could still feel. He had spent those three months waiting for the black rush of despair and the hum of assimilation. Sweat beaded on the driver's curled lip and the fish began twitching in their seats. David floated to the back of the bus and dazedly plopped into an antiseptic blue seat. The engine vibrated to a hum and the prison drifted in green tints past the window. He wiped his mouth with his matted arm. Sand squeezed through his lips.

As he inspected his thick face and neck in the window, recycled breath billowed from the overhead nozzle and cemented to his stocky frame. He scratched his remaining patches of black hair; sprinkles dusted into the collar of the shirt he had pulled from the "outprocessing" locker that morning. Some dirt never came out. That's what Mother had told him. David had been playing in the old backyard sandbox the day before he was sent away to St. Rictor's when he learned about the dirt that never came out. From Father's old Navy locker in the garage, David had pulled his new fire truck and old steel gray Tonka from their winter exile. He would never be in the Navy and have a wall locker like Father. Father made sure he knew it every time he left the room when he cried. "Such a sniveling fat fuck" Father sneered only that once before sentencing him to the backyard. He had been drinking Chivas that day and the assembly line grease on his fingers smudged the pawed tumbler as he waved it loosely at the screen door. David's intestines wound themselves until bile dripped brass along the sides of his tongue.

Hunched over in the sandbox with his back to the house, David leaked tears into the back of the dumptruck. His mind looped those two words over and over until blood

in his ears began to beat with their rhythm. Fat fuck fat fuck fat fuck fat fuck fat fuck. His eyes thumped their white yolk in time with his racing heartbeat. Half dazed, he looked down at his trucks and saw that he had been smashing them against one another. Both trucks horribly twisted from multiple head on collisions. The larger gray truck had overwhelmingly beat the smaller red one into a crumpled heap near the mossy corner of the sandbox. His anger ebbed with the loss of his trucks. In one last burst of concentrated frustration, David wielded the gray truck over his head and brought it down on the wounded. The metals of the two trucks meshed and they swung against the tattered wooden corner as one contorted juggernaut. Pulling them out of the splintered wood, David heard something that reminded him of the hum that his alarm clock made the minute before it went off. Ashen hornets erupted from their spiny burrow, squeezing their sodden bodies in every slit of David's clothes and face. He scrambled toward the house as one clutched his screaming lip. In the short lull between stings he could feel their horrible bodies wriggling under his shirt and searching. The hornets pumped and writhed against patches of skin. The only thing that would calm them was his corpse, bloated and ready for infestation. With one swollen hand pushing against the wooden basement door, he pinwheeled the other against the muddy cloud. In the basement, David had sat in clammy silence until dark, waiting until the last sandy wasp had stung and fluttered from his sleeves and hair. Afraid that father would hear him, he had only whimpered quietly once or twice while he waited for mother to come find him. When Mother finally came, she had huffed and wearily gazed at the specks of mud and ash that the wasps had blotted on David's new school clothes. Later she had scrubbed each sting with pink lotion and told him that "dirt like that doesn't come out Davie. Do you want Father to go broke buying you clothes? You know I try to watch out for you, but Father can take only so much you know. Good boy."

He woke staring at the highway with his head tilted into the window. The lines in the road checked by faster now. How many more lines were left before he saw Father again? While Father had sat in his beaten leather chair drinking Chivas, her light had browned out like it had been connected to a sputtering generator. Eventually, Father had been left alone in the ticking house with only resentment to occupy the space in the other kitchen chair. Although she had known that her husband would never apologize to him, she had made him promise to write David monthly in the morning of her final day. David had never known about the cancer; the first letter he received from Father stated only that she had died from it and that he would be corresponding from then on. It was in the plain delivery of the information that David knew that

Father had been destroyed. There had been none of the snide sarcasm that he always used to reveal his disappointment with him. Instead there had been an aloof frankness that had allowed David to separate from the naked terror of his youth and begin to understand why he had murdered.

He turned his head and pulled back from the window. Pressing the tender areas on the back of his neck, David looked at the puckered blank faces of the sleeping and the stern faces of those that stared too long at anything but him. He remembered the stock boy having the same glassy eyed blankness before he gurgled and dropped to the green squares of the linoleum. That had been the day after he had been kicked out of St. Rictors for "not maintaining the moral code of this establishment." It had been innocent enough. David had sheepishly asked Mary Dunford to help him study his geometry. She had arrived in her green and gold uniform, still glistening from practice, with pompoms swinging from her backpack. Her unblinking eyes darted trustingly like a newborn. The intoxication from her sweaty polyester and grape bubble gum reeled him back a step and he had let the door squeak open with an absent hand. Mary pointed in his book and explained how pi represents the ratio of the circumference to the diameter of a circle. David just nodded in the spaces between sentences left open for questions. The puff of baby powder hovered each time her ponytail fanned it from her sweater's womb. David had never been able to understand how one final answer could come from a never-ending circle. It was clear to him that he was not going to understand it tonight. David was surging and had to know whether or not Mary ever had any feelings for him and that he thought he might be in love with her. She jutted her chin forward and barely stifled a giggle. Later, after Mary had decided to call it a night, David remembered how Mary's wrist had pulsed under his hand and how her face had flushed to a deep red under her curled bangs. The headmaster and a hulking officer had shown up at his door forty-five minutes later to discuss "David's future at St. Rictors." The headmaster and he had decided that "it would be better for all parties involved that he withdraw from the citadel immediately." David had not protested, he knew it had gone bad once blood had started streaming down the cuts of the sheets. He had had to ensure that charges would not be pressed.

The news of his dismissal had preceded him. By the time David arrived home, Father had been sitting in the corpse of the lawn chair mulling over the silent toys of the locker. Pushing up the driveway, he saw Father's face had crinkled and swollen over his accusing spider eyes. Father quietly spouted soft words that floated over the stares of his toys and settled on David's quivering hairs. Nerves howled in his guts and

cranked them into a hollow ball. He wouldn't stop. Words and words crested to take away the braces and pull up the muddy cornerstones. He saw by the frosted spittle collecting in the folds of Father's mouth that he had some rehearsed speech clicking away and suppressing the darkness. David looked up and saw that Father had stopped and was staring at him as he rocked and groaned like a beached whale lurching away from the rotting sun. He was standing now. Spots flashed his retinas; he was approaching with clutching hands. David spun and ran so hard he felt heart seams begin to wheeze and coat his ribs with bloody flem. Houses windmilled past him as if mounted on one great laughing wheel.

By the time he reached town, the folds of flesh stacked on his belt had burped out lines of sweat that curled around his body in gauzy stripes. He needed to find a sanctuary where he could connect the pieces and plug up the holes. Looming in the center of town, the lights of the Safeway flickered on in the deepening crimson sunset. The sun shades over the store's windows flapped lightly in the air conditioning. The light failed and flickered against the tinted plastic. The storefront, a rippling oil slick of dancing blackness, hypnotized David and lured him into its soothing rhythms. As he approached, the door silently opened as if sensing his need for welcome. Once passing the door's threshold, the store bathed him in its cool fluorescence while drying his sweat and tears away. People were cogs of a greater machine here. The people in the checkout lines shuffled to the clicking register tape and the employees marched to the clacking cart wheels. "Can I help you sir?" A tall gaunt manager with gray comb lines and a smell not unlike canned peas had been alerted by David's paralyzed euphoria. He was looking at a security guard with a knowing eye while giving David a toothy manager smile. David immediately sensed that he was not participating and was probably to be labeled a virus if he didn't start incorporating himself immediately. David used the smile he had learned at St. Rictor's to quell those on his floor that had asked about the rotting smells coming from his room the night before trash day. He told the manager that he had a magnificent store here and he was just taken aback by its grandeur. He knew the game; he had just stopped playing when Father talked to him in that tone. It was as if Father had forgotten his role and had left the house a broken wreck without even a thought about the infection he might spread to David. The manager strutted away to help a humped crone with her dog food, and the guard recessed into the glass of the customer service box. David gave his smile to the one-way glass; the guard was still lurking behind his tinted reflection.

The uniform piles of fruit called him to their waxen perfection. David strolled up and down the isles whistling and pretending to be a shopping husband with a healthy

barbecue in mind. The dull thumps of fruit being dropped into scales and the shoppers circulating through the rows flushed him with warmth. He had to be careful; too much time in any one area made him a target. He knew he would have to visit the entire store if he had to stay in that ticking house with no Mother to set his schedule in the morning. David poked his finger through the membrane clinging to the yellowing cadaver of a chicken. The cancer was rotting Mother's corpse into a pale yellow right now; her skin tightening into a swampy cellophane. Jazz droned through the rafters while David made his way to the humming freezers. In clouds of frost, the molecules of stacked lemonade and waffles stood at attention in one beautiful formation; their organized stillness making him giddy. The game would have to be delayed for a few minutes. He crept into the cooler and sealed it shut behind him. David clung to the dripping shelves and licked the frozen dew from bags of frozen shrimp.

Behind him the door opened. "Sir, I don't think that.." a pockmarked stock boy with blazing red hair stammered with mocking lips. The guard was running quickly with his hand holding his holstered revolver now. David twisted his body out of the cooler and flopped onto the floor. "What the hell do you think you're doing, you fat fuck?" David was still holding a bag of butterflyed brine shrimp when the guard skittered to a halt and shoved his weight against the teetering shelf. Images of police bringing him home and Father speaking to him with those tired excusing eyes again raced in and out. He knew that security had already identified him as a threat to the integrity of the whole. His heart raced against the gentle hum of the gaping cooler. The boy was advancing with a gun that dwarfed his infantile hand. David saw himself pressed between wormed slabs of mud and the yellowing decay of Mother's cancer. The ringing in his ears enveloped the world in red silk and muted the guard that was screaming for help. David yanked the revolver from the holster and emptied six rounds into the boy's throat. The guard wasn't moving anymore. The shelves dropped like a support beam onto the gurgling stock boy's knees. A pricegun, smudged in bloody fingerprints, slid to middle of the aisle. The body lay gaping and curled, submerged in bags of shrimp. Everything had clouded over in a pulsing haze. He had been arrested three hours later mumbling in a used car lot. David remembered how Father had taken the stand and embarrassingly cried and stuttered in clipped responses. Although David had testified violently that Father was the one that needed hospitalization, the jury had found David guilty of the lesser charge and sentenced him to twenty years.

The bus slowed at the town limits and passed the shell of the Safeway. It looked dead now; time had taken its form and replaced it with a mustard skeleton. He saw the

house and pulled the cord. The fish jerked in unison. Waddling down the isle with his bag bouncing off of his knees, he stepped into the street without looking at the driver's husk. It was a dollhouse now. The garage tipped its frayed roof to him as he stepped to its side door. The locker opened with a rusty shudder; his eye scanned its bowels for his red fire engine. Inspecting it in the window, he remembered the innocent stock boy and those cloudy bags of shrimp corpses as they lay cold on the tile. His key still fit the house lock, and it slid noiselessly into its mate. The dining room picture window sprayed shafts of glittering dust against the staircase and Father in his chair. Father's eyes flicked and he saw David behind and above him smiling. David pounded the truck into his head until the dining room window was painted in strokes of red bars. David called the police and waited for his ride home.

JOSHUA ROBNETT

Call of Cassandra

She had spent sixteen years in that awful tube and lived longer than all of the others. Her body had shrugged off the gene and hormone therapies as well as the aging effects of the nutrient incubation bath without any deducible cause. Blood and tissue samples had rejected all attempts to introduce recombination splices. She was an enigma and I loved her for it. Sixteen years. My hair had been receding slowly until that day. She had finished the job for me in a moment. It was a record for any donor bodies to last over five years; they had been designed that way in order to keep production high and maintenance low. Immersion tanks are horribly caustic to the outer layers of skin, and most floaters simply cannot withstand the process for an extended amount of time. The bath removes moisture and vitamins from the outer layers, collects it in siphon tanks, and re-introduces them to the interior soft tissues and target organ. Only the organ for which the body is being harvested receives everything it needs to remain healthy for donation.

I had studied Donation Genetics for six unending years and still had not been prepared for the brutal sight of a husk thumping in its tube. Of course I had expected the skin to be darkened. I had not expected hairless insect bodies tightening in fetal rigor; tufts of bone-white hair tearing out of the scalp and mocking the furled body's indifference. The bath wrung flesh around bone and cartilage. It left faces in immutable screams and stretched eyes into bulbous raven orbs. I had left orientation twice in order to relieve my stomach of its contents. When I returned, the amused orientation administrator informed me that I was the newest member of the Retrieval Team.

I quickly learned that retrieval process was fairly simple. Only the target organ is consequential; a rib-splitter and a scalpel are usually the only equipment necessary. Bodies are seen as hosts. Skin is peeled away like bark from a tree, the ribs are split, and the engorged organ is pulled from the host with minimal fuss. Unfortunately, the body's reaction to the bath and its utter deterioration is an overproduction of T-cells and a gross swelling of the lymph system. This results in a sweeping pus saturation that smells like baby powder and key-lime pie when exposed. They were mercifully

engineered to lack what could be considered to be a brain capable of consciousness. Basically, the brain stem keeps them alive and plugs the hollow brain cavity.

But she had hovered unchanging while the tubes around her were repeatedly cleansed with sterilization jelly, replenished with nutrient bath, and impregnated with a rolling fetus. Every month, we pulled her out for exploratory, and every month we put her back knowing less than we did before. Pathology had worked double shifts for ten years. She just levitated in that red illumination while we bustled around the lab looking for an explanation. She was as brainless as the others were, yet, even as a child had a seductive aura about her. She had looked as if only in secret contemplation, waiting for us to wake her with our science. In mute purgatory, she had become a woman. Eventually, we had to accept the only answer that her blood would divulge: her genes were virtually devoid of any codable structures. Whereas most of these structures are housed within thousands of studded receptor sites, her sites resembled the dead volcanoes of the moon. I wanted to stay late and track the activity of her brain stem. I was convinced there was something burrowed beneath the surface. Liam said that the experiment had been done before. I argued that the tests were biased. Liam gave me the rehearsed director's speech about limited grant funds and salaries paid for duplicated research. In the end, he gave the green light under the condition that I work on my own time.

On the first night of my research I waited until everyone left before pulling her out and carrying her to the Operating Room. Light seeped in from the door window and the reading lamps in the observation booth. My steps reverberated across steel tools and trays. One arm hung limp as I poured her onto the table while the other slid from my chest. Bath and sweat soaked into my scrubs, trickled down my shirt, and dripped between my legs. I flicked the overhead on. In the lamp's glare, the room fell away; the tiles of the floor and walls reflected like starlight. She was beautiful. Her ivory skin was defiantly casting translucence back at the lamp. I took her in. Her mouth was parted slightly. I could see the edge of her eyeteeth emerging from under her pouting lip. I brushed the back of my hand across her face and let a finger slide into her mouth. She was warm inside. Her lip was soft against knuckle as my fingernail scraped across the bristles of her tongue. I was breathing in rapid convulsions. The stars vibrated in their squares. I staggered away from the table. The room blanched. Using both hands, I leaned against the foot of the table. My legs were twitching. Slowly, the room came back; sound began to connect itself and absorb the ringing.

Her eyes were open.

She was staring at me. My God, she was staring through me. There was only ink in the sockets, dancing and churning against their glassy orb. The lights dimmed. No, she was absorbing it. The tiles pulsed and pupated blackness. Dark pods lurched from the wall and clouded the room with swirling locust. She was blazing now. I was crippled by the swaying darkness in those eyes. There was something else. Everything in the room was a cloudy reflection in the whirling swarm. I saw my own deadened face flashing in and out. My entrails pinched and were blocks of dead ice. There was no consciousness in those eyes to hold back the piercing cold. It was coming now. The locust tore at my flesh as they orbited her. There were stars in her eyes now. My heart fluttered and was still. I was so numb. Two expanding stygian moons. I screamed and it was nothing. It was here. Biting and gnashing, the awful vast screamed from her eyes. I was immersed in its wailing; then it was in me. Then nothing.

I floated frozen and submerged in the thunderous void. A great voice bellowed and diffused in its waves. I remembered when I was ten. My sister and I would sit underwater at opposite ends of the pool and try to talk to one other. My screams would rattle my skull and quake in my molars. Sometimes I had kneeled on the pool floor and screamed until blood clouded from my ears. This voice was more than that. It was unintelligible, and it liquefied the marrow in my bones. It was my father. I had thought I was dead, but my father was living with my mother in Cape Sebastian. The cold was couched in here as well. My chest pulsed and spiderweb warmth began to sear through my veins. The voice subsided and was replaced with the deafening juices of lung and heart. I could hear it creeping behind them. I tried to push away. My intestines were held fast to a throbbing braid; my arms only twitched and grappled to membrane. The womb twisted in the pull and slack of the lung; its grip slowly tightened around my head. How long would it be before I was born? How long could I endure that malignant thing sneaking and digging around me? It was closer now. Through the gurgle and murmur, it slid under me gaping its toothy rictus. It cleaved at the lining and pulled it apart. I dipped through the rupture. It was whispering.

She closed her eyes.

They had found me in the morning, curled on the tile at the foot of the table. Three days later, I awoke in the psych ward with Liam staring at me with sunken eyes. Of course he had had to fire me. He said that my research had become an obsession and my objectivity was shot. I agreed. I tried to tell him what he was hatching in those tanks. He had watched the door until I finished and told me to rest. Once I checked out, I had spent weeks contacting every credible university and lab in the country. My reputation had preceded me.

MARK DICKSON

The Sound of Inevitability

A distant whistle at dawn:

too faint to draw me from my

morning

reverie—

the five minute lifespan of a dream

the five day lifespan of a fly

that necessitates

one thousand eyes

to see faster

The insistent wail of 8:43:

I've heard its sound since birth.

The sun rises always in approach to noon

elongating my shadow.

Its whisper crescendoes in my ear

like the determined shriek of an oncoming train

lost in coalescence with idle chatter.

We are the rail layers

laying tracks

in an unending tapestry

of wood and steel,

fixed to prairies

in eternal embrace

like awkward lovers in early morning

whose shrill sighs betray their equilibrium.

The clash of hammer and steel:

A dull cadent thud

to subdue the ringing in my ears

and measure the distance between suns.

I like to think

because I chopped down the trees

and I forged the steel

that I am the maker

because I stitched my name

and Time is the tapestry

that I am the artist

because I have trained my ears

to hear its approach

I can step aside

and forget my name.

KAREN FRETT

Fear of the Dark

I heard about the house before I went there myself. It is in the middle of nowhere in Sycamore, Illinois—an abandoned farmhouse. Drive through cornfields, then through a tunnel of reaching trees. Most people go at night, to make the most of the experience. Then the trees are really reaching and the river is smoking. Go farther around the curve and then turn off your lights when you hit gravel. It is too dark to make out anything but the most general details. The grouping of trees to the right is where we're going. There is no driveway, so park on the field that makes up the front lawn. Peer through the trees and you will see a house buried behind them. It is small and lonely, boarded up as it is. The paint is peeling from the wood siding and the boards over the front door and the windows are old and battered. The porch extends along the front of the house with a dingy and broken railing. It does not want us here.



My boyfriend passed the stories to me over the phone while I was away at school, and then later told me in person. *Last year this one girl went with some of her friends and took a Walkman with. They left it on through the whole house and went to play it on the trip home in case anything had happened. In the background there were mysterious whispers and strange music. She got freaked out and in this really surreal voice told the driver to go back. They opened all of the doors, waited a few minutes, and then left. They played the tape and it was just her talking. Somehow she knew the ghost was trapped on the tape.* The hair stood up on my arms and I shivered just a little. It wasn't very scary, but something had happened, though I am extremely susceptible to stories.

The Residence Hall Director went to check the place out before the Resident Assistants took their floors out. He wanted to see if the floors were rotten and the stairs were okay. From upstairs, he saw that his lights were on. He went back outside, turned his lights off, and then went back in. Back upstairs, he saw that his headlights were on, so he went and turned them off again. Not wanting to go back and find his car lights on again, he turned around and they were on. He went back to the car, started the engine, and left. Goosebumps again, but I get scared easily.

Another girl went to the house with a group of her friends. *They were all playing off her fears, like Derek and I do to you. The guys with her tapped her shoulder, made spooky noises, and kept scaring her as they walked through the house. Adding to the atmosphere. Once they got to the stairs, she had had enough. "If one more person taps my shoulder, I'm leaving right now and taking my car with me. Cut it out!" Everyone stopped in place. They hurried upstairs. No one mentioned that there was no one behind her.*

When my boyfriend and his friends went, he took a video camera and filmed by flashlight. He was hoping to get something a little more definite than a story about a girl and a tape recorder. They pried the board up from the window to the right of the front door and crawled through. *That's the cold room over there on the left, where the ghost can be felt the most. Maybe it's where the wife was killed. We're going down the hall into the kitchen to finish the downstairs first. There's a white machine in the closet there; I don't know what it is. All of you, avoid the decaying leaves and animal crap on the floor. No one's getting back in my car with that crap on their feet. It looks like something died in the corner over there. I'd go poke at it with my foot, but these girls are getting too nervous.*

Here's the stairs—no one wants to be the first up, so I might as well go. Always the first for everything. Did you hear that? Turn off those flashlights. Turn 'em off! We are trespassing, you know. Could someone else be here? There's a little door there on the left but it's locked. And guess who gets to open it. Get ready to run 'cause I won't be waiting for you all if something's in here. He slid open the latch and pulled the door toward him. It's a small room. There's a window over there with a full moon. I'm going to put the camera through for a better look. Okay, we're going to go through the rest of the upstairs. Haven't heard any footsteps.

I did not want to see the tape. Something might happen, and if it did, I really did not want to see. I had goosebumps of course, and my hair felt like it was standing on end. That would have happened anyway, though the entire situation was compounded by the fact that I knew the people starring in this the movie. I was one of the children who covered her eyes when seeing Disney's *The Black Cauldron*, and that was animated! I was only five or six at the time, but not that much has changed. I still scare very easily. And this home video was a little too real. My imagination has a tendency to run away with me. But I sat back on the couch and continued watching anyway.

No electricity, no plumbing. There's nothing left, other than so-called ghost. We had better get going. A quick look in the root cellar and then we're gone. These girls are getting kind of scared and we've been here long enough. I hope no one has driven

by and noticed the car. The tree there close to the cellar door could be the one he hung himself from, with that flat branch. They walked to the front of the house, taping the exterior. While all of the intruders wiped their feet on the grass, Jason taped a final view of the house. The Cheshire Cat's smile, as in Disney's *Alice in Wonderland*, shed a little light from behind the trees that towered over the roof, fading behind clouds as the tape stopped.

I was told that the man who lived there shot his children and his wife and hanged himself from a tree in the backyard. It either happened fifteen or twenty years ago, a short time, considering the condition of the house. It seemed to be abandoned by all but thrill-seekers, rodents, and whoever mysteriously mows the lawn. Two of the guys who went with my boyfriend decided to research what exactly happened at the house. They found out his name and the names of his children and his wife. The idea was to walk through the house, calling out the names, hoping for some reaction. College—in the form of studying, drinking, and working—got in the way of this plan, though it may have been common sense under another name. They wanted me to go, and my boyfriend wanted me to, but I refused. Especially at night. I need to see what is ahead of me. Things can hide in the dark, but things can hide in the light as well.



I was at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign for my freshman year of college. Two and a half hours away from home on a very large campus, “on my own” for the first time—traveling to Italy my sophomore year of high school with an English teacher does not count. Well, I was not completely alone; I had a nice roommate and my sister was two floors away, but that place was not home. I was not happy or comfortable. At least that is how it began.

Then I would be walking to class at ten in the morning and pass behind Noyes Lab. The hairs on my arms would stand up; my neck would get prickly; I would start glancing over my shoulder and into doorways. I stopped walking to class that way and went around all of the places that gave me bad vibes. I stayed away from very open spaces and very closed spaces. I did not go out by myself or at night if I could avoid it. I went home most of the weekends, not able to stay. I would drive one minute on University Avenue, three minutes on Lincoln Avenue, fifteen minutes on I-74, forty-five minutes on Route 47, twenty minutes I-55, twenty minutes on Route 59, three minutes on 111th Street, twelve minutes on Book Road, four minutes on Rickertt Drive, five minutes on Ogden Avenue, one minute on Brookdale Road, thirty seconds

on Manchester Lane, fifteen seconds on Foxhill Road, to Winchester Court. I counted the minutes.

Driving under the bridge on Ogden Avenue, I would think of crashing the car so that I would not have to go back to that place. But I shared the car with my sister and could not leave her without an escape, so I would drive on, happy for the two days I had. I talked to my parents, but they would not see the depth of my concern. They saw a nationally-ranked school where I should succeed. Transferring was not an option. I talked to my boyfriend about the idea and he supported me, the only one. Everyone else seemed to think that the fear would just go away or that I should grow up and suffer through for a good education. People either loved it there or hated it there, but few left for such a “silly” reason as mine.

Jason listened to me, reassured me, and entertained me with stories of his life. And with stories of the house. It was a fear away from what I knew, a fear that someone could visit and then leave. A fear that others would share. And it was fear I had, not nervousness, anxiety, or homesickness. People (specifically Rush Dozier in his book, *Fear Itself*) talks of fear as “the quintessential human emotion.” Dozier’s examples are a car crash, walking in the woods, getting out of the way of a runaway car—he discusses the “primitive fear system” as enabling escape. One of his self-defined themes is “how men and women...not only cope with fear, but come to relish being in extremely dangerous situations.” In my mind, I can understand those looking for a rush, taking risks, such as going to a haunted house, but that is not true fear.¹

My sister and some friends of ours were going to a movie at the end of first semester, after one of their finals. They were going to try to meet me at the dorm, but if they weren’t there by ten o’clock, I was supposed to meet them at the theatre. I waited until the last possible minute, but then I had to leave. I was so angry with Christine—she knew what I was going through but she didn’t even try to make it back the dorm. I held onto that anger, made sure that it carried me over the pavement without a broken leg, carried me past anyone who would come after me, carried me to the theatre without mishap.

My uncle gave me a very thoughtful Christmas gift that year—a small self-defense knife that I carried everywhere with me on my keychain. It was a triangular-shaped knife that fit between my middle and ring fingers when I made a fist. I would not leave for class without it. Pepper spray and Tae Kwon Do were not enough to keep me safe. I went back for second semester, promising to talk to someone and get some help. I never did, unwilling to hear another person telling me that I should stay. I

managed day to day. My mantra: "I can leave. I can get in the car and drive away. I can transfer."

My friends and family tried in their way to empathize with me, but did not and could not understand. They knew worry, being startled; they didn't know fear. True fear is when you can't leave your house without something to protect yourself with. True fear is knowing that if something happened, you would kill if you had to.

"If we cannot habituate, then psychological problems—diseases of fear—may cripple our lives."² I wonder if I would have been considered "crippled." How long is the limit on habituation? How long should I have waited to be accustomed to living a life of constant fear? How long did I have before my fear became a disease instead of something that everyone told me would go away? I forgot to eat and forgot to sleep. I forgot to wake up to my alarm. Was it ruling my life? I went home every weekend. I talked more about transferring and then looked into getting student loans. I would pay for college myself if I had to. I could not live like that; happiness was too important for me to wait any longer to "habituate."



I was visiting my boyfriend for a weekend and gave into impulse. I did not crash my car; I compromised with a visit to the haunted house at dusk. My boyfriend drove through the cornfields and under the skeletons of reaching trees. He pulled onto the grass and stopped the car. It was a very small house but there in the half-light, there have been few times that I felt more uncomfortable, out-of-place, and unwanted.

We sat there staring at the house and I did not want to get out of the car. But there was no way on this earth that I was staying in the car alone. I allowed myself to be coaxed out to the front lawn, but then pulled my boyfriend back onto the hood of his car when he tried to approach the house. "Bad vibes" was my answer. I could not and would not go near that house.



The Blair Witch Project came out in 1999, two years and a lifetime after my first attempt at the house. Supposedly, it was a documentary of footage taken by three college students who disappeared searching for evidence of the Blair Witch. Police "found" their film in 1994 while searching for the students.³ Long after the viewing public had learned that it wasn't a documentary or urban myth (as the first previews and their Web site had made it seem),⁴ I finally watched the movie on video. I was not

scared at all, just a little disturbed at the end, and then only because of the abandoned house. The video was similar to the one my boyfriend shot—the same type of house, the same refuse on the floor, the same quality of picture, though there were no bloody handprints or people standing in corners my boyfriend's video. *Blair Witch* exits for the same reasons as the film of the haunted house. For people to be scared. To feel chills run up their spines. To be disturbed by “safe” horrors.



Little children are afraid of the dark, crying out in the night at bumps, creaks, and whispers. As adults, we know the difference between reality and fantasy. We are the protectors against boogymen and are the killers of spiders. We are the ones who can not be scared, for we must reassure. But every so often, we want controlled fear. We are fascinated that the darkness in our imaginations could exist. That is why we read of witches and vampires, why we love Halloween, and why most of us shiver with delight when we hear of ghosts. That is why we go to haunted houses and houses that are haunted. We must conquer our “fear.” I must go to the house again.

I made my plans to go at about four o'clock, so that it would be a little dusky, but still not night. I was not ready for night. Mysterious things happen at night without any extra encouragement. But when people get nervous, they talk, and so I did. I talked to a guy who had already been there, told him of my plans.

“You can't go there. They're tearing the place down, or at least they were the last time I tried to go. But I didn't make it very close to the house. I couldn't really see anything—the neighbor's dogs ran out into the road and wouldn't let me pass. I even honked, but they just ran around, so I gave up and left.”



How can the house be torn down? It has been there for three years while friends of mine went and explored and I stayed at home. It cannot be demolished, not yet. I have been afraid for too long to give up. There will never be another chance to face whatever is there, in the house or in my mind. Like when I was eight years old and my father made me go to bed during a commercial—before MacGuyver escaped from the man-eating ants (giving me nightmares if my hands or feet hung over the bed)—I needed closure and I needed to know that I could persevere. I had finally made the decision to go; I must be able to follow through. Besides, people had been saying for

the past two years that the house is being torn down and it never was. It *will* be there. It *must* be there.

We drove out on First Street, my boyfriend and I, taking four wrong turns along the way. I turned on the headlights as the sun began to go down and we continued to look for our turn. Sights began looking a little familiar and we made a right, going through more cornfields, across a bridge, and around a jagged curve before taking the final turn. As the tires crunched onto the gravel, we stared ahead in shock. There were no concealing trees; there was no farmhouse; there was no rubble left. We pulled off the gravel onto the grassy shoulder and stared. There was a cheerful white ranch house with green shutters, a stained-glass door, and a two-car garage with bright lights framing it on either side. There was not even a lawn planted around this brand-new house. This scene belongs in a brand-new subdivision in suburbia, not in the middle of rural America.

They tore out the original, well-kept lawn. I understand why they tore down the house; restoring it would have been impractical. Or perhaps they think that if everything is gone—the house, the lawn—the ghost will be gone as well. The only thing that let us know that this was indeed the right place was a small woodshed about a hundred yards to the left that had not yet fallen.

The old house had no electricity, running water, or gas lines—there was only a hand-cranked ceramic washer; many improvements had to be made for these very modern inhabitants. Did they purchase the property to build their house? Did they tear down the haunted house themselves or was it already gone? Are they the family of the original owners? Are they the original owners and the entire story is an urban legend? I decided to find the truth of the story for myself. I read through every “Murder Case or Attempted Murder” headline in the *Chicago Tribune* indexes from 1980 to 1985 at the Naperville Public Library, clearing the time from fifteen to twenty years ago. Then my impatient boyfriend needed to go home in order to eat Thanksgiving leftovers and write a research paper on genetics. He told me that the entire story was simply that, a story. *No one ever found any evidence for it. Nothing ever happened. Can we go home now? I'm hungry.*



The people living in this new house will realize something strange is going on when college kids drive past at two in the morning, looking for fear that is no longer there and for darkness that no longer exists. Perhaps the new house will be haunted as well.

No one has yet proved whether ghosts and hauntings are limited to the building or the location, but if the ghost did survive the house, there could be problems, possibly exorcisable problems. A couple living outside of London bought a house known as Lowes Cottage. Their exorcism only made the ghosts retreat for four months and then the haunts were back, behaving suspiciously like the fictional ghosts from Amityville.⁵ This couple sued the two sisters who sold them the house for the outstanding payments, totaling three thousand pounds, in the first paranormal case before the English courts since the middle ages.⁶ In a country where each diocese of the Church of England has a team of exorcists, this case was predictably dismissed, as society frowns on the idea of ghosts.⁷

I wonder if a case such as this would even make it to court in the United States. However, since 1993, sellers in New York are required by state law to inform purchasers if the house is haunted.⁸ Perhaps the couple in the new ranch house should keep this in mind. We may not have many exorcists, but in America, everyone can sue and lobby. Though even we here in America have the ability to exorcise, as long as there is no true evil. For disturbed spirits, make a sign of the cross in holy water on each wall. Or approach your local priest to celebrate communion in the home.⁹ This is not England, but we have options.

Perhaps I will never experience a true haunted house—according to the courts, there is no such thing—but I will continue my nightly ritual. Shut the door to my bedroom in the midst of blazing electricity, turn off the light switch, turn down the bed, look in the closet, close the closet door tight, turn off the dresser light, get in bed, and sleep. We all must be on guard for the unknown. But we must also take our fear while we can get it: it is the spontaneous fear that quickens the blood. Or is it the long-term nervousness that escalates into an infectious disease? Or the imaginings of irrational people causing hysterical hallucinations? Or are ghosts trapped low-frequency sound waves?¹⁰ I would not know, for I missed my opportunity.

Notes

¹ Dozier, Rush W. *Fear Itself: The Origin and Nature of the Powerful Emotion That Shapes Our Lives and Our World*. New York: Thomas Dunne, 1998. 3, 17, 19.

² Dozier, 25.

³ Aubry, Erin J. "The New Face of Horror." *The Independent* [London] 22 Aug 1999. 28 Nov 1999 <<http://proquest.umi.com>>

- ⁴ Luh, Shu Shin. "On the Web, Rags to Witches." *The Washington Post* 19 Aug 1999. 17 Nov 1999 <<http://proquest.umi.com>>
- ⁵ Treneman, Ann. "Ghost Stories." *The Independent* [London] 4 Jul 1999. 17 Nov 1999 <<http://proquest.umi.com>>
- ⁶ Weaver, Maurice. "Couple Refuse to Pay For 'Haunted' House." *The Daily Telegraph* [London] 6 Jan 1999. 17 Nov 1999 <<http://proquest.umi.com>>
- ⁷ Treneman, 4.
- ⁸ Eason, John. "Raising the Spirit Level." *The Guardian* [Manchester] 20 Feb 1999. 28 Nov 1999 <<http://proquest.umi.com>>
- ⁹ McClymont, Fiona. "The Knack Exorcising Your Home." *The Independent* [London] 8 May 1999. 17 Nov 1999 <<http://proquest.umi.com>>
- ¹⁰ Matthews, Robert. "Science Finds a Sound Reason for Ghosts." *The Daily Telegraph* [London] 28 Jun 1998. 17 Nov 1999 <<http://proquest.umi.com>>

*I've got to pack my bags and I'll get out and they never
will find me*

—The Bollweevils, “The Witness”

Some six years later, in the fall of 1994, I attended a concert at the Fireside Bowl. I am pretty sure it was fall, but I couldn't give you much of a descriptive account of that day because I am notorious for being the least observant person in the world. I tend to remember the feelings and the atmosphere more than the concrete details. I was well aware of Fireside by that point, though: it had become relatively famous for being one of the only places in Chicago to check out bands for those unlucky enough to have not yet hit the magical drinking age. The crowds were, and still are, comprised mostly of chain-walleted boys and nicotine-addicted girls who got out of their chores for the evening and convinced Mom and Dad to let them drive the station wagon to the show.

Chicago, by that time, had developed a closely-knit punk scene. A few bands had played together often enough to attract a respectable number of fans. For me, the scene revolved around The Bollweevils, a pop-punk band that I first saw live in the summer of '94. A flyer I picked up at a comic convention persuaded me that I should check out a show they were playing at the Metro. It was a visceral experience, unlike anything I had ever witnessed before. The club was packed with about a thousand sponges all being wrung out in time to the frenetic beat. The white noise saturated the room. The band allowed—no, encouraged—us to be participants, not just spectators. The 150-lb. weights that arced from the stage into outstretched arms acted in obedience. Microphones craned down from three points on the stage, inviting the yearning voices to join the band in its celebration. From this single concert, my love for punk rock spun out and evolved to what it is now.

*We ain't got no place to go
So let's go to the punk rawk show
I wanna get into the crowd, I wanna hear it played
real loud*

—MxPx, “Punk Rawk Show”

Ah, this leads me back to Fireside. The bowling alley-turned-punk rock sanctuary, located on Fullerton Avenue between California and Western, was my formal introduction to the subculture. I had seen a punk band in the confines of a mainstream rock club; now I wanted to approach punk on its own turf. The headlining band was again The Bollweevils. I bought their record at the Metro gig, the brightly colored

blue vinyl enclosed in a multi-colored sleeve emblazoned with the title, "Stick Your Neck Out," and I had memorized every song. As I drove past the bowling alley to find a parking spot, I first saw the large bowling pin hanging overhead. The dilapidated exterior (it can actually be seen as the police hangout in the Brandon Lee film *Rapid Fire*; oddly enough, the interior shots are from a bowling alley that someone might actually bowl at) provides the venue with anonymity. It was our version of the secret back alley Hollywood nightclub. At the doorway, the promoter accepted my five dollar offering, and one of his friends stamped an ink design of acceptance on the back of my hand. Up a few stairs and to the right is the bar, with its hand-scrawled sign warning underaged patrons not to enter. A few steps further, and you are in the bowling alley. The cigarette machine next to the concession counter usually had flyers announcing the next few months' worth of shows. I would grab a flyer, and head into the bowling alley.

The stage is erected at the end of the bowling alley, on the left-hand side. The lanes, which are sometimes roped off during performances, stretch out opposite the doorway. Scarlet- and turquoise-crowned boys and girls mill about, lighting each others' Marlboros, making idle chit-chat while waiting for Elliot, the sound guy, to get the levels right. And when the music started, I found more than a concert: I found a community.

*I'm a lexicon devil with a battered brain
And I'm lookin' for a future—the world's my aim
So gimme gimme your hands, gimme your mind
Gimme gimme this, gimme gimme that*

—Germes, "Lexicon Devil"

"Lexicon Devil" is an extremely well-known punk anthem. It reminds me of a Germes song called "No God" in which frontman Darby Crash snarls, *I peered in every window where I saw a cross/ But I never could see just what they saw/ In that piece of plaster on the wall.* I have not listened to that one in a while, because I do believe in God. Actually, not too long after I discovered punk rock, I found Jesus Christ. Or rather, He found me. We had been sparring for a while. I have always believed in God, but sometimes I found him a little too aloof, and sometimes too oppressive. The problem was, I did not look for the truth, I merely made up whatever was easiest for me to believe. The bands I listened to most during my high school years supported,

or perhaps created, my opinions regarding God. *Hey God*, Trent Reznor calls out in Nine Inch Nails' "Terrible Lie," *I'm all alone in this world you must despise/ Hey God, I believed Your promises, Your promises and lies!* Reznor acknowledges that there is indeed a God, but he does not necessarily like Him. Later in the song, Reznor pleads, *My head is filled with disease, my skin is begging me please/ I'm on my hands and knees, I want so much to believe.* I understood the urgency of Reznor's plea. I, too, wanted so much to believe in God. I wanted to believe that He cared for me, but I had not yet recognized where God was at work in my life personally.

*I know that your soul is hungry
I know that you're cold inside
Open up your veins and fill your life with Christ
inside*

—Ruby Joe, "Spiritual Heroin"

The worship area of New Song Church is actually the gym of the renovated elementary school that the church now occupies. The basketball hoops are drawn toward the ceiling on Sunday mornings. A two-foot high stage sits in the center against the back wall. Rows of blue cushioned chairs are aligned in front of the stage and rows flank either side of the stage, enough to seat about 500 people. Large speakers are suspended above the stage and are surrounded by theatrical lights. In the back of the room, a couple of guys control the soundboard, and spotlights are perched high on either side of the room. Onstage, a band is assembling for a pre-service prayer. I take my seat near the back of the worship area. Everything about New Song is casual, inviting. No one is wearing a suit and tie, not even the pastors. In fact, the teaching pastor, Marty Schoenleber, is fond of saying that whenever you see someone wearing a tie, they are probably performing in that morning's drama. Yet it wasn't the décor of the sanctuary, or the apparel of the congregation that made the most distinct impression. Rather, it was Marty's fervor to preach the truth about God.

"Live for an audience of One," Pastor Marty told us. "David says in Psalm 42, *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, O God.* I pray that that is your desire. God so desperately wants to bless us, but we rarely give Him the opportunity to." Marty took off his reading glasses and grasped both sides of the lectern firmly. He looked intently at each and every member of the congregation. His gaze, punctuated by a pause, swept across me. "People, it is vitally important that you

understand that Christ's blood has covered us," he cried. "He paid the penalty. For us. For you. For me. *Live for Him*. Seek a relationship with Jesus Christ." That was when I understood—no, not understood, accepted—the grace of God.

*On the street the air is thin, dim night like the rest
At the door of the club loungin' eyes so undressed
Then you open the door and the noise shakes the floor*

—Richard Hell and the Voidoids,
"Down at the Rock and Roll Club"

I do not go to shows at Fireside very often any more. Usually, the bands I want to see play at The Empty Bottle, a little bar tucked away next to a laundromat on Western. The awning that reads "friendly" and "dancing" and the Budweiser sign with confetti markings on it are the only ways to distinguish the Bottle from the other bars on that stretch of street. Like the Fireside, if you do not know where the entrance is you could easily miss it. The entrance ritual to the Bottle has the addition of requiring the proper I.D. The first few times I attended shows at the Bottle, however, I did not "have" the necessary identification. Each time, the admission process was similar. For the Red Aunts show, after drummer Leslie convinced the owner, Bruce, to let me watch the gig, he said, "If the cops show up, you're working the lights." He motioned toward a board in the back as he said, "And stay away from the bar." At Bottleshock '95, Bruce warned, "I see you with a drink, I break your fingers." For a show with the New Bomb Turks and Teengenerate, he instructed the waitresses and bartenders to let him know if my friends or I tried to drink. And at another Turks show: "You even have a glass of water, I'll break your hand."

In the past few years, I've become a semi-regular at the Bottle. Whenever I go, I see a lot of the same faces, and I imagine that they recognize me. The Bottle draws a lot of Link Wray guys, and a lot of Betty Page girls. The bar is small: *maybe* 250 capacity. In one room you can play pool and pinball, and the adjacent room holds the bar and the stage. There is usually room enough at the bar to squeeze in and get a drink, but sometimes it is a challenge merely to get to the tables in the narrow area opposite the bar. The stage is angled so that there really are no bad sight lines, nor is the sound particularly bad in any spot. The Bottle gets the best of the punk and garage bands that come through town.

*Spent years procuring a parochial mind
The last ten making my own
May have stained my soul in the meantime with my
secular record collection*

—New Bomb Turks,
“(Gotta Gotta) Sinking Feeling”

I took a friend of mine from church to a New Bomb Turks show at the Empty Bottle. He knew it was a secular concert at a bar, so I wasn't worried that he would be offended by the surroundings. When we walked into the bar, I immediately spotted Matt, the Turks' bassist.

“Hey Matt, good to see you guys here again,” I said.

“Andrew, yeah, I'm just glad people are still into rock n' roll here,” he answered as we shook hands. “We've been in Europe for a while, and I thought everyone was into techno now,” he said, only half-joking.

I introduced Matt to my friend Gary, but the Turks were hitting the stage so Matt had to go set up. So far, so good. Nothing had happened yet to make Gary fear for my salvation. After the band got their equipment ready, their singer, Eric Davidson, jumped on stage. He always looks like he isn't sure what he is doing, like he is preoccupied by other thoughts. He slid out of his leather jacket, whipped it behind the drum kit, and then spun around to grab the microphone stand. All I could think was, “How am I gonna explain this one to Gary?” Eric's T-shirt contained an advertisement for The Pleasure F***ers. There it was, in all of its offensive glory, screaming out to Gary that I was knee-deep in sin.

*All I know is the path is straight and not so very
wide
But I never was too good at coloring inside the lines
Will You open up Your gates for me and let me come
inside?*

—This Train, “Missing Link”

So is it wrong for me, a Christian, to enjoy punk rock? Is God going to turn his back on me because of my *secular record collection*²? Or will He still open His gates to me even if I'm not “*too good at coloring inside the lines*”³? God says in Joshua 1:5, *As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.* He also says in Colossians 2:20, *Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this*

world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules, and continues in verse 23, *Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence* ⁴. It is pretty clear to me that since I have accepted Christ as my Savior, listening to a secular record is not going to cause me to lose my salvation. MxPx is a punk band from Bremerton, Washington that has experienced something similar to me. The members of the band are Christians, but they do not call their band a Christian band. Mike Herrera, the band's bassist and vocalist, says, "We're Christians, but we're not missionaries. We're not trying to save everybody. It just happens to be what we believe."⁵ In a separate interview, Herrera is asked about the criticism leveled at MxPx for their lack of evangelizing. "It's kind of weird, because we're Christians, and everybody knows we're Christians... I guess we're ministers, in the fact that God uses us and that every Christian is called to minister in some way, but I don't consider myself like a preacher or anything."⁶ Some of that criticism is evident in a broadcast of "Week in Rock" on MTV. An MxPx fan interviewed by MTV stated, "I think that a lot of people, they hear about MxPx signing with a secular label, and I think a lot of people sense that they're drifting away from their relationship with God." Another fan concurred, saying, "If they're going to start out as a Christian band, then they should just stick with what they believe, and just do it for Christ."⁷ Herrera, though, would "like Christians to be the standard, not the minority. More accepted and less weird." MxPx intends to do just that by touring with secular bands like Bad Religion. Herrera acknowledges, "Bad Religion influences thousands of kids to hate God," but he also believes that "if we're asked to be on a tour like that, God is using us."⁸ Christ spent His time among the tax collectors and the prostitutes. Jesus says in Matthew 9:12-13, *It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick... For I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners.* ⁹

*My ears are humming 'cause the music's loud,
As I take a leap over the crowd...
It's time to rub some elbows, it's time to fellowship
It's time to fuel the flame of life that Jesus Christ
has lit*

—Crashdog, "Vent"

Will punk rock turn its back on me because I believe in Jesus Christ? A Swedish band, The Hellcopters, claims that *The Devil stole the beat from the Lord*, but there are

plenty of Christian punk bands who will testify to the contrary. I do not believe that punk rock and Christianity are necessarily mutually exclusive. In fact, in an article called "Punk and Avant-Garde Art," Tricia Henry states that punk rock involves "juxtapositions of seemingly disparate objects and behaviors."¹⁰ Punk rock and Christianity seem to be extremely disparate lifestyles, but I believe they can co-exist. Some secular punk musicians have spoken on albums and in print about their belief in God. Mike Ness of Social Distortion has used God as a theme for years. In "When the Angels Sing" he calls out,

*At last we meet again, dear God, when the angels sing
The funerals are nicer when we know You're there, when the angels sing
Sometimes I try so hard, to understand the things You do
Who am I to question You when it all comes down.*

In "Through These Eyes," Ness sings, *Through these eyes I've looked the Devil in the face / And I've seen God's holy grace.*

I have never been hassled by punk fans for my faith. But while I do not deny my faith, I do not stand in the middle of a bar evangelizing to the masses cradling their beers, waiting to shower the stage with glass shards if the band sucks. At a Guitar Wolf show at Lounge Ax, on my way to the stage I spotted a large-framed individual sporting a T-shirt that announced, "Christianity is stupid." I stood there a moment, wondering what the proper move would be. What good could come from chiding this guy who is pounding Budweisers at the bar? Is there any way to instill in him a respect for people of faith? I ended up simply brushing past him, eyes downcast, as my WWJD necklace clinked against my chest.

*It wasn't just not so long ago, I told the Lord I
loved Him so
Get in my heart and got baptized and now I'm precious
in His eyes
When I talk to Him at night, you know He makes
everything feel alright*

—Oblivians, "Feel All Right"

Interestingly, a Memphis trio called Oblivians offer convincing lyrics for Christians on *Oblivions Play 9 Songs with Mr. Quintron*. In one gospel-tinged song, "Ride That Train," they sing *If you don't wanna pray, you don't have to pray / If you don't wanna ride His train.* The tunes on *Oblivians Play 9 Songs With Mr. Quintron* all seem to

contain spiritual themes, yet the band hardly gives evidence of actually believing any of their own lyrics. On “Live the Life,” they exclaim:

‘Cause you can’t go to church, child

Now, and sing all day Sunday

And go out and get drunk....

You’ve got to live the life

You sing about in your song.

They sing these wonderful hymn-like songs, yet their live shows are marked by extreme drunkenness and profanity (although they back all of that up with some intense rock n’roll). But the problem becomes: are they serious, or are they mocking the faith? Even if they are mocking the faith, the lyrics really do speak the truth about Christ and His love for us. In that respect, I can sing along with the songs, because I do believe the lyrics. Whether or not the members of Oblivians believe the words in their songs, Christian artists can take a lesson from that line from “Live the Life”: *You’ve got to live the life / You sing about in your song.*

What do your arguments prove?

Surely I speak of those things

I do not understand

—Halo Friendlies, “Cry of Job”

I guess I cannot speak for the band members, so I should let them, Christian and secular, speak for themselves. Wuv, drummer, P.O.D.: “We don’t shove [our beliefs] down anyone’s throat or tell them what to do.... All we do is tell people what God’s done in our lives personally.”¹¹ Deanna, drummer, Halo Friendlies: “Our ministry is more individual than as a unit. We figure if we stand up on stage, opening for Rancid, and try to preach to the little punk rock kids, they’re just gonna think we and all other Christians are dumb.”¹² Spike Nard, vocalist, Crashdog: “I ended up going to this rally...I only got 30 seconds to share the Gospel with this whole group of people. I realized, hey, if I had a band with me, I could have 45 minutes standing up here.”¹³ Greg Russinger, vocalist and guitarist, Ruby Joe: “Rockabilly is what we love, and it’s what we listen to, what we are everyday... and now God is allowing us to use it to let a new generation of kids have fun and learn about Him at the same time.”¹⁴ Glenn Danzig, vocalist, The Misfits, Samhain and Danzig: “It’s the whole Messiah thing in general. Some people are waiting for the Messiah to come back, some people are

waiting for the anti-Christ—who cares.... If there is a God, it's a cruel God, that's for sure."¹⁵ Nick Cave, musician: "The Christ that emerges from [the Book of] Mark, tramping through the haphazard events of his life, had a ringing intensity about him that I could not resist. Christ spoke to me through his isolation, through the burden of his death, through his rage at the mundane, through his sorrow."¹⁶ Mike Herrera, bassist and vocalist, MxPx: "[Christianity] is seen as not punk rock and that is getting away from what punk rock was originally about: Going against what's normal, the system."¹⁷ Sonny, vocalist, P.O.D.: "When we first started playing... we were playing to the local skinheads and punk rock kids. They were shocked we weren't talking about destruction and chaos and violence. They were shocked to hear us talk about God with such aggressive music."¹⁸ Jim Carroll, poet, musician, author of *The Basketball Diaries: I love the rituals of Catholicism...* I mean, the mass is a magic ritual for God's sake, it's a transubstantiation, and the stations of the cross—I mean a crown of thorns? Getting whipped? It's punk rock."¹⁹ Deanna, Halo Friendlies: "The Christian scene is so accepting of mediocre bands that would completely fail in the secular scene, yet are huge in the Christian market. Why? I think there should just be one scene where the Christian bands have to measure up to the secular bands to make it."²⁰ Mark Robertson, bassist, vocalist, This Train: "Hank Williams didn't necessarily live what he said in ["I Saw the Light"], but I think he attempted to... It doesn't dilute the power of the song.... I think you can separate the art from the artist."²¹ Russinger, Ruby Joe: "Our band mission is to represent who we are in Christ."²² Herrera, MxPx: "None of the guys in [Bad Religion] believe in God, but Greg Graffin, the lead singer, really doesn't believe.... So he'd make little jokes... most of the time it was funny, but other times it kinda stung."²³ Deanna, Halo Friendlies: "At Warped Tour every person in every band, and every roadie and every crew member knew we were Christians just by seeing how we are and stuff... I don't think anyone actually came to the Lord, but we planted some seeds I guess."²⁴ Herrera, MxPx: "[The members of Bad Religion would] all be asking us what we believe, if we really prayed and read the Bible. One time [Bad Religion guitarist Greg Hetson] asked Yuri [MxPx's drummer] to pray for his wife and kids because they were sick."²⁵ Wuv, P.O.D.: We didn't even know there was a Christian music scene until people started asking us to play in it. We were just doing our own thing talking about what God had done in our lives."²⁶ Deanna, Halo Friendlies: "I totally hate the term, 'Christian band'. It seems to cause so much controversy. How can a 'band' be Christian? It's the members that make it up."²⁷ Tom Wisniewski, guitarist, MxPx: "We really don't consider ourselves a Christian rock band, we just consider ourselves

a band.”²⁸ Halo Friendlies: *Where is my hope and my comfort...? I long to see Your face / Take me out of this place.* Dead Boys: *I don't wanna kneel, I don't wanna feel / Guilty suppression.* P.O.D.: *What can a man give in exchange for his soul he cannot save/ When the time comes, in His glory we will rise/ Reign, Most High.* The Misfits: *Evil is as evil does and who/ But me could write the book of cruel?* This Train: *And I swear I can feel Your touch, though it can't be true they say.* New Bomb Turks: *Everyone they said were sinners gave me faith to play this game/ Defiled like the rest of them, defiled anyway.*²⁹ MxPx: *But I look to you, Jesus yes I do/ And I trust in You.*³⁰

*Behind those eyes, soul of a savior I recognize
No compromise, while the whole world becomes corrupt
Tonight we break the surface for lives*

—P.O.D., “Outkast”

I vividly remember that first real punk show at the Metro. The way the drums pounded back and forth in my chest, and the three chords being bashed out by the guitarist swirled around my head. The way the band communicated with the audience on a personal level. The way they were accessible, before and after the show. I remember the first New Bomb Turks record I bought. When the needle hit the vinyl, and the first chords of “Id Slips In” filled my tiny bedroom, and I was pretty much forced by the music to play air guitar. A later Turks song, “Jukebox Lean,” describes the situation: *The needle drops, my mood sprouts from the vinyl seed / Burn my records, watch me bleed.* Likewise, I remember my first visit to a Bible study for young singles, and the immediate connection I felt with the strangers whom I would later call my friends. I remember my baptism, and the knowledge of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

I know a lot of born-again Christians immediately get rid of all of their secular music, all of their movies, and all of their books that are deemed contrary to their new-found faith. I tend to think some of these things can build faith more than destroy it. Listening to a band that espouses a viewpoint that is in opposition to my own does not cause me to lose my faith. It merely informs me about the other ideas that float around.

Ministering through punk rock is no different than Jesus ministering through parables. The Pharisees were constantly trying to trip Jesus up, but through his parables he was able to relate His message in terms the people could understand. In that way, His words would not be misinterpreted. Christians who play in punk rock bands are reaching audiences that the schmaltzy pop that some contemporary Christian

artists play never could. A lot of the time the bands are playing the music they listened to before they became Christians and it is a logical step in their ministry. Music fans who are Christians should not be afraid to hang out in a bar, or any other secular concert venue, because in that way they can be the shining lights that Christ calls us to be.

*Well the drums are like a twin machine gun
And the voice is a full-throated roar
The guitars are comin' on like a buzzsaw
I can't wait until I get some more*

—The Fun Things, “Savage”

Getting shoved out of the Metro by their security, my ears are hardly buzzing. Well, if they are, I can't hear it over the din of the ringing that is already in my eardrums from the other abuse I have put them through. Jen's hearing is only slightly affected, but still, neither of us wanted the show to end. The walk seems longer back to the car, which is parked at a meter on Southport, close to where Blackout Records used to be. Tomorrow it's back to school, and back to work, back to the daily grind of things. At least I have that awesome mix tape for the ride home.

Notes

- ¹ Sex Pistols, “Anarchy in the U.K.”
- ² New Bomb Turks, “(Gotta Gotta) Sinking Feeling”
- ³ This Train, “Missing Link”
- ⁴ Holy Bible NIV
- ⁵ Johnson, Dan. Interview with MxPx. *Rocket Magazine*. 1 Dec. 1999. <<http://www.mpx.com/rocket/htm>>.
- ⁶ Ciani, Michael. “The Game of Life: MxPx.” *CCM*. Mar. 1997: 34-35.
- ⁷ *Week in Rock*. MTV. 26 Sept. 1997. Transcript. 2 Dec. 1999. <<http://www.mtv.com/news/gallery/m/wirmxpx9709266.html>>.
- ⁸ Urbanski, Dave. “Where the Buffalo Roam.” *CCM*. 1 Dec. 1999. <<http://www.ccm.com/ccmmag/98aug/features2.html>>.
- ⁹ Holy Bible NIV
- ¹⁰ Henry, Tricia. “Punk and Avant-Garde Art.” *Journal of Popular Culture*. 17.4 (1984): 30-36.

- ¹¹ Jenison, David. "P.O.D." *7Ball Online*. 6 Dec. 1999. <<http://7ball.com/front.index.htm>>.
- ¹² *Bandoppler Homepage*. "Halo Friendlies." 6 Dec. 1999. <<http://www.bandoppler.com/haloint.html>>.
- ¹³ Blinn, Beth. "Crashdog." *The Lighthouse Electronic Magazine*. 6 Dec. 1999. <http://tlem.netcentral.net/old/crashdog_9405.html>.
- ¹⁴ *Music.crosswalk.com: The Ultimate Christian Music Experience*. "Ruby Joe Bio." 6 Dec. 1999 <<http://music.crosswalk.com/artists/bio/1,1608,1133,00.html>>.
- ¹⁵ Blush, Steven. Interview with Glenn Danzig. *Seconds*. 1 Dec. 1999. <<http://the7thhouse.com/seconds44.htm>>.
- ¹⁶ Cave, Nick. "A Punk Rocker's Angry Christ." *Harper's Magazine*. Dec. 1998: 33-34.
- ¹⁷ Johnson, Dan.
- ¹⁸ Jenison, David.
- ¹⁹ McNeil, Legs and Gillian McCain. *Please Kill Me*. New York: Grove Press, 1996.
- ²⁰ *Bandoppler Homepage*.
- ²¹ Knopper, Steve. "This Train: Bound For Nowhere (Fast)." *Chicago Metromix*. 6 Dec. 1999. <<http://metromix.com/top/>>
- ²² *Music.crosswalk.com: The Ultimate Christian Music Experience*.
- ²³ Urbanski, Dave.
- ²⁴ *Bandoppler Homepage*.
- ²⁵ Urbanski, Dave.
- ²⁶ Warden, Scott. "P.O.D.: Doin' It For G.O.D." *K Rock*. 6 Dec. 1999 <<http://krockradio.com>>.
- ²⁷ *Bandoppler Homepage*.
- ²⁸ *Week in Rock*.
- ²⁹ "Defiled"
- ³⁰ "Like the Sands Thru the Hourglass, So are the Days of Our Lives"

Ahulani: Addressing Places
(An Inside, Outside Story)

Katrina Elisa Davis-Salazar

I. IN THE FIRST PLACE

1. Wake for the First
at 1011 Indiana

She happy bathes in pilgrim pools
of her own tears (warmed by the whims

of ancestors) breaking tools, fools,
mules, and humming her nina's hymn.

Now a pain-killed morning slips
past storm gray doors (*half-moon eyes first.*)

Following, a sock bare toe tips
on cement to eat with the nursed.

2. Wide Awake Girl
watching 1011 Indiana

Ahulani climbed
hill muddy with yellow men
further altering.

Faces, lights, question-
asking. She wished-watched bright birds
nesting in the house.

Ashes ashes all.

Blackened billows slept.
Ahulani opened her
mouth—tongue twisted legs
into a vehicle for
leaving without this inside.

II. STARTING PLACE

1. Late Summer, After the Fall: *childhood house*

Ahulani peeled
off her bird suit, flying be-
side the Hero in

Silver Oldsmobile
Eighty-eight. Arriving, she
appeared wet inside

limp clothes, shedding her
dewy shell-membrane. Daddy
helped Hero carry
in small white paper bags. Her
body now fuller—stretching

her bias-cut sheath
though she held only a stuffed
bear. See her silent

sisters. She crossed blue
house to phone Mami, pulling
a red-dropped sock from
foot—torn on absent flower,
thorny, from the brush out front.

2. A Few Small Nips
blue house back yard

Girl spun out into the garden;
hands beginning to move
again. The ground was once hardened
cold. Now her limbs are loose.

Girl pulled long hands through stretched torn hair,
rubbed it hard into earth.
She looked if anyone was there,
kissing grass, ants, snails, dirt.

She smelled small crazy flowers with names like little girls
from storybooks: Trazadone, Paxil, Celexa, Ativan . . .

Lilly thorns swallowed cut her lips
numb, but sooth her belly.
Hero patches a few small nips.
She was found until he.

III. THE PLACE WHERE DOOR MEETS FLOOR, IN A TOWN NEARBY, HOLDING PLACE, THRESHOLD

1. Everything in its Place *the upstairs house*

The house must be
in right angles; mop, pitch, scrape, pray.
The house must be;
books up, lamps right, pitch, scrape, pray. She
can't peel the floor from her day,
so in keeping her in her way;
the house must be.

3. Crossing the Threshold

The Place:

The backyard, now tilled
and tamed by the oldest girl,
is pretty as when
Mami tended it. Bride's eyes
swallow green childhood place.

The Ceremony:

Family, boys, in
black, and blue girls, flank a split-
haired groom and an "all-
dressed-up-with-no-place-to-slow"
bride speaking words with the pastor.

The Reception:

Daddy, relatives,
and girls rushing about. Blue
and whirling white
past deviled eggs, pastry, toast
champagne, other traditions.

The Threshold:

They stepped over it.

4. *This Town*

This town
is cow dung, faces, rain,

pants, bricks,
cement, upstairs, traffic.

This place
is where she searches grace.

She hits
her head with a hard fist.

We'll grasp
another place, perhaps.

IV. IN THIS STATE, FINDING ANOTHER, IN PLACE, ETC.

1. Dear,
the place where

Where is the place where the door does
not open and I slip
into the right side, ride, get out,
step upstairs to soap plates,
spoons, pots, saucers, spills, bowls, splatters?

Where can I find a place where small
women in pink doughy
dresses do not enter my chest
cavity and swing from

my lungs when I am asked a
question? I can sleep,
bathe, ride the bus alone, laugh
quite a bit before

I realize I not
am sitting right here.

P.S. The day she arrives I'll . . .

2. Contemplating a Blue House
so near a father

Her mind drives down
Thurlow street past pale
blue house, eight a.m.;

A man with thin brown-gray hair,
strong slumped shoulders steps
from the side door.

He bends down, supporting
himself with one hand on his
khaki-covered knee,
emptying cola cans and dinner boxes
into the plastic bucket.

After the door closes,
the flickering electronic box
lights low from the basement window.

The telephone rings.

3. Healer's Assignment # 9: "Where?"

go again

buying groceries,
beside many mountains, in
a car, carrying
a big portfolio with
black handle, creeping, eating

watermelon on
a porch, feeling, following,

fleeing, holding a
child's hand as we cross the
street, inhaling large
breaths of cool air, freeing, mouth
full of tears, mouth open, on

land, opening the
mail, riding a bicycle
to school, sitting on
a tall bed with many crisp
layers, sipping lemonade,

seeping, speaking, spinning, standing
in front of an open air window with baby's milky scent at cheek,
turning around,
walking to the store by myself . . .

idea: *leave new*
town's bridges unburned

SADIYA KHAN

Hijab: To Cover or Not to Cover

I'm very grateful to be an American. I'm what you'd consider a patriotic citizen because I believe in the concepts and beliefs on which this country was founded. I take pride in jury duty and exercising my right to vote, because I know these are privileges I would not be granted everywhere. I cannot fathom growing up in a country where the female is limited in her opportunities to speak her mind, hold public office, and do anything a man has the freedom to do. Yet, you would think that a country as wonderful as ours would be willing to embrace everyone's individuality with no questions asked. To a certain extent we do, but we also ask others to conform to our standards. What confuses me the most about America is everyone's effort to flush away his or her heritage for a piece of the American dream. If we all have beautiful heritages and cultures, why don't we try more often to bring our strengths to the table? I am a young Muslim; as a first-generation child of Pakistani immigrants, I've seen what valuable lessons my family, from a country that is even foreign to me, has tried to teach me; a strong work ethic, a love of education, and a genuine concern for community welfare have developed within me from lessons my parents were taught back home. My religion, Islam, has contributed largely to the way I choose to live my life.

Islam, as a religion, is a complete way of life. It offers ethics, morals, and restrictions upon which a Muslim makes daily decisions. As do many people, I find a great deal of comfort and strength in my belief in religion. Following the basic pillars of Islam, I have come to educate myself on a religion into which I was born. I have realized that the strength in my faith is my understanding and acceptance to submit my will, not just to blindly believe in Islam because my family and friends do.

As with every strength, there is a hidden weakness. Allow me to share mine. In Islam, there is a tradition of women covering their bodies so that only their hands and faces show. This tradition is called "hijab." This word is derived from the Arabic word "hajaba," which means to hide from view or conceal¹. The purpose of wearing hijab (one who wears hijab is often referred to as hajaba or hijabi) is to observe modesty, or "purdah," as God asks women to do. I do not wear hijab, but I believe that my behavior and attitude, as my parents raised me in an Islamic environment, can

definitely be described as modest. However, hijab was never explained to me as a child because it is not something that many Pakistanis observe in America. The primary reason that Pakistanis don't wear hijab is the lack of its recognition as a religious practice. In Pakistan, religion, society, and politics are melted together. It is extremely difficult to distinguish what practices are enforced by a patriarchal history or are required by God. Most people observe a form of purdah in Pakistan and India because society tells them that if they don't cover, they are indecent. Even non-Muslims cover in Pakistan and India because otherwise men will stare. When my mother arrived to America, she didn't shed purdah for a lack of religious beliefs. My mother has always been a very religious and modest person; she just viewed the connection of purdah with Pakistan, not Islam. She was taught a strict code of modesty from Islam, which she taught my sister and me to observe: no revealing clothing, no tight clothing, and always cover your body from your neck to your ankles. I grew up understanding modesty, but hijab I did not.

I was introduced to hijab through my friend Shazia. We were 12 years old when her parents told her to wear it. Shazia told us that she felt a little out of place at her public school, especially since she was the only one who wore hijab at school. In the Islamic community that I was raised in, only three other girls observed hijab. These were typically females of Middle Eastern descent, whose parents or husbands asked them to cover. As I watched my Pakistani and Indian Muslim friends, who didn't observe hijab, I figured I was okay. Moreover, as I noticed the behavior of the hijabis vs. the non-hijabis, I was a little upset. Some girls wore the scarf, yet dated (a major sin in Islam). This hypocrisy made me distrust them. They appeared modest, but were not modest at all. Others appeared meek and submissive, and that clashed with my strong feminist personality. I felt outraged for any female who was covering because someone else told them to. My teenage view on hijab thus became associated with a suppressed woman or a hypocrite.

The turning point in my views on hijab occurred about two years ago. I was interning in Florida when I met another Muslim who wore hijab. I was at the mall with two of my friends when I encountered my "sister." Being away from home for eight weeks was hard because I didn't know any Muslims in Florida. I had no hesitations about walking up to my covered friend who was browsing in the window of the Gap. After a 15-minute conversation, I was quite happy. Sarah and Todd had looked at Nusrat a little strangely while I conversed with her. I was very relieved to finally meet another Muslim, so I didn't ask why they seemed curious. Later, while Sarah, Todd, and I ate lunch, Todd asked me why she wore a scarf. I explained that there could be

several reasons. It was basically her belief in Islam, her parents' request, or her husband's request. I continued by explaining the influences of culture and religion on hijab. Todd summed up his impression by exclaiming, "You mean that because some misogynists can't control their sexual urges, you have to be covered?! That is insane!" I sat there, a little stunned at his statement, and for some reason felt he was being harsh. There had to be more to hijab. I needed to learn more in order to explain this in a better way. I couldn't sit by as someone viewed Islam in such a negative light. And worse, I felt bad for knowing so little about it that I actually contributed to his stereotype.

Over the past two years, I have slowly made an effort to educate myself on hijab. My purpose was twofold: find out the truth about hijab, and learn more about Islam in general. I hadn't seen how over the years I had shifted, away from a more religious view, to a view that was more of the young teenage attitude—"No, you convince me!" It was time for me to start realizing and convincing myself. Now, as a young adult, with a larger group of friends who wore hijab, I have found myself thinking of hijab more and more. I'm sure that most of it is because every single close Muslim friend I have on campus wears hijab. There is a kind of pressure for me to conform—from both my Muslim sisters and brothers. Yet, I know that just picking up a scarf and pinning it to cover my head will not suffice without my doing it for the right reasons. So, I've begun my mission to learn.



I've often wondered whether people see me as a radical, fundamentalist Muslim terrorist packing an AK-47 assault rifle inside my jean jacket. Or maybe they see me as the poster girl for oppressed womanhood everywhere. I'm not sure which it is.²

Naheed Mustafa, a Canadian-born Muslim woman, took up hijab at the age of 21. My friends Aisha, Yasmin, and Asma laughed and nodded in agreement when I read this to them one evening. "People can be *soo* judgmental when they see you with a scarf. I've was born and raised here. I've graduate from high school with honors; I was on the speech team in high school. Yet, every time I go to Jewel and get in the check-out line, the cashier feels the need to talk loudly and slowly as they ask for my preferred card. I wear a scarf, I'm not deaf!" Asma said. My friend Aisha grew up in Chicago and began wearing hijab in high school. She grew up with a circle of friends who wore hijab, but waited until she felt she was ready. "I don't believe hijab is required by

Islam. I feel that modesty is, but I wear it because I feel that it lets people realize that I'm really not like them. I'm not weird, I just have a different set of rules to play by," she explained. Aisha's belief that hijab is required by Islam is a very controversial one. This is another reason I wanted to learn more; is hijab an Islamic requirement or a cultural one imposed upon women? The Islamic holy book, called the Qur'an, (pronounced kur-AHN), states the following:

*And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands. . . .*³

My problem is that I have no training in ancient Arabic scripture, the language the Qur'an is written in, so I can not study the significance of each and every word to realize what it means. "Veil" and "beauty" are such ambiguous terms. By veil do they mean I should cover my face? Or what exactly is the type of veil this refers to? Then there is beauty. A concept that everyone has pondered since the dawn of man. What is beauty? What makes someone or something beautiful? If I consider myself ugly, do I not have to cover? This whole aspect is confusing. I do agree with the modesty portion, perhaps because I was raised that way. I've learned that my modesty has allowed me to demonstrate my mind and personality, and not just my physical looks to the opposite sex. So, if wearing hijab is a feminist practice, maybe it is something for me to consider.

An Iranian schoolgirl stated in an article that, "We want to stop men from treating us like sex objects, as they have always done. We want them to ignore our appearance and to be attentive to our personalities and mind. We want them to take us seriously and treat us as equals and not just chase us around for our bodies and physical looks."⁴ I don't want to be treated differently because of my gender. Come to think of it, even my non-Muslim friends don't want to be treated that way. I once heard a Nancy Ali, a Muslim convert who began hijab at the age of 30 explain, "Even non-Muslims should wear hijab. Why? Because they will realize the benefits of being treated by men as a real person, not just as a plaything. In fact, in Biblical times all women, including Mary, covered their heads." This is something for non-Muslims to reflect upon. Yet I think the best case for feminists lies in this statement by Naheed Mustafa: "Women are not going to achieve equality with the right to bear their breasts in public,

as some people would like to have you believe. That would only make us party to our own objectification.”⁵ This sister definitely has a point.

I explained hijab and the feminist perspective to my friend Lynn, who is a devout Christian.⁶ We casually discussed our perspectives one afternoon. Lynn felt that as a religious person born in the American culture, she also sees many conflicting aspects. The feminist perspective was of particular interest to her.

“I think that too often women equate their freedom with their body with the freedom of their mind. When they try to defend, say for example, the women in bikinis at the car shows, as women who are proud and secure with their looks, they actually hurt themselves even more. By allowing men to objectify women in sexual terms, these women are contributing to the stereotypes everyone else is trying to fight. If they thought about it, when was the last time a man focused on their minds, not their bodies, at one of those car shows?” she argued. I agreed with her. My views and ideas of hijab had grown from a seed of knowledge into a garden. Lynn and I discussed hijab, feminist perspective aside. She said that if she were a devout Muslim, then she probably would wear hijab. “If I believed in Islam, and knew enough about it that I could make the decision on my own, I think that I would. I think it would change my view of the world and how the world sees me,” she explained. Now it was time to ask myself the question, as did Naheed Mustafa:

*But, why should I, a woman with all the advantages of a North American upbringing, suddenly, at 21, want to cover myself so that with the hijab and the other clothes I choose to wear, only my face and hands show?*⁷

This is the question I asked myself. Why should I consider wearing hijab? Should I wear it to obey God, to make a feminist statement, or to show people that I am a Muslim? It was not a very simple question, so I figured the answer would not be simple. Yet in writing this essay, I realized just how much time I spent lulling over this question. I knew that taking this step would be an irreversibly momentous occasion in my life. Once I started hijab, I would wear it for the rest of my life. At 21—that is a hard thing to consider. Still, the more I thought about hijab, the clearer the answer seemed: I am doing this because I understand myself. I know this may seem a little vague, but in all of my conversations and all of my research, one factor always held true. Hijab is about a reflection of yourself. Feminism reflects the beliefs and ideals women feel that they are truly capable of. Religion also is a reflection of how we as human souls fit into this universe. So, hijab is a special way for me to reflect

how I feel about myself. I have decided to make this change to strengthen myself. I know that this decision will cause conflict, prejudice, and fear. Yet at the same time I feel a wonderful sense of pride that I am taking a step in the positive direction. Because everyone can agree, you feel your best when you accurately reflect yourself. This is what hijab is to me - an accurate reflection of myself. When the inner you is ready, the outer you will fall into place.

Notes

- ¹Ali, Mary C. *The Question of Hijab: Suppression or Liberation*. Chicago: Institute of Islamic Information and Education, 1.
- ² Mustafa, Naheed. "My BODY is MY Own Business." *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 29 July 1993: A26, 1.
- ³ Qur'an 24:30-31
- ⁴ Ali, Mary C.
- ⁵ Mustafa, Naheed.
- ⁶ Names of interviews have been changed at their request.
- ⁷ Mustafa, Naheed.

SARAH HOSSA

Anthropology: Searching for Meaning

Anthropology \-je\ n [NL *anthropologia*, fr. *anthrop-* + *-logia* - *logy*] 1 a: the science of man; esp: the study of man in relation to distribution, origin, classification, and relationship of races, physical character, environmental and social relations, and culture b: a treatise on this science 2: teaching about the origin, nature and destiny of man esp. from the perspective of his relation to God

—Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary

As I walked into the anthropology museum at Northern Illinois University I was unsure of what to expect. I have been a student for four years at the university and the thought had never occurred to me that NIU would even have such a place; when you become entranced in your own world, it is sometimes hard to search for places. I overheard someone talking about this museum at work and vowed that I would make the time to explore this unknown land.

Being involved with school, campus jobs, and organizations did not provide much time for frivolous activities on my part. It had been two months and I still had not been over to see the museum. It seemed that whenever I did make the time to visit it more important circumstances took precedence over my silly obsession; I tried to relate the possible experience to previous memories. I had been to The Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois when I was younger. What could a small anthropology museum at NIU offer me that I could not experience at the Field? Still, I remained fascinated with the idea of visiting.

I was so captivated by this massive museum and remember feeling a new sense of excitement entering each different room. My curiosity was sparked by the detailed façade of the outside of the building. Female statues that looked as though they might be angels were carved into each side of the building as if they were protecting it. What was inside? What was so valuable that required these angels to keep watch? My father had explained that the building was once the site of the World's Colombian

Exposition of 1893. It was, in fact, built to house the biological and anthropological collects for this exposition.

I ran up the huge concrete steps and as I entered the glass doors the first item that caught my attention was a huge sign that read *European Collections*. Although I was only about five or six, one of the exhibits that I saw in this room was a picture that remains vividly painted in my mind. It depicted the ruins of the doomed Pompeii; glass cases contained household objects from the Roman villas of Boscoreale, a site nearby. The idea of a city completely covered in ash amazed me. The descriptions that the museums provided, along with my father's answers, cleared my confusion. The museum represented this exhibit in a way that had always stayed with me. The Field Museum had a commitment to anthropology; great time and thought had been put into each exhibit that I viewed in the six hours that we were there.

After browsing The Field Museum website at www.fieldmuseum.org, I came upon a quote that made their commitment more clear to me: "Anthropology at The Field Museum is all about what makes us human, our place in nature, our common concerns and our differences." When I realized the direct impact anthropology had in relation to my life, I knew I was somewhat obligated to visit. Anthropology addresses the very question of human existence. The notion of anthropology is analogous to the notion of home. According to Maleuvre in *Museum Memories*: "The home is a response to the human need to dwell in a human-made environment, that is, in a humanized world."¹ I needed to visit this museum in order to understand the culture of those who helped create the environment of which I am now a part.

One day I was passing through the Stevens Building at Northern, where the museum is located; I had about an hour to spare and could not resist the urge to go inside. It was 4:05 p.m. and the dingy brown sign in the door explained that the museum would be open until 4:30 p.m. My excitement faded as I turned my head to both sides and saw that the space was not half as large as I had expected it to be; unfortunately, I would have plenty of time to tour the dilapidated museum that time seemed to have left behind.

I walked in to find the attendant half-asleep at the welcome desk; this sight provided me with a less than exuberant feeling of welcome. I thought that this place might provide me with a better understanding of our species. My mind wandered to memories of the one in Chicago; the preserved bright orange and black monarch butterflies that looked as though they could fly through the glass cases had captivated me as a child. The visual representations of cavemen were astounding. I looked so forward to exploring this anthropology museum and to recapture the excitement I felt

as a child in the Museum of Natural History. I could apply the knowledge I had gained since my previous experience to discover the history and culture of my species; I would leave with a better understanding of my place in this world. This museum could prove or disprove my preconceived notions of the world's history. Suddenly the uninterested woman at the front desk interrupted my thoughts, "We do close at 4:30 p.m."

I wanted to learn from this museum and became increasingly unsure if this was an attainable goal. According to Hein in *Learning in Museums*, although such institutions do present unique difficulties, it is possible to learn from them. Learning from museums attacks learning from a different angle; it is unlike schooling and usually occurs in family groups who spend a brief amount of time on complex activities.² Therefore, learning in museums is limited by the short duration of the visit.

It is also important that museums capture the visitor's attention. Empirical data supports the belief that most visitors spend little time at individual exhibit components. People do not spend much time reading labels and tend to move on to the next exhibit before considering all of the components from the previous exhibit.³ NIU's Anthropology Museum did not have to work hard to capture my attention. I made this job easy for them. I entered the museum interested and willing to work as hard as necessary to derive meaning from these exhibits. However, I could not guarantee that the next visitors would be willing to do the same.

I walked into the first room and was greeted by a huge alligator and the musty smell of a basement. After further inspection, I could see that this alligator was in fact a totem pole lying on its side. It had huge intimidating teeth; even though the alligator was wooden, these fierce teeth still frightened me. It looked like it belonged in the steamy swamps of the Louisiana bayou or in some kind of horror movie. A glass display case on the left-hand side of the room explained various aspects of anthropology and divided these into separate categories: cultural, physical, linguistics, and archaeology. In the cases were several yellowed pictures accompanied by newspaper clippings and descriptions that had the same yellow tone. In the "physical" display case there were pictures of apes that reminded me of trips to Lincoln Park Zoo when I was a child. In the case labeled "archaeology" were fragments of a Havana Wear vase; these fragments did not seem much different from the terra cotta flowerpot on my front porch. It seemed strange that something so old resembled something that I currently owned. Finding my place did not seem like it would be that difficult considering I already saw parts of my life in this context. Maybe the basic aspects of the lives of those who preceded me were not all that

different from mine. This terra cotta vase served as the foundation for the grandiose expectations I had for this museum.

On my way to the next room I passed a Maggannggi fern figure made of palm tree leaves and covered with a rough vegetable matter. This figure resembled a Donald Duck character bush that I once saw at Disneyworld. I also passed a gigantic red wooden chest from Thailand. The cracked green glass that framed each of the four panels on the front of the chest was what initially caught my eye. I noticed the faded red flowers that were painted on the inner part of each panel. When I looked even closer I saw that two Thai figures in extravagant costumes had once danced on this chest; now I could barely see these figures with straining eyes. Did the culture of these people fade with their portraits on the front of this chest? Did their lives make an impact on the lives of others or was this all that was left of them? I was concerned that I might be observing too closely. The condition of the faded men on the distressed furniture was most likely a result of the physical world. I reminded myself of the confidence I felt in finding the vase and rationalized my feelings toward the chest into misconceptions. Everything changes with time and it was silly to assume that because these figures were not the vivid reds and yellows they once were that this had any impact on the importance of Thai culture.

I walked into the second room of the museum and found myself staring at "Mr. Page's Museum." This display case contained items that were described as hinged slate boards and resembled miniature 5x7 inch chalkboards. The case proclaimed that the 1890s were years of change. This was all I remember of that case; there was another room off to the left accompanied by a sign that read "Small Wonders." Seeing a huge brown stuffed bear underneath that sign confused me and I had to get a closer look.

I walked through the doorway and into an entirely different world. I first approached the bear with its huge claws and outstretched paw; he looked like he was going in for the kill. I stared at this bear and wondered if it had ever frightened anyone during its life. It certainly did not frighten me with the Chicago Cubs baseball hat that it wore, the Chicago Bears football jersey that hung from its side, and the stuffed teddy bear that was lodged inbetween its legs. If this museum was interested in giving an accurate representation of history, why did it make such a mockery of this bear? This was not a fair representation of this bear; it seemed more like a bad joke. Maybe I had dismissed the wooden chest too easily. The representation of this bear was inconsistent with my notion of anthropology. If this museum could not accurately represent this great beast, how could it possibly attempt to study man in relation to nature?

A seemingly realistic-looking branch protruding from the plaster wall distracted me. After looking more closely, I saw that the branch was real and lonely the murky green leaves that clung to the branches were fake.

These fake leaves seemed totally appropriate in the context of the bigger picture. There was a painted bright blue sky behind the tree and, when I looked down, I saw painted green grass and a huge ceramic frog. The shiny multi-shaded green frog had amber marbles glued to its sides, but some of them had fallen off and all that was visible was the dried glue that remained. The frog sat on a fabric lily pad with a tacky pink silk flower leaning on its side. Next to the frog, a stuffed spider about the size of a small rabbit hung from a ribbon that dangled from the branch of the fake/real tree branch. This depiction of wildlife left me feeling confused; the history of these animals was not being taken literally or even seriously for that matter. Searching for meaning in these displays made my life seem less meaningful. I became increasingly critical of the museum and its contents. The comfort of the terra cotta vase was a distant memory.

I turned around to see what seemed a representation of the houses of Pueblo Indians. These “homes” were made of plywood and were painted white. They were shaped like stairs and on one of the “steps” there was a label that read “step here.” I did not exactly see the point of the label, so I tried it out and stepped onto one of the steps. I looked to my right and everything in the room still looked the same, but when I looked toward my left I saw what I was expected to see. The wall was painted blue like a sky with three yellow tribal suns and two huge purple clouds with bolts of white lightning shooting viciously through them. I now understood that this was supposed to represent what the Pueblo Indians had witnessed in their time. I had never seen a sky of this sort and felt as a foreigner in a land where I did not belong. When I held onto the roof to step down from the house, I felt something sticky and looked down to see clay. There were some vases made of pottery enclosed in a case and children were encouraged to try their hand at making an ancient artifact right on the roof of the Pueblo Indian homes. This scene would not accurately portray the life of the Pueblo Indians to those who would stand on these steps. This exhibit made their existence appear trivial. A plaque on the side of the exhibit explained that the Pueblo Indians prided themselves on these works of art, and yet children were merely encouraged to play with dried-up scraps of clay; this undermines these works of art. While the clay seemed to promise the sense of interactive quality a museum should have, sadly, it is clear that this part of the exhibit did nothing to educate the viewer (children, it is assumed) about the significance of clay pottery in Pueblo culture. It cannot be difficult

to create an interactive clay exhibit that goes one step further to educate as well as entertain. The beautiful sunsets the Indians experienced were reduced to inconsistent skies that looked as though a child had painted them. It was not possible to understand many aspects of Pueblo culture from this depiction.

I wondered if previous visitors had experienced the same disappointment. In the mid-1950s a group of first-year sociology students visited the "Rijks-museum voor Volkenkunde" in Leyden, Holland. They were encouraged to explore a section of the public galleries that contained exhibits of the Surinam, Dutch Guyana people. Afterwards, they were invited to a lecture discussion room and were asked to recount what they remembered from the exhibits. Few could recall more than two or three objects. More importantly, students were not able to tell what use the specimens originally served and were not able to recall from memory the material from which the objects were made. Students and professors both felt it had been a disappointing experience.⁴ These students visited a museum of the 1950s and technology has changed since then. Yet I understood how they felt and I was visiting a museum of contemporary culture. It seems that over a period of nearly fifty years, those in this field should have taken these issues more seriously. It is important that people imagine the lives of different cultures accurately in order to determine their meaning and implications for today's society.

I turned to my right and saw a row of white shelves above a black and white checkered table that contained Tupperware containers labeled: *spices*, *feathers* and *archaeology*. I had seen feathers and spices before, but I was surprised to find that the whole field of archaeology could be contained in one small Tupperware container. I decided to open the box and found about 20 stone arrowheads that were similar to the arrowheads found on family camping trips. Could arrowheads truly define a discipline as large as archaeology? Archaeology is defined in *Webster's College Dictionary* as "the scientific study of historic or prehistoric peoples and their culture by analysis of their artifacts, inscriptions, monuments, and other remains." Granted, these arrowheads were a remnant of prehistoric peoples, yet there was no explanation of which people, and no indication of what period of time. I analyzed these arrowheads for a great deal of time, but was unable to use them to define the history and culture of my species. All that came from examining the arrowheads were broad generalizations that I had carried on from childhood. I remained unclear on where I fit into this bigger picture. The lives of previous societies that had helped me create my history appeared so trivial; how could my life be important? Will present society be viewed in this same manner in such a museum in the future? I envisioned a dusty

keyboard for a 20th Century computer in a large Tupperware container in a museum of the future. No description was provided for the visitor; he or she was simply to derive 20th Century culture by analyzing this seemingly insignificant keyboard. My initial excitement to see the museum had now transformed from frustration to anger.

A study performed by Borun and Miller found that percentage of visitors who “made a comparison of the perceived temperature of two metal plates by actually touching them went from 6 to 78% when a label was added to the exhibit”.⁵ This study shows that labels do help with the understanding of an exhibit. However, when a label is not clear, it does not aid in the explanation of the exhibit. Unclear labels only confuse the visitor’s conception of what the display really means. Labels are important because they hold the power to create misconceptions about a specific culture or anthropological issue, which is the opposite task of what an anthropology museum’s objective should be.

What confused me the most was the huge white felt board placed next to the Tupperware containers. The board contained removable felt pieces lined with Velcro that could be arranged in any order. Some of these parts included pants, eyelashes, faceless heads, arms, and a hand. After a closer look at the board I realized that there were not enough pieces to put together a face or body, unless of course you were trying to capture the effect of a Picasso painting. This board did not seem to be significant to anthropology.

Anthropology museums are very diverse in nature and this is demonstrated by differences in their names. The line between different collections can sometimes become blurred. Many assume that a museum is either part of a university or it is not, but this is not always the case. Private museums may gradually be taken over by a university or public authorities. Also, it is important to note that many public museums receive private support and may be dominated by individuals with varying motives. Money may significantly influence the museums’ activities.⁶ Part of the problem with this museum might be a result of lack of funding from the university. Still, I do not feel comfortable believing that money is the only problem. For instance, it would not be difficult to research a little bit about clay-making in Pueblo society (certainly the Internet is a viable—and affordable—resource), and provide viewers with that information. Even a small laminated page documenting the use of clay in Pueblo culture would be an improvement at little expense. Perhaps, too, the University could allocate more money for this museum.

Then I saw the rocking chair. It was identical to the rocking chair in my mother’s room. It was made of the same dark brown wood and it had the same golden flowers

on the top rim of the chair. It had the same brown corduroy cushions, and the thin gold stripes were also faded from use. The inclusion of the chair in the museum confused me, but somehow it comforted and calmed me. This chair was merely intended for one to sit in and read the books that lay on the table beside it; it was here that I seemed to fit in. How was it possible to feel comfortable in such a strange and confusing place? This chair had absolutely nothing to do with the history of man, yet provided a link to my history. I related to this chair because it was a remnant of my culture. Although the museum struggled to make a poor representation of previous cultures, I realized that part of the reason I had such trouble was because these cultures were so foreign to me. Because these cultures are foreign to spectators, the museum should have worked even harder to make representations accurate and clear to those who wish to learn about the science of man.

After I had finished looking through the room of "Small Wonders," it was already 4:29 p.m. and the attendant was standing by the entryway anxiously awaiting my departure. I left without seeing the other rooms; I had no desire to see them now. I did not see how the room that I visited had anything to do with the cultural, physical, linguistic or archeological aspects of anthropology. The inaccurate representations of previous cultures drove me to relate to objects that were already familiar to me. It seemed that in order to simplify foreign concepts, the museum only succeeded in undermining what these animals and cultures really mean. I am not exactly sure what is meant by the term anthropology. The dictionary definition of the term contrasts with the meaning I derived from the museum. The rocking chair that I could relate to was not placed in the museum because of its culture, but because people might want to sit while they read *Harold and the Purple Crayon*. Instead of placing myself in the larger context of history, I had felt that my life was more insignificant now than when I had first entered the museum.

Notes

¹ Maleuvre, Dieder. *Museum Memories*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999. 121.

² Hein, George E. *Learning in the Museum*. London: Routledge, 1998. 133.

³ Hein, 138.

⁴ Frese, H. H. *Anthropology and the Public: The Role of Museums*. Leiden, Holland.: E. J. Brill, 1960. 1.

⁵ Hein, 138.

⁶ Osgood, Cornelius. *Anthropology in Museums Of Canada and the United States*. Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1979. 15.

RICHARD TONY THOMPSON

On One on One

it must be little to be true; the two-story building may have an exposed steel frame
allowed by what it lacks in height to shed its porous concrete and fragile brick
parallel lines create the road more than the blacktop; a double row keeps life ordered
permissions are made for traffic consumption and defecation at monitored breaklines
mathematicians prefer large problems with small solutions; the equal sign is fulcrum
answers float above their questions like heaven layered upon earth and non-localized hell
eating ham and american on white is an experience; sense and object make private love
stench, friction, hunger, lust and climax feed the body from the skin to the mind
skin can only be seen in the absence of clothing; bodily truths live close to the bone
nude playthings welcome the danger of sunrays, mosquitoes, goosebumps and death
sleep has a gravitational pull on the sleeper; the horizontal body is heavier than ground
dreams prolong existence in the style of plastic wrap around flesh in the refrigerator
and oh the breathing sleep of intercourse; sex and again on the oh and the up for the oh
the body on top and the top of the flesh on the blood and the pulse of the now away
women in labor recline with joy from pain; a hungry cracker jack to show to their friends
dead children in coffins fall under the shadows of mothers, standers of pain from joy
childhood is the gift of existence; nature makes walkers of crawlers without instruction
bodies move away from truth vertically day upon night, visited in dreams, foiled by death
closed books are thick and meaningless; books might as well burn as remain untouchable
flatten them and they lose themselves like the lost calories of a split oreo or sentence
shakespearean sonnet lines are ugly creatures of centuries ago; rules destroy meaning
reduce the thing like stock with flour and the final couplet will make itself into gravy
ink layered on the page is not beautiful; poems are aliens, mutables, selfish indulgences
fondled awkwardly by the fingers, eyes and mind, the poem must be little to be true

M. A. MACOR

Resistance

He never gave a second thought to his rejection of me. In some area of his brain he'd made the necessary arrangements — information relating to my person was promptly classified under a different file heading, of the "circular" variety. One cannot hold grudges unless one has a sharp memory — neither can one hold that type of continual affection we know as amour...

Regardez-moi. Bitter? The word is anathema. I went on with the schedules, deadlines, and little games each of us play which convince us of life's purposefulness (even while we are perpetually confronted by its true lack of meaning.) I fought the fight against time, and I casually observed those to whom this fight was a given, indistinct in the backdrop of existence.

Since the deterioration of my relations with P., I felt that I had emerged from the positioning of a comfortable veil, only to witness its removal taking with it all the previous, less pervasive veils which I had accepted without question throughout my life....

I'm a traveller, not a tourist. I was in France at the time — we met at a party in Paris. It was one of those functions we all feel indebted to attend, although the bonds in question have long since obsolesced....

Monogamy didn't exist and neither did God. Those were the two points on which everyone agreed. He was conspicuously nondescript, at this congregation of the bohemian.... Basic Baudelairean black, slim, almost "waifish." Pale as a WASP. All the other attendees were dressed as outrageously as possible, all protest T-shirts and dreadlocks, with tattoos displayed like the scars of war....

A brawny artist with a shaved head attempted to befriend me. I complimented the detail in his sketches — portraits which belied a hidden sensitivity. He smiled shyly and retreated to his room, pretending to have work to do.

"I just got back from a protest in Budapest," this Canadian prima donna was saying. She had an unusually large mouth, and was overly fond of opening it. Somehow I always found myself at the same gatherings with her, although I couldn't stand her at all. Bored, I looked at P., who was similarly unimpressed.

We eyed each other like two criminals. Our first attempts at conversation with each other were halting, only memorable because it was obvious we needed any excuse to start talking to each other.

“What’s this music?” He asked me.

“Dead Can Dance,” I replied.

“Never heard of it. But it’s nice... relaxing.”

I thought that was an apt description. The group’s utter lack of provocation was exactly why they disturbed me to no end.

Since we were situated near Père Lachaise, the famed cemetery, we made plans to venture there the next morning. The next day, his corpse-like complexion shadowed me there, and we walked in silence up its steepnesses and down its hills.

Colette’s grave was dignified by an old copy of one of her books.... The rest of the plots were littered with Paris Metro passes.... Oscar Wilde’s was the one which prompted us to pause in reflection. For him, a huge marble angel in flight. A handful of students sat, watching us and it, at the side of the foot path.

He rested one thin hand on his hip and cleared his throat. “I had no idea....”

“He’s remembered,” I said. “That’s something one can’t say of many people who’ve actually made a difference in the world.”

“Who says he’s actually made a difference?” He retorted. “The system just swallowed him into its prisons and regurgitated him a quaking shell. They beat the writer right out of that man. What good did all his ferocious wit do him then? Like it or not, he’s an example of what happens when you pretend that you’re free.”

The students sat with their chins in their palms. Le Soleil was in evidence, drenching our forms in an affirmation of vitality. We left the cemetery slowly, as if we’d left someone we’d known.

He was deceptively mature. I’d thought I’d glimpsed in him a sophistication beyond his years.... We took walks together, punctuated by intellectual day-dreaming. We argued constantly, yet never breaching the line of personal attack. We were calm, rational. Perhaps we were overly controlled... Both of us had been estranged from our emotions, even as they thrived within the bonds of repression. At their surfacing, we were completely unprepared.

He had had lovers in the past — I knew that without needing to ask. Whether they had been *masculin* ou *feminin*, *jeunesse* ou *ancien*...serious relationships or casual flings... We never talked of these things.

We were standing on the steps of the Sacré-Coeur, looking out over the monts of Montmartre.... its a fairy-tale village, this area.... And of all the things he doesn’t

remember, he doesn't remember this....

He turned to me and asked if I'd ever felt love.

"Quoi?" He was too soft-spoken, I thought.

"Did you.... have you ever loved?"

"What is love, anyway?" I snapped.

He paused, waiting for me to continue. Finally I said no.

He turned away again, his leg resting on mine — half incidence, half propriety. It was the first of a long series of ambiguous gestures which were exempt from suspicion, yet they always unsettled me. I refused to guess at why. It required too much effort, and there were other things to ponder.... I admired his silence which seemed to suggest too much thought to be verbalized.

I watched two boys fighting, hitting each other, totally oblivious to the enraptured gazes of their senior counterparts at the view before them....



We went to Zandvoort together. Neither of us had been to Holland before. Here, I felt on equal footing with his more wordly presence. I'd wondered if the Dutch reputation for coldness was deserved — it was. For all the rude French I'd met, I'd never encountered such virulent ethnocentrism before, particularly in the young.... For my American accent I received glances filled with hatred for all that my nation represented. I would come to learn that my country was a creche for ingrates, fools, and power-saturated madmen.

Although I was fully in agreement with many of these sentiments, and envied the Dutch their progressive government, I was also repelled by a common lack of tolerance for foreigners...and non-whites. My first morning in Amsterdam began with the shouts of someone complaining about "the niggers." Apparently no similiar Dutch obscenity would suffice....

"I've never heard that word spoken aloud like that before." P. remarked.

"Probably because you're white," I said.



On the beach, in Zandvoort, P. and I became intimates.

The sky was just darkening, the air turning cold. The last sun-worshippers to leave were a woman and her lover.

The woman has long thin breasts. Her companion was muscled and tan.

“Nay,” he kept repeating, to her unamused expression.... She shook her wet branches of hair, and they faded into the distance.

We were alone. I could have left then. We could have passed that moment without touching—the lull in conversation.... His longish blonde hair fell back over one eye as he moved from his back to a leaning on one elbow, looking at me. There was a time when I might have felt fear, but I didn’t just then. I moved the hair from his eye and cupped his cheek — we kissed —

Later, it was as if he’d never known me. I didn’t hear from him for days. I returned to Paris, consoling myself with the ghosts of Sartre and de Beauvoir at Les Deux Magots. I went to Shakespeare and Company, reading the dead and talking to no one. Crossing *Le Rue* to Notre Dame I heard the organs play and felt like the last person on Earth....

By my own bad luck I ended up moving into the same flat which housed the Prima Donna I despised. I sat in my room and read all day, leaving only for a helping of *quenelles*. Every few days there would be a “skipping” expedition. The *femme Canadienne* would leave with a shopping cart and return with old fruits and vegetables which the neighborhood’s grocers were about to throw out. One day we were rewarded with fine croissants which were still *tres bien*....

I went back to Zandvoort. Je ne sais pas pourquoi. Alone, I recalled my former life and how I’d never have been fazed by a man’s dismissal then. But now, it irked me. At the hostel, I checked my chin in the mirror. Smooth — as if it had always been that way.

I kicked off my heels, sank into bed, and dreamed of America.

AARON SITZE

Whiskey 101

He swirled the glass in his hand, ice cubes on a beach of whiskey crashing.

“Whiskey?” I asked him.

“Whiskey.” he said.

“Guinness is delicious,” I said, “and it drinks like a meal.”

“You don’t have any pain,” he said, “that’s your problem.”

I sipped on my beer and thought: chocolate grain coffee dirt.

“I’ve got some,” I said.

“No. You don’t.” He was looking into his glass, swirling it and watching it swirl.

“You do?”

He shrugged, drank, and his face was calm as he pushed the glass over to me.

“Drink it.”

“Why.”

“See if you have pain in there, down in there.”

I swirled the glass, watched the rocks against the ocean. He watched me.

“Drink it.”

I tipped it back, as quick as I could, but was held in check by the ice cubes. There was no slugging it, no slamming and forgetting. I felt it in on my tongue, cold and expanding. There was a taste like dusty horses escaping downhill to drink at a pool of ether. The horses were wild. They kicked my throat and would not be captured. I grimaced and caught myself, but it was too late. He smiled and shook his head.

“Rough?”

I put the glass down. The horses were circling and I shuddered.

“Not bad,” I lied.

“You don’t know your pain,” he said, “and if you don’t know your pain, you don’t know your mind.”

“I know my pain.”

“What’s it feel like.”

“Horses.”

“Are you intimidated by horses?”

“Not usually.”

“Are you intimidated by pain-horses?”

I shrugged.

He motioned the bartender.

"We'll try it again," he said, "until you get it right. Think about how it felt, that uncomfortable feeling in your stomach, uneasy and foreign. Where have you felt it before?"

"Last time I drank whiskey."

He shook his head. "Do you get in fights?"

"No," I said.

"Have you almost gotten in any fights?"

"Yes."

"You know that instant, when you either have to back down from someone, or hit him, that one split second when you know you've got to do something."

"Yes."

"And everyone's watching, and he's ready for it, and everything's up to you in that one instant."

The feeling was rising in the pit of my stomach. I began to get uncomfortable. I was nervous. The horses were circling again, rising and kicking up dust.

"Yes."

"That's your pain," he said, and handed me the glass. "You know it's coming."

The horses exploded in my mouth, riding like apocalyptic voices. I was nervous.

"You're a cowboy," he said, "a dusty cowboy of America." His eyes gleamed at me, and he smiled with admiration at my boots and leather belt slung low with bullets. I nodded and set my face. The horses were wild, and I was a dusty cowboy. I corralled them with my cheek and tied them away, daring them to escape. They circled in my stomach and I glared them quiet.

"That felt good," I said.

"Now you know why I was drinking whiskey," he said.

I nodded, picked up my beer.

"Is that what you were drinking?" he asked, glancing over his shoulder at me as I stood.

"Yes."

He nodded. "What's it taste like now?"

I sipped at it and thought: fluffy sheep clouds on mattress earth.

"Comfort," I said.

He turned back to the bar, staring into his glass and swirling it slowly, sizing up his pain before engaging it.

"There's always that, I guess," he said.

RICHARD TONY THOMPSON

Commaless

tender-skinned boy
unscarred by crime
slither into a square of metal
boxed zebra
decide *I cannot feel this place*
fill your sentence with cadaver
words, colorless zoos of men

ihavecrowbar
amgoingtokillwithmycrowbar

savage as a wound
the brain fires into the blank state of thought
blood runs by way of thistle and blade
synaptic bullets find flight in passion and premeditation

somewhere lives a boy with a comma-shaped spine
age seven
soft balloons that weave snakes into baboons

he punctuates life

execution of the spoken word,

Contributor's Notes

Mark Dickson is a senior pursuing a B.A. in English and a B.S. in Mathematics.

Karen Frett is a junior from Naperville, Illinois. Her major is Computer Science and her minor is English. She is the webmaster for the student chapter of the Society for Technical Communication and is involved in the NIU Peer Mentoring Program. In her spare time, she practices Taekwon Do and makes chainmaille.

Darrel Hedman is a senior english major at Northern Illinois University. I am involved in a Christian group on campus called Campus Crusade for Christ, and I am on the ultimate frisbee team. I am originally from Bellevue, Illinois, which is a little town outside of Peoria where the water taste good.

Sara Hossa is a senior majoring in Corporate Communications with a second major in Journalism. Hailing from Chicago, she is active in the Golden Key National Honor Society, Delta Gamma Sorority, and the NIU Honors Program.

Sadiya Khan is a senior Operations Management and Information Systems major who keeps her sanity through her English minor. After graduating in August, she hopes to pursue her Masters in Information Systems. A member of the Campus Activities Board, the Islamic Society of NIU, and the Kemper Scholars Program, she is currently working on her capstone project on Internet Research on Shakespeare.

Andrew Kleimola has interviewed punk bands ranging from Electric Frankenstein, The New Bomb Turks and The Red Aunts to Lagwagon, Rancid and Pennywise for various fanzines. In 1997, he flew from Chicago to San Francisco to see the Oblivians, the Infections, The Chinese Millionaires and the Brides. In August of 1999, he co-wrote and registered his first screenplay with the WGA.

M.A. Macor, a senior in English Literature, is originally from Cleveland, Ohio, though he has lived many places.; his projected graduation date is this spring. He spent Fall '98 to Spring '99 in London, courtesy of the NIU Presidential Study Abroad Scholarship. He plans to pursue graduate studies in the UK as well. A member of Phi Theta Phi, Phi Kappa Theta, Golden Key, and Sigma Tau Delta, he recently finished a Capstone project on the relationship between Beat Literature and Postmodern Experimentalism. His favorite novel (or anti-novel) is *Querelle* by Jean Genet.

Josh Robnett graduated Cum Laude from Northern Illinois University's English Department and is now working on his first novel while living in Woodridge, Illinois. Josh is a passionate music enthusiast with many interests ranging from sky diving to skuba diving.

Katerina Elisa Davis-Salazar is a first generation Mexican-American mixed media artist working with paint, textiles, printing, and words. She received her BFA at the University of Kansas and will soon pursue her MFA at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

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Submit two (2) copies of your work.

The first copy must have, in the upper right hand corner of the first page: your name, address (include email if you have it), phone number, social security number, title of the piece, and its genre (poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction).

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Turn submissions in to the *Towers* mailbox located at the English Department in Reavis Hall. Manuscripts cannot be returned. Notification of publication will be in February 2001.

Deadline for submissions is December 1, 2000.

Inquiries should be directed to Dr. Amy Newman at anewman@niu.edu or 815.753.6651.



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