Forum

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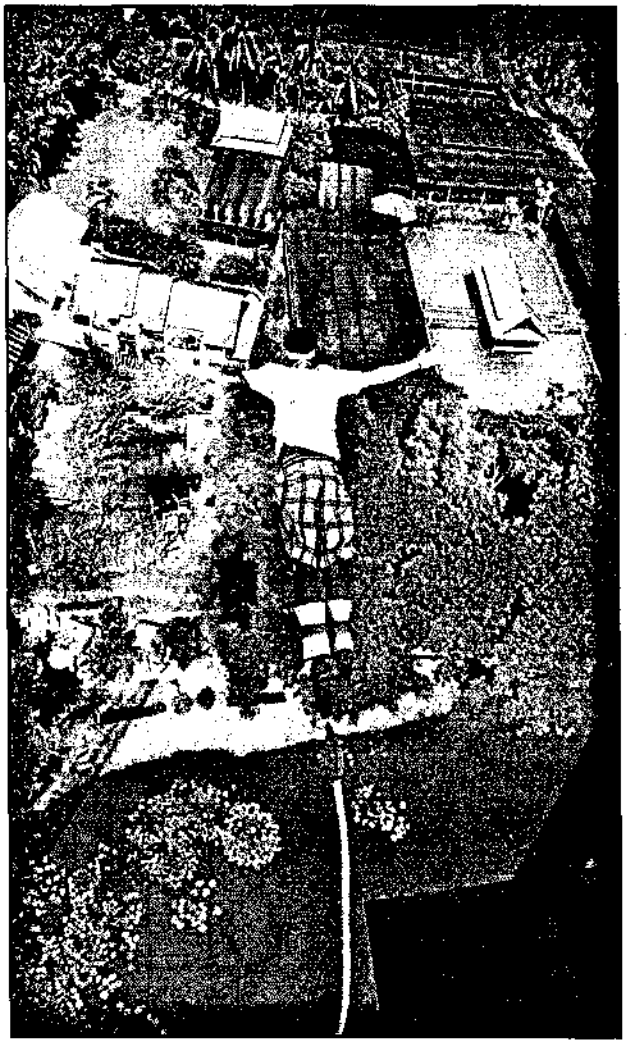

Loyola College in Maryland

The Forum

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The Forum is a student-run literary magazine that annually publishes the nonfiction work of undergraduates at Loyola College in Maryland.

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Dear Readers -

Anyone who is not a paperdoll will tell you that life exists in 3D. Human existence is anchored in space and time. We cannot *be*, unless we do so in a specific place at a certain time. We define ourselves by where we've gone, where we find ourselves, and where we plan to go. Often the settings of our life stories become characters in themselves, exerting some force upon us, that sometimes inspire our very recollections. We never really leave the places we're been to, because we are tied to them in our memories. Our surroundings shape us as much as our childhood, our cultural, and our daily experiences - aren't these, in fact, by-products of location?

It is no surprise, then, that this year's authors have written about their experiences as dictated by place. We've all come to Loyola from *somewhere*, and that *somewhere* has affected us in some way that's worth communicating to others. We share a legacy of location that's universal, whether we hail from Louisiana, the Eastern Seaboard, or Nigeria.

This year's edition, appropriately published during "The Year of the City," demonstrates the draw of locale more than ever. It is my hope that readers will not only enjoy this anthology, but relate to the stories within it that show the inseparable relationship between human experience and place.

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Thank you to my staff for their unflagging dedication and vigorous work ethic. A very special thanks to Matt Lindeboom for his technological wizardry and unflagging patience.

Sincerely,
Alison Koentje
Forum Editor-in-Chief

Everything We Hate
John Walters

Behind the garage where I used to work, in a parking lot that was supposed to be empty, there sat a 1993 Cadillac Sixty Special with a flat tire, a dead battery, cracked leather seats, and a faded coat of red paint. Somewhere behind the single, expired Texas license plate and the crumpled "Disney's Aladdin" towel that inexplicably rested on the passenger seat, I knew there was a story.

I never really found that story, though from my questions around work I gathered that it had been owned by a guy named Horace who used to work for the company "back in the day." The Texas plate had been added by Eion, another former employee who had driven it around town a few times on his lunch breaks. I'm not sure which of them left the Aladdin towel.

An encyclopedia will tell you that the Cadillac Automotive Company was founded in Detroit in 1902 by William Murphy and Lemuel W. Bowen, two of Henry Ford's financial backers. It will tell you that Murphy and Bowen called in one Henry Martyn Leland as a consultant, born a Quaker fifty-nine years before in Vermont. It will tell you that Leland convinced them to stay in the car-manufacturing business by showing them his design for a vastly more efficient engine than was currently manufactured. It will even tell you that the name "Cadillac" comes from the early eighteenth-century explorer who discovered Detroit: Le Sieur Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac. This is why no one reads encyclopedias.

I forget who wrote the first encyclopedia. And I really shouldn't, because we just talked about it in history class. I remember the teacher explaining its biases; how if you were to look up the rite of the Eucharist in it you would have to look it up under "cannibalism." I can tell

you with relative certainty that the author's name is written down somewhere in my notebook, which right now could be found in my book-bag, less than an arm's length away. But, honestly, I'm not that curious. Instead, I'm much more likely to hop on the internet and look up how many horses that Cadillac's 4.9 liter V-8 can crank out at 3000 rpm. It's 200.

I know. I was a little disappointed too.

It's advertising's fault, really. "Advertising has us working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need." Just ask Tyler Durden. It's advertising's fault that I can open up ESPN magazine and see a two-page close-up of a 22" chrome wheel and know immediately that it's for the new Cadillac Escalade. Incidentally, Cadillac once ran an ad called "The Penalty of Leadership" that never once mentioned the company by name. You would know this if you had read the "Cadillac" entry in *The St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture, Volume 1:A-D.* But who does that? Instead, I spend my time cruising to website after website, all bearing names like CarDomain.com or AutoPartsWarehouse.com, looking for new ways to spend money on a car that already runs just fine, programming my head to be more likely to turn for an expensive automobile than a beautiful woman.

Now you may begin to understand my enthusiasm.

I only saw that car move once, and to be honest it really couldn't have happened at a better time. See, a car like that can only sit idle for a certain amount of time before someone decides they've got what it takes to steal it. In this case, that someone turned out to be me.

I had worked that job for over nine months and had never once seen that car move. As far as I was concerned, Horace wasn't ever going to be back for it, and the guys at work wouldn't miss that old hunk of junk taking up space in their parking lot. The way I figured it, I could jack it up and take the wheels without anyone batting an eye, and

could probably have the whole car towed to some random location where I could strip it down without anyone even noticing. It was something totally unlike me, but that was exactly why I felt I had to try it.

And let me tell you another amusing little tidbit about my enthusiasm for cars. In the middle of writing this essay, I picked up my cellular telephone and called my friend Tim and bought his old '92 Accord from him. That's right. I bought a second car, in the middle of writing an essay that might as well be titled "How Much I Love Cars." Sounds like a lie. But it's not.

So here's the scene: it's mid-afternoon, and I'm hanging out with two of my friends, one of whom happens to be very technically adept at all things car-related and the other just plain ridiculous. If you really want to know, we're sitting in the corner booth at our favorite pizza place discussing which of the two girls who work there is more attractive and waiting for our order of one extra-large pizza with all the meats. There's a lull in the conversation, and I take the opportunity, introducing the topic as a "serious matter."

Now, explaining to your two good friends that you want them to participate in something very illegal with you is a risky business. The risk, of course, is that they'll be all for it, and you'll suddenly find yourself in a hole too deep to climb out of. Now fast forward to 11:29 that night when we're checking out the Caddy from every possible angle in the less-than-ample light afforded by a nearby street-lamp; speaking in hushed voices about which parts we want most and what type of tools we'd need to get them. Sounds like a lie. But it's not.

The next day I was sent to work with a single mission: to find out as much as I could about the car. Lug size, curb weight, current owner, alarm system -- anything at all that would help us with our intended theft. I was supposed to try and keep a low profile about this and not

ask too many questions or spend too much time obviously looking closely at a car in which I had no business being interested. How would you have done it? Believe me, watching movies like *Gone in 60 Seconds* or *The Great Train Robbery* does surprisingly little to prepare you for the various complexities of real-life crime. I would know -- I've seen them both.

Pretty much everyone has got their little supply of car stories that they carry around with them. Usually they involve crazy drivers, bogus speeding tickets, or very near misses. If you're lucky, maybe you'll run into someone who's witnessed some hardcore-illegal street racing or been part of a massive and catastrophic accident. Trust me, it's the bad stuff that's good to hear about.

For example, my friend Tim (yes, the Tim who's car I purchased five paragraphs ago) totaled one of his cars by hydroplaning it into a curb at 35 miles an hour. His girlfriend was riding shotgun at the time and she came close to having a heart attack from the shock. Gasping for breath and barely able to keep her head from spinning, she looked over at Tim, who sat stone-faced and unflinching in the driver's seat. All he said was "Oops."

I ended up learning something much more important that day at work. It was insufferably slow, which made it hard for me to find time to slip out to the back lot to look more closely at the car without being noticed. Thankfully, the other mechanics were getting just as bored as I was. I watched Andy walk towards the back lot, keys in hand, and open up the door to the car I had, just the night before, started planning to steal. He popped the hood and, while I stared in disbelief, swapped out the old battery for a new one and started her up.

That pretty much put an end to our plans to "steal a car that doesn't even have an owner." Where I come from, the person in possession of the keys to a lock is the owner,

and even if he wasn't, that was good enough for me at the time. I learned later, after he had pulled the car into the shop and started checking fluid levels and inspecting the brakes, that he was about to take it for a test drive because he had a prospective buyer for it. When he and Bob, the other mechanic on duty that day, returned from the test drive all I could get out of either of them was that it ran "pretty damn well." Mechanics, untouchable in their limited but essential sphere of expertise, are men of few words.

I don't think it's what you could call a coincidence that today you see two distinct types of car commercials. There are the ones where an honest-sounding person will talk in a calm voice about all the various safety features crammed into whatever new model they're pushing, all while soft music plays in the background. Then there are the ones where you can barely hear the background music over the roar of an engine nearing redline, but whenever you do catch a bit of it, you can only describe it as "rockin.'" These commercials push the thrill of driving onto a generation of consumers too afraid to mimic the outrageous chase scenes we see in James Bond movies (FYI -- Pierce Brosnan can't even drive a stick shift).

And for good reason. Driving's probably the most dangerous thing most people ever do in their lives. Maybe if we didn't grow up spending hours upon hours inside 3000 pound machines driven by a series of controlled explosions propelled forward at speeds faster than even the quickest of animals, we'd realize just how ridiculous the modern world really is. Think about it. Everyone's gone around a turn just a little too fast. Everyone's been through a drive that they thought would be their last. And one out of every two people will have the privilege of being part of a car accident at some time in his or her life.

I can remember the scariest half hour of my life, and it was the 30 minute drive from my friend's house to

his work. I was following him in my car, which was new at the time, and my very first manual-transmission thank you very much, through a veritable maze of winding back-roads that he knew by heart but to me were totally unfamiliar. If you still remember what it was like to be a teenager, you know that it's the job of the leader to do his best to lose his follower, and Jake came way too close to losing me. Permanently. I think the danger reached its peak when I was forced to swing wildly around a mini-van across the double-yellows at 75 miles-an hour just so I wouldn't slam into it from behind.

I lost my grandfather to a drunk driver. Well, really, I shouldn't say that. My mom lost her father to a drunk driver. I never got to meet him. Since then, I've come to look at bad driving, and even more so, impaired driving, as something unforgivable. There's no excuse for putting the lives of every human being that could potentially, at that moment, be out on the road at risk just because you think you've got to be somewhere. I think if you boiled it down that way to everyone it'd be a no-brainer. After all, who wouldn't agree to that? Who's going to say that they'd rather get in a car accident and kill their neighbor's child than drive the speed limit and be late to work? I know I wouldn't.

Yet, here I stand, with my plans to drop an engine with 40% more horsepower and a stage one racing-clutch into my car. There you stand next to your massive SUV that you drive while talking on the phone, even if only rarely. There stands corporate America, cranking out commercials with hemi-powered trucks that pull donuts in the desert and send up fantastic clouds of dust and sand. It's the thrill -- the clear and present danger -- the knowledge that we're cheating someone, somewhere, out of something unknown -- that gives us the ungraspable feeling of being alive, and makes us choose things we'd never choose otherwise, acting unlike ourselves in all the

ways we've always wanted. In driver's-ed, they say you drive towards whatever you're looking at. I guess that means we're all slowly but surely moving in the direction of everything we hate.

Barbie (39-21-33)
Jenna Mizia

I can remember the exact aisle. Walking through the doors of endless possibility, I would hang a right, then wind around a large, ever-changing display of toys. Nothing ever distracted me; there was something irresistible about the familiar path. Then, on the right, about six aisles down, there it was: one of the most coveted places of my childhood. I could, and often did, spend hours on end gazing at the sea of hot pink that seemed to swirl around me. Her plastic smile drew me in and suggested - no, demanded - that I buy her. Sitting in her box, perfect though certainly not emulable, my idol defied me to leave empty-handed. Inevitably, I submitted, then walked out of the doors of Toys-R-Us with a feeling of complete joy...and a brand new Barbie.

Twelve years later, I had all but forgotten (or so I thought) about Barbie: she had long ago been packed into her accessory bin, neatly placed next to her perfectly folded wardrobe. Then one day something curious happened: Barbie and Ken broke up. Alert the media... literally. Mattel, the toy company that produces the dolls, announced on February 12, 2004, that the couple felt it was "time to spend some quality time-apart" ("Splitsville"). I found this press release and subsequent news report interesting because people actually cared. I mean, they really *cared* that two pieces of plastic had ended their fictional romance. Why? Because she's more than just your average play-toy, more than just a universal relic of childhood. More than just a pretty face behind a hot pink box, and more than a doctor, lawyer, veterinarian, sister, girlfriend. She transcends the limits of a mere plaything because we have made her a role model - the cultural phenomenon that she was yesterday, is today, and will be tomorrow. How has a non-living doll become

larger than life?

Barbie was not the first doll of her kind. She was modeled after the German prostitute doll Lilli, who was marketed exclusively to adult men (Rand 32). Matt Elliot, founder of Mattel Toys, and his wife Ruth Handler brought the idea from overseas and tweaked her appearance from that of a foreigner to a more domestic look: a "blonde, blue-eyed vision of the American Dream." (Rand 40). Revamped and renamed, Barbie as we know her today hit stores in 1959 (Rand 40). Her instant success with girls meant the mass production of various Barbie-related paraphernalia: records, stories, and more dolls, specifically her boyfriend Ken, who appeared on the market two years after his blonde counterpart.

Although the couple's fortune and the Barbie industry were booming, the success went hand-in-hand with controversy. One of the biggest debates concerned the plastic sex parts of Barbie and Ken. From the beginning, Barbie's breasts were enormous. If she were human scale, her actual measurements would be 39-21-33. Instead of changing her appearance - which was protested by mothers of the time - Mattel made Barbie's partner, Ken, look like a good boy to counteract the notion that Barbie was getting a sex partner. After many considerations about psychological ramifications, Mattel even decided to mold permanent shorts onto him, with a "lump in the appropriate spot" (Rand 44). This quasi-penis was never affixed to Ken, however, because it was decided that he would be easier (and less costly) to produce sans the shorts or the bulge. Initially concerned with Ken's neutered state, Mattel worried that it might produce anxiety among girls ("Why does Daddy have something Ken doesn't? Was Ken in an accident?"). The concern eventually subsided and he was accepted as an unsexy counterbalance to Barbie's blatant sexuality.

The years have progressed, Barbie's name has continued to build, and today she brings in billions of dollars each year. In 1992, one Barbie was sold every two minutes, and there had been seven hundred million sold in her thirty-three year reign (Rand 26). But she's proved that her time isn't up yet...today, three dolls are sold each second ("Splitsville"). We may understand this popularity first by considering Barbie's power as a role model. Loyola College students' interpretations of a role model include "someone that you look up to and admire the way they are [...] and you want to be like them" and "anyone who can easily influence others." However, when an eight-year-old girl who plays with Barbies was asked what a role model is, she gave the definition, "A fashionable model." Indeed, Barbie was first marketed as a teen fashion model. The confusion of role model and fashion model in the age group of young girls is certainly no coincidence. Even as teenagers, girls strive to obtain that stick-like, anorexic figure exhibited by fashion models. It is likely that we girls read the magazines, watch the television shows, and visit the websites because those models possess exactly what the idol of our younger years did: perfection.

Huge-breasted, thin-waisted perfection.

As a role model, Barbie fills all quota mentioned by male and female college students: we look up to her because she is attractive and has influence over others - we want so much to be like her. And why wouldn't we? She's not only beautiful but also rich, talented, and capable of simultaneously holding down numerous occupations. For young girls at a vulnerable age with a weak sense of identity, Barbie gives them their first outlet to preoccupation with perfection. As Dan Acuff states in his book, *The Psychology of Marketing to Kids: What Kids Buy and Why*, "This emulation of Barbie and her friends provides much of the reason for Barbie's popularity - especially in a developmental stage termed

the 'Rule/Role' stage, in which an 8-through-12-year-old's focus is on figuring out who she is through the multitude of role models that exist in her psycho-cultural environment" (89). A little girl looks up to her mother, her sister, her grandmother, a teacher...and Barbie.

I latched onto Barbie as one of my first role models because she was so *real.* She wasn't like my other dolls, with whom I had to use my imagination. Barbie and Mattel gave me life-like situations, real people and pets and clothes, accessorized with materialism and unattainable perfection. Through my lens of childhood, she looked like a real person, she had real-people jobs, and she lived in a real-person house. Except she wasn't and didn't. I was too young, too impressionable, too in awe of her hot pink convertible to know or care. The artificial yet very real influence she exerts on children creates a pressure that hovers throughout the teenage years and even into adulthood. As the girls grow up and pack the dolls into the attic, society picks up where Barbie left off: girls continue to strive to identify themselves with the flawlessness they were conditioned to revere.

Oddly, Barbie has no education, no parents, no neighbors...her world revolves around herself. This narcissistic blond bombshell has Ken, a few friends, and two younger sisters. The latter puts her in an arguably maternal role, especially when pictured steering infant Kelly around in a stroller. But Mattel is careful to identify Kelly as a younger sister because, otherwise, Barbie would have a child and no husband, and the controversy there is unimaginable. She doesn't live in a tiny apartment or even a mid-sized house - she lives in her own Dream House and drives a convertible. Not Barbie Volvo or Barbie Minivan: nothing that could be considered middle-class will do. She epitomizes a surreal fantasy life - and we surrender to living it vicariously, completely ignorant to the fact that she glorifies everything contrary to traditional

familial values.

What's interesting is that Barbie is not popular because of her integrity or even her intellect...she gains her popularity and desirable status through her beauty, her body, her scanty clothes, and her sex appeal. Our collective values are imitations of Barbie's: we esteem trim bodies and closets full of clothes because she showed us how. As a society, we just can't get enough of what we can't be: our headliners include Paris Hilton, Britney Spears, and Tara Reid. All three are ridiculously rich, living imitations of Barbie. If these attributes are viewed as success by a little girl, no doubt she will adopt Barbie and these celebrities as her role models. It makes me wonder why, at the most innocent point of a girl's life, parents unquestioningly hand girls a doll whose appeal is based solely upon appearance. Because the generation before did the same to them? How many times does the cycle have to repeat itself before we stop wondering why anorexia is becoming as much a trend as Barbie's new clothing line? How many more generations does Barbie have to speak to before we silence her? How many will she, regardless of what we think or do?

Needless to say, understanding values is central to a child's development, and it is through play that children learn their earliest life lessons. "The toys we provide for them serve as lessons and reflections of society's values," Susan Linn writes, "It's also important to question the *nature* of a child's experience playing with a particular toy." One college student I know recalls the doll's sexual influence as follows: "I think through Barbie I learned a lot about the differences between male and female bodies; there was something about the way she was packaged that projected a 'make-me-fake- kiss-Ken-now.'" Having not yet come to terms with sexuality, girls can act out what they do not yet understand through Barbie, letting her experiment with Ken or another Barbie. Many women can

recall playing with naked Barbies, perhaps because this nudity is so easily accessible, for even when she is clothed (and that is scantily done, at best), her belly shirts and miniskirts invite removal. This is not to say that play with Barbie decides sexual orientation; nonetheless, girls are taught, from this early age, "to sexualize the adult female body." They dress and undress the doll, act out bedroom scenes, and in this way, "they can remain good girls while Barbie is the slut" (Lamb 52, 51). Although not all girls turn Doctor Barbie into Slut Barbie, there is enough experimentation (and not always conscious exploration) to aid of the early stages of sexual development. Even in the recent pop song "Barbie Girl," sexual promiscuity is blatantly evident:

Make me walk, make me talk,
Do whatever you please
I can act like a star, I can beg on my knees
Come jump in, pretty friend, let us do it again
Hit the town, fool around, let's go party
You can touch, you can play, if you say:
I'm always yours

According to Ms. Susan Stewart, an English teacher at Council Rock High School North of Newtown, Pennsylvania, Barbie "is more than just a doll, [she] has become the stereotypical ideal of female beauty: tall, blond, buxom, and unrealistically thin." This embodied idealism is the goal for almost all women out there...and can perhaps be attributed to the male fascination with Barbie. She is an icon to men because - and solely because - of her body (recall that she was first marketed to men as a prostitute doll). The women strive to be like her because she is exactly what the men desire, but what is it that inspires such a lustful approach to Barbie?

The male fascination with Barbie is cultivated with time. Young boys playing with Barbie seems socially unacceptable, as Ms. Stewart points out: "Kids are

socialized at a young age to play with their 'gender-correct' toys [...] dolls are not 'masculine'." There is no natural impulse to play with a G.I. Joe or a Barbie, just as there is no predisposal toward blue or pink depending upon gender. But children - from the moment they are born and wrapped in a gender-specific blanket - are subjected to gender-stereotyping. At the age of play and exploration, the boys are handed the soldier figure and the girls are handed the fashion dolls. "My brother always used to pull them [Barbies] apart. That was the extent to which he played with Barbie," recalls one college student. The oversimplified divisions of violence or beauty cut society in half and send a caveat against overstepping the boundaries: even if a boy were to play with Ken, the chances are highly in favor of his being judged as homosexual: "It's just not appropriate for young boys to be playing with dolls," decides a Loyola college student. The girls are encouraged to play with Barbie, yet the boys are banned from doing so. Check back with the males a few years later, and they are drooling over the hot pink icon because she is exactly what they couldn't have. It seems that they are so isolated from ever being allowed to play with or touch Barbie (any more than simply ripping her apart) that the result is a fascination with her and a demand for her shape to be manifested in real-life women.

You may wonder, as I did in my younger years, how is it that Barbie, introduced to the public as a teenage fashion model, has the capability to become an astronaut, a doctor, a lawyer, a veterinarian, a police officer, and a rock star all at the same time and without any sort of college education? Think about it...have you ever seen College Barbie? No; she doesn't exist. Moreover, the occupations that she manages to undertake are extremely broad. There is Doctor Barbie, but is there Podiatric Barbie? Cardiologist Barbie? And why is there no Plumber Barbie? Janitor Barbie? Electrician Barbie? I can

remember thinking about the future in high school and being astounded when I realized just how many positions there are out there, just how many different paths I could take in life. Did this come as a shock to me because Barbie influenced my perception of the limited spectrum of the career world? Ironically enough, Barbie doesn't contribute to the you-can-be-anything- you-want-to-be lesson to children: she prefers the you-can-be-anything- you-want-as-long-as-it's-a-doctor-teacher-lawyer-or-some-other-high- powered-career craze.

Her feet won't fit into shoes that aren't high heels. There was nothing more aggravating to me as a girl than trying to fit the sneakers onto her unreceptively pointy feet. Although she owned them, the sneaks matched very little of her wardrobe. But the pink high heels? They were a staple - I had approximately forty-two pairs and they *always* matched the chosen outfit. She doesn't blink. I didn't like how her eyes didn't close, so my Barbies never slept. Her knees can't bend, her elbows are robotic, and her head can execute an exorcist-style turn. There was never a way to move her gracefully, but she was somehow *always* graceful. Why *is* she so hard to play with? It was always a fruitless endeavor that inevitably ended in defeat to get Barbie to stand, sit properly, or hold any of her accessories. Ultimately, her paralysis is frightening, as is her utter lack of any emotion that doesn't involve a scary smile. She is simultaneously one of the most terrifying and beautiful dolls on the market. So will *I*, ten years from now, give my daughter a Barbie doll and subsequently hand over all that she entails? Probably. There's something redemptive about her despite her impossible body image, career feats, and manipulation of children's minds. There's something about being a part of society that demands that girls play with her, and there is no way to change the tide of her grueling, century-spanning, tremendous popularity. She is a source of fascination and

a quintessence of curiosity: she is only a doll but so much more. She is our cultural icon; she is our Barbie.

Notes

1. The breakup happened about two and a half years after the September 11th devastation. Our troops were preparing for war; the media was covering Barbie's embrace of the single life.
2. They dyed her hair and made her eyes blue: today, girls dye their hair blonde and buy contacts (some even non-prescription) to obtain artificial blue eyes. Hardly a coincidence.
3. The doll itself cannot stand on her own two feet but much less would a woman with those dimensions: the weight of her chest would not be able to be supported by her waist. In all likelihood, she would be hospitalized for her weight.
4. Barbie's lack of a vagina was never debated. According to Erica Rand, "Sexist and heterosexist presumption [...caused] Mattel [to] presume that girls might be traumatized by the sight of a plastic male without a penis and [to] fail to worry about the sight of a plastic female without a vagina."
5. Some would argue that these women - and most celebrities - have just as much plastic in their bodies as Barbie.

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Falling from the November Sky
Leon Malloy

Growing up, I was emotionally independent from my family. Conversations were hollow, empty. Recently I started having discussions of substance with my mom. My family never lied to each other directly, but we withheld the truth—never giving another enough.

I can recall my dad sitting in the passenger seat of his beat-up work truck on a Saturday afternoon when I was four. I could not tell at the time, but he was drunk. I was thrilled with how we swerved between lanes on the street, but I soon became worried when we suddenly slowed down. I looked over and he was asleep. I screamed for him to wake up, but it was too late. The truck veered off the road and stopped dead in a ditch. "Fuck!" he stuttered. We were on the way to get some worms for our planned fishing trip on the lake. That trip, or any other, never came.

I rarely talked to my dad; even four-word conversations were rare. I know nothing of his past or of his feelings. My dad has never hugged me or told me that he loved me. I have different titles for my dad. When speaking to friends or those outside my direct family, he is "my dad." When speaking to my mother, he is referred as "Mike." When speaking to my sisters he is just "he" or him." When speaking directly to him, he is not addressed. From here on, he will be called Mike.

Although it was my personal decision to interview Mike, this assignment would naturally be impossible. How could I even talk to him? What was he going to say? I studied the floral pattern on the living room floor and waited for him to come home. It was his living room, he lived there. He slept there. He ate there. He wasted his life there, reading The National Geographic or watching The Discovery Channel. A hermit living among us. Although he

lives in my home, we haven't had a conversation since before I can even remember. In over a year we haven't exchanged more than three words. Not even for just one day—one hour—could I forcefully break the barrier that has grown between us.

I looked at my watch again. Of course he is going to be late, he's always late. I left him a note on the coffee table that told him I needed to interview him for an assignment. He knows that he is supposed to be here; the message I left is crumbled on top of a stack of his National Geographics. How nice, I thought. I tossed my note aside and picked up the most recent magazine. As I gazed over the cover, my mind began to wander. I could only imagine what he might say if I asked him a simple question. In fact I know exactly what he would say. As I nervously waited for him to stumble through the door, I imagined the conversation that would soon take place. What's it like to be a mason?

"It's real hard. Outside work. I go at eight and don't get back till late. I get burnt in the summer and near froze in the winter. I'm good at it though. It's a lot of work, but the pay's good. All's I want is the table set and the food ready when I get here. It's not like I'm fuckin' askin' for much, ya know?"

There would be a long pause as I thought to myself how unpredictable he is; how he never comes home at the same time. There are times when you do not even come home until three in the morning. You cannot be working that late; you can't even work until nine, it's dark then. I would look at him—in the eyes—for the first time since I could remember. I snapped back to where I was sitting on the living room couch, in a trance to the African child on the cover of his stupid magazine. I could feel his icy blue stare burn a hole right through me.

"What kinda shit do you think you're getting' at? You little punk. All's I want is a little fuckin' respect

around here. You know what I do. I go down with Joe and Paul. You heard what I said, did I stutter? We go down ta the Cookstown Tavern or ta the Laurel House and kick a few back, what's the harm with that?"

I would hold so much back. How could he seriously ask what the harm was? I would click my pen to interrupt the silence. I couldn't look at him. I knew then that I never could again. That night—was it four years already?

"Issat where this is going? Why are you askin' this shit? You know full well where this was. It all started when I came home. Your mom din't even have the table ready, the food wasn't ready. I couldn't find the fuckin' newspaper, so I sat and waited. She told me it'd be another 20 minutes. I'd already been there for 20 minutes and I wasn't bouta wait 20 fuckin' more. Then your sister came in. All dressed in somethin' too tight an' too short. I told her she hadta change. She just kept fuckin' walkin'. Din't gimme the timeaday. I wasn't bouta take that shit from no one no more, no sir, not me. So I said somethin'. I don't even remember what. But she just kept walkin' away. Then you said somethin' smart. Pissed me off to all hell. You always open your fuckin' mouth, sayin' somethin' smart. And I justa bout had it. And I wasn't goin' take no shit from nobody in my house. No, not in my house—I built the motherfucker. And I wasn't bouta hear shit from you."

I felt an electric wave of violence surge through my veins from the vision of his strong, clenched jaw. Did you come home from the bar? Why were you so angry?

"I hadda keep you in line, show you your place in my house. So I told you my saying, you know it—Yours is not to question why, yours is just to do or die. Then I gave you a few hits right in the mouth, and then I don't really remember. I did it so you'd remember next time. The next time you opened your fuckin' mouth when no one asked you."

I knew that I would not believe what I was about to

hear. I would hold my rage inside. It all started when you came home that night—that night? It started before I was even born.

My mom once told me the first time she had ever met Mike was at a house party when she was seventeen. He was passed out on the couch, a half-finished bottle of Coors Light in one hand and a smoldering Marlboro Red in the other. He had his shirt off and was breathing shallowly.

Within the next few years, they had a shotgun wedding—her parents paid for a small ceremony at the Town Hall. She cried herself to sleep that night. While Mike was building his company and the house we live in now, we lived in a four room house; six people to four rooms. I remember hiding underneath the kitchen table when my dad would come home from work, or wherever for that matter. There I would sit and stay in fear, stay until he passed out on the table. Did he even go to work that day? With the weight of his head in the crook of his arm, I would be waiting for his subconscious habit of bouncing his leg to cease. It would be safe then. I would crawl, avoiding his dirty work boots, out from underneath the table feeling relieved. I was more than relieved, I was safe.

"Then you went up to your fuckin' room. Hadta run away up to your room, din't you? Din't you? I sat down on the couch, took one of your mother's cigs, and watched TV. There was a knock on the front door. Your mother answered it. She told me there was someone at the door for me. It was the cops. Your mother called the fuckin' cops on me. I din't do nothin' wrong, was just teachin' my son a fuckin' lesson. Somethin' that he needs in his life, a little fuckin' respect."

I heard the kitchen door open, it was Mike. I had been waiting for two hours—still looking at the cover of The National Geographic. I heard him rustling around in

the kitchen. I could smell him—beer and cigarettes. He was taking off his dirty Carhartt jacket and stained Timberland work boots. I listened as he pulled the aluminum foil off of the covered leftovers. He shuffled the pages of the newspaper, always pausing at the page six girl. I sat in the dark of the living room, waiting. I held my breath as the thudding footsteps approached. He turned on the light, and saw me sitting on the couch. I didn't look up.

"Shit. I...umm...hadta work late. Let's get this over with, I've been waitin' to see this thing 'bout jellyfish on The Discovery Channel. It'll be on in ten minutes."

"It's alright, I finished my paper. I changed topics." I lied. And that was it. I went outside to my car and sat there. I had to get out. I had to get away from him as soon as I could. I can't deal with it. I don't deserve it. I can't get anywhere with him.

I thought about the events that had taken place last night. The police station. The fire trucks. The rain falling from the November sky. The cigarette he smoked on the couch did not make it to the ashtray. Seeing the police officers, he threw it across the room. It landed on my mother's grandmother's chair. While we were filling out the "accident" reports, I heard a fire dispatch to my house over the strayed police radio. The rest was a blur—the sound of the firemen smashing the picture window for smoke ventilation, Mike shouting at the top of his lungs at the scene of the crime, and me. I sat in my car a while longer, and thought I was losing an unfair battle—I don't want to fight anymore.

Forgetting Puerto Rico
Marisa Conlin

I heard the phone ring at 4 a.m. one morning, and thought nothing of it. At 6 a.m., my mother tiptoed in, leaned over me as I opened my eyes into my pillow, and whispered, "She's gone." Somewhere in the back of my mind, in the recesses of my heart, I knew. An acrid burning arose in my throat and salty tears streamed into the corners of my mouth. I didn't move—there was nothing to do right then. A flood of memories about my grandmother, Mi Abualita, and the complexities of her mentality rushed at me all at once, and I felt the deafening realization that I would never get to speak to her again. Regret took hold of me just then and changed my life forever. For a young girl, the language barrier and indiscernible ramblings of a past I would never know had kept us apart. Thinking back now it did just the opposite, because when I smell the sweetness of dried roses and the warm, comforting scent of Spanish Coffee, I am reminded of her and the life she ultimately created for me.

Mi Abualita emigrated from Puerto Rico in the early 1950s. She left behind a country that most people associate with long expanses of sandy beaches, swaying palms and tanned bodies decorating the sand that gleams a harsh white against the turquoise- blue of the Caribbean. *Abualita* came from the side of the island the tourists don't see, where rolling beaches are run by leathery-skinned men with machetes selling head-sized coconuts with straws to tourists for a dollar. The misty green rainforests and charming "coqui, coqui" song of the Coqui frog are the images *Abualita* longed to forget. What she remembered were the homeless widows that lined the streets in their ratty black cloaks, the sardine-packed houses of San Juan that stood tilted from hurricane winds,

and the hoards of children sleeping on sand dunes whose parents were nowhere to be found. Sitting at the kitchen counter while she fried *plantanos* in Crisco on her ancient black stove, her voice would rise over the blaring brass horns of Spanish music and noisy city streets from the open window and say, "Don't go there, Marisa, I am not proud of my country."

Born Vicenta Gerena, the definite year unknown, she was one of four children who received neither a good family life nor the opportunity for schooling. *Abualita* was forced to work as early as she was capable and made a life as a maid. This creamy-skinned woman found no comfort in the beauty for which she is famed. Her straight black hair and porcelain-white skin were the dominant traces of her Spanish background, and the high-cheekbones of the Caribbean Teano natives created a canvas for her perfectly defined facial features. This radiant beauty held her back in a land where women had no place—a place where beauty has a price tag for those who don't have any other way. Overworked and underpaid, she married young, to a dark man who remains a mysterious ghost to us even now. This pure Puerto Rican man was not a prince, and one day she left him. Taking her baby girl, my mother, and his youngest son, my Tío, *Abualita* crossed the great expanse of blue waters to *Los Estados Unidos* in search of a new life. A grim gray building in the clamoring bustle of New York City became a home for this single parent family. As for my grandfather, well, "That man...I could pass him on the street and never know he was my father," Tío would say.

Floating on my back, the rippling waves softly rising and falling beneath me, I bobbed with the current in the crystalline blue serenity of the Caribbean. I was lighter than air, squinting against the brilliant sun suspended in cerulean skies. My parents lay on bamboo mats on the white sandy shore, beads of water glistening

and running rivulets down their tanned backs. I emerged from the calming waters and ran to them. On shore I question, "Why don't we visit Abuelo?" naïvely hoping to build connection to the land of my blood. "We're in Puerto Rico, so shouldn't we try?"

Sighing, my mother's meditated expression signaled that she was sifting her thoughts in a vain attempt to find the right thing to say.

"Mamita, after so long, its better that we don't."

Patiently I awaited confirmation, hoping that I would meet some family from the land Abualita seemed to hate so much. Combing the sand out of my saltwater-logged hair my mother thought in silence and finally whispered, "He was never there for us before—some people are just better living without."

It was years later when I found out that she didn't even know where he lived; whether or not he was even alive on his farmland of sugarcane. We still do not know.

Abualita had the smallest hands I had ever seen, with long, slender fingers that moved like lightning with two knitting needles. The rough and calloused tips were resistant to even the sharpest pricks. Immune to rejection, she searched for work in a city that regards immigrants as outsiders and inferior stragglers in society. *Abualita* found hardships in her search, struggling with her imperfect English and temporarily relying on her sister to make do for herself and her children. When she couldn't find anything better than factory work, *Abualita* took matters into her own hands. Not taking "no" for an answer, this tiny, headstrong woman marched from apartment to apartment whenever she heard the wailing of a baby's cry. Knocking on the door, she practiced her broken English, slowing enunciating "I make clothes for the baby, well-made, hand-made."

A clientele of Spanish-speaking mothers grew with rapid force. *Abualita* could make a square piece of cotton

into a gorgeous Christening gown adorned with intricate embroideries, ruffles, and bows. Deftly working the material of an item in the comfort of her own third-floor apartment, she kept one eye on the needle and the other glaring like a hawk to make sure that every child was bent over a book.

"Mom always wanted me to speak English first," my mother would say, musing over a pot of boiling beans and wiping beaded steam from her brow. "We always spoke Spanish at home, but out there," she made a quick gesture toward the window, "it was always English: English to get a job, English to make friends at school, English to be American."

Gray smoke curled from the glowing red tip of Titi Judy's cigarette, souring the air and burning my nostrils. The yellowing pages of a cracked leather-bound photo album flopped open in my lap, and I lightly ran my hand over a small black and white photo of three little girls. One girl stood thin and tall, caught mid-laughter with her head tipped upward to keep over-sized "adult" sunglasses from slipping down her bicycle-seat- sloped nose. She protectively wrapped her fingers around the hand of a little girl with brown skin, freckles and frizzy ringlets, who in turn, had a chubby little arm around the shoulders of a blond and green-eyed toddler with chipmunk cheeks and a toothless smile.

"Is that me?" I asked, referring to the taller one with dress-up glasses.

"No Mamita, that's your mother, and that's Jenny and I."

She hacked a dry, cracking cough and picked two knitting needles out of her braid. She looked at my mom's protective stance and gave a little chuckle. "Your mother was in such a rush to grow up, but I guess she pretty much had to be. With Abualita sick so often she had to fill in."

I knew that my grandmother used to be sick all the time and it was during these sleep-overs at my aunt's cluttered Manhattan apartment that I dug for the secrets left untold in my own house. My young mother became a mother figure to her sisters in Abualita's times of sickness; a martyr who postponed her own schooling to work and help out and face of the harsh life of an immigrant. I kept my eyes on the three little girls smiling the photo and listened as Titi Judy continued, "It's not easy to have the guts your grandmother had," she continued, "leaving on her own and raising us without a man. Never let a man run your life, Marisa, because God knows it never ran hers, or mine." Her eyes became glassy as she reached across me to smooth her rough hands over the faded photo. "It wasn't easy, Mamita, growing up with so little, but that's why we laugh. Abualita always told me, 'If you can't laugh at life, what kind of life will it be?'"

That was the *Abualita* I knew, quick to laugh but with a certain sadness that permeated everything about her. She cringed when the explosive "boom" of a car backfiring reverberated off the walls or teared up and nervously fingered the smooth pearls of her rosary every time she saw violent images on television. Forgetfulness crept into the apartment and became *Abualita's* permanent companion. Yellow post-its clung to the cabinet doors, the counter-tops, the white pill cases: "CLOSE me! Turn me OFF, take TWO today." Spicy scents of Spanish cooking lingered in every fiber of her beige sofas and mixed with the stale smokiness of extinguished candles to create an atmosphere that made me feel the most in tune to the Puerto Rican blood that coursed through my veins. A small round table in the corner was typically covered in white-crocheted doilies, long multi-colored knitting needles, empty pink packets of Sweet 'n Low, strands of beaded rosaries, and a bone china vase

with red dried roses in it. I would sit at that table for hours during visits, coloring and singing *"De Colores"* with her, while observing her knit, cook, or simply sit quietly and contently. We had a simple relationship: no questions, no deep conversations, but words and songs, smiles and hand-holding. Sitting together at that table, *Abualita* taught me to roll my "R's" against the roof of my mouth and to tap my feet in time with the pulsating rhythms that danced from the red Sony radio on the counter. Drinking sugary Malta soda and sucking on sesame candies when Mom left for a few hours, we'd sit concentrating on the click-clacking of marble against aluminum during games of Chinese checkers. Those days were made of sunlit silences and smiles lingering on candy-coated lips.

The last Christmas before Abualita died, her illness really took hold. Her disorientation was apparent in the motorized way she walked, the blank stares, and the absent-minded demeanor. On Christmas Eve, my mother, Titi Judy, Abualita and I sat at my round kitchen while my blue-eyed German father watched an action movie in the den. What we were talking about I only remember in vague intervals. What I do remember was Abualita's clarity that night. Immersed in the piney aroma of the evergreen tree, spicy arroz con pollo and Spanish coffee, a strong electricity ignited the spaces between us. Cradling our white porcelain mugs in the same exact way and smiling the same wide-lipped smile, our mahogany brown eyes sparkled with laughter. I kept looking from her, the quiet immigrant with the mysterious past, to my widowed aunt who was blunt in manner, sharp in tongue. Then I gazed at my mother, the porcelain-skinned beauty with an aura of protective care. At that moment I understood why my mother wanted me to learn perfect English before I attempted Spanish, why Titi Judy tapped the tips of hands when I had my elbows on the table, why both of them always made it a point to

remind me that at twelve years old there was no reason to have a boyfriend. It was Abualita—the head of it all. She endured far more pain and struggle than we would ever want to imagine and trapped the painful memories so deeply in her mind that they would never taint the lives she built for her children and for me. Looking at these women, these women with an affinity for spicy foods and needlework, I understood our strength. I understood that it takes a strong woman to leave her country behind and to raise her children alone. It takes a strong daughter to look after her younger siblings when her mother was sick, to be the first to go to college, to give her only daughter the things she never had. And it takes a strong sister to rebound from loosing a husband by being the confidant to every niece and nephew to call upon her care. Perhaps as a granddaughter, a daughter, and a niece, my strength may lie in the determination to decipher the memories still left among the swaying palms and cerulean skies.

I was thirteen years old and surprised that *Abualita's* condition was not just a facet of her personality but a deciding factor of her health. A deep weight conjured up within me and I felt a piercing tightness in my lungs with every breath of worried anticipation. Sautéing reddish-brown ground beef in my adolescent attempt at chili, my mother stood close behind me in an intimidating and observant manner. Reaching over me to scoop up the spicy substance with her wooden spoon, her hushed voice tickled my ear with a soft warm wind. "You should visit *Abualita* this weekend." She pulled back, and I pretended that my watering eyes were merely the sting of onions. I never got that chance to make a final visit; she was gone before the weekend came.

The cold winter sun illuminates my mother's russet curls as I focus on her face though my tears. She tenderly sweeps the hair from my face. Trying to suppress the

angry regret that tweaks my heartstrings and revokes the contents of my memory, I fail to hold in tears of anger, regret, and confusion. My mother's moist eyes search deep within mine, and she holds my head between her delicate hands. "Don't cry, mija," she says, "think of what Abualita used to say: It is beautiful to cry, but don't let tears stop you from moving ahead. Laugh, mija, take each day as it comes, and that is all we can hope for." Looking at my mother, I think of the things that Abualita will miss, but then I realize that no matter where I am or what I do, she will always know. Taking a mental step back, I think about the young woman I have grown to be. In my light-skinned encasement, straight hair and mahogany eyes, mixed high-pitched laughter and quiet complacency, perhaps there is more of her in me than I thought. So today, whenever regret tempts me but outstretching its ugly hand, I smile though the tears—and I laugh.

Pharmaceutical Sainthood
Daniel Corrigan

In December of 1172, Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, made the deadly decision to return to England and claim his office. Becket had been staying in France for some time due to a little tiff he had had with King Henry II of England. There were a host of offenses that Becket perceived on the part of the King. First among them was his attempt to collect graft on Church properties and place the money into his own royal exchequer, and his subsequent assertion of power over the movement of the clergy within his kingdom and certain Church-related judicial processes didn't help matters. Finally, his decision to levy false charges of financial dishonesty toward Becket himself brought the affair to a head. All of these actions left the Archbishop understandably peeved, and he went into exile in France as a protest. Upon Becket's return, the King was heard to off-handedly remark at court that he wished someone would rid him of this meddlesome bishop. Several knights overheard the comment and hurried off to Canterbury, where, in an act of zealous patriotism and loyalty, they quickly dispatched Becket to the Great Beyond. His martyrdom is celebrated on December 29th.

Going against the grain is a surefire way to get oneself noticed, and an even surer way to breed dislike amongst one's fellows. People who have the audacity to criticize some powerful segment of a society are also the ones who frequently end up having their heads displayed on pikes, or at least inspire everyone else to loathe them. It's not a very pleasant thought, but a laundry list of historical precedents supports the fact. For example, consider St. Peter, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Socrates, Mahatma Ghandi, or any number of other subversives who met with a similar fate. The running thread through

all of their stories is that they upset people by disagreeing with something simply for morality's sake.

Morality, you ask? In a broad sense of the term, yes. We have a word for people who stubbornly adhere to their own morality in the face of worldly common sense: saints. I'm not using the word here in the traditionally Catholic sense, either. In this case, I'm speaking in a general way of men and women who led lives devoted to ideals of some kind, and are vindicated for their efforts at a later time. Of course, this doesn't mean that their contemporaries found them palatable. People who are catalysts for radical change in a society almost always run into violent reactions from people who were satisfied enough with the *status quo,* as in the cases of Thomas Becket versus Henry II or Martin Luther King Jr. versus James Earl Ray.

There are saints of an opposite extreme as well. There are some who follow the principles most people *claim* to hold so closely that they make everyone else look bad. When describing his feelings about Mother Theresa of Calcutta, the writer Robert Fulghum made this kind of point by saying, "There is a person who has profoundly disturbed my peace of mind for a long time," (189). Certainly no one ever picked up a gun and tried to off Mother Theresa, but Fulghum succinctly implies the way in which saints like her upset people. By her very mode of living, she challenged the way of life of everyone who claimed to believe in the same things, but didn't live that way. Whether intentionally or not, she made people feel guilty. In more extreme cases like that of Dr. King, a saint can openly challenge people's way of life, thus infuriating them. Either way, saints breed uneasiness in the people around them. This can manifest itself as the queasiness of the stomach that comes in realizing maybe one isn't living up to everything to which one claims. On another level, it can cause the animalistic ferocity that comes when one's beliefs are put

under the microscope and found to be harboring disease.

So, in a way these figures cause trouble for themselves by upsetting everyone else. Many people wear religious medals depicting saints, or read biographies of distant people like Ghandi or Dorothy Day. However, when confronted with a saint in our own time, like Sister Helen Prejean or Thich Nhat Hanh, most of us just grow uncomfortable, as though a person's holiness is dependent upon historical distance.

Saints from times past are nice and squeaky clean—they've endured years of historians applying layers of whitewash to their lives. But, to others, they certainly didn't seem that way in their own time periods. When describing Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador during a lecture, Fr. Kevin Burke, S.J., said that he was dirty, old, and irritable, "but he was a saint." Burke related how in 1977 a parish priest, an elderly farmer, and an altar boy in Romero's parish were gunned down by government soldiers. A few days later, Romero ordered that every parish in his diocese would not be open the following Sunday, and that the only church that *would* have mass would be the cathedral—anyone who couldn't attend was granted a dispensation. He intended it as a sign of unity. The government could shoot the priests but they could not kill The Church. Over 100,000 Salvadorans flocked to the cathedral that Sunday. The papal nuncio from The Catholic Church protested this decision because it violated canon law. Romero's clashes with both The Church hierarchy and the Salvadoran army became more frequent over the next few years, until he was also shot by Salvadoran soldiers while saying mass in 1980. He had publicly encouraged soldiers to disobey orders and refuse to shoot their own people.

That was only twenty-five years ago. Romero is on the road to canonization, since it's a hard thing to avoid canonizing a priest who was shot on his own altar.

Already, though, whitewash is being applied: many critics of the current archbishop of El Salvador, Fernando Saenz, say he is underhandedly attempting to "neutralize" the influence Romero's memory holds upon the people of El Salvador. He began his term as bishop by criticizing the liberation theology to which Romero and others adhered, and has asked the Salvadoran people to *not* publicly celebrate Romero's life, as this could "interfere with Romero's canonization process," (Wirpsa). Lip-service to the martyred archbishop. Romero is revered by the people of El Salvador for his efforts on their behalf, which eventually cost him his life. He is already a saint by popular acclamation in his home country. However, many men in the hierarchy of The Church find him too radical for their tastes, so one can be assured his legacy will undergo a thorough spit-and-polish job before being allowed to proceed on the road to canonization.

Perhaps we're more comfortable with saints from the past. Coming from a strongly Irish-Catholic background, I know that some of the more controversial things saints have done "just aren't nice to talk about." We like to have the buffer of the passage of time, so that we can feel that the social and political conditions that they spoke against no longer exist. That way, we can sit happily on our fluffy couches and praise them for their role. They don't present any challenge to our own lives, and so they pass muster by virtue of leaving us unperturbed.

But contemporary saints remind us that we have those moral values we claim to hold so highly stored in the back closets of our minds, just as their predecessors did for our forebears. When face-to-face with someone who approaches the ideal of devotion, we tend to write her off as a goody-two-shoes or insinuate that she is acting that way for pretense. No one wants to have one right next

door.

Fr. Daniel Berrigan, S.J., is a good example of how some actions can be written off as inconsequential or done only for pretense. He's considered to have been the leader of Catholic opposition to the Vietnam War. In 1968, he decided it was time to bring public attention to the issue of the draft, and, along with eight others, burned a pile of draft cards outside of a government office in Catonsville, Maryland. He was jailed for a year and a half, and many people, even some Jesuits, felt that he had gone too far. Many said that he was only engaging in sensationalist tactics and that he was drawing more attention to himself than to the issue. There are a great number who disagree with what he did even today, but his actions helped launch a national backlash against the draft and created momentum for the anti-war movement as whole.

Maybe stirring the pot in the way Fr. Berrigan and Oscar Romero did is the most important role of the saint. Certainly they accomplish a great amount of good by their own actions, but in a wider context they highlight injustices of all kinds for the public to perceive. They purge us of our warm and fuzzy illusions about what a nice place the world is by confronting problems that often we would rather blissfully ignore. A kind of societal diuretic which brings the real messiness of our collective stomach to light. Eugene Kennedy, Professor of Psychology at Loyola College in Chicago, observes that "Saints are relevant in a relativistic culture, for they are unshakable pillars that stand through storm and revolution -- both antidote and example for the modern world," (par.13). This medicinal quality of the saint makes him a kind of spiritual pill for the society in which he lives. Perhaps it upsets our stomachs, but it cleanses our system for the long-run.

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Bowie, Maryland
Greg Howard

Bowie, Maryland. Sixteen square miles of perfection in a bubble. A peaceful oasis surrounded on all sides by drugs, gangs, guns, poverty, blacks. The only truly safe place to live and raise a family for miles around. In Bowie, there are no wails of sirens, no hisses of lead bullets, no pounding of hammers as houses are boarded up, no voices of homeless people begging for money to eat. Bowie is home to the upper-middle or upper class, the self-proclaimed "financially-comfortable" crowd, made up of doctors and lawyers and CEOs and surgery-enhanced women whose very healthy, very rich husbands all mysteriously die of heart-attacks. Bowie is home to celebrities like Kathy Lee Gifford and the boy from N*Sync who hit puberty. JC, I think his name is. Looking in, Bowie has everything one could hope for. It is a fortress, a shell that protects the 55,000 residents from the harsh, unforgiving outside world. Instead of prostitutes and liquor stores on every corner there are soccer moms and Petsmarts.

Looking in, Bowie is a wonderful city, and no one ever has a reason to leave. There are schools, private and public of course, a college, shopping centers, outlets, two malls, a golf course and soccer fields all over the place. And the houses...you can't forget about the houses. In the northernmost tip of Bowie lie the houses owned by the "financially stable:" three-story mammoths that sit on half-acres of rolling hill. Every family has a basketball hoop in front and a lacrosse goal in the back, right by the porch so Mommy and Daddy can watch Timothy work on his lay-ups and stick skills from age three. As you take Rt. 450 into the city, you may catch a glimpse of Woodmore North and Woodmore Highlands, gated communities full of multi-million dollar palaces for the "financially loaded:"

doctors, surgeons, CEOs and celebrities, and, of course, their conniving, murderous, yet strangely irresistible wives. Along Route 193 in South Bowie, community is stressed as opposed to individual wealth, and every street begins with a K or P, and there are pools in every backyard, and a swim and racquet club in every neighborhood. To the southernmost tip, right next to Six Flags is Woodmore South, the "new and improved" gated community that somehow found a way to include the best of every Bowie neighborhood into its own. (No one really knows what the best of every neighborhood is, but that's the sale pitch and apparently is the most persuasive pitch of all time, because a new house is being built each day.) Unfortunately, I'm from Bowie. I understand that the invisible walls of Bowie do just as much to entrap me within the city limits as to keep the harsh, unforgiving world out. But now that I'm out, there's frankly no way in hell I'm going back.

The wonderful city of Bowie is separated into two wings, North Bowie and South Bowie. North Bowie is a bit duller than South Bowie, for North Bowie is where all the disgustingly large residences are built, right along Route 450, over by the 7-11. Although there are some pretty sweet houses in North Bowie, all the fun is on the Southside, where there's a mall, movies and all the youth sports you could hope for. It was obvious to me from an early point in my life that blacks don't really live in North Bowie unless they have a good reason, i.e., they are on the Wizards or have won the lottery. Wouldn't you know, the Howard clan missed the memo when looking for a house. My father definitely doesn't play for the Wizards, his jump shot is suspect and he can't drive to his right. And my family only plays the lottery when the jackpot is around 70 million dollars. Talk about get rich quick schemes, I keep telling my mother to buy tickets when the pot is only at around three million, so we can slowly work our way up,

winning small pots at a time. But I digress. When my family was looking to move from a townhouse in DC, my parents apparently fell in love with Bowie. You know, thought it would be a great place for me to grow up, wanted to do their parts as parents to put me and my baby brother in solid positions to succeed. While looking for houses in North Bowie, my family was suspiciously rejected from four potential houses, all the while getting phone call after phone call about condos and townhouses in the South. After a year, we were finally able to settle on a house, one exactly 0.37 miles outside the northernmost city limits.

Essentially, my family is still protected by the bubble surrounding Bowie, and lives in a neighborhood much like those in the North, except that we can't use the Bowie gym and our street names don't all get to start with the same letter (our streets are named after common girls' names, like Lisa, Alexis and the like). It never occurred to me why we were kept from living within the Northern limits until about thirteen years later, when I was in a Bowie Leader's forum. I learned in one of the nifty little future career workshops that the real estate agencies most likely weren't racist themselves, all money is good money. The kicker is that families who move or live in North Bowie apparently want to live quiet, peaceful lives. Studies show that blacks as a race are more boisterous than whites, and so the Southside is a better fit for blacks as a whole, close to the mall and the town park so that blacks can be loud and play that wretched hip-hop without bothering anyone. Selling houses to blacks in North Bowie isn't prohibited, but apparently it reduces the salability of the houses. Just business.

It's simple to see why Bowie is sarcastically referred to as the Last Stronghold by its minority residents. In the "ghetto" that is PG County, Bowie stands alone as the only majority white city or town. In short, Bowie's goal to be a

haven brings about a certain monotony to the whole area, a monotony that is just hard to live around. The only word that really explains the city more than anything else is *slow*. It doesn't feel like an East Coast city, bustling with excitement, but rather, a Midwestern city. Drivers stop in their cars to let pedestrians cross the street, and the same people go to the same Starbucks and IHOP every day to talk about the same meaningless banter that doesn't really matter to anyone. Most of the locals are born and raised in the city and never leave. As a result, there are an alarmingly large number of decrepitly old people in the city. I know that "decrepit" may not be politically correct, but it's true. Just driving through the streets, you see old people in their Camaros driving to the golf course, asexual plaid sweater-vests on, listening to Queen on Oldies 100 or Quiet Storm on WHUR. You know that Tuesday and Thursday nights are Bingo Nights, because the elderly all appear in the street like a scene from *Night of the Living Dead*. They walk or wheel across the street with their flannel shirts, corduroys and New Balances on, and you don't know whether to stop and wait fourteen minutes to let them get out of your lane, or to maneuver around them. They never even look at the drivers, and you end up just getting pissed off because *they* know you're there, and *you* know that they know they're there, but they just refuse to acknowledge you, the cocky bastards. You're supposed to be America's future, but they treat you like you're insignificant and only rant about "important things" like WWII and Bob Barker.

The fact that there are so many senior citizens also means that there aren't many kids. In my neighborhood alone, of the two hundred or so houses, there was one other person my age. A girl. An unattractive girl. You don't know what that does to a growing boy, when he walks his dog and the only person he can relate to looks like someone shot the hell out of her forehead with a BB

gun? It's bound to have an effect if you give it enough time. But I digress. The monotony of Bowie just sickens me, leaves me without any real motive to go outside during the day. In a city of 55,000, the average person would think that there's got to be something to do, besides Bingo Night, of course.

So we precious few kids there are, young gems in an old city, we drink. Or at least, most of us drink; I personally just watch them. A mixture of hatred for your own life and town, a hopeless feeling of an inability to escape that town and by controlled substances together usually amounts to nothing less than a bullet personally fired into the oral cavity. And I won't lie to you, when people drink, mindless stuff usually happens. As a result, trash that is supposedly being held "at bay" by the fifty foot high walls of Bowie is suddenly being manufactured within the city limits. And I didn't get the memo, but drunk, young kids apparently have a strong affinity with setting fire to things. The Marshall's over by Bowie Town Center was burned to the ground a few years ago by a kid who failed his art class. Let's forego the arson for a second. I didn't know it was even possible to fail high school art. A house was burned down last year by a girl a year older than me who put food on the stove after Homecoming and went to sleep. Let's forego the horrible mistake for a second. I didn't know it was even possible to be so much of a loser that you would legitimately go directly home after a Homecoming dance. The list goes on and on, starts with arson and ends with suicide, gang fights and the like.

Racially or sexually charged harassment is a huge deal, as well. I had a friend who lived in South Bowie, Hazel, who in my eyes was beautiful and unique in every way. I mean you kids think you've had crushes before, but you truly have no idea. She was gorgeous, hilarious, *and* the girl played soccer, best our age in Bowie, which is no

small feat. I asked her to marry me, twice, but she said she didn't want a family until she was at least sixteen. She was mixed, black and white, and always seemed so cultured as a result of her heritage. Her parents were named Karen and Bridget, but sometimes she saw Michael, who was her sperm donor. Yea...that's the kicker, two gay mothers and a sperm bank father, too. She was a strong girl and hid it well from me, made me think she led a normal life, but every single time I went over her house, one of her loving, soft-spoken mothers usually had a new bruise, or you could hear people yelling "fag" as they drove by. Last year, enough was enough, and a brick hurtled through the window into their family room while we were watching *Mighty Ducks*, Bridget asked her job for a transfer and Hazel moved with her parents to California. The fact that such a horrible injustice is allowed to happen within Bowie is disgusting and scary as well. Part of the problem also lies in the fact that Bowie has no police department; the closest station is about 10 minutes away in Greenbelt. I'm not saying Bowie's as dangerous as some parts around it, but the lack of authority has always been a cause for concern. Although it sounds cool to say that we don't even need a police department, the fact of the matter is that in a city, authority is necessary. There's no way to stop the break-ins, the fights, and the rapes that occasionally happen. The insistence that a police force is unnecessary is nice to hear from the outside looking in, but within the bubble, talk is cheap.

A few pretty rough areas surround Bowie, so its residents are naturally influenced by the "ghetto" around it and base their opinions on experiences they've had with minorities of any kind. Many of the residents are obnoxiously naive to relationships with minorities, or are disgusted at the sight of a black, or a Latino, or an Asian. This faction is especially frustrating because racism, to me, was always hard to understand, especially when I was a

kid. I remember being eight years old and playing youth soccer for South Bowie. Naturally, I was the fastest, most skilled, overall best player on the field, but more importantly, the only minority of any kind. We were playing Crofton, a rival team, and the game was pretty heated for eight year olds. We were down 1-0 when I broke through with about seven minutes left in regulation and scored. Then I scored again. And again. And again. Four goals in about five minutes, before Coach took me out. As I went over to the bench, a team parent called me over, Randy was his name, and bent down, looked me in the eye, smiled and said, "Listen nigger, you're fast as hell, so keep playing soccer because I don't think many cops are going to be able to catch you." I had no idea what he meant, and I've never heard the N-bomb before. When I did find out though, it rocked me to my core. I just won for Bowie, and I'm still being looked at, not as a soccer player or even just as a boy, but I'm being labeled. When you go to most cities, race isn't an issue, because everyone of every color lives in close proximity.

To consider Bowie a city would be to group Bowie in the same league as a New York, or a Washington, or a Los Angeles. Sure, it's a city by default, except in one major way. Cities aren't closed circuits, they're not surrounded by invisible walls and they're not bubbles. Being cut off doesn't make a city great, it's being porous that makes a city great. The funny thing is that throughout my entire life, even with all of Bowie's obvious flaws, I accepted it as home. It wasn't until I moved to Baltimore for college and got out of the shell that I realized how unbearable the city is. Although there are few "poor people" in Bowie, there's still rampant segregation and discrimination. From any angle, that doesn't seem like a very good trade-off. The bubble has been burst, not from the outside but from within. Bowie isn't the shining city upon a hill that it is thought to be by its residents. The great walls of

Bowie are moot at this point, because Bowie has every quality of its surrounding towns. Horrible crimes are committed regularly. People are still poor, not devoid of money, but devoid of character and blind to equality. Sure, the bubble keeps people out, but it's been burst because the same problems that manifest themselves in the "ghettos" like Landover, Kenmoor, Brightseat, Palmer Park, Silver Hill and Clinton are in my city as well. Bowie is not the oasis, the Zion, that everyone talks about and truly believes exists. Bowie is just a town, a city by default of its population and amazing mall. It's shaped me for who I am today, it's appreciated on some level, but it surely won't be missed.

Diamonds and Nostalgia

Mary Murphy

"The difference between false memories and true ones is the same as for jewels: it is always the false ones that look the most real, the most brilliant." ~Salvador Dali

I.

"Weren't those the days," says my father, with a sigh too heavy for his forty-six years.

The Busy Bee was torn down in 1983 and replaced with a bank. And just in the nick of time. It was the summer of 1983 that my parents met there, at the convenience store in the center of town where my mother worked the register and my father stocked the shelves. There are times I'm convinced my parents found some sort of relief and gratification when the Busy Bee was destroyed, finally giving them permission to wax nostalgia about the tiny shop's pink curtains and unsightly uniforms. As if its destruction has cemented its status as *memory.* As if we can only dwell on a past to which we can't return.

II.

It was early July, I think. The day I passed my driver's test. I remember it distinctly - pulling out of my driveway in my mother's green Toyota, obsessively checking my rearview because I knew my parents were watching from the porch. I pulled out onto the road, away from the house—glancing back. The car was empty and I was driving. *Alone.* And I wasn't the least bit scared. I'm sure every 16-year-old has that moment, when the sense of freedom and possibility that a vehicle brings finally becomes comprehensible, tangible. That was mine. Four years and countless miles later, the thrill is gone. But the memory of that feeling comes back in waves - and just last spring, the wave washed over me again.

I hopped a Greyhound from Baltimore to New York to visit my friend Matt's new apartment. Sitting on the overcrowded, overheated bus for three hours, reading my *Vogue,* the day was like any other. I brushed past the other passengers on the way to get my luggage. I fumbled through the aisles with my overstuffed suitcase. I burst out of the bus into bright lights and familiar discord of 7th and 34th street when it hit me. As I searched for Matt's face in the crowd at the crosswalk, I was back in my mom's Toyota, glancing to the backseat in order to fully grasp the fact that *I was alone.* And I wasn't the least bit scared.

III.

We'd drive for hours that summer. No destination, no greater purpose, though we had our routes. Through town, past the bank, around the school and back. The roads were familiar and hypnotic, our knowledge of their curves and textures instinctive, and U-turns were only extensions on hot nights with stingy curfews.

Sometimes we'd actively try to get lost, becoming disoriented even in areas we knew well, but tried to make them seem new. We could somehow stretch the boundaries of our little town, coming across abandoned parking lots and dilapidated buildings. We'd regard our findings as treasures or tiny indications that this town had more potential than we had thought. Faint glints and sparkles emanated from the rough. We had to find the diamond.

IV.

My coffee black. His, two creams, no sugar. We sit across from one another in the same diner where we spent the entire summer before high school, laughing too loud and realizing we had the same sense of humor. I ask if he's going to marry her, half-joking, but he knows I'm not kidding. He knows how I feign indifference when I care

the most.

"Maybe," he responds, eyes fixed on the table, then the window, then the table again. I laugh and offer some sort of artificial praise, something I neither remember nor regret. Silence.

"Hey do you remember that time," he begins, his eyes still to the window, mine vacant and glassy, "when we got lost in Brookfield and my car backfired by the lake?" He laughs forcibly and continues with a memory that he was recalling incorrectly. We weren't lost that night. I had dared him to take the mysterious shortcut around Lake Moraine, insisting it didn't exist, and he took me up on it, laughing the entire way. We weren't lost then. But we were now.

V.

Can memories truly exist? Can they remain in their purest, most authentic form forever? Once we recall them as memories and label them past, we recreate the experience to our liking, omitting the pain and inserting the sentiment. With every recollection, we fine-tune, polish, and edit our memories until they fit like missing chapters into the story we wait our lives to tell. Maybe memories only fill the voids. Or create new ones.

VI.

My mother asks me to drive for the first time. "The sun," she insists, "it hurts my eyes."
We pull over and exchange roles. I move the seat up and the steering wheel down as she becomes my passenger. Following her gesture to pull into the bank to cash a paycheck, I signal left and carefully turn in to the lot.

"This place," my mother starts, "was such a dump." Referring to the Busy Bee, the building's former identity. I'm shocked. It was if my mother, a devout Catholic, had

just renounced Christ himself. She senses my wonder.

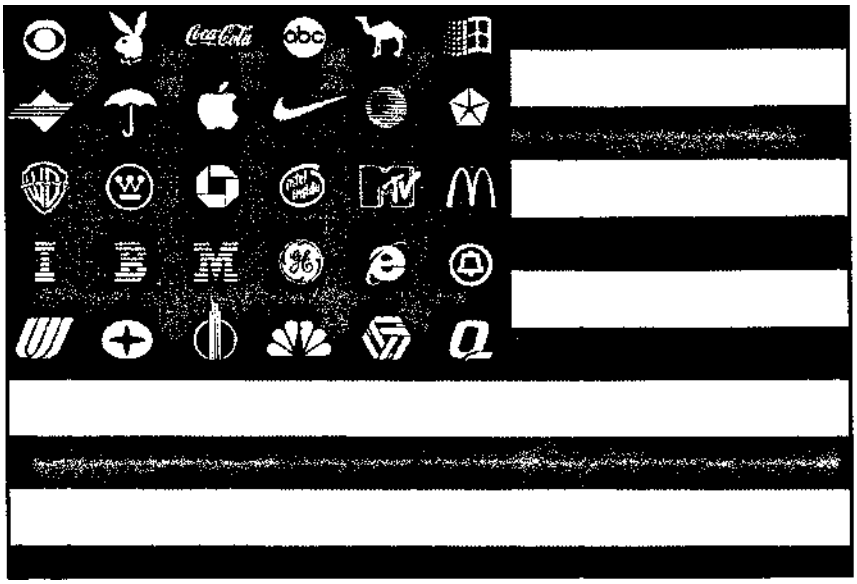
"Well, your father talks about it like it was something magical," she laughs, "It was just a greasy truck stop. The air conditioner was always broken and it was so hot you could barely breathe. Plus, I didn't even know your dad until after I quit and he got fired. He only asked me out because Melanie DelVecchia turned him down." I laugh as I picture my father, awkward and cocky at 22, sidling up to my prudish mother and proposing a date.

"It's funny," my mother sighs, "the way that story changed so much over the years."

VII.

I write this in Paris. Alone in my apartment, my first apartment, and I'm freezing. Water boils for tea, and Joni Mitchell's Blue radiates from my computer speakers. In different ways, they both fill the emptiness. I spent the day in poetry class, and have found that I can't write poetry here or even capture Paris in poetry. Paris is poetry.

Strangely, this new city has been full of empty pages for me. One-sentence entries in my journal and untitled documents I choose not to save. Anything I write seems trite or too shallow to do the details any justice. I cannot articulate Paris to anyone, nor convey the impression that will be left on me in words. I can only attempt to describe the shape of its fingerprint. Perhaps that is the memory. Perhaps the memory of Paris cannot be expressed in pictures, poems or brief journal entries. The memory is not within me, but it is me and only exists in the difference between who I was then and who I am now—alone in Paris, at 20, waiting for my tea to boil.



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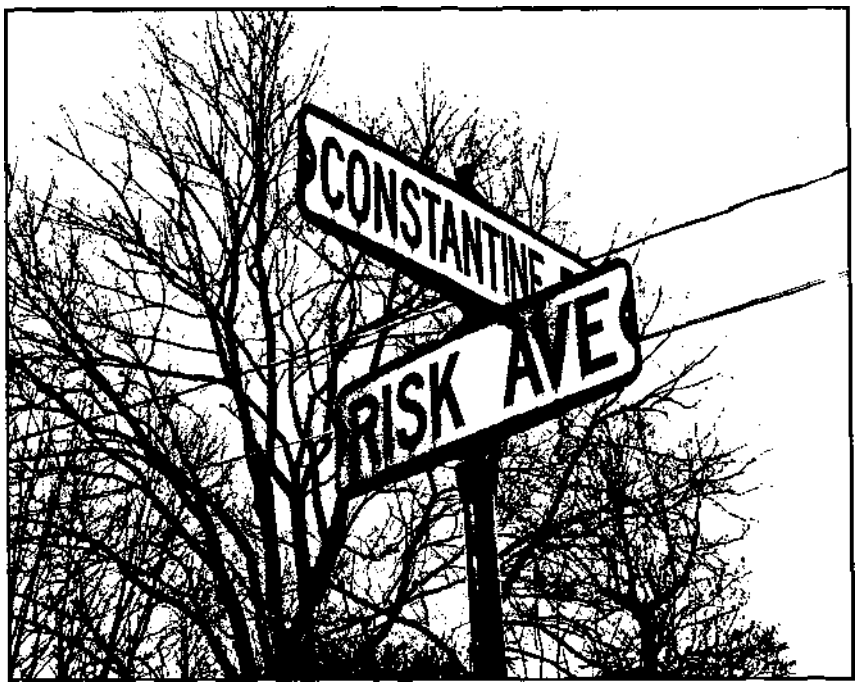
Caroline Kennington



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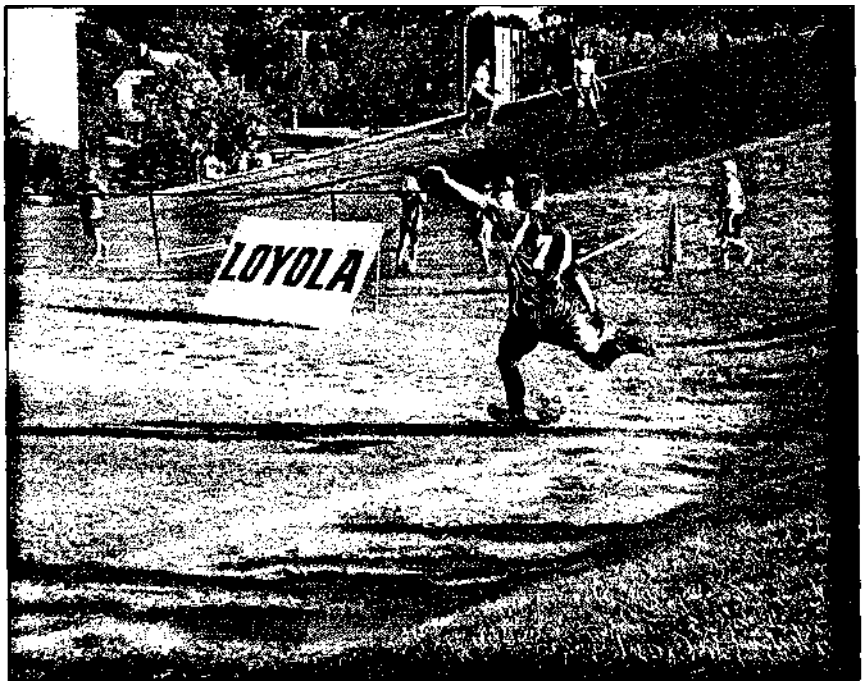

Kristine Boise

Celine Cannizzaro

Celine Cannizzaro

Erik Schmitz

Erik Schmitz

Hoop Earrings and All...
The realizations of a repressed Jersey Girl.
Lorraine Cuddeback

The conductor cam and ripped my ticket, giving me a little torn slip of paper that indicates my destination in some secret, train-conductor language. The scenery slowly starts to roll by as the train heaves into motion and rollicks from side to side while gaining momentum. Sitting in the belly of the beast, I think of how routine this feels to me. I'm traveling back to Jersey; the train is my gateway from one world into the other.

It was fairly early in life that I learned of these worlds: Jersey, and Not Jersey. To a girl born in Bergen and bred in Somerset, I was familiar with all the different flavors of Jerseyan Suburbia, but life in Not Jersey was a mystery. The only glimpses I had of it were when we came through the Lincoln Tunnel to arrive in the City - and this world fascinated me with its bright lights, loud noises, and tall buildings. Or sometimes my family took long stretches of smooth, gray highway to the picturesque, rolling hills of Pennsylvania to visit family friends who lived in the houses of rich giants, with grand play-sets and bright aqua pools. These Not Jersey places seemed vastly superior to my medium-sized house next to other medium-sized houses in a medium-sized town. At the age of seven the contempt of the familiar was already settling in.

I guess it came as little surprise then, when I announced at the age of eight, on a family vacation to Chicago, that I was going to leave Jersey and live in Not Jersey. It was grander, brighter, more exciting, and vastly different from the Jersey world I knew; and that made it desirable. Not Jersey was a big, big place - and I couldn't wait to be a part of it.

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"Wilmington, Delaware," the speakers tell us in

scratchy, crackling voices. Traveling home every break is something less than thrilling, and I fervently wish that I was still in my dorm room, a floor or two away from my friends, and enjoying life as a college student. Across the car I spot a familiar hairline - a friend of a friend, fellow Loyola student making the journey back to Jersey. I wonder if she's silently bearing the same discomfort at the idea of going home, or if maybe that's only me.

The decade following my decision to leave Jersey for Not Jersey was spent in a sort of simmering rebellion. I was never the get-your-nose-pierced-and-a-tattoo type of teenage rebel, but I expended a tremendous amount of energy seeking ways to leave my Jersey bubble. I traveled every opportunity I got - music camps, service trips, and student conferences dotted my schedule regularly. Any chance I had to leave, I took.

I perceived Jersey as mediocre, as something between truly wonderful and truly horrible. I knew enough to know that there were worse places in the world than Jersey, but I also knew there were places far greater. I never wanted to just settle for mediocrity, or for what was expected of me. I wanted to exceed all expectations; expectations were limits waiting to be broken. In my desire to be everything *but* what I was "supposed" to be, I developed a strong hatred of stereotypes in all their forms. Stereotypes were just limits, personified. Of course, the most repugnant of these stereotypes was the Jersey Girl. This gum-cracking, hoop-earrings-wearing, boots-and-Bruce-obsessed girl first crossed my consciousness with the release of the ever-popular "Jersey Girl" song on WPLJ Central Jersey radio. It was a re-done version of the annoyingly catchy "Barbie Girl" song - and yes, I'm sure the humor in using that song was entirely intentional. As I grew up, the stereotype developed under icons like Adrianna from the Sopranos and every girl in every Kevin Smith movie ever made (the exception being,

ironically enough, *Jersey Girl*). Apparently, when I grew up I was supposed to have really, really big hair, wear perfectly applied make-up, stiletto boots, tight jeans, and gold jewelry, fall in love with both Bon Jovi and Bruce Springsteen, and spend copious amounts of time down the Shore. I wondered, were all Jersey girls permanently stuck in a 1985 time-warp?

It seemed the older I got, the harder it became to escape the stereotype. Friends I met from Not Jersey started to mock my accent (but to this day I cannot hear the difference between my "coffee" and everyone else's). This, naturally, confused me. How could I possibly have an accent when all the actors I saw in television and films talked just like I did? Little did I know just how many people in the entertainment industry grew up in Suburban New Jersey. Time spent at a music camp in Not Jersey — St. Paul, Minnesota, to be exact — involved jokes about our "Garden State" motto, and the amount of time I spent in malls on a daily basis. Right, and just where is the Mall of America, again?

I slowly came to the realization that New Jersey was considered the "armpit of the United States," and that the Jersey Girl was its terrible banshee-angel. At first, I resorted to typical defense mechanisms; I made terrible, self-deprecating jokes, swore off malls, and refused to like Bruce Springsteen. Maybe, then, Not Jersey could laugh with me, not at me.

Despite my best efforts, in high school I began to grow into the stereotype - all the while continuing to deny it. I took to wearing hoop earrings in high school, but only because they made me look older. Boots were cool, dammit, even white ones. And you know what? Bon Jovi is a nationally popular band, so they are clearly not just a Jersey thing. But if you ever asked me if I was a Jersey Girl, I'd flip my hair-sprayed hair and tell you "no" as if it were the most obvious thing, *ever*.

Worst of all was the ever growing Jersey attitude I developed almost without realizing it. The more I longed to leave Jersey, the more arrogant, the more sarcastic, and the more cynical I became. The take-no-bullshit attitude and arrogance so often associated with Jersey girls became something of a trademark for me - "God, Lorraine, you're so sarcastic" is a phrase I hear quite often, even from friends. I figure by my senior year of high school all I needed was the big hair and gum cracking to be the worst of the Jersey-Barbie-Girls. Existing, however, solely in Jersey, I was simply one among many. It would take time in Not Jersey to see my true self.

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The train comes to a halting stop at the Philadelphia Thirtieth Street Station, and I travel to the cafe car to get a snack. Waiting in line, I stare out a window at the pillars and cement in underground Philly while idly playing with one of my hoop earrings, twisting the lobe around and back again. The clasp accidentally comes undone, and I remove the earrings and place them around my wrist for safekeeping (yes, they are *that big)* until I have a chance to replace them in my ears.

Back in my seat, I take the earrings from my wrist, and fiddle with them in boredom. I try to make them spin on my fold-out tray, or hula-hoop them around my index finger. Running out of tricks, I let them rest in my hand. They are almost as big as the palm of my hand, these thin, hollow tubes that are light enough to not weigh upon my ears. Really, there is nothing spectacular about them - they aren't real silver, they can't even stay in half the time. They don't have any of the decorations so commonly seen in today's fashion; no delicate chains strung across the center, no bright, flashing discs suspended along the bottom. Just large, simple, silver circles. Yet, despite any possible fashion *faux pas,* I continue to wear them, to the point where they are as much a part of my image as they a

part of the Jersey Girl's.

I remember going to college and bringing these hoops with me. I was excited and anxious for my personal liberation from Jersey. Ever since eighth grade the word "college" had meant freedom to me. It was my great chance to escape into Not Jersey, and I'm sure it surprised no one when I chose to attend the school on my list which was furthest away. The distance wasn't the only reason I chose Loyola; but it was certainly more than just a perk.

When I first arrived at Loyola, I didn't think I was any different from any of the other students on campus in my choice of fashion accessories, yet it quickly became apparent that I was one of the few girls who chose to go the hoop route. I'm not sure when I noticed the hundreds of other lobes decorated in only a large, round pearl or delicate dangle, but I do remember being described as the girl with "the really big earrings" to a friend's friend. Somehow, the prevailing fashion in my high school had become a sort of personal trademark. It was then I started to take careful note of everyone else I saw with hoop earrings; and to my dismay learned that each girl I spotted with shiny round circles in her ears also hailed from some part of Jersey. My hoops weren't just my trademark, they were Jersey's trademark. The girls with their pearls and dangles all hailed from Not Jersey - Connecticut, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York. A line had been drawn, once again, between Jersey and Not Jersey, and I found myself on the wrong side of it.

Thing is, I liked my hoop earrings. I still like them. I felt no desire to change my earring habits; if anything, I clung to them more fervently because of their uniqueness, out here in Not Jersey. Yet, there resided a lingering disappointment in myself for succumbing to the Jersey Girl stereotype, and then proceeding to spread it throughout Loyola College with my giant earrings. Now everyone I met from Not Jersey would see me, a girl from Jersey, and

think: "hoop earrings."

But then, I said to myself, they'd also think "girl who looks damn good in her hoop earrings." Even my ex-boyfriend, a Queens boy through and through, once admitted that I'm one of the few girls he knows that can really pull them off - and I know he's not lying. If he was, he'd feel the infamous Jersey Girl wrath.

I wake from my reverie and years of practice let me easily slide my hoops back into their proper places. I see people from Philly still walking the aisles in search of seats, and every so often they give me and my hoop earrings a sidelong glance. Let them look. They're probably just jealous, anyways.

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Weighed down by my bags, I exit the train into Trenton Station. I stumble by and people brush past me, all of them in a rush. This is Jersey, and life is never slow. It's an up-and-at-them lifestyle, an ambitious lifestyle, a unique lifestyle. It's the lifestyle that drove me away, reaching and climbing upwards. Nothing is ever really good enough for a Jersey Girl, not even the best. She knows the secret; that there is no best, only better.

All around me I see girls bringing off giant suitcases that are inevitably filled with more clothes than really necessary for the short break. I see the fellow Jerseyite from the train wave for a taxi with a blase look and brightly manicured fingers. It's a migration of Jersey Girls, all come home to feed on diner food and good pizza, to complain about road congestion and count down the hours until they can leave again. This is the new generation of Jersey Girls; the Jersey Girls like me, the ones that exist out in Not Jersey, forging a life for themselves apart from our bubble of a state.

I think of the old stereotype, even as I'm surrounded by the new one. Our hair isn't teased anymore, but the flips and curls are as precisely done as ever.

Maybe we fall in love with Bruce and Bon Jovi as children, but now we can add Fountains of Wayne ("Stacey's Mom," anyone with an ear for pop can tell you, was like musical crack with its addictive sound) and other numerous bands to our Jerseyan repertoire. Our jeans are no longer tailored down to slim ankles, but are boot-cut or flared - and still tight enough to make our butts look good. And yeah, we probably always will spend copious amounts of time down the Shore.

I'm playing with my earrings again when my father pulls up his car; the first words he greets me with are "Traffic was a bitch." Piling my bags into my father's car, I ask if he and Mom had ordered pizza like they do every Friday night, and make a mental note of the time of my return train. As I stare out the window while we pull out into the traffic on Route 1, I think: you can take the girl out of Jersey, but she'll just take Jersey with her.

St Paul Street
Matthew McDonough

The rough texture of the sidewalk felt foreign to me. I don't believe I had ever before in my life walked so great a distance without feeling the springy give of trimmed grass or the satisfying crunch of fallen leaves beneath my soles. I had awaited this balmy September morning for some time now. It was a pleasant, optimistic Labor Day, and, as I recall, the last day before college classes began. As a new college student living a stone's throw from Baltimore City, a place which for me, as a lifetime resident of the rural part of the County, had always seemed to carry a certain dark mystery about it, I would presently have a chance to find out what urban life was all about. This was a chance I had eagerly awaited for much of my tedious summer vacation, during which I had developed a fascination with all things urban in anticipation of my new college life here. I would, in many ways, "find out" more than I had bargained for in the coming weeks and months. Indeed, I have much to learn yet, it seems. My first expedition into this hitherto uncharted territory was one that unfolded quite differently than I had expected.

My own personal naiveté in this, my original "urban adventure", cannot be underscored enough. Sporting gelled hair, Nikes, some bottled water, and a smile, I was filled with the deepest sense of discovery as, before me, the first high-rise buildings peeked over my horizon and out from behind the verdant cover of the nicely-pruned trees by the sidewalk, upon which I had walked approximately a mile south on St. Paul Street. There was no particular reason why I had chosen to follow St. Paul Street specifically—looking at the map, it simply seemed the most convenient route into "the city." I was an explorer gazing for the first time upon the shores of a harsh and foreign land, upon the native peoples' hidden metropolis

and standing in awe of its secrets. Or, at least, that was how I felt at the time. In reality, I was likely a closer semblance of the clueless tourist than of any latter day Columbus; you know, the sort of person who takes his family to see the indigenous village, clad in sunglasses and Hawaiian shirts, cheerfully snapping photographs while the natives shake their heads and return to work. I was not completely defenseless, however. My mother, who had worked in Baltimore City much of her educational and professional life, had left me with a kernel of wisdom that I imagined would prove applicable in this new situation: always offer a polite greeting to everyone you make eye contact with, or at least a friendly nod. I would later learn that it was this, and not any part of my appearance or demeanor, that apparently separated me most from the city folk.

As I continued my southbound trek, which, as far as I can recall, had no particular destination, though my hope was to walk all the way to the Baltimore Aquarium, (unbeknownst to me a cool eight mile round trip), I did my best to absorb all the fascinating minutiae around me. A few blocks south of University Parkway, there was some heavy construction in the little commercial area near Johns Hopkins University. The air was filled with dust and the noise seemed all-encompassing. Workers shouted back and forth in Spanish from their precarious positions on the steel beams above, while pedestrians attempted to navigate their way around the obstacles blockading the site. Perhaps the first thing that struck me as I passed through the noisy construction area and hit the first residential blocks on the east side of 31st Street, besides the warm rays of the sun and the pleasant breeze casually working to clear the dust, was the affluence and chic-ness apparent in these first townhouses. I had read about gentrification, or heard about it in school: the process by

which homes in working class, black neighborhoods in the city are moved into by up-and-coming educated whites, fixed up, and resold for a higher price to other up-and-coming whites, which raises the property value of the surrounding area and eventually drives out the working class blacks. Perhaps I was witnessing gentrification here on St. Paul Street? Indeed, the sidewalk around me seemed populated exclusively by busy-looking students and artists and other sophisticated urbanites with flashy cell phones and iPods, their yards well planted and decorated with fascinating little sculptures. The only African Americans around had been working on the construction several streets behind me. It was intriguing, but not quite what I had expected.

Gradually, the brilliantly colored townhouses and gardens gave way to blocks that more closely resembled what I had envisioned the city would look like. Traffic seemed to grow thicker, litter collected around me, public transportation benches sprang up, and the pedestrians seemed to thin out. The rough hues of gray, black, brown, and white I had anticipated began to dominate the architecture. Around 27th Street, Margaret Brent Elementary School seemed to demarcate the point at which pink, red, yellow, and green melded into gray and brown with surprisingly little transition. While this description may seem less appealing, I was captivated by my surroundings. So *this* was the "real city." In retrospect, I sort of chuckle at my original naive perception of St. Paul and 27th as being in any sense gritty. My next emotion, however, is one I am less eager to recount, but one which, nevertheless I feel must be discussed, for I have come to see that it is one that affects too many Americans, and without good reason.

As gentrified affluence gave way to the rusty playgrounds, boarded up buildings and liquor stores

around 25th Street, and more specifically, as black faces began to replace the white, I began to feel a sort of vague uneasiness nagging at my mind, which I believe most residents of Baltimore would agree was unreasonable at that location, but which I also believe might have similarly affected anyone with my background. As I gazed upon the blackened, dilapidated buildings of Hargrove alley beyond the vine-encrusted basketball court near the elementary school, I grew wide-eyed with awe and fear. It was a fear, I now believe, rooted in 17 years of the media, of my family, and of my peers speaking about the less affluent part of the city and its black inhabitants in unfair, unbalanced, and biased ways. It is the fear, I have come to realize, that is shared by an unfortunate number of white Americans, even those who live in and around the city, who have too long been spoon-fed over-the-top hip-hop music videos and similarly over-the-top news reports of black gangs running the streets. It must also be said that this unspoken fear seems largely mutual, and that in many ways, the racial divide that continues to separate Americans can be attributed to mutual preconceptions and misinformation. As I look back, I am glad I was able to discern this fear as being unwarranted and undeserved by the people around me and continue my expedition in spite of it, for I was presently to have an educational experience.

"Hey, how's it going?" I asked casually for the umpteenth time that morning. Three middle-aged black men conversing on a stoop nodded at me, though the liveliest among them, perhaps forty years of age with a backwards baseball cap and a graying moustache, added a smile as well.

"Hey, hold up a second," he called from behind me, for I had passed him several seconds ago. Perhaps it was the friendly tone in which he spoke, but my simmering trepidation was immediately replaced with curiosity.

"Where your people from, man? You look like you straight German, or Russian, or something."

I politely shook my head no, but told him that I was part German. I briefly considered asking him, "What about you?" but decided it might come across the wrong way.

"Yeah, yeah," he nodded. "You definitely German. What's your name?"

"Matthew," I replied.

"Matthew? Hey, I have a young brother named Matthew. He's about your age, too. I'm Mack, this Stanley, and this my boy Willy. Where you from?" When I responded that I was from "out in the county, Baltimore County", he seemed to have a hard time recalling exactly where that was in relation to the city. His friend Stanley, a bespectacled older guy holding a forty of malt liquor in a concealing black plastic bag had his own suggestion. "Mayne, you ever heard of Shepherd Pratt?" I nodded yes. "Did you *escape* from Shepherd Pratt?" They had a good chuckle, except for Willy, who never spoke much and just kind of observed things with his one good eye, and took surreptitious swigs from their bottles of Ring Cobra. His next question was both surprising and slightly amusing: "Mayne, if I gave you some rope, what would *you* do with it?" He gazed off at another white person nearby unloading some things from his car and trailed off. "Look at him, he coming over here with some rope right now..."

I thought this over for a moment, and hastily came up with, "I don't know... I'd probably make a swing, I guess." It wasn't very clever, but Mack laughed and pointed a finger at Stanley. They seemed to be more at ease after that and toned down their taunting.

"You lucky you ran into some good mo's like us, man," Mack said to me. "There some real knuckleheads out there. You just gotta be careful. You'll be alright on this street, but probably about two or three streets over

that way... you want to stay out of there." He gestured toward the east. Willy nodded.

"Word," Stanley said. "I walk into the hood with this dude, and he carrying his water bottle, I'm a get my ass beat." They laughed again. I chuckled half-heartedly, but the reality that the very nature of urban communities can change in a matter of just two or three blocks was still surprising to me.

At one point the conversation hit a serious note, and, after a pause, one of them (I can't remember exactly who it had been) said, "You know, white people usually don't stop and say 'hi'." Indeed, several minutes prior, a young white woman who must have been a student had walked past. Mack had greeted her amiably, but for whatever reason, she hadn't even glanced back at him in response. She just kept on walking, pretending, it would seem that three black alcoholics sitting on a stoop at 24th and St. Paul simply weren't a part of her world.

"God bless you, man," Mack called out to me as I left him that day. "God bless you and your people."

Fast-forward five months. The mild days of September have come and gone, leaving in their absence a Baltimore considerably grayer than the one I had first encountered. Winter's harsh bite has long since sent 24th Street's little community of alcoholics and stoop philosophers indoors. Mack has had a rough time lately. The last time I heard from him was from rehab. Stanley is still drinking his King Cobra, and I haven't seen Willy for a long time now. The scenery changes, the people come and go, but some things have not changed at all on St. Paul Street. I still observe whites suffering from sudden-onset hearing loss whenever a panhandler approaches or a word of greeting comes from a stoop. I still see blacks suspicious and guarded when I pass by. On more than one occasion, I have been approached under the absurd suspicion that I

was working undercover. I still see past the quaint, peaceful façade of a neighborhood that somehow exists simultaneously in two different and entirely exclusive worlds.

Living on 32nd and Charles since the end of January has only deepened this perspective. Just in the five months or so that I have been here in Baltimore, St. Paul Street has already changed substantially. The construction by University Parkway has been all but completed, ushering in a string of chain stores inhabited at all hours by groups of Hopkins students—having lived among them at my new Charles Street apartment residence for, as I said, about a month now, I have observed that they generally seem quite isolated and out of touch with the rest of Charles Village. More startling to me, personally, however, has been the change on St. Paul and 24th Street, the place where I consider my education in Baltimore to have begun. The boarded up buildings have been converted into real-estate offices with notices against stoop loitering posted outside. The liquor stores, African-American hair salons, and pizza joints seem to be in the process of being taken over by a host of vegan food stores, Subway restaurants, and home decor shops descending from the north, sweeping away gray and brown with pink and yellow and introducing white people into an area that seemed almost entirely black when I first encountered it. And as I first encountered it, the level of non-interaction between these two groups, even as they now converge on a single block of city street, is startling to me.

I recently met a homeless man outside the Safeway at 24th and Charles. He asked me for change, but seemed surprised, not so much at the fact that I was willing to help him, but that I was willing to stop for a minute and talk. "You're not from around here, are you?" he asked me. "Usually these Baltimore people have an attitude."

How is it that the people of this city can slip into such a state of complacency and acceptance of this at best awkward and at worst sad situation of isolation and fear? How is it that in the single mile between University Parkway and North Avenue, St. Paul Street literally morphs from a bourgeois, upscale community of students and artists into a neighborhood of working poor tainted by drugs, alcoholism, and unemployment? My background in the rural suburbs in Baltimore County has not provided me with any answers to these questions, but I feel it has been, at least in part, a factor in my asking them. I do not claim to be an expert on any of the greater issues I have referred to; indeed, I will be the first to admit myself to be an outsider to all things urban. But perhaps it is that fact, the perspective of an outsider looking in, that allows me to notice some little things which might otherwise be taken for granted and ponder their significance in the larger problems that I think must be apparent to any American with an interest in them. I do not know where the fears and misperceptions originate or why they persist, only that they exist and continue to loom large in the racial inequality and non-integration so clearly evident on St. Paul Street, in Baltimore City, and, more broadly, in urban America at large. Something tells me that perhaps the "attitude" of which the man spoke is not confined to Baltimore.

Perhaps the sentiment can be summarized most clearly by the response given to me by one of my peers whom I had asked to come along with me that day, a response that has been echoed in some form by every other person I have asked since: "Are you kidding? This is Baltimore—you'll get shot!"

They all shared one thing in common; none of them were from Baltimore.

Changes
Cara Weigand

Each time I come home from college, I notice the many things that have changed: the crops growing in the farmers' fields, the leaves, the color of the walls in our living room that my mom can't seem to decide on. There is always one change that I can count on, and that is my sister, Alexa, growing up.

We sit at dinner quietly listening, waiting for each person to go around the table and say something about their day. Mom usually tells a gross story about one of her patients, leaving us to push the food on our plates around in circles, followed by an update on her self proclaimed "personal crusade against fast food." Dad tells a boring story about work, and we are all a little more stressed after that. Now it's Alexa's turn to tell a story, usually more of a testimony—stories about a classmate she stuck up for, a new friend she made, or a teacher she stood up to. She is like a prophet; she is a teacher for all of us at the table. Alexa's stories are my favorite part of dinner.

"There is this kid in my history class, he looks Hispanic..." After those few words I can see where this story is going right away just by the look on her face and the sound in her voice, passion, and strength. She continues on as I flash back to a hot, August day in King's Dominion when Alexa and I finally got our name plates.

The name plate cart was our favorite cart in the whole amusement park. At this cart you tell the vendors your name and they look it up for you; its meaning, origin and all sorts of other fun facts about it. They print it out on a pretty piece of paper of your choice. On this particular afternoon, Alexa and I were determined to get our name plates. My father went to get an Italian ice at a stand near by and we saw it as our golden opportunity. We soon convinced my mom (she decided they would look nice in

our rooms if we got them framed), and of course Dad said yes after Mom did.

The man showed us our name results on his computer screen before printing them out. I looked at mine and saw "Irish and Gaelic for 'friend'" under the category of "name meaning". I was very pleased with the outcome and decided it would definitely go on my bedroom wall right above the headboard, and I picked the pink and blue airbrushed striped paper. Then it was Alexa's turn, my mom read her the meaning, "protector of mankind." Alexa's already red cheeks flushed even more. Her excited smile died down a little bit, hiding the tiny brown front tooth that she had hurt the spring before, when she slipped on the back porch while playing with our dog after a rain storm. It was clear that it wasn't the explanation she was looking for. Something along the lines of "friend" may have been more pleasing for this little girl. My mom stood behind her explaining why Alexa should be proud to have that has her name's meaning, as she toke one of Alexa's long pigtails in her each of her hands straightening out the kinks the humidity had put in them. In times of frustration, our mother always took our heads into her hands, laying them down with our hair fanned out in her lap, and she played with it, combing it soothingly out of our faces. My mom and I helped Alexa pick a pretty pink and white toile print paper to print her name's information on. We brought it home and hung it on her bedroom wall. I didn't know then, and neither did my parents or Alexa, but over the years "protector of mankind" would be a title that Alexa has lived her life by. It's amazing how well her name's meaning fits her character.

Though she is younger than me by four years, on more than one occasion in my life Alexa has been stronger than I was, and has gotten me, or the both of us, through tough situations. And each time I come home and hear

another of her stories I am reminded of this.

My last few visits at home were planned because I had to visit my Grandfather in the hospital and finally for his funeral. It was my first experience with a death in the family and I didn't know what to expect; my emotions were lacking due to the intense state of shock I was in. I drove home through the city not sure whether or not I could, or was able to, cry. I was in total disbelief, lost in the situation trying to figure it out.

Alexa dealt with it differently; she was very emotional. It was a spiritual experience for her, and I was jealous, embarrassed and confused as to why I couldn't express such emotion myself.

We sat in the funeral home for the viewing. Alexa had been crying that morning when we arrived; later we said our prayers in front of the open casket that held our grandfather. As I sat there next to her, looking at our grandfather, our eyes set in the same parallel visual trance, yet mine felt totally callous. I felt out of place, out of line; I wanted to cry with her.

We had been sitting there for about three hours when my mother's sister finally arrived to pay her respects to my father's family. Not able to get a babysitter, she had to bring her two children, Nico and Peri. Alexa was running around chasing and trying to control Nico in vain as I sat and colored with Peri. For some reason laying there on the floor of the funeral home lobby with my five year old cousin was comforting. I figured she didn't really understand what was going on, so told her that we had to be quiet because people were "sleeping" there.

She took a break from her coloring and looked up at me, "Cara, are you sad about your Pop Pop?" she questioned.

I was shocked. "Yes, but I am okay," I replied, trying not to make her feel uncomfortable about the whole situation. She looked up at me with the same soft,

considerate eyes, red, flushed, round cheeks and out of control hair that Alexa had had at that age.

"You know, Cara, you don't have to be sad. He is in heaven waiting for you and one day you're going to go to Heaven, too. He will be there, and you will be together again!" I felt the tears roll down my cheek, and I promptly whipped them away. Looking at Peri I felt like I was looking at a young Alexa all over again, not because of the physical similarities, but because Peri held me in the same considerate and caring gaze that Alexa had so many times before, and I felt at home again.

When our Aunt Susie got married she moved to a large farm in Pennsylvania. We went there to visit and played with her horses, swam and fished in the two small ponds on the farm, explored the woods, and the best part was that in Pennsylvania, we had thirty-seven second cousins to do it with. One summer, our parents and Susie decided that Alexa and I could go visit her for a week. I was in middle school, Alexa was in first or second grade, and we both had never been away from home or our parents for more than a night. Our parents explained that a week was a long time and wanted to make sure that we'd both be okay with it. We weren't nervous. How much free time could we have with all the things to do and kids to play with?

Two nights into our one week visit I woke up one morning and decided I had had enough; I wanted to go home. I started to cry quietly; I was embarrassed and didn't want my aunt or cousins to know I was homesick. Alexa heard me crying and rolled over in the bed we were sharing. She put her arm around me and asked what was wrong. I told her I wanted to go home. We lay in the double bed, looking out the window at the beautiful expansive farm; Alexa held me and rubbed my hair back out of my face, just like our mom always did. Somehow I

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Last year I came home for one night, just to see my family and get away from school for a little while. I went to five o'clock mass with them, and I was just as excited to hear my sister cantor for the mass as my parents were. My sister's singing was no new thing in our house; she had been in multiple plays and shows and had sung at mass before. I sat between my parents, looked around at the familiar faces in the congregation and enjoyed Alexa's singing. I was kneeling after communion, saying a prayer and just reflecting on things in general, when the piano played a few familiar keys, and I immediately recognized the song as "Ave Maria." It was a beautiful song; it was perfect for that moment and I was pleased to hear it. As my sister began to sing the words, chills came over me as I watched her from a mere five feet away. She had come a long way, no longer standing on our fireplace mantel singing "A Whole New World" from *Aladdin* in her pajamas; she was a beautiful woman, poised and elegant with this amazing voice flowing out of her tiny body. The church candle light glowed softly around her face, and soon tears started to fill my eyes. Embarrassed, I did everything I could to hold those few tears back. With each note she hit perfectly, however, it became harder and harder to hold them in. Usually after my sister sings, a few

people come up to her at the end of mass and tell her how well she did, but that night more than one person came up to her in tears, telling her how her voice had moved them. It was the first time I realized that she had grown up. I caught her glance between the people complementing her, and we both knew that it was the beginning of our adult friendship. I have told her since how great it is to know that I have her, "protector of mankind," as my sister.

The Surcharge-Spangled Banner
By John O'Neill
(see related graphic on page 50)

"Whose broad stripes and bright stars, thro' the perilous fight," is one of the most illustrious lines of the "Star-Spangled Banner," our national anthem. In 1814, this musical masterpiece was composed to exemplify the ideals of our country, and as a tribute to the greatest icon of our culture, the American flag. Today, in 2007, there are many questions which linger in society in regards to our flag. What have these stars become, and what are their significance? Where is the American model of self-sufficiency; and where are the heroic leaders of today; those who modeled themselves after the brave men who fought for our independence from Britain? Hugh Hefner, Steve Jobs, and Bill Gates have become the new "heroes" of America, and the idea of self-sufficiency has transformed into which corporation can deliver the lowest prices. Today, the stars of our flag, which once held such a high moral value, have developed into the very logos and symbols which we witness everyday, advertised everywhere. Rather than courage and bravery, they represent the corporations which structure the economic fiber of the United States of America.

If our model flag was intended to replace the traditional version, would many other aspects of life in America be greatly affected? Is the division of the fifty American states, which the original stars represent, truly necessary? Many would argue that it is, based on tradition, but in actuality, what would be different in our country if this change was made? Instead of defining location based on states, would one describe where they live based on the closest city, or the established corporation nearest to them? Is this a practice we already use today, despite the state border lines? This is a completely farfetched theory,

but it is interesting to comprehend what society would be like if the state borders were disbanded.

The replica that we have been given is a mockery of the American flag, but it does hold some *truth to be self-evident.* What makes up our United States today is not the individuality of states; but the news about which corporations are expanding or merging, and the daily ebbs and flows of the stock market. When was the last time a headline in the news read, "Iowa Has Succeeded from the United States of America," or "Maryland Has Declared War on New Jersey?"

Within our United States, many citizens might be able to easily interpret this faux American flag because it is a logical economic representation of our present day life when you consider economic affairs. In my waking hours today, I have watched television, worn athletic shoes, explored the Internet on my computer, and used my cellular phone; all while being in locations that utilized electricity. These actions would encompass almost one third of the displayed icons, in only one morning! The cruel reality of this flag is that many American citizens could easily identify and rattle off the names of these economic symbols without difficulty, but could we say the same about recalling the names of all fifty states?

Corporations of all types clearly dominate every form of media found in America. An advertising opportunity on the American flag would have one of the greatest price tags in history, and admittedly; the profit would be useful in helping to pay for our outstanding deficit. This flag model poses intriguing questions about the moral and economic framework of America, and how we are living our daily lives. As the times have changed from wilderness and wildlife, to the World Wide Web and wireless, so have our ideals. As a result, what the inhabitants of our great country appreciate and understand today is very different from those principles

almost two-hundred years ago. Our country as a whole holds a great deal of respect for our almighty flag, but as time progresses, will our country ever resort to a scheme such as this; will tradition become overtaken by corporate conglomeration?

Confessions of a Closet Cigarette Addict
Caitlin Rohan

For some people a comforting smell may mean Christmas Cookies, scented candles, baby powder, their boyfriend's cologne or their mother's shampoo. I treasure all of these revered, clichéd scents, but there is another odor I adore. This smell is usually classified as offensive by most, or borderline unbearable and even disgusting to others. This scent permeates my childhood memories of a favorite, adored relative, haunts my hallowed Long Island teenage nights, and often greets me in the present tense at bars in Baltimore, where it is not banned. This smell is cigarette smoke.

I myself am not a "smoker." True, I did succumb to the appearance-generated habit of smoking in my rebellious teenage years, puffing cigarettes off-and-on for a few months or so, and sometimes even now I like to smoke a cigarette, although I am perfectly aware that it causes heart disease, lung cancer, wrinkled skin; it can kill me, and, yes, it will ruin my "runner's lungs," oh, and augment my exercise-induced asthma. My perverse relationship with the smell of smoke can be fathomed in the earliest and, therefore, most resounding memories of my childhood mind. On days when my mother would need a break from the terrible task of dealing with my rowdy, two-year-old self, she would enlist her mother, affectionately known to me as "Nanny," to pick me up at the local preschool. Both my Nanny and Poppy (my grandfather) had smoked since they were teenagers, starting the habit because, "It was cool. You were a 'ninny' if you didn't smoke. Smoking is bad though, it's hard to stop and you shouldn't listen to anyone who tells you to smoke," Nanny related to me when I was eight. Although Nanny tried not to smoke near me, her entire environment smelled like it. When she picked me up from "Pixie

Preschool," I was greeted with the savory surprise of her nicotine-flavored hair and the beautiful tobacco scent that ricocheted off the glamorous gold-leather interior of her tank-like 1982 Mercury Grand Marquis.

I spent countless hours of my early childhood with Nanny, forming a bond with a woman who would sing songs with me, tap dance, bake me chocolate cakes, and wear a hat identical to mine to the supermarket. All these early days were punctuated with the subtle, yet comforting smell of hot tobacco, the familiar comfort I knew I could reach in the presence of my grandparents. The hard, bold scent of tobacco lay in the groves of their shag carpets, mixed in with the Dial soap and baby powder that desperately tried to cover up a scent that was omnipresent, a smell I didn't even think was disgusting.

The strange, comforting, hot-lit, fire and soot, dirty and dashing smell of tobacco deserted me for a while after my preschool and elementary school years. After Poppy died from a heart attack when I was eight, Nanny stopped smoking and her Alzheimer's worsened, sending her to the grave isolation and harsh disinfecting, illness and suffocating heated smells that corrode a nursing home. At the time of Nanny's sickest and eventual death I had reconciled with the smell of cigarettes. I was fourteen; a gangly high-school freshman, who had just finished an awkward phase and emerged decent-looking enough to garner whistles, shouts and other interests from some good-looking older males in the high school. Cigarette smoke radiated from the parties I could only imagine being at; it caressed the curls of the slacker-surfer boys I was in dire love with, it mixed with the school-lawn, and canvassed the car interiors of the boys' cars that I snuck into without my parents' permission. The heavy, hot smell of cigarettes became the ultimate smell of badass, and the embodiment of all things I longed to be- carefree, slacking-off, endlessly loved by one of those smoking boys

in the same consuming way that I obsessed over them.

It was during this phase of ultimate Long Island high-school peer pressure that I briefly succumbed to the smoking fad as part of my new rebellious image (obviously trying to negate my middle-school personality, brace-spackled, freakishly book-wormed and accessorized with a scoliosis-inducing load of textbooks at all times). For a time I liked the minty, jaded smell of menthols, the harsh way the inhalation of what was rumored to be "glass" burned my throat and smarted my eyes. The pain and the smoke-smelling hair was part of the image I endured to appear more bad-ass and rebellious. For a brief period I also dabbled in Marlboro Lights, liking the smooth, easy, yet still capricious MARLBORO scent of them, or maybe just the golden glow of the Marlboro Lights box and the two classy silver rings that incased the fire and filth smelling cigarettes.

And so, I smoked, and knew smokers. Smoke was the constant, heavy backdrop that fumigated my Long Island teenage reveries. Cops would chase us out of Long Beach after dark, boys throwing down the odorous firecrackers as we ran off the lifeguard's stands and into the unforgiving streetlights, still surrounded by the tattoo of cigarette-reek, like some sort of a wild sin, which we tried profusely to hide but followed us around, even after we'd physically ridded ourselves of what caused the strong scent. At house parties, on summer-damp decks and covert kegs at Mill Pond and Twin Lakes, the inevitable overture of grassy-summer and cigarette fumes would make my head ache a little faster and fizzier than booze or the glamour of these teenage events. I would drink in the smell of my surroundings, the wet-dog stink of mass alcohol and the layers of hot-fuelled reeking cigarettes would engulf my clothes after a night of sneaking into bars. Even though by junior and senior year of high school I rarely, if ever, appropriated a cigarette, I was still

incessantly surrounded by its foggy, mind-numbing, yet nicely blanketing stench.

Today, in college, only one of my close friends still smokes. When we are out at bars, one of my girl friends is constantly batting him away, screeching in disgust: "EEEEWW! Get that thing away from me! I'm going to smell like smoke, why can't you quit?" Our smoker-friend will often leave his seat next to the perturbed person, and sit down next to me, smoking away while I second-handily inhale the toxic yet annoyingly comforting smells of his burning cigarette. I've come to realize that smoking isn't good; at all; it is in fact, as Nanny once stated, a serious addiction and deadly. I've read the ads, I've never owned my own pack, never chained smoked, never bought my own cancer-sticks at the local Royal Farms. I'm sort of a bystander of the cigarette addicts, a half-dazed lackey myself, somehow savoring a scent that is ruled out as malignant and offensive in our society. I'm an addict in my own way, still groping onto the disgusting yet intriguing smell of cigarettes when they waft through my life. I can't help but smile, a cacophony of memories encased in the warm, half-dead, half-alive, burning, dangerous scent of cigarettes as my friend nonchalantly smokes next to me, appreciatively unaware of why I never insist that he move when he's smoking.

The Curse of the Yellow Jersey
Lizzie McQuillan

I can still hear the whistle blowing three times, announcing the team's victory. I still cringe at the sound of the grass ripping underneath the souls of my sneakers. Even when I try to block these memories, they still find a way back to me during my most vulnerable moments. In my many attempts on the offensive and defensive side of such a popular physical education activity, I could never capture the flag.

Even ten years and hundreds of miles away from the sight of the dreaded game, I could feel the same pressure hovering over my path: the need to run faster, to tag my opponents before it was too late. The angry voices of my teammates pounded in my head as I left my home in the small New England suburb of Medfield, Massachusetts, for Loyola College, in Baltimore, Maryland, a city I knew nothing about. While driving away from the community dominated by youth soccer and high school football games, I stretched the passenger seat backwards and stared out the window.

Although interested in the new life that lay ahead of me, I had read the pile of pamphlets that college had sent me in the past few months, and all I could think about was my ten-year-old body sprinting across the recreational field, unable to protect the pride of my team. This sour memory originated early in my elementary years, as gym class became more ruthless and competitive. Consisting of few rules, Capture the Flag requires two teams to battle for each others' flag. The prize, which is not always an actual flag, but always representing one, is positioned at the back of the team's boundary. Until the opponents are in the free zone, they are vulnerable to the defenders. If tagged, they must walk straight to "jail."

Ever since the game took the place of leisurely

kindergarten activities, I said good-bye to the recreation that I had come to love. No more obstacle courses constructed of blue mats. No more jump-roping. No more oversized parachute. I missed the smell of the old gymnasium and the dirt that traveled from the worn out equipment and onto my hair and clothing. (I never minded the smell, although I pretended to agree with my friend's disgust.) Since these activities were not competitive, I was free to wander as I wished, feeling welcome within the germs of the closed-in area.

The absence of these activities in upper elementary school left me feeling lost within a crowd of athletes. I never learned to throw a ball fast, and I couldn't compete with the other kids in the class. Unlike my classmates, who were eager to accept the challenge of the new curriculum, I dreaded going to school on Tuesdays and Fridays, knowing I would have to face the direction of my teacher, Mr. Pope, who wore the same blue and white windbreaker everyday. His career centered upon refining our skills for various sports that the school had funded equipment for (which only included basketball, stick hockey, and capture the flag.) I pretended to share his excitement, as well as my peers' enthusiasm, holding my fear for the game inside. But I couldn't hide my humiliation on the field. Instead, it multiplied, making me feel even more stiff and uncoordinated than I actually was.

"You're on defense," Mr. Pope called as he pointed in my direction. Instead of separating his index finger from the rest of his palm he stiffened his hand into a plank, creating a smooth surface from the tip of his nail to his wrist. The signal resembled a misguided salute. Maybe the gesture made him feel in control—thinking that one finger would not be enough to capture our attention. Freshly cut curly hair sprung out from under the frame of his glasses. His eyes were hardly visible through the dark lenses that tinted within the light of the room. He

continued to blow his whistle, each time the pitch getting higher as he called the class in from warm ups.

Class always dragged on slowly as I watched my friends tag each other, running from the opposite ends of the field to close in on the flag. Dirt sprang from the dry glass as I darted around the field, trying to tag the opponents, hoping that if I put more effort into the position, the process would suddenly become more fun. The old yellow jersey sagged at my waist, worn out from elementary students from the past ten years. With each opponent approaching the goal, I tried to hover over them and create a wall between their destinations. I was still blissfully unaware that they would pass me, make it to their safe zone, while watching my face redden as I called for back-up.

With half of the class still ahead, Mr. Pope lingered over to my side of the field. He called my name from a few feet away and I scurried to meet him in the middle.

"No offense Lizzie," he said, folding his arms at his chest, "but you're not helping your team."

He walked away afterward. His matter-a-fact statement lingered through the air, not needing a response. My ten year old body shrunk, knowing that once again I had failed.

You're not helping the team.

The words still haunt me ten years later. I still remember tugging on the jersey, trying to look occupied with something else, hoping to forget about the tears welling up in my eyes and the tightness in my throat. If I pulled the fabric hard enough around my skin maybe the humiliation with free itself from my fingers.

Years have passed since my last Capture the Flag experience. I tried to avoid the game at all costs after fulfilling the wellness class requirements. Until then I pleaded with my mother to write me notes about my inability to participate in gym class, or I sat on the

sidelines talking to my friends as the tournaments pressed on. My legs were unable to carry me fast enough to catch others, and my heart lacked the motivation to guard the prized possession. I told myself that the game didn't matter to me, but, deep inside, a part of it did. Mr. Pope convinced me that I had to care. In seeing the fulfillment in my classmates every time they seized the flag, I secretly hoped that someday I would feel that same success.

After finishing my P.E. requirements, I filled the remaining class periods with art and writing courses, helping me to learn and grow in ways that I felt comfortable and had control over. After years of training my subconscious to judge my accomplishments according to Capture the Flag, I was relieved to find satisfaction in a different field. Although I never forgot about the game, and Mr. Pope's brutal honestly, I could accept my weakness while not surrounded by the activity.

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After reaching the parking lot outside of my dormitory, I realized that I had yet to escape the nervous anxiety that Capture the Flag had brought out in me. The heat steamed off the pavement as my family and I pulled the van onto campus. A sea of brightly colored shorts with matching collars welcomed me into the college, as the entire freshman class unloaded their trunks. Although the college's population reminded me of what I had left behind in suburbs of Boston, the unfamiliarity still brought tension to my neck and shoulders. I recognized the clenching in my stomach; a feeling that often rose in response to the swooshing of Mr. Pope's windbreaker, as his sleeves brushed up against each other while he directed the class.

Each student seemed poised, even though I knew they all felt as nervous as I did. I latched onto a few girls at the opening orientation, who, in turn, latched on to me.

"What do you like to do?" I asked one of them as we

washed our hands in the bathroom. I think her name was Jennifer, although it's hard to be sure because she didn't say much. Jennifer looked into the mirror, fixing her eye makeup and smoothing a strand of hair behind one ear.

"What?" she asked, uninterested in my wonderment. I repeated my question, hiding my annoyance with a phony smile.

"What are you interested in?"

"I don't know," she replied, studying a corner of her eyelid. "I don't really do a lot. Shopping, I guess."

She turned away from the mirror, flinging her hair over one shoulder and quickly walking back to meet the crowd. Instead of keeping up with the quick rhythm that her flip flops made against the tiled floor, I lagged behind. My childhood memories followed me through the dim hallways as I wandered back to the lecture. Although we were all condensed into the waiting area outside of McManus Theatre, the space seemed was larger than any field had I played on. I felt more alone in that crowd than I did in fourth grade, only accompanied by two other jail guards.

Crowds of girls compared their designer purses and discussed their in-authenticity. I took a seat next to the group, clenching the wristlet my mother gave me for my birthday. They would never be impressed by the accessory, and I wasn't sure if their approval would have flattered me anyway. Although forced onto the same team, I felt their motives were different from my own. I didn't know what I was fighting for yet, or what to make of my short time in Baltimore, but I knew that I did not want to follow the questionable guidance of the majority. Even if we were wearing the same color jersey.

I slowly started to adapt to the Loyola community, with the help of a busy schedule and strengthening friendships. Maryland still felt foreign to me, away from the cold climate and colorful foliage I left behind in New

England. I missed the curving roads and antique bridges I had taken for granted at home. Slowly, though, the Baltimore area started to grow on me. Using my limited time, I started to explore the city past the campus's boundaries. I could still see the beauty within the city's downfall of poverty and crime. Baltimore may stick out to the rest of the world, but the residents rarely talk of the problems. Baltimoreans feel no need to impress anyone. In recognizing the strengths of a city that has been ridiculed in multiple studies, I sought reassurance in its existence. While discovering its false stereotypes, I finally realized the fruitlessness of my own struggle.

The study lounge was quiet on Monday afternoon. I walked through the glass door, letting its frame bounce behind me. After selecting a desk, I spread my books on its surface. The door opened again, and I looked up to find a man wheeling a soda cart behind him. His soiled clothes could have gone days without washing, a white tee shirt stretching with his hanging gut, and paint-stained shorts reaching below his knees.

"Where are all of your friends?" He joked, repositioning his baseball cap over his forehead, allowing some of his greasy hair to emerge from the rim. I shrugged, unsure of what to say.

The banging of the soda bottles against the machine's refrigerator let me lose focus on *Jane Eyre*, and instead I listened to the man talk about his career working for the refreshment companies.

"Don't ever get a job like this," he said, chuckling at his own remark. Although he talked at length about his seventeen hour shifts and endless heavy lifting, he never lost his smile or let out a yawn. His remarks did not plead for sympathy.

Before he left, he sat a cold Diet Pepsi on the side of my desk.

You'll need this," he said, smiling before walking

away. I hate Diet Pepsi and the syrupy aftertaste on my tongue.

But I drank the bottle anyway, its carbonation stinging my tongue. I thought of Mr. Pope, and how he will never know that his words still follow me. *You aren't helping your team.* I can hear his flat tone a decade later. As I rolled the bottle cap in between my fingers, the yellow coloring rubbed onto my palms. I smiled, thinking of the three years ahead of me in Baltimore, and realizing that I no longer had to confine myself to rules of a game that I had never wanted to play.

The Ocean is for Dad
Daniel Barry

Swimming in pea soup is unpleasant, like sailing into a thick fog. Moving swiftly through the rolling waters of the Block Island Sound, *Whisper* settled in on a sou'easterly course towards Block Island. The wind coldly scratched at my face, its fingernails clawing at my skin, leaving it raw and hurting. The sound of the rushing water was accompanied by the sound of Sports Radio, a kind of "Yankees at the beach" cacophony of sound.

"You alright, Dan?" Dad asked, his eyes shining through darkness.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm fine." My hesitant voice made my statement sound like a question.

"I'm going to lay down. Are you ready for your watch?"

"Yep. Go ahead. I'll wake you up if I need you."

Dad crawled into his sleeping bag and shut his eyes. Those tired eyes that had seen more ocean miles than I could dream of. The eyes that watched me grow into the man I am and the sailor I have become.

I looked up into the starry sky beyond the fog, an experience unrivaled by any stargazing on land. Something about the ocean makes stars multiply, like a picture taken by the Hubble Space Telescope deep in the abyss of space. Again I changed my train of thought, focusing now on the wake behind me. Lights flashed in the water behind the boat. Night sailing always signifies the times when I get to see the bioluminescent plankton. The little oceanic fireflies light up like light bulbs in a power surge, and then fade to nothing as they return to the darkness of the ocean. Block Island is just a green blotch on the edge of the radar display, like an autumn leaf on blacktop. At least another six hours would pass before we

entered the shallow waters of the Great Salt Pond, our resting place for this part of our passage eastward towards the Elizabethan Islands.

Slated to be on watch until 4 a.m., I wondered how I would pass the time. The Yankee game ended what seemed like eons ago, and angry fans called Sports Radio 660 to pass along their "expert" advice. What makes them think they could manage a baseball team? The Yankees have a pretty active eye open, and if you were better than Joe Torre, you would probably be the manager already. *I can't listen to this anymore.* The voice in my head boomed and echoed. My head felt like a cavern with a thousand people shouting opinions at me, trying to be louder than the person before them. My surroundings came in screaming detail: The red interior light glowing through the companionway hatch meant to nurture your night vision seemed brighter than the morning sun. The waves crashed like a *Blues Brothers* car pileup and the wind hissed through the rigging like the thousands of snakes in *Indiana Jones and the Lost Ark.*

The natural order of sounds had come once again, quiet filling my mind where such chaos had just taken place. The surroundings were so repetitive, the noises all so similar. Looking around, I took an inventory of what was normal. The wood on the cockpit benches shined with the season's freshest coat of teak oil and varnish, Dad's specialty. The canvas dodger covered the front of the cockpit, and beyond that, down the companionway, my mother slept a forced sleep in the saloon. I backed my mind up the companionway steps into the cockpit. Dad slept on the low side bench. The tag on his sleeping bag said it was rated for use in temperatures to -20 degrees Celsius. Envying his warmth, I unzipped my offshore jacket and zipped both under-layers of fleece all the way up my neck, re-zipping my jacket. Much better. I began to drift again, but not toward the chaotic craziness that

drowned out reasonable thought. Back-traveling through my mind, meaningful experiences charged to the front of my memory. Bits and pieces of memories flashed like colors through a prism.

. . .

"Hang on guys!"

Flying Cloud charged up what seemed to be an immeasurable wave to my ten year old eyes. The bow broke through the crest of the wave, and with the hangman's command, the trap door opened and we all fell crashing back to the sea. Again and again the boat rose and fell with the rhythm of the large waves in the Fire Island Inlet. My brother and I took turns retching over the side, while my dad tried to navigate safely through the angry waters. A friend of my father's once said, "Men confuse discomfort with adventure." We were all very confused, and the ocean's wrath drove us back to the safety of our home port. My dad made the decision to give up the insanity of taking his young sons on their first open ocean passage.

. . .

The phone in the kitchen rang while my mom prepared dinner for my sister and me. Her sweet voice answered.

"Hello. Hello Don, where are you boys? Really? It's that bad? It's worse further north? Jacksonville, okay."

She walked over to the hallway where a map of the Eastern Seaboard hung, red marks and lines showed *Second Call's* path from Tortola, which was now taking a precariously strange turn towards Florida. The phone call had to be brief since satellite phone calls from yachts offshore are very expensive. Mom explained Dad's situation, saying that they were in a squall and they were having some mechanical problems. Dad could fix it; Dad could fix anything.

A week later, Dad walked in the front door, his face grizzly with a mixture of grey and brown. He entertained us with harrowing stories of jury rigged parts and trips to the top of the 75 foot mast in 18 foot waves. Nothing would stop him from coming home to us, not even the forces of nature itself. Even though Dad didn't wear a skin-tight blue suit and a red cape, he was as much a hero to me as any comic book good guy.

. . .

"Beep-beep, beep-beep, beep-beep." Ten minutes until four, and dad's watch sounded out of the homey comfort of his sleeping bag. He rustled awake in the dark and sat bolt upright. He glanced around, looked at his watch, and met my eyes with a stare. Here he comes to save me again: to save me from the cusp of sleep.

He stood up and came around the helm, put his hands on my shoulders and said in a proud voice, "Good job, Dan-o." No other three words could have made me as happy. As I stood there with my fathers' hands on my shoulders, I realized that I would rather be nowhere else but in the middle of the ocean with my father. It was my turn to sleep, and as I zipped up the sleeping bag, I looked at my hero, and closed my eyes.