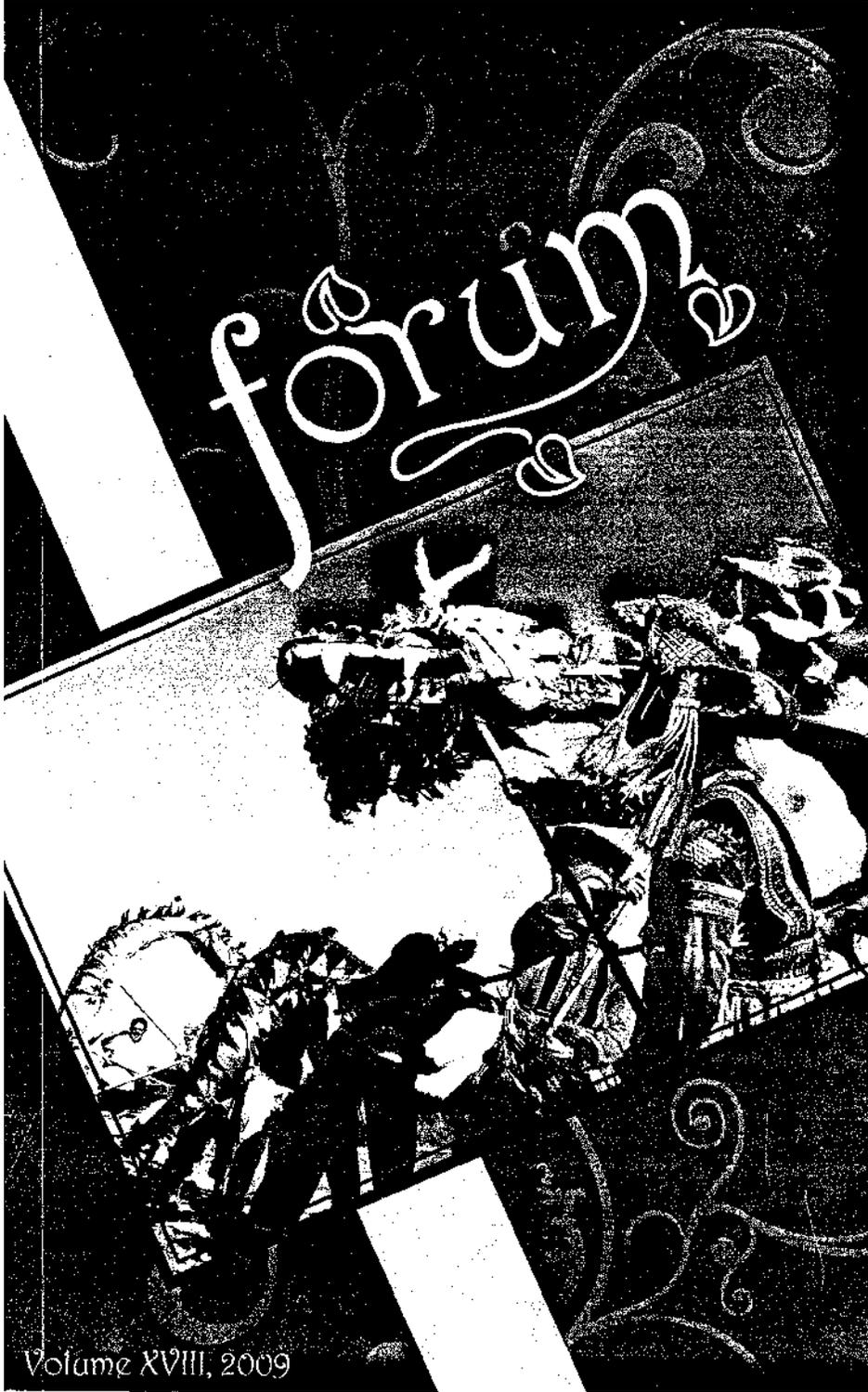


# forum

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# Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

In order to grow, we need to reflect on our experiences. While we must strive to live in the present, we can never leave our pasts. In this collection of non-fiction essays by Loyola undergraduate students, there is a common thread that ties each piece together: a desire to make sense of an event, an idea, a relationship, our lives.

Writing allows us to share and remember. These records unite our campus by their creative connections and bare honesty. This publication is testament to the growth of Loyola students and the diverse challenges and experiences they have faced. In sharing their stories, these writers are allowing others to join them.

Thank you to the *Forum* staff for their dedication. A fervent love and passion for writing, reading, and editing pulled these diverse pieces into this anthology. I would especially like to thank Dan Corrigan for his brilliance and patience.

Sincerely,  
Samantha Harvey  
Editor-in-Chief

*Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.*  
-William Wordsworth

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# Flash

by Remi Formal

She led me up the staircase and gestured for me to hold her hand. I complied. Our footsteps were in complete synchronization. Flick. The lights illuminated every step; each had its own creek as the worn wood seemed to submit to our weight. *Here, this...this is your new room.* My eyes darted around the blank, unfurnished walls. A hint of daylight filtered through the lattice and onto the dusty floor. The lack of color was paralyzing. I didn't know what she expected. Should I say anything? Did she *want* me to say anything? I turned to her in perplexity. Out of my mouth came an abrupt *thank you* as I slipped into the white room and closed the door in front of her. My thoughts became tangled and everything I wished to articulate sunk back into my throat. I choked on my words. Click. The door locked. I lodged my hands into my pockets, made my way to a corner, and buried my legs into my chest. Flash.

There's something about memory that's so astounding. Sometimes, we walk into a room and can't even recall why we went there. Or we learn a name and immediately forget it moments later. Other times, we remember the precise sequences of an event: we remember our emotions, we remember where we were, who we were with, and miniscule details which are impossible to retain on a day-to-day basis. These precise memories are known as Flashbulb Memories. When we associate our emotions with these details, it allows us to travel back in time and recall our every sensation (Tarvis 366). Flash.

My mother sat on her unmade bed; I curled up next to her. *Laura*, she ran her fingers through my hair, *I'm just scared. You won't love me when you're older.* I looked up at her. *Mommy, you know that's not true.* She turned me over, and looked into my eyes. *You say that now, but it's not gonna happen that way.* I wrapped my arms around her, entwined her fingers with mine, and I said, *No matter what.* She sighed as she released herself from my grasp, unlocked our hands, and walked outside. Flick. She lit a cigarette and exhaled anxiety in a breath of thick smoke. Now engulfing my body, her off-white sheets smelled of Chanel and a fresh pack of Marlboro Reds.

Our memories go through a complex filtering process. First, our

sensory registers are at work. They see, smell, touch, taste, hear, and determine if what we sense is important. They breathe in the perfume; recall the spray on her wrists and on her neck. Visual information is retained for about one half of a second, auditory two seconds. It remembers her as she sat outside, bathing in the daylight. Information is lost from these registers unless we rehearse it. Like if she creates a daily routine of telling you how you won't love her in the future. Our senses then transmit what is seemingly significant to our short term memory, which lasts up to thirty seconds. She leaves you in the white room when you expect her to say something more, something that makes sense. This information is then transferred to long term memory, which can retain information from minutes to decades (Tarvis 366-367). Even a slight sound, such as a knock on a door, can be incorporated in a flashbulb memory, and thus can be recalled for decades. Flash.

Thud. *Laura, are you there? Laura?* I pried open my eyes. My body felt numb, and even if I wished to respond, I couldn't. *Laura, it's dinner time. Come down the stairs. Laura? Laura, wake up.* This time, there was a pound. Click. The door unlocked and revealed my mother's shadow shed delicately on the floor. *Just come down.* She retreated back down the staircase. I followed two steps behind her. *Laura, listen. We wanted to tell you...* I sat on a chair draped with white, thick paper and cellophane. I adjusted my posture, making sure my back was in an upright position. My mother and father sat across from me. My eyes averted to the bare floor.

*Listen, we didn't tell you. It was a mistake. Isn't it nice here? Where the fuck are we? How am I supposed to know if it's NICE here? My father looked at me, Know how many times I've moved in my life? Eighteen. EIGHTEEN. Listen, you're lucky, alright. When I moved to the United States, it was to avoid the fucking army. Alright? What's the difference if we told you we were moving?* I turned around and walked back up the steps. Flash.

It only took me about ten minutes to walk to JJ's house. I went around the back; he always left the back door unlocked for me. I carefully closed the screen door, sauntered through the kitchen and into the garage. His concentration was absorbed in the beat he played on the drum set. Once he saw that he had an audience, he put two cigarettes in his mouth, struck a match on the table and lit both of them. He handed me one. *Twenty? Who do you think I am? Five. C'mon. You owe me.* I swatted away a gnat and tried to bargain with him. You know *I'll hit you back.* He submitted, reached into his pocket. *Dude, this is good shit, though.* He flicked the dime bag a bit. *I'll smoke you out and shit. This one's on the house, how's that? Just 'cause you're my girl.* I nodded slowly, obeyed. JJ led me to his room. After we climbed the stairs, I knocked

on his father's door. *Hey, dad.* Mark threw some clothes on, swung the door opened, and greeted me. *Laura, long time no see.*

JJ opened the room to his door. *What are you doing?* Instead of climbing into bed with me, he reached for a small, imprinted silver box on the top of his desk and popped open an Rx. *Yo, gotta try this shit. I just got it as a prescription. Painkillers are amazzzzzzzzzing.* I removed a few shirts from the bed and laid myself on the bottom bunk. The green walls were covered with posters and pictures of bands and the black light emphasized the multi-colored text on each one. The colors were garish and cacophonous, yet somehow comforting. He slowly twisted the pill, allowing the tiny beads inside to sprawl over his desk. Then, he unfolded his wallet and removed his student ID. *Dude, I knew this would be useful one day.* JJ's pupils seemed to expand and contract instantly. A blue vein in his neck protruded from beneath the layers of his light skin.

*Seriously, dude, it's like, euphoric. Then you smoke some reefer, and it's just like the best escape. This world that we live in...it sucks. Now I'm up to like, three painkillers a day. Can't be better.* I tuned him out. *Alright, ya ready?* He reached for my hand and grasped it tightly as he courted me outside. *I was gonna save this for later, but ya know, why not? Click.* The lighter illuminated his face and he appeared older. JJ's black rimmed glasses seemed thicker, his eyes looked more experienced. *You can't see the fucking stars in Jersey anymore. All this pollution - that's all you can see.* He rubbed his glasses with his shirt as if it allowed him to see the sky more clearly.

I tilted my chin up. The clouds bolded against the midnight. Or was it just because smoke draped around us and I couldn't tell the difference at this point? A plane flew by and unthreaded some stitching in the sky. Time felt as if it deliberately put itself on a hiatus. In that one moment I exhaled and *I've done the thing I'm most afraid of. What happens now?* It just seemed so desolate, as if we were the only two people in the entire world. I turned to him, *Dude, sometimes, I wish I was an addict. Maybe that would clear a few things up for me.* The indolent smile on his face never seemed to fade, and he nodded in agreement.

As we passed the joint back and forth, I found my focus locked on his eyes. *Laura, I fucking love doing this. Just. Being here...with you.* He placed his fingers around my wrist as if he wanted to check my pulse. Right then, it didn't matter if I was alive or dead. His dog Sammy slowly found his way between the wooden door and the screen, inched through to get outside, and nuzzled up next to my bare legs. I sunk into the chair, stroking Sammy's neck and ears. My eyes moved off of JJ's face, and searched around his back yard. I tried to concentrate on the

broad trees, the green fencing...tried to remember this one moment, and, *Jay, it's so humid. Can we go back to our room...soon?* A smile played upon his lips. *Our room?*

I didn't even notice he left until I heard the screen door close, and saw him reappearing from the kitchen. JJ placed two beers on the table. All of a sudden I looked around and felt unfamiliarity creeping up on me. Where...? I took a minute to look around, and realized exactly where I was. *You've been here before. In fact, you've been here every day. Don't worry.* Oh, where'd the beer come from? *Thanks.* I couldn't tell if I actually thanked him out loud, or just thought about saying it. I probably did. Say thanks, I mean. I guess.

*Shit. It's so humid outside.* I wrapped one hand around the cold can, pulled the tab up...Fizz. It reminded me I wasn't really too fond of beer. I guess I'll...just take some sips. It would be rude if I didn't, right? Plus, I already opened it. If I were in Europe right now I'd be having a beer with my dinner. After he finished the joint, he took another out of his pack of cigarettes. In that instant, everything was put on a hiatus. I was only aware of my pulse.

He sifted some opium and with his fingertips, rolled it with the marijuana. Guess *my tolerance has gone up.* Fizz. He grinned, *Opium does crazy shit.* Every single word I said seemed to vanish the second it came out of my mouth. I suddenly felt my knees, legs, and arms become completely uncoordinated. Subtly, I removed my camera from my bag. Flash. JJ's face appeared for a brief few seconds on the screen, and then faded away. *Yo, I wish I could, ya know. Be a photographer or something. Just, travel and shit. See the world through a lens. Ya think I could make the world look any better with a camera?* I don't think he was paying attention anymore.

When you take a picture, the shutter of a camera opens and registers how much shadow or light falls on every single photograph element, or "pixel." The more light that's sensed on the pixel, the more photons it records. The photons are counted to determine the highlights on the screen of a digital camera. However, if you choose to enlarge an image, it begins to lose quality and each little picture element begins to show. You can choose to make it one small moment, so you can remember him for a long time. The pixels that are enlarged appear to be blurry squares that form together to create an image. You can focus on him, instead of thoughts that tend to ruminate about your mother and your family. This effect is called pixelization. The more pixels an image contains, the sharper it appears. And once the high starts to wear off you realize that he's the only thing that's stable in your life. For example, when using binoculars, the image may become

less clear when you try to view an object further away. That's why you keep him so close; you let him into your world so close. Our eyes act similarly to cameras when we try to stretch our field of vision: in a distance, we see colors yet everything becomes blurred (Curtin).

There are many aspects of a digital camera that are easy to control for a photographer. Aperture refers to the amount of light in the film. Setting the aperture for a too high or low of a number affects the amount of light in each picture. Dimmer lights require a larger aperture, and brighter a smaller setting. A small aperture also sharpens the objects in a photograph, creating a wide depth of field, meaning the objects in the photograph are all in focus. A larger aperture creates a shallow depth of field, in which one part of the photograph is in focus while the other parts become blurred. Turning on the flash typically creates a shallow depth of field: while the main subject is very clear, the foreground or background is hazy (Curtin). Flash.

Sitting underneath the off-white sheets, I heard the door slam and my mother return back upstairs. She approached her closet and pulled out a suitcase from the top shelf. As if she wanted to portray her frustration, she exaggerated every action. Her arms flung, her ironed shirts clumped on the bottom of the suitcase, and her huffing became louder. For some reason, I knew that she wasn't leaving for too long. It was temporary. She opened the door to her room and looked back at me. Although she tried to make it look like she glanced at something else, I saw her eyes quickly dart at me. I tried to return a glance before she left. Flash.

I accidentally changed the depth of field when I took JJ's picture. In the background, I saw the neon green walls of his bedroom that became out of focus, while every single aspect of his smile was completely intact. I turned the camera to show him the picture. Anyone else would have told me to delete it. He handed me the camera, turned it back on, and posed. I took a deep drag of a Marlboro Red, and turned on the flash. All I could think about for the rest of the night was the white room, sitting in a corner, and my mother's voice. Flash. My legs climbing the steps, the door locking behind me, and *I'm afraid you won't love me anymore* underneath the off-white sheets. Everything was colorless. It just didn't fit.

Curtin, Dennis P. *The Textbook of Digital Photography*. 2nd ed. CD-ROM. Massachusetts: Short Courses, 2007.

Tavris, Carol, and Carole Wade. *Psychology*. 9th ed. New Jersey: Pearson, 2006.

# Chasing Paper Airplanes

by Leigh Stambaugh

I can remember when February seemed warm. When it breathed a sense of comfort and excitement. When it meant presents on the 28<sup>th</sup> and vacations, mountaintops, and a white blanket. She could think back ten years and remember the neighbors she once knew and the familiar faces she couldn't even recognize anymore. I can remember how February meant snow igloos on her front lawn, the safe houses from the flaked pellets thrown between the boys and the girls, the children, the eight year olds.

Somewhere in time, she grew up and grew old, not by my standards, but by those around me. The temperature dropped a frigid 30 degrees, voices fell below Nick and Bobby's Adam's apples, and my legs refused to pass 27 inches. My body remained the same, my fingers swollen and my feet brittle, but my neurons moved quickly in response to the same questions from the same voices every day.

"College. I can't believe you are looking at colleges."

"Where are you going? Have you decided yet?"

"What'd you get on your SATs? I'm sure you did great."

I could hear the voices running over and over in my head: the voices from every mother, grandmother, and from Selma, the garden lady across the street. To this day, I hear them and, to this day, I can fill in the gaps, yet I feel like I still don't know the answers. Nothing, I thought, could ever be set in stone and never, I thought, would I find the answers.

The Princeton Review, The Prince, my favorite Blue and Grey Game T-Shirt, and my snow boots were all packed up and ready to go that February, the only February I remember being cold. In the middle of Frequent Flyers I waited along with my two best friends, Abby and Blaike, and Blaike's parents for the flight delay to subside. We lived off Nacho Doritos and chai tea lattes for the next two hours, read our books and listened to the occasional interruption from Blaike's father about "how selective admissions will be next year."

On the plane I jammed my iPod into the canals of my ears, praying for some sort of escape. I was on a vacation, I thought, not a verbal

college tour. As Dave plucked acoustic into my ears, I read lines from Wicked that made me believe in magic and that flying Continental was a step up from a broomstick.

I forgot everything out West. I flew down the mountains that Olympians grazed with their own two feet and didn't give a care in the world. I veered through trees like it was old hat because the snow felt softer than it did in New Jersey, but for some reason all I wanted to do was build an igloo on my front lawn and crawl inside with knit mittens covering my fingertips.

That week I traveled through hot tubs and trails and met people from all over the country. These boys from California smoked fruit flavored air through a pipe with their teachers and claimed to suffer from the same trials and tribulations that my friends and I went there to escape. The boys with cross necklaces and defined goggle tans had loved and lost, and for some reason, they didn't care. No matter how hard things seemed, whether their father beat them, their parents got divorced, or their mother died from cancer at 34, to them, everything was always "rad."

I learned from that mountain that living on the edge was nothing more than a figure of speech because as well as people try to hide, you can always point out their scars upon first impressions and there's nothing secret about tragedy. I learned that as she could read the people on the lifts, the ones in the hot tub, or the California boys, they could read me, too. They could see that I was tired and exhausted and made being in bed by ten o'clock my habit. They could tell I had too much on my plate, a potluck of peanut brittle and Eskimo Pies that I devoured to escape thinking about the Bisons of Bucknell and the church bells of the University of Richmond. George from Kentucky could tell by the way my feet hurt after several runs and would have to hear about it all 15 minutes up the mountain. I would shift my shoulders, send a message to my feet, and it would all disappear if only for a couple of seconds. And Kyle, the boy whose brother was a Mormon, could see my eyes flutter in and out of sleep through the fog and snow around the hot tub. The way he moved his body when he spoke didn't tell me how his senior class spelled out "POT" by cutting down trees in the mountain across from our lodge, but his body language told me that I was too tired to notice, too tired to pay attention.

When I returned, I was well rested and jet-lagged at the same time. I had brought home chocolate caramel fudge for my father, a mug for every cup of tea my mother drank during the day, and tourist t-shirts for my brothers. They all seemed grateful and eager to hear how 2,000 miles felt to a girl who never traveled farther than Pennsylvania, all of

them except for my mother. When I arrived I got the "Hey, how was it?" but my mother still sat in her dark room, sipped her tea, smoked her cigarette, and shut the door because whatever she was talking about, thinking about, she did not want her daughter to hear.

That night I didn't sleep and the next morning I was repeatedly reprimanded for not cleaning my room upon arrival. It still looked the same as it did before I left. Every morning before I ran to the bus stop, my mother cleaned my room and made my bed because, for some reason, my mother treated my four walls as her fourth child. That morning my mother screamed and yelled for help; for help around the house, with the dishes, with anything. She just screamed. My mother never yelled, never screamed unless I came home too late without a good story. We were best friends and she never yelled.

That afternoon I came home from school and saw my mother in her green chair with the glass doors closed, smoking her cigarette and drinking her tea. I never said anything to her because her eyes were red and barely slits from lack of sleep, and her shirt was water stained. I continued into the kitchen feeling the cold and dirt mesh between my toes. My mother's tile was never dirty. As I took a plate out from underneath the cabinet, I could feel my clumsy, swollen hands lose grip around the rim, and it fell, hitting the floor hard and causing my quiet, cold house to shutter. My mother stood in the doorway and again, she yelled. She yelled and she screamed until I said I was sorry. I didn't know what I was apologizing for, but I knew I was sorry. I was no longer tired and for once in my life, I felt awake, alert, and weak all at the same time. But something, right then, knocked my stomach hard, reminding my insides that I had to be strong, not for me, but for her because all she could do was look down at my toes, churning along the grout.

"I have been in a court room all weekend and you come home, and you come home, and you come home..."

I had no words for her. My stomach hushed and the house was silent once again, quiet and cold. She stood there, hands clamped tight across her face and I shuffled my feet enough to let my cheek graze her saturated shirt. And I was tired once again.

It took a whole week to figure out what was wrong with my mother, why the floor was dirty, and why February made me shiver. It took a whole week for me to realize that she could travel to Japan, Treblinka, to Cape May even, and she would still come back. I would still come home to a bed made with four pillows, clean dishes in my wood cabinets, to a woman in a dark room, smoking her cigarette and sipping her tea. I would still come home tired, worn out, and run down.

# A Simple Assignment

by Allison Iudica

The soft scratching of my pen on the paper breaks the silence of the classroom. Glancing up, I am amused by the intense expressions of concentration on my classmates' faces as they search their minds for inspiration. I want to tell them that the assignment doesn't require that much effort, but I doubt my opinion would be appreciated. So I turn my attention back to my own paper and, gripping the pen, I reread my short thesis statement written in glistening black ink: My mom has cancer.

## *The Introductory Paragraph*

My mom did not enjoy a moment's rest for the first fourteen years of my life, sixteen if you start counting from my sister's birth. She insisted on participating in bake sales, driving car-pools, cooking family dinner daily, and even having a part-time job as a teacher's aide at a nearby primary school. She ran five miles a day to keep in shape and had her "usual" spot on the local beach that she was very possessive of. Mom always helped us study our vocabulary words and knew how to put the perfect finishing touches on our last-minute science projects. Sunday mornings she would wake everyone up early and force us into church clothes so we could go to mass. She somehow managed to balance work with play and knew each individual's schedule by heart. The smoothness of our day depended on her coordination skills. She was the minute hand by which the rest of us synchronized our times to.

I remember that particular afternoon with acute clarity. My sister and brother were on either side of me, both silent and tense. The room smelled of latex gloves, antibacterial spray, and something else that evaded recognition. It was agonizingly quiet as I sat processing what my parents had just said: It was a brain tumor on the right parietal lobe and it was not benign. My brother asked what that meant and Mom said, "It means, sweetie, that I have a harmful growth on my brain that the doctors have to go in and take out next week." My mind immediately raced to the week ahead, pondering if I would miss school

and be at the hospital all day. I thought of my friends and wondered how they would react to my news. I knew with certainty my two best friends would cry.

My thoughts were interrupted when Dad asked if we had any more questions. They had explained the circumstances in such simple terms that even my eleven-year old brother understood the severity of the situation and what was to come. I glanced at my mom and saw her gently smiling at us. She looked as she had always looked to me—healthy, happy, and strong. My sister questioned what would happen after the surgery and I watched as Mom laughed, saying she would have to buy a wig once the chemo began working. My brother asked for a tissue and a hug, which signaled the instantaneous downpour of tears from everyone in the room. My siblings clung to my mom as she quietly reassured them that she was "going to be just fine." I hugged my dad and wondered when we would be going home.

#### *The First Body Paragraph*

Dad had warned us that this operation affected Mom more than the previous ones, but I was still unprepared for the sight of the woman who was supposedly my mother. She was sleeping when we arrived, slowly breathing in and out as the IV protruding from her bruised arm dripped loudly in the quiet room. My eyes traveled over the bandages that hid her scar and shaved head, and took in the exhausted appearance she wore even in sleep. The red spots and broken veins caused by the numerous shots and IVs over the past two years contrasted with the snow-white sheets covering her wasted body. She looked like a small, vulnerable child lost amongst a sea of covers. My siblings' startled faces mirrored my own thoughts, but we all respectfully refrained from commenting and patiently waited for her to wake up from her drug-induced slumber.

When Mom's eyes finally fluttered open, the confusion within them took a moment to clear. But then she smiled as best she could and silently cried as we each came forward to gently kiss her sunken cheek. Everyone took turns recounting the week's events and making small jokes in an effort to cheer her up. Her laughter was winded and sporadic, a faint echo of her once contagious chuckle. By the end of our visit Mom was exhausted from talking and barely had the strength to raise her trembling hand to wave goodbye. With promises to call and visit again next week, we exited her room and silently made our way back to the car to begin the three-hour drive home.

It took 28 days after that surgery before the doctors at Johns

Hopkins pronounced my mother strong enough to return home. By that time, we made the downstairs wheelchair-accessible and Dad had installed railings in the garage, bedroom, and bathroom to ensure Mom had all the support she needed to balance. Her day became a routine of therapy, sleep, and pill-taking. While Mom's speech improved, lack of physical *movement* resulted in her struggling to take more than ten steps at a time. She became confined to her wheelchair and my once independent mother now relied on the help of her children to use the bathroom, get in and out of bed, and push her around the house.

*The Second Body Paragraph*

Even though Mom struggled to physically smile as she *once* had, she always glowed with some inner joy that the rest of us could not hope to understand. When questioned, she replied that she'd found strength in God. Her favorite pastime consisted of sitting with her rosary or Bible and praying for the health of her family and friends. She truly believed that God had allowed her to come through the surgeries safely and that He was with her at all times. Mom often cried while praying, but never for herself. I'd walk past and hear her asking *God to* protect her children and not make herself a burden on the family. She had faith that everything happening to her was a part of His great plan and never questioned why she had been diagnosed with this terminal illness in the first place.

Mom found simple joy in the tiniest of actions. She treated every wobbly step she took as a small miracle and insisted *on* responding to every sympathy card she received. She laughed at her own memory lapses and joked about the twenty pills she'd take every day. Family dinners became the center of Mom's world and it brought her endless happiness to just sit and talk with her children and husband every night. Nothing could dampen Mom's spirits or faith. "I'm continually blessed by God each day," she loved to boast.

*The Third Body Paragraph*

I found out rather quickly that having a parent with cancer automatically placed me in the "pity" category. The first question out of everyone's mouth for a long time was "How is your mom doing?" to which I would reply, "She's fine, thanks!" in a sugary voice. Add an overly bright smile and enthusiastic nod to emphasize my answer and most people would be easily convinced of my sincerity and let me carry the conversation in a different direction.

It always took a little longer persuading my friends and teachers that I was telling the truth. I could see the doubt in their faces as I continually reassured them that I was fine and that no, I did not need to "talk about anything." Most hesitated to believe me, but they could find nothing in my behavior to disprove my words. My grades remained in the top five percent of my class and I was an active member of several school clubs. I had many friends and everyone knew I had a loving, supportive family at home. Eventually, the looks of concern diminished and everyone forgot I was the daughter of a woman with brain cancer—at least until the next grey spot appeared on the MRI.

### *The Conclusion/Resolution*

The room was cast in shadows, the only light coming from the small desk lamp next to the bed. I waited impatiently for my cousin to come back from saying goodnight to her parents so we could begin our habitual nightly talk sessions. I had wrapped her comforter into a tight cocoon around my body and stolen a pair of socks to ward off the chill that permeated through the nearby window. In an attempt to distract my over-active imagination from manifesting horrors in the surrounding darkness, I busied myself by tracing small figure eights on the cotton sheets beneath me. Only a few more minutes passed before I heard her muffled footfalls on the other side of the door. I smiled at her when she came in and laughed at the face she made when she noticed I was hording all the covers. However, I knew she couldn't really begrudge me my warmth because I had left her oh-so-precious Spiderman bedspread alone. I laughed harder as she dive-bombed into the blanket and stuck her head out enough to resemble a turtle. We sat for a few minutes in comfortable silence, collecting our thoughts and enjoying the peace that came only during moments like this. Then Sarah asked, "Al, are you really ok with everything?"

In the past two-and-a-half years we had always skirted around the topic of Mom's cancer. Sarah understood me enough to realize I needed a distraction more than I needed a confidant, and she would entertain me in our make-believe world where everything was perfect and diseases were nonexistent. But with Mom's fourth surgery scheduled for the following day, Sarah recognized my need to talk, even if I didn't.

I had never lied to my cousin, so my initial shock at her inquiry turned to frustration as I struggled to find the words that would convey my exact emotions and reasoning. She waited patiently and didn't prod, for which I was grateful. When I finally formed my answer I looked

her straight in the eyes and said, "No." When she didn't say anything, I began rambling off every thought that entered my mind, if only to break the unnerving silence that had settled between us.

I first told her about my anger. I was angry with my Mom's body for developing the brain tumor and causing her to become a passive-bystander in my teenage years. I was furious at my siblings for unintentionally making me feel inadequate because I didn't break down crying at every new piece of bad news we were told. I was angry with Mom for treating her cancer as an obstacle she had to overcome, and not just some disease she had no control over. And I was irritated with myself for being incapable to do anything but earn good grades and keep a smile on my face.

I told her how tired I was. Tired of the "family meetings" my Dad would call whenever the tumor grew back or a new complication arose in Mom's treatment. Tired of the meals other people felt compelled to cook for us, as if we were a charity case family, unable to prepare our own food. And, above all else, tired of hiding behind the fake smile I had been wearing ever since that day in the hospital when this long journey first began.

I sat hugging my knees, not making eye contact with Sarah because I didn't want to see the pity I knew my words had invoked. But, more importantly, I didn't want to see the surprise and disgust she would harbor once I spoke my next part. I pulled myself further into my safe-haven of blankets and took a deep breath before continuing.

I told her about my overwhelming hate. I hated God for what he had done to my once beautiful mother, for continually beating her down with each new tumor and surgery and treatment. I hated my parents for holding back details and trying to shelter us as best they could from the harsh realities we faced. My loathing extended to friends and teachers who insisted on bringing up Mom's condition every time they greeted me. It felt like a fresh slap in the face each time they asked that stupid question. I hated Mom for what she had become. The shadow of her former self haunted the curve of her lips and the tilt of her head, and I couldn't bear to look her in the eye anymore. But, more than anything, I hated my unexpressed need to break down on someone's shoulder and be held like the child I was.

I was shocked to discover that I was crying for what was only the third time in the past three years. I quickly wiped my eyes and cheeks in an effort to put off looking at my cousin, but found my actions cut off when her arms encircled my shoulders and she hugged me in a tight embrace. I stiffened for only a moment before my arms shifted to wrap around her waist and I buried my head in her shoulder. She just held

me more tightly and gently rocked back and forth for the better part of an hour. When we finally pulled apart, and I apologized for her now wet shirt and she for mine, Sarah said, "You know I love you, right?" I smiled, a gesture no doubt made comical from my red face and puffed eyes, and I told her I loved her, too.

The bell signaling the end of class startles me out of my thoughts. Looking down at my paper, I am painfully aware that the only thing I have written is my now-dry thesis statement. Ignoring my classmates' chatter, I rip the sheet out of my copybook and crumble it into a tight ball. I sigh as I dispose of it in the trashcan, knowing my evening will now be spent brainstorming a new topic. Everything I could possibly hope to share on my original subject had been summed up in that one sentence. I had nothing left to write.

# Too Late, the End is Past

by Jacob Goodwin

*Don't let it end like this. Tell them I said something.*  
Pancho Villa (1877 -1923), last words

I have little desire to reach back into prehistoric humanity. Wearing dirty rags of deerskin and eating my meat raw simply doesn't appeal to me for all the most obvious reasons. However, I do enjoy one throwback to those times: camping, backpacking in particular. Like the nomads of old, I have on occasion packed everything needed for my basic survival into a bag and carried it for miles. The whole point of the activity is to travel outside of the modern world, to enjoy life on a scale thousands of years old. Whenever I went backpacking, I thought myself to be separated completely from our mechanized society, alone.

On one such trip, on the Appalachian Trail, some inclement weather blew in. Sleet and freezing rain made the rocks underfoot slippery, putting everyone in danger. Whatever precipitation remained liquid seeped into our clothing, where it joined forces with the cutting wind to make us even more miserable. Two group members caught hypothermia.

It was a near emergency situation, and we were in the woods. If we didn't stop, the two cases of hypothermia would become worse. If we did, the group ahead of us would think that disaster had struck when we never reached camp. I remember thinking that someone would have to hike several hours alone to contact the other group. Then, with an anticlimactic flourish, someone pulled out a cell phone.

A cell phone on an icy ridge miles from home. Like the ancient peoples, I had been thinking of the distance in terms of the time it would take to cover it on foot. When early man set out on journeys, he measured distance in days, not miles. "A good day's walk" was understood, but not the fixed distance that is the mile. After all, it takes much longer to walk a mile in mountains than it does on level ground. To say that a two-day journey was just as far as a ten-day trek is preposterous - but using the mile, they are proved equal.

When that cell phone was unveiled, we were no longer four or eight or ten hours away from the other group. They were standing just seconds away along the invisible signals of a cell phone. The distance between us, solid with icy rocks and driving wind, suddenly

disappeared. The distance became zero.

This dramatic compression of space is not limited to backpackers in distress. It has happened the world over - people who would have been separated by an impenetrable barrier of miles just a century or two ago are now next door neighbors. A voice, which is just the face of a mind, can travel around the world instantaneously. Magellan's ships once circumnavigated the globe in three years.<sup>1</sup> With a cell phone, I can do the same, instantaneously and without risking death.

If the system of measuring distance using time is applied to the cell phone, then the world has a circumference, radius and surface area of exactly zero: zero years, zero hours, zero seconds. In mathematics, if all of the dimensions of an object are zero, that object does not exist. The world has ended, and it is too late to repent.

The most easily noticeable symptom of the end of the world is that more attention is paid to problems a world away than to problems nearby. Because of the telephone, and its sister technologies, television and the internet, disasters elsewhere are broadcast directly into our living rooms. We see explosions and earthquakes in vivid Technicolor, the distance between ourselves and the afflicted having been blasted away by telephones. Huge charity drives are organized to alleviate suffering in the distance when there is equal suffering nearby. It isn't wrong that we care about those who are so far away; in fact, quite the opposite is true: we should care, because whatever is happening far away is also happening everywhere that there is a telephone. The problem is that we are also victims of these disasters: strife and hurricanes send vibrations along our phone lines, desensitizing us until we feel disasters no more than those who were killed by them. Once the vibrations have rendered us numb, not only will telephones have ended the world but they will have destroyed that which makes us human.

The desensitization can already be seen through the actions of those who feel the need to be the most connected. When the Apple iPhone was released, thousands of cases of latent technophilia came into bloom. Lines of addicts lined up at the doors of Apple stores across the country like the hungry poor in breadlines. Among them was John F. Street, wearing a raincoat to stay dry. Like everyone else, he was desperate for the new toy that would put him in touch with the globe. There was only one difference between Mr. Street and the others waiting in line: he was the mayor of Philadelphia, the city with the fastest growing murder rate in the country, a failing school system, and an upcoming election. When asked, he said "It was worth the wait. I am a gadget guy."<sup>2</sup> Long years of being well-connected had numbed him: the murders had ceased to horrify and his duty had ceased to

motivate.

When a phone is worth more than a city, it is too late. In a rationally existing world, no civic leader would spend fifteen hours of office time sitting on the sidewalk, and no citizenry would accept such a reason for doing so.

Communication was handed down to us from the Romans. Their Latin word *communicare* means "to make common." Through the cell phone any information can be made into what we call "common knowledge," known by almost everyone. What is often forgotten is that common knowledge is rarely interesting; a story that everybody knows loses its entertainment qualities, a surprise that is explained beforehand is no longer surprising. The common is not sought after - we search for diamonds and gold, paying exorbitant prices for trinkets that have no practical value. Steel is vitally useful, but worthless in comparison because it is relatively common. Likewise, we search for new and exciting information instead of what is important - because importance can be easily communicated via the telephone. If you doubt this, turn on the news. More time is spent discussing celebrities and sports than any moderately important issue.

In the past, distance was that which made all things rare. News, even dry, boring political news, had to be carried, by letter or word of mouth. It was expensive and time consuming, but everyone craved word of something far away. Distance made America: if traversing the Atlantic was not so difficult, news of hard times and poverty would have been common in Europe and the great migrations of immigrants might never have happened.

The hook is the only thing that remains between the individual and everybody else, but it is being eroded away. Even in our language, it is only used to describe a phone soon to be in use: "ringing off the hook," for example. Once the phone is answered, you are no longer alone - you are lumped together with all of humanity and their cell phones. Perhaps this is why my father never let anyone answer the phone during dinner. No matter how long it rang or how annoying it became, he would just say, "Let it ring. If it's important, they will call back." After all, everybody can be brought to dinner via the phone, and that would be far too many guests to sit at our table.

<sup>1</sup> "Ferdinand Magellan." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*. 2007. Columbia UP. 24 Oct. 2007 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-MagellanF.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> "Mayor Street Draws Fire for Off and on iPhone Wait." *CBS3.Com*. 29 June 2007. CBS News. 24 Oct. 2007 <<http://cbs3.com/topstories/Mayor.John.Street.2.309996.html>>.

# The Real Thing?

by Paul La Plante

After riding roller coasters, waiting in lines, and walking around all day in the sticky, muggy, suffocating air, I was absolutely exhausted. Fortunately, though, weather had been the only downside of the August day I had spent at Six Flags: Great Adventure with my younger brother, Jon. After starting the day off with Kingda Ka - that is, by going 456 feet high at 128 miles an hour - our day still somehow only seemed to get better. Since *everyone* was in line for Kingda Ka, we got on Medusa, Nitro, and El Toro, all before stopping for lunch, waiting in line for, at most, fifteen minutes.

As crazy as it sounds, though, I don't mind waiting in line and talking to my brother. Jon has always liked arguing, especially when we were little kids. Being two years younger than I, he usually came out on the losing end, until we started fighting with words instead of fists. You see, my brother has a scary habit of memorizing everything he reads in a magazine - almost verbatim. Even though I usually lost the arguments, I had fun discussing everything with my brother, from the up-and-coming Indian economy to why Hillary can't win.

Jon is a libertarian socialist. He completely supports maximization of individual rights, while ardently supporting socialism, on the premise that the government has a responsibility to protect the marginalized in society. Think Gandhi, but times a thousand. Also, since Jon was always championing some humanitarian crisis or another, I could usually count on him to be decidedly outraged about something. Usually, though, it was about AIDS in Africa or children starving to death in rural Mongolia or unrest in the Middle East - you know, something I was sorry for but had to move on from since I couldn't do anything to solve the problem. So when I could tell that he was about to launch into one of his "moral tirades," I would just tune him out. After Nitro, he seemed ready to rant; I just couldn't be sure about what.

Then, I saw it. Like that mirage of an oasis in every movie with a desert. A godsend on a hot day, the universal symbol for refreshment. Ever since its inception in 1886, with its sugary goodness and characteristic curves, Coca-Cola has quenched the thirst of literally

billions of people. And I could tell that I was going to be next. After losing easily a gallon of sweat, I felt it was about time to re-hydrate myself.

I approached the machine with great anticipation, pulling out my wallet. Standing in an air-conditioned grocery store, you know that \$3.50 for a 20-ounce bottle is highway robbery. But at a strategically-placed vending machine, you'd sell your soul for just a drop. No sooner had the machine devoured my hard-earned money than the floodgates opened.

"Did you know that you just endorsed the death of 16 union heads in Central and South America?" My brother's expression was a mix of outrage and alarm.

*Here we go. Something I'm supposed to feel bad about but can't do anything to solve.* "What, they died of caffeine overdose?"

My brother wasn't about to quit that easily. "No, Coca-Cola regional headquarters hired a paramilitary corporation. From 1994 to 1996 alone, Coke covertly ordered the assassination of 5 union leaders in Columbian factories where Coke manufactures some of its beverages. That way they could hire nonunion workers for lower costs."

I took a long swig to throw down the gauntlet, then gave my brother the "you're b.s.-ing me" eyebrow raise. He didn't flinch. I retreated, throwing away the Coke in a trash can by Nitro's exit, a little embarrassed that I hadn't believed him right away. I guess I just didn't *want* to believe it.

The now-not-so-satisfying bottle that had been in my hand had practically made me an accessory to murder, or at least showed that I tacitly approved of what Coca-Cola had done. In my mind, this was worse than Enron cheating millions of workers out of their pensions. *But it's not really real*, I kept telling myself, even though I knew my brother was probably right. I just couldn't accept that fact. Surely, Coca-Cola, one of the most-recognized brand names on earth, symbol for the American dream and bastion of free-market capitalism, surely *they*, of all people, would respect the human rights of their workers, right? I mean, isn't that why we claim that China is such a "bad" country? Because of their human rights violations and terrible treatment of workers? Even beyond less recent events like Tiananmen Square, *The New York Times* always seemed to rant about China's lack of serious labor laws and low product quality standards. Could Coke really be in the same category?

Though not one to call my brother a liar to his face, I decided to check his sources after we got home. I found that, much to my chagrin, there indeed were websites dedicated to the atrocities committed by the Coca-Cola corporation. However, many seemed like the ranting of

an angry activist group - not usually something to be trusted. Jon's accusations were confirmed in part by a Wikipedia article on Coca-Cola, although the article wasn't much more credible than the ranting websites (or more coherent). These sources lacked credibility because they didn't cite external sources, and seemed prepared to condemn Coca-Cola at all costs, without mentioning anything positive that they may have done.

*Looks like you're wrong, Jon*, I chuckled to myself after my cursory research of the topic. After confronting him about it, he rolled his eyes at me and asked, "What, you're afraid to look for real and actually find something? Everyone knows magazines are way more reliable than websites anyway."

Never one to back down from so blatant a challenge, I went to the last place I thought I would go on a summer afternoon - the library. Using a database of old newspaper stories, I eventually found a few stories about Coca-Cola's misdeeds, though not very many. After several fruitless searches, I finally found a name: the Columbian food union that Coke "works with." The union, the *SIndicato nacioNAL de TRAbajadores de la INdustria de ALimentos*, or SINALTRAINAL, finally gave me results. Unfortunately, though, I only got 27 articles — written in the past ten years. Talk about selective omission. What was more, of those 27, only the first few were true stories uncovering some of the terrible things Coke has done. Unfortunately, only one article was from a credible source: *BusinessWeek*. The other sources were local papers from Australia or Europe that were too small to do the investigative reporting necessary, and probably got their facts secondhand. The likely source of their facts was a newswire, since several articles were verbatim copies or had the same facts in different words. Most of the articles simply stated that the union was once again pressing charges, but dismissed their grievances as inconsequential and melodramatic. It was clear to me that the entire media wanted to turn a blind eye to the shortcomings of this company.

*Is this what the world has come to? Is this to be the outcome of globalization? Getting what we want cheaply, and not caring about who suffers along the way so long as we get our precious sugar-water for a few cents cheaper? And what about other industries, like clothing, energy production, manufacturing? Have we really become that selfish?*

With these questions perturbing me, I decided to ask Jon about the situation.

"So, how did you find out about this stuff?"

"I don't know, I guess just from reading articles online and I ran

across it. Then I looked it up and found out it was real."

"So what do you do about it?"

"Don't drink Coke. Tell other people about it."

"Jon, do you really think you can do anything?" *Stupid question. Of course he does - he's an idealist.*

"Not individually, but if enough people do it, well, you understand."

With this new insight, I stepped back from the issue as it specifically related to Coca-Cola and took a more general view. Needless to say, I did more research. Thomas Friedman, columnist for *The New York Times*, points out in his book, *The World is Flat*, that globalization has its benefits and its challenges. One obvious benefit has been the increased productivity of businesses around the world: by being able to move many of their factories to developing nations, multinational corporations have dramatically reduced the cost of manufacturing, allowing them to compete in a global market. At the same time, corporations have often taken advantage of the slacker (or nonexistent) labor laws of these nations in order to employ business practices that are inhumane and grossly illegal in America. Said Debra Dunn, HP's senior vice president of corporate affairs and global citizenship, "We used to say that as long as we complied with the local law, that was all we could be expected to do. But now the imbalance of power is so huge it is not practical to say that Wal-Mart or HP can do whatever they want as long as a state government or country does not stop them" (Friedman 384). One important responsibility that globalization brings with it is the call to social activism. Friedman insists that we cannot simply stand idly by and watch as these corporations redefine what is morally acceptable for a business. As Friedman notes, "Advocates of compassionate flatism need to educate consumers to the fact that their buying decisions and buying power are political" in today's globalized market (384).

In the contemporary world, Americans simply don't care what we consume or where it comes from, as long as we don't pay a penny more than we have to. One very good reason for why we've become so slack about these moral issues recently is because it's easier to simply turn our heads and look away. The media does it for Coca-Cola (or any other major American corporation, for that matter). I realized that I did it too: I would rather believe that my brother had made up this ridiculous story than actually admit that Coke was culpable. But once I admitted it to myself, I was able to do something about it: stop buying Coke.

I told Jon that I wrote this paper for my writing class, and he was proud of me.

"You've really done well. Now everyone in your writing class

knows about this."

"But what if everyone keeps drinking Coke?"

"Well, then that happens. But at least they know now. They can't feign ignorance any longer."

Though talking with Jon and my subsequent revelation may not have been the most comfortable experience, he taught me that we can make a difference in the world, now more than ever. For the causes that we are passionate about, we can inform people, organize rallies, create sometimes-factually-questionable-Nobel-prize-winning documentaries, all sorts of things. As for me, I might not be able to stop AIDS in Africa right now, but I stand up for workers' rights. And I believe that is "the real thing."

# Silent Night

by Alexandra Scholldorf

All is still in the sunset's eye. The birds have suddenly halted their loud discussions; the hawks have postponed their arguments with the crows. The gentle bovines that were grazing in the field have taken shelter in the barn and the crickets have come to direct the music of the night. The light, as it clings to its last breath in the shield of the sky, slowly fades from my perception. Another night in the seventh year of the twenty-first century has come. It seems to pass so slowly... and yet we never see it flying by.

This open field of tall, coarse grass is empty. It is in the center of the land that my Opa uses to grow corn each and every year, year after year, for the cows on our dairy farm. It is devoid of all significant movement except for the cold wind, which whips through my hair and fights with the weeping willow branches. The tree's tall mass of cream-colored drapes looms over me. We used to climb this tree as little kids... barefoot... even with the burning pile, full of shards of metal and glass, just several feet away. We were careful of some things, though, like snapping turtles and water moccasins in the creek... but for the most part, we really didn't know if it was dangerous or not... we were just having fun.

*He darted across the shallow stream. Water, as clean as the bottoms of our muddy shoes, splashed everywhere; I was forced to shield my eyes and scream at him to go slower as I struggled to get rid of my socks.*

*"Hey, Jonathan, wait up!"*

*Suddenly, the water didn't make noise anymore. I looked up to see that his foot had caught in the sloppy mud and that he was tugging to get it out. I laughed; I laughed as he chuckled with me. I followed him into the ankle-deep creek and kicked the water toward him. He shook loose as he tried to dodge all the droplets and shot off to the other side after he had stolen a quick splash at me. I stumbled as I laughed.*

*"Jonathan!"*

A voice resounds in the wind's stream of cold air. I stop to listen, waiting to hear if it will say any more, but it dies down as the earth goes still again. As I stare at the creek, near the big old fallen tree, I

remember how we liked to "make history" by throwing huge branches into the water and watching them lodge themselves in the mud and distort the water flow. But honestly, what did we really know?

I laugh to myself as I ponder the answer to my own question. Knowledge. It was as inconsequential as a sock lost in the mud; it was the last desire of our innocent minds. We could wear shoes without socks; this was a true fact, and recognition of this fact came from sheer, raw experience. The shoes might have felt a bit more soggy or uncomfortable, but it didn't matter, because barefoot was the preferred style when padding through the fields anyway. The shoes and socks, as insignificant as they were, only went back on when we reached the gravel path or when the boys (my cousins -Jonathan, Michael, Robert and Nicholas) spotted their mother behind the wheel of a tractor, disking in the field.

The cold is too penetrating to stand in any longer. I walk quickly to the road and along the sheds, up to the barn with its crusted paint and shack-like appearance. I bend to walk through the four-foot door.

*The barn always had the same thick air. It immediately got warmer as I ducked under the door and the perfect mixture of a ton of cows, grain, hay, and dirt hit me. I stopped to sneeze halfway down the narrow, squeaky stairs. I shook my head, opened my eyes and wiped my nose on the sleeve of my worn sweater. My eye caught a quick cat leaping up onto the grain hag right next to the stairs and into the rafters and I ran down the stairs to chase it, but once I reached the other side of the white divider wall it had escaped. I pouted for a second, looking toward the rows of huge cows, until Rebecca, my little sister, called me over to the hayloft.*

*I sneezed again. The hay was piled so high; it was so awesome to look up at the hills of dusty straw as if they were the hills by the weeping willow that we went sledding on in the winter.*

*"Mike!" Rebecca yelled to her favorite cousin, who was following Jonathan up the stacks of newer hay.*

*"Come on, hurry up!" he called down; his brother was already really high. I sneezed again, running my fingers across my nose and wiping the mucus off my fingers with my sweater. Rebecca climbed up and I followed, but before I got very far, I looked over to where Jonathan had just jumped across a huge valley. I wasn't going to do that; even I knew my limits. Mike followed right after, but somehow after he landed he slipped and slid down, like he was sledding, to the soft floor, screaming all the way down.*

*We all laughed as he popped out of the pile, covered from head to toe in dust and straw, spitting and flailing his arms as he tried to get all the hay out of his hair.*

*"Whoa, Mike! Move; I'm coming down!" Jonathan sat down and followed*

*in his little brother's track, landing with a thump and the sounds of a waterfall of hay behind him.*

*I shook my head as I sneezed again. My laughter died down as I thought how crazy my cousins were. But I loved them all the same. I would love them forever; nothing would ever change.*

When I was young, I thought that nothing had ever changed. I didn't even know how my family came across the farm, but now, with my eighteen years of wisdom, I am able to realize its significance. My grandfather purchased it from my Uncle Carl way back when, in the years following his escape from Nazi Germany. My grandmother came to join him and my dad was born here, in Rhinebeck, NY, a first generation American. Since then, they have called the dairy farm home. My aunts and uncles, five kids including my dad, were raised here, with my grandmother's amazing German cooking and my grandfather's strict chore command. But things have changed since then - people moved away, started families, began jobs - it continues endlessly; it is the cycle of change, and it is always constant.

*"Come on, Rebecca; let's go on our own adventure."*

*"Okay..."*

*We started out on the road from the house and walked past the barn; its tall silo loomed above us, casting a tall shadow in the early morning. It was slightly muddy, since it had rained the night before, and we took care not to get our sneakers dirty because Mom had told us not to. Jumping over puddles and thick slushy mud, we reached the silage, the tightly packed cow food, which was covered in tarp and old tires.*

*"It's not as fun without them," I said as I looked at the ground and put my hands in my jacket pockets.*

*"Yeah. Why did they have to move to Massachusetts?"*

*I shook my head. I couldn't answer her question. I didn't know.*

*"Mom said they'll be here next time."*

*"I hope so. I really miss them."*

*"Yeah, me too."*

It's funny, I think as I laugh to myself, how much we take for granted as little kids. I never knew how hard my Opa worked to make a decent living; I just thought that the farm had magically appeared as their home and as our play-place. Perhaps it was merely parental and grandparental discretion that played a part in my ignorance; that they waited so long to tell me about how Opa's horses were taken by the army and how his family's milk was confiscated to feed the troops during the war. He had escaped with his livelihood and he struggles even now, more than fifty years later, to make things work. Now he's not doing so well... his knees are bothering him and he's going to the

doctor's much more often than he ever had to.

As children we are oblivious, kept in our own little bubble for safety. We never knew and we never understood what was going on at any given time; we were so occupied in our own little worlds of adventures and historical exploits that we didn't need to. We didn't need to know that Uncle Paul wasn't making enough money and that he had to relocate to Massachusetts so that his job would pay him more. We didn't understand; as long as things didn't change, we didn't need to.

*I sat on the bench outside the waking parlor with my sister, Rebecca, next to me. We were waiting for them to arrive from their five hour car ride; we were so excited. My mom was crying inside; I could still hear her through the open door. When I was inside, I cried, too, because that's what she was doing - and so was my dad. I didn't blame him; if I was a boy, I would cry if my mom died too, even though I wasn't supposed to.*

*"When are they gonna get here?" I whispered to Becky, who was kicking her feet in the air.*

*"Mom said soon."*

*I sighed.*

*"I'm so bored. We're definitely gonna go on an adventure when we get back from church."*

*"Yeah, that'll be cool."*

*"Do you think we should bring snacks this time? I have my gameboy bag. We can bring some of those ginger ale bottles that Grandpa has hidden behind the door in the room with the coo-coo clock!"*

*"There's soda back there?"*

*"Yeah, I checked this morning!" A loud sob caught our ears and we both looked toward the room.*

*"I guess we should be a little softer." I said, lowering my head.*

*"Hey, Alex?" I looked up to meet Becky's eyes; they were still pretty red.*

*"Are you sad that Grandma died?"*

*"Yeah, I am."*

*"Who's gonna make her famous gravy now that she's gone?"*

*"I don't know, Becky..."*

The chicken coop is a mess of unkempt fence and cobweb-covered wooden nests. It was grandma's little hobby; I don't even know where the chickens went. They just disappeared after a while. The house grew dirty, the porch table got dusty because we don't eat there anymore, and the dogs were let in to sleep on the couch on the first floor. Grandma would have never allowed that. I can't bear looking at the desolate coop any longer; I turn and storm down the road toward the barn. I collapse in the little nook in the long hill between the upper

and lower streets of worn-out pavement. Gentle tears begin to stream down my face; Jonathan and I used to lie here together all the time. Back then we could both fit comfortably and look up at the roof of the barn. We watched the light fade away at day's end and the crows chase the sparrows from their little rafter retreats. But now, I can barely fit myself. The wind whips through the grass once more and I wipe the tears from my cheeks so that they won't freeze to my skin.

Jonathan isn't here because he had to work; he took a job at Hannaford's to pay for a new tuba. Aunt Julie and Uncle Paul are still struggling to make ends meet; they don't own a car that's reliable enough to drive five hours down to Rhinebeck. Besides, Jon's starting college and Mike's busy with track and the paper route. Rob's in high school now and Nick's booked with soccer games. They can't make time for us anymore.

The tears begin to start again. How did everything get so complicated all of a sudden? How did we stumble upon this burden of responsibility that ruined our lives? Knowledge. When did that appear in our minds? It must have just magically materialized; cynicism crept into our perceptions like the assassin in the night and cut the throats of our childish selves. We didn't notice Opa's trips to the doctor's; we didn't know that Oma was sick. The realizations hit me as if they had come out of nowhere. We were oblivious. But now, everything's changed.

In aging, we are forced to mature; we face the reality of it all. People change; they grow up. They leave some behind and they take others with them. Things get old; new things replace them. Places that were once meaningful will someday hold no value, and time must be spent wisely rather than wasted. Once you know this, you can never go back to innocence.

The soft *fall breeze* whistles through the *grass right next to my ear*. *Jonathan shifts beside me, accidentally clunking my head with his bent elbow. He laughs and mutters an apology; I whisper that it's okay so that he can stop feeling embarrassed. The pretty little birds are chirping away on top of the barn roof; I love to listen to them sing. I love laying here in our little hide-away on the hill between the roads. We've been here for a really long time - we've hardly said anything. It's almost like I'm alone. But I'm glad I'm not.*

*"Jonathan," I say, turning my head a little bit.*

*"Yeah?"*

*"We're going on an adventure tomorrow, right? After church?"*

*"Sure. We can go down to the creek and see if there are any frogs. Mike wanted to catch frogs."*

*"Awesome. But I'll let you boys catch the frogs!"*

*"Sure, whatever!" He laughs. I smile and turn away to dream about the amazing day I'll have tomorrow.*

*"Hey, Jon?" I begin to ask.*

*"Yeah?"*

*"When are you coming here again?"*

*"I don't know."*

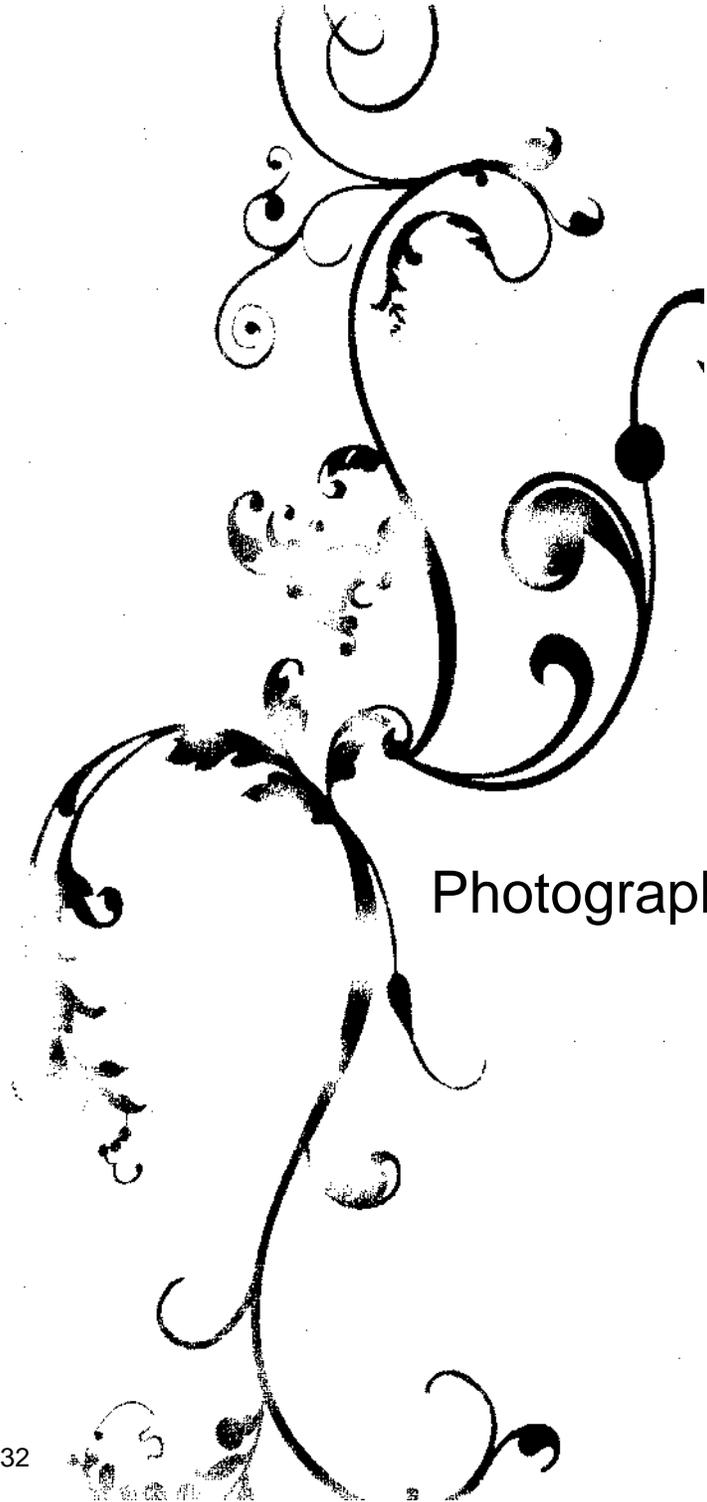
*I pause at this, look up to the roof of the barn, and stare at the darkening sky.*

*"We'll have to wait and see," he says.*

*"Yeah, I guess so."*

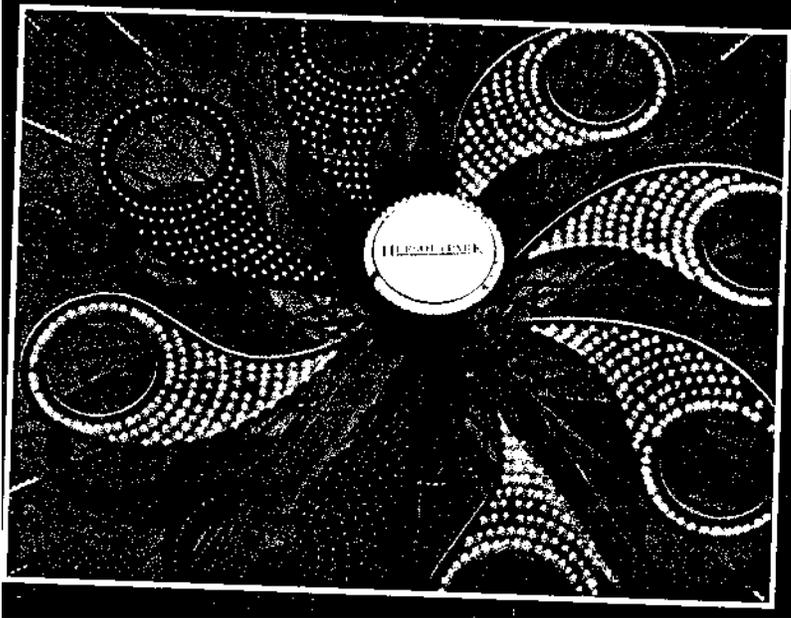
*The birds quiet down and the wind stops blowing; the grass that was once moving rests along with my hair, which settles among the blades. All is calm, simple, and beautiful.*

*Stille Nacht.*



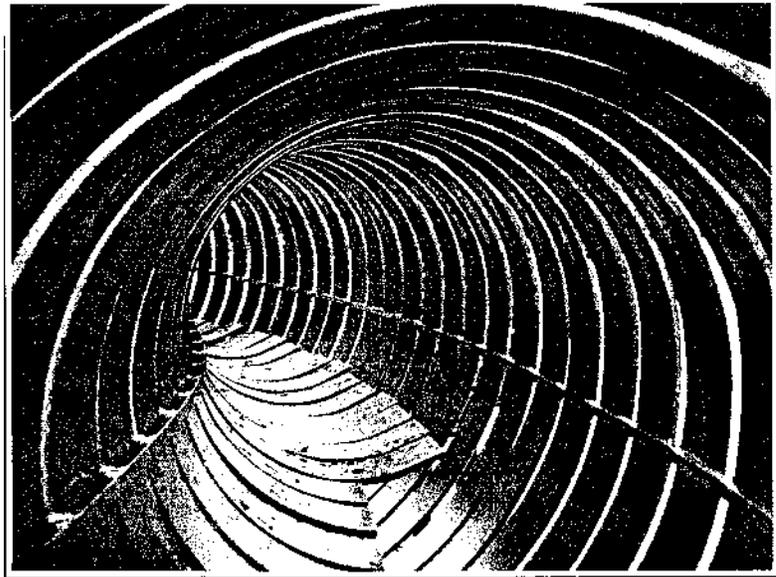
Photography

# The Wheel



by Michelle Cowan

# Spirals



by Michelle Cowan

After Rainfall



by Sarah Sweeney

## London Neptune



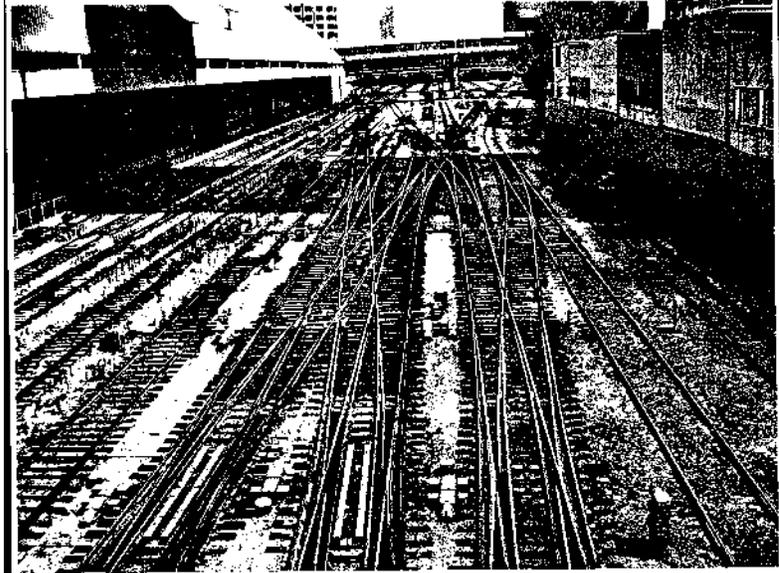
by Sarah Sweeney

# Pou Toko Manawa



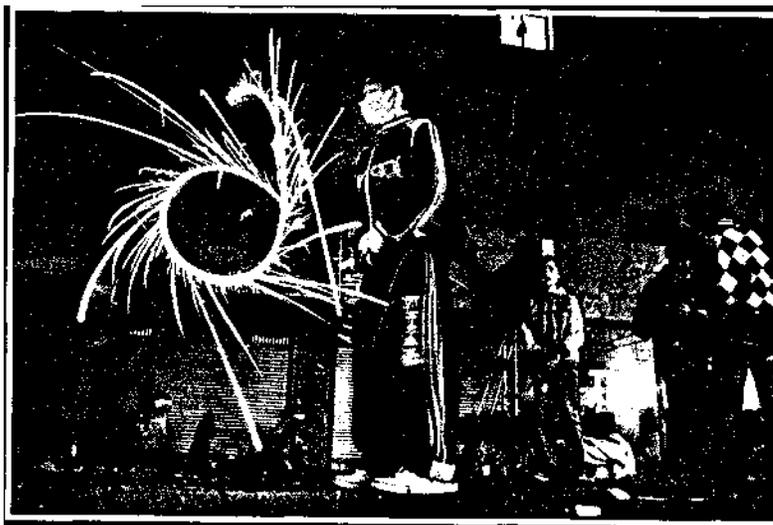
by Kristine Boise

## Confusing Tracks



by Nicole Ferrari

# Xinniankuaile



by Patrick Depuydt

# Wuming



by Patrick Depuydt

# End of the World



by Tyler Fitzpatrick

## Cappuccino in Cobh



by Tyler Fitzpatrick

# Neutral Territory

by Cameron Beattie

## *The 38th Parallel*

The line of latitude that conveniently separates North Korea from South Korea; a demilitarized zone following an imaginary line. It feigns peace.

Now, I imagine the air over the DMZ would be thick with dread.  
Almost like the sound of silence.  
The sound of silence that resonates after a bullet has been released,  
after the M-16 has recoiled sharply into the shoulder.  
But, before the bullet has nestled itself  
into the roof of a building,  
the trunk of a tree,  
or the warm softness of the target's flesh.

I wonder if Koreans on either side of the DMZ peer across  
impassable landscape and wonder whether rumors are true-

Perhaps a soldier would even consider putting down his rifle  
And asking his neighbor for a cup of sugar  
Only to receive a smattering of shrapnel

## DMZ

North Korea, 38th Parallel, South Korea, Seoul, Demilitarized Zone.  
Words that bring home red silk pajamas and matching slippers, Korean dolls, and a miniature set of Qin's terracotta army after my dad's deployment.

I envisioned the demilitarized zone as...  
...Disorder, no houses, no trees, no people  
A long stretch of grey barren ash from which sprung the dolls, the clothes, and Qin's abandoned army  
As a child, my life is orderly, the military is orderly.  
The military in all of its genius  
Puts life in order

I'm learning analogies in school. Similes are to similes as antonyms are to antonyms.

military: order:: demilitarized zone: disorder

*Neutral Territory*

France, ferry, London, cliffs of Dover, bed and breakfast.

When he came home, my father decompressed by traveling, away from the army, the men he had commanded, and life, as those waiting for him, knew it. My sister and I would be taken out of school to explore different European countries, sleeping in bed and breakfasts along the way.

I remember Cadbury eggs,  
Lined up in the door handles  
Of the rental car.  
Instead of eating the eggs,  
We hoard them to see  
Who could go longer without eating  
One.

My mother reads us a book called *Head and Tales*, in which two children carry the head of their dead father to a cherry tree where they had promised to bury him, along the way his head tells tales.

Eventually, my father's presence became less alien. I expected to see him every morning when I woke up, expected to see him at dinner, and expected him to tuck me in at night. When we returned home he became dad again, reclaiming his position as head of the house.

*Neutral Territory: Introducing dogs*

Whenever we visited my grandparents or family friends, my father always introduced our dogs to the dogs of our host. Partly out of pride in his painstaking training, and his use of the dogs as a crutch in social situations, my father created a SOP for introducing dogs.

"Neutral territory," he would say. "That's what you need, neutral territory. That way neither dog can claim dominance."

Cold, December, Christmas.

Towed by Sudz, his abandoned husky, my grandfather labored up the icy sloping driveway, white hair blending in with the banks of untouched snow.

My grandfather's son stood at the end of the road, about fifty yards away, with Marlin and Remy, our two labs.

Introduced on neutral ground the dogs seemed to get along well. We walked back to my grandparent's house, watching the dogs, waiting for neutrality to cease, waiting for a fight. We descended the driveway, Sudz ran ahead, to the door. A cacophony of barking came to a crescendo as Sudz invited Marlin and Remy inside. The neutral territory had moved from the driveway to the house. There were still adjustments to make, still sniffing and sideways glances, but the hard part was done.

On subsequent visits the same events would take place.

Neutral territory, reintroductions, the transition from foreign to familiar

It always worked and usually by the end of the first day everyone would have settled in.

*How to take a punch*

I was still jet-lagged, running down the pavement that stretched between the door to my stairwell and the playground. Why I had decided to come back? It was spring and beautiful yet I was being drawn home. As I entered the atmosphere of the apartment had changed.

He wasn't unpacking.

He was repacking, packing his bag for work.

Daddy? Where are you going?

*To work, just for a few hours.*

Behind my father's frantic collection of documents, clipboards, clothes, shoes, and uniform, my mother was taking down the Easter tree that hung above our kitchen table.

Carefully she took off and placed each ornament into the cushioned valleys of an egg carton.

*When you realize someone is about to punch you, ready yourself by leaning forward into the punch. Because the fist has less of a distance to travel, the power behind the punch will be lesser than if you had attempted to lean away. "By squaring up" my father used to say, the punch won't hurt as much. You'll be in a better position to retaliate.*

He didn't come home in a few hours,

That night,

The next morning.

Midnight he calls my mother

Deploying again tonight.

*Where?*

*Somewhere in Africa, I don't know yet. Liberia.*

*For how long?*

*Maybe a week. Almost a month.*

Timeline .....

Bosnia for four months, Two weeks vacation in England, Less than three hours at home

To be redeployed in another two

If I had

Crept out of bed to listen,

Could have seen her face

When she picked up the phone.  
I imagine she would have straightened up,  
Taken a deep breath,  
Leaned a little forward  
In preparation for the punch.

*Neutral Territory: Introducing Daughters*

My life is dissected by lines and zones of neutrality, demilitarization, and remilitarization.

My father returns home. The space between me and the figure carrying a rucksack seems so distant. So unrecognizable, yet he is one of us. Part of my genetic code, yet detached from us by time, by four months of time.

I feel as though I am standing at the edge of the 38th parallel, watching a figure from the North draw nearer and nearer to me. The air is tense, the infinite space grows smaller, suddenly he is upon us and there is no escaping.

In the end, we will all retreat to neutral ground. My father will shed his camouflaged skin, his military mentality, his battle dress uniform, and all it entails. Underneath, my father is his most basic form. Man, husband, father. My sister and I re-meet him in the throes of a foreign country, in neutral territory, before the family returns home, to the home my mother, sister, and I have inhabited in his absence the home he left months ago.

# When Can I Turn Five Again?

by Andrew Zaleski

Not once did I ever think I could obsess this much over lint. As a child, my fears held a certain weight—a machismo, if you will—to them. Spiders and snakes made me wriggle and squirm almost as much as snakes themselves. Ghosts and the bogeyman prompted many instances of checking and re-checking closets and empty spaces underneath beds, often to the chuckle of my parents. Above all, the imminent threat of a mother's scream should I break a lamp while playing ball inside the living room hung a cloud over my head, one even darker than the night skies I ran through during games of flashlight tag with my friends. Childhood was the heyday, so to speak, for fearing everything but fear itself.

On this particular day, though, I feared lint. It's funny how life seems to unexpectedly dilute itself as you grow older. I grew up always assuming that life would become steadily more exciting as I gained years, experiences, privileges, and responsibilities. Instead, as I was slowly beginning to realize, life evolved into a series of headaches and heartbreaks, each of them vying for the advantage and jockeying for the most influence. Those microscopic white poof balls were my headache on this day. They clung ferociously to my black pants and my black tailored jacket, refusing to surrender to my dual assault of masking tape and lint roller, regardless of how many times I regrouped and attacked. I didn't need to deal with this, I thought—I was somber enough.

A bright August sunlight peeked through the multi-colored windowpanes. Rays of blue, green, and yellow interlaced on the surface of a black piano in the corner. Pretty, I guess. Coyle was in the background playing a melody on guitar. Tyler was slumped back in a chair messing with his phone, or something. Outside, there were birds chirping. Trees swayed with the wind. People were arriving in their cars; old men, old women, girls and boys, fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters had all come to celebrate. It made me nostalgic for my high school prom, seeing the women dressed in purple, blue, and white gowns, the men shifting uncomfortably in their trousers and ties.

I pressed on. I forced Tyler to get up—he had to be lint-rolled too. Coyle was next. Then Tim, Ethan, Brandon. Their black suits were lint magnets. We needed to look good today, and if we don't, then it's all my fault. I kept telling myself that. Damn lint. It was a nice distraction. Dan walked in. He was wearing nearly all white: white jacket, white bowtie, white trousers, white shoes. The vest was gold—he had to match us. No one really said anything. That is, no one really said anything of substance. We cracked jokes. Something about a pirate and a hooker...or something.

"Shit, man—your shoes."

Scuffed. I headed to the men's room at the end of the hall and practically robbed the paper towel dispenser. Just a big clump of brown paper, soaked in hot water and soap. I came back and went to work on Dan's shoes.

"Gotta get these marks out."

I got most of the visible stuff. No one should be able to see those scuffs anyway, he'll be so far up toward the front. Dan got lint-rolled as well. I didn't trust the whiteness of his tuxedo. I knew those balls of lint were somewhere and if I didn't kill them now they would surface right in the middle of the ceremony. That wouldn't be good for pictures.

We headed to the back of the church and I found my place in the procession. I'm rather short, but the girl I was walking up with was shorter than I am. I probably looked hunched. Checked my pocket again—the rings were there. I heard Coyle's guitar and the bodies in front of me started moving. I was breathing heavily. It was dark in the hallway; I couldn't see my shoes and I wondered whether I'd start walking and then trip if my left foot came down accidentally on my right. Thankfully, she took the lead, and I found myself thrust into a sea of bright light. Dan was the sun—there was an aura in the church that seemed to emanate directly from him. This wasn't so bad.

I got up to the front of the church and sandwiched myself between Dan and Tyler. Then I felt the eyes. All those pairs of eyes. Sort of like in third grade, when Sister Jean would lock her hawk eyes on me for passing notes in the back of the class. Except this time my face didn't fill up with that tomato-red color. I was pale—innocent and pale. Behind me was a railing, an altar, and a boring gray wall. I couldn't escape. Rows...upon rows...upon rows...of eyes.

At some point during all this my mom started to cry. I forced myself to keep my eyes glued to the floor, but my body was aching to turn in her direction. I caught my mom's glance, her face a twisted, debilitating mixture of smiles and tears. A lump situated itself in the middle of my throat. Did Tyler just sniff? You've gotta be kidding me—

I'm going to cry in front of an entire church full of people...

Suddenly I was 16 all over again. Blisters on my middle fingers oozed blood. My stage clothes were soaked in sweat—my white button-down, my black, silk DKNY tie, my tuxedo pants. All of my pores were drowning in a mixture of oils, sweat, and saliva. I loved it. We were only three songs into our set, too. Shit, we're playing a good show...

"...And now—yep, yep there it is—Dan's pants are off."

"Take it all in, boys; take it all in." Dan was joking around. It was the usual. Other people we knew were getting high or making poor, alcohol-induced decisions with ugly girls. But we spent Friday nights making my basement tremor with a mix of bass and over-amplification. Then Tyler would complain about some girl, I'd get shafted out of the decent junk food, and Dan would settle his sweaty, pants-less body into the good spot on the wrap-around couch. Of course, that was supposed to be my sleeping spot. That ass. Whatever—there was something special about these Friday nights. They were rowdy, misguided—blameless, even...

I was 17, and she dumped me again. I called up Dan. We spent five minutes tearing her apart: she's dumb; she's a waste of time; she's just a stupid girl pulling her nonsense games again. You don't need that, man. I bet you in a couple months she'll come crawling back. She never did, but it was nice to hear him say it...

"Andrew? Andrew! The rings?"

I fished around in my jacket pocket and snatched a hefty silver ring. That was his. Hers was this puny little gold band. I laughed—guess that's what happens when you get married at 19. That was wry. I remember choking back tears in the groom room later that night. I wanted to cry, but I didn't. I couldn't. I'm the best man, I'm the oldest. I convinced myself to "be strong," or some variation of that meaningless, empty bullshit you'd tell a widow at her husband's funeral. Tyler cried for the two of us anyway. Big, lumpy tears welled up in his pouty blue eyes and trickled down his cheeks. I wanted to do that so badly. But I just couldn't.

We were saying goodbye—well, at least, we were trying to say goodbye. My best friend of five years, and now he was married and moving 2,000 miles away. To Idaho, no less. What the hell is in Idaho? It ate a hole in me. If my insides were a house, then I was having the biggest termite infestation in history. This was worse than heartache. I hated her for that; I hated him for that...

I was 17 again. Dan's telling me about this girl who really wants to date him, but he can't stand her. She calls him a lot, and she always talks to him in school. Heh, poor guy.

"Haha, man, watch you end up marrying her!"

"Yeah, dude, that'd be crazy."

Home was an hour away. I drove with all the windows down that night—I wanted to be cold. When I finally got there, I didn't bother taking my tuxedo pants off. I didn't take anything off, actually. I just collapsed on my wrap-around couch, white button-down, tie, and all. It was impossible for me to get up now...

"You wanna get the gear outta the car?"

"No way, man. Just leave it 'til the morning."

I was half asleep, slumped on top of a pillow and covered by an old blanket that barely covered my feet. Tyler was talking to this girl on his phone.

"That kid's a whore."

I made this half-laugh, half-snore like sound. Dan threw a pillow at Tyler. Then, like usual, Dan's pants came off.

*That kid is way too comfortable in his boxers.*

"You always need to get half naked after a show?" My eyes were still closed.

Dan gave me the finger: "See you in the morning."

I think I might've said something back, but I can't remember—I was already asleep.

# The Interest Rate on Life

by Andrew Rosenberg

*The International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed in the 1990s that Saddam Hussein had an advanced nuclear weapons development program, had a design for a nuclear weapon and was working on five different methods of enriching uranium for a bomb. The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa. Our intelligence sources tell us that he has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes suitable for nuclear weapon production. Saddam Hussein has not credibly explained these activities. He clearly has much to hide. The dictator of Iraq is not disarming. To the contrary, he is deceiving. From intelligence sources, we know, for instance, that thousands of Iraqi security personnel are at work hiding documents and materials from the U.N. inspectors, sanitizing inspection sites and monitoring the inspectors themselves. Iraqi officials accompany the inspectors in order to intimidate witnesses. Iraq is blocking U-2 surveillance flights requested by the United Nations. Iraqi intelligence officers are posing as the scientists inspectors are supposed to interview. Real scientists have been coached by Iraqi officials on what to say. Intelligence sources indicate that Saddam Hussein has ordered that scientists who cooperate with U.N. inspectors in disarming Iraq will be killed, along with their families. Year after year, Saddam Hussein has gone to elaborate lengths, spent enormous sums, taken great risks to build and keep weapons of mass destruction. But why? The only possible explanation, the only possible use he could have for those weapons, is to dominate, intimidate or attack. With nuclear arms or a full arsenal of chemical and biological weapons, Saddam Hussein could resume his ambitions of conquest in the Middle East and create deadly havoc in that region.*

George W. Bush, 2003 State of the Union Address

The pasta was boiling.

My mother chopped onions nervously in the kitchen. I'm sure she did not enjoy overhearing the State of the Union Address downstairs. Whenever I would ask her to watch a speech or debate with me, I was always confronted with, "I can't. It makes me nervous!" That night was no exception.

I was sprawled out on the couch with my father. He was coming in and out of snore-filled slumbers. I would have hit him to wake him

up; however, whenever someone wakes him up, he jumps like Yosemite Sam with his ass aflame. It's ridiculous how loud his snore can get. It's like the wind section of an orchestra clumsily warming up.

Anyway, this cartoonish President of ours was convincing us to go to war. I sat, with notebook in hand (our Social Studies' teacher had everyone write four key points for class) and scribbled.

I finally went upstairs once my father's cacophony became too abusive to my tympanic membrane.

"I'm starving Mom!"

"It'll be ready soon, Andrew. Is Bush doing a good job?"

My mother's politics are interesting. She might not like the person, but she always picks the pro-life candidate. Bush was no exception.

I went back downstairs. My father woke up to go to the bathroom.

According to Direct Lending Solutions, the expression "keeping up with Joneses" comes from a 1913 comic strip by the artist, Arthur Momand. Momand critiqued the way in which Americans competed to impress each other (Keeping Up). The culture of America was becoming a dog show. Instead of Irish setters, people were prancing around their latest purchases.

On September 20, 2008, George W. Bush asked Congress for a 700 billion dollar bailout plan for Wall Street. The House of Representatives denied the bill; however, a revised version of the bill finally passed to ease the current financial crisis.

CNN senior business correspondent, Ali Velshi expressed his views on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Velshi believes that a major contributing factor to the economic crisis was the American tendency to live outside of one's means. America believed that home values would increase, salaries would rise, and the stock market would continue to be successful. Velshi says that this optimism led people to spend more. "We all lived beyond our means and then a lot beyond our means. Now our country, our people, and our banks and our government are all heavily indebted and the money is running tight" (Financial Crisis 101).

\*\*\*

My father returned to the couch and fell asleep.

"It's ready!" my Mom shouted down the stairs.

Excited to eat, I ran up. I was so hungry.

"Andrew, go back downstairs and wake up your father."

"I hate waking him up; he always jumps."

"Michael! Michael!" my Mom shouted down the stairs.

"Ugh, leave him alone. I'll go get him."

Due to the financial crisis, experts like Greg McBride, senior analyst for Bankrate.com, feel that "...we're undergoing a fundamental shift from living on borrowed money to one where living within your means, saving and investing for the future comes back into vogue" (Associated Press).

Suze Orman, financial expert and *O Magazine* columnist, has similar feelings. Orman finds the deceitful mortgage practices at fault for the condition of our economy. She says, "It was the banks and their greed... wanting to make money and giving loans to people when they should have said, 'I'm so sorry', like they did years ago... But instead they said, 'Here you go, little one, take a mortgage'" (Financial Crisis 101).

\*\*\*

"Mom he isn't waking up!"

"Michael, Michael!"

My dad opened his eyes and stared blankly at us. He could not speak.

"Michael, wake up! Oh my God, Andrew! Oh my God!"

"Call an ambulance Mom!"

"Dad, sit up! Dad! Say something! This isn't fucking funny!"

He just sat there murmuring gibberish. He stared like a frightened doe.

When the ambulance came, the EMS entered the house. I went into the bathroom. I knew that was the last place he had been. There was an empty pill bottle in the trash basket. *Ambien*.

\*\*\*

According to financial expert and author of *Master Your Money Type*, Jordan Goodman, The United States has over 900 billion dollars worth of credit card debt, and an estimated three trillion dollars in combined car loans, student loans, and medical debt. There is approximately ten trillion dollars in mortgage debt as well. According to MSN, 43% of American families spend more than their annual income (Goodman).

To be fair this doesn't all account for people living glamorous lives they cannot afford. Someone who is uninsured and falls ill will suffer costly medical bills. Banks gave people mortgages irresponsibly with very low interest rates that would adjust to the market. Now the interest rates are going up and people are being forced to foreclose on their homes. This is not living beyond means, but merely trying to maintain a lifestyle when normal expenses are becoming more expensive.

\*\*\*

As I sat in the E.R., I did not once think that it was a suicide attempt.

Then I overheard my uncle say, "Sometimes people get overwhelmed and..." I did not hear the rest of the sentence. It hit me. My father tried to kill himself.

I sat stunned.

My mother decided it would be a good idea to drive me home.

"How could he do such a thing? How ridiculous! Doesn't he know we love him! We really do love him!" I screamed. I hated myself for the things I was saying. My words were so melodramatic and typical- the words I would roll my eyes at if I heard it in a film.

I came home. My sister and mother went back to the hospital. I will never understand why they dropped me off. I was alone with *him*. His presence was everywhere. Pictures of him were on the dresser, the window sill, above the television, above the computer, on the wall, in my mind. I quickly turned down all the frames. They all scared me. Who was this ghost in all these photos?

The doorbell rang.

\*\*\*

"In the credit era, which is like living on steroids, you're not saving money, you're not breaking even. You're actually borrowing 20 to 30 percent," Robert Manning, author of *Credit Card Nation: The Consequences of America's Addiction to the Credit*, says. "We're going to see fundamental changes in consumer behavior" (Associated Press).

In essence, the party's over. In the last 30 years, Americans have used credit cards, been approved for loans with not much bank hesitation, and have been "siphoning the equity in their homes" (Associated Press). Due to the financial crisis we find ourselves in, these practices must cease to exist.

I am not a psychiatrist, but why do people live beyond their means? I think it gives them a sense of identity, a sense of validation. "People want to be me so I should be happy to be me." However, in living a lie you become less yourself.

\*\*\*

I answered the door. It was my next-door neighbors, Lisa and Andy Lavine. My mom must have called them to check up on me.

"How are you doing honey?" Lisa said. "Why are all the frames down?"

"I don't know, I couldn't look at him."

"Oh don't be silly..."

*My dad tried to kill himself. I always joked around, telling him "go kill yourself!" Did he take that seriously? I can't believe he would. He works so hard for us. Every day. He cares so much about us. He gives us the world. I can't believe he wanted to die. Why did he want to die? He always made us*

*take pictures. My sister and I with coerced smiles. "Close your eyes... now open!" he would say to us. It was his way to ensure no blinking in the photo. I would take pictures without complaining now. I swear I would. Why is this life so hard? I'm so sorry for him. How could he do this to us? What would my mother have done if he were successful? He's horrible. He's horrible. I can't say that. I don't know. Is he in debt?*

"...right, Andrew?"

"Yes, you're right."

That night my mom stayed with my father. She poured the charcoal down his throat and held him tight.

I stayed with the Lavines. I watched "Three's Company" over and over again. Each episode there was a misunderstanding that led to a humorous outcome. Yeah, we get it! Enough.

My father was no longer infallible.

My father had tried to escape. He was living beyond his means, if you don't mind the cliché (and if you do mind it your head's already through the wall from this essay). He was \$40 thousand dollars in debt. He had earlier been in debt \$200,000 dollars. My mother said she would leave him if he ever did it again. He did. He rationalized in his mind- as many Americans do- that his family deserved it. We deserved the Broadway shows, the trips to Disney, the season tickets. We deserved it all.

My father is fine now. He's a great man. A flawed, great man. I learned from him; he told me, "Andrew, I think I learned from all of this shit that wealth doesn't come with a credit card. That's a lie. You lie to yourself every time you buy something you cannot afford. You loose yourself little by little. With every purchase your identity grows smaller and smaller. To truly become 'great' you must live in your truth; lead an authentic life."

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# The Exhale

by James Rose

## *Day 1*

My throat burns like the blistering pavement as I inhale the sweltering-sun-blocked-salty-bathing-suit-sea-foam air of South Beach, Miami.

It's spring break and I have strep throat; diagnosed by my best friend and the prescription called in (slightly illegally) by his parents (their doctor) over the phone. I leave the condo to pick up the medicine and wonder: what could be worse? As the white infection scratches the back of my tender throat, I tromp down South Beach's Collins Avenue to the CVS. Upon leaving the store, I take the first of my six individually-packaged pills and call home to inform my parents of my misfortune. No *one* answers; seven rings to the voicemail.

My mother's gentle voice recites, "Hi. You have reached the Rose's. I'm sorry we are not able to answer this call right now, but if you would please leave a message, we will get back to you as soon as we can. Thanks. Buh-Bye."

## *Day 2*

I take my second blue strep-throat pill. It reminds me of cotton-candy (after it has melted in your mouth) for its color, taste, and the surprising ease with which it goes down my aching throat. The rectangular plastic container, its bottom covered in silver foil, now has two holes punched in where the pills used to be. Coming in from the beach and feeling slightly worse, I call home again, this time four rings and my father picks up. I say hello and ask to speak to Mom.

After a short hesitation he says, "She's out getting groceries. She will be back later."

I have been away from home for almost a year now and this is the first time he ever answered the phone when I called.

Suspiciously, I ask, "What's going on Dad, why aren't you at work."

"Oh, well, Terrance had to leave early to watch Grace's soccer

game so we called it a day at three." He rarely comes home early and it is even less likely that his partner, Terrence Healy, would leave work at all.

"Oh, alright, Dad, well just tell Mom I have strep throat but everything is okay. Mark's parents called in a prescription for me," I say and quickly add, "and South Beach is great, the view from the condo is amazing." Anxious to get off the phone, I say, "Alright Dad, I'll talk to you later. Just tell Mom I called. Buh-bye." My father and I are close - I think as close as guys can get - just not talking-on-the-phone-or-hugging close.

I wonder why my father hesitated and seemed so unsure of himself. Was it something I just never recognized before? I call my mom on her cell phone, not wanting to look any deeper into this. The phone rings several times. I hang up and try again. No luck. An hour later, same thing. I notice that my forehead seems rather warm but I write it off due to the weather.

Although I am confused, frustrated and sick, it is hard to stay worried in Miami on spring break with five close friends who have a vodka saturated watermelon. The burning sensation in my throat is telling me, "NO!" but peer pressure concurs all — it is going to burn going down either way. We slice the watermelon directly in half, creating two yellow-pale-green ovals with pink centers, spoon and scrape out the fresh fruit however we can, and pick every remaining sliver out of this five-pound watermelon to load it into two large mixing bowls. We carefully wrap the tops of the bowls tightly to be opened for later in the week. The leftover juices, sweet but potent, now run through the concave, half intact, watermelon shell. The juice has a thin consistency with small bits of pink mushy melon. We pour the juice into a large cup and try to ladle out the remaining pieces of fleshy melon with a spoon. Eventually, we give up and pour the almost perfect juice into an empty thirty-two-ounce-water bottle. Even after our tireless work and careful procedure there are still small almost untraceable pink-melon-y specks in our freezer-bound cocktail. My failing throat and rising temperature are thankful that we save it for later.

Day 3

It's eleven A.M. and upon waking up I take my third round and chalky strep throat pill. Today I feel worse than the previous two days but at least the pack is half-way done. Opening my mouth wide, I can look in the mirror and see the white puss crawling up the back of my throat, claiming more territory. Keeping my mouth open this wide makes

my throat dry and my jaw tight but closing it to swallow only sends a distinct pain throughout my body. Not a decisive piercing pain from a stab nor a blow from something blunt, but a scratch like a claw trying to grasp the base of my throat — perhaps a cat, using my esophagus as a scratch board. It starts behind my nose, wraps in front of my ears, and then spreads from under my jaw, to my lymph nodes, to the back of my throat. The pain is intense but it feels brief because I know that after three more days when I finish my antibiotics it will be gone.

I haven't heard from my parents, nor have I tried to call, partially because I begin to feel juvenile for being so persistent and suspicious, but also due to the care-free atmosphere of the vacation. After lounging by the pool lagoon, strolling down the white sand beaches, and browsing the boutiques of the city, my friends and I come back to the condo and play cards. We are discussing where we want to go to dinner and what nook of the city we want to explore when I get a phone call from home. I quickly answer and get up from the kitchen table.

"Hi, James," my mother begins softly.

"Hi, Mom, how are you?" Not waiting for an answer, I blurt, "I've had strep the past three days but everything is okay because I got a prescription and it should be gone soon. I told Dad yesterday but I'm not sure if he told you. He was home from work."

"Oh, okay. Yes, I know he was home."

Her slow response and lack of comforting manner seem uncharacteristic. I walk from the kitchen to my assigned bedroom that has an entire wall of window looking out over the city.

"James, I need to talk to you about something," she says, her voice tranquil.

I shut the door behind me, lock it and then sit on my bed.

"Yes?" I reply, barely audible.

As she takes a deep breath my mind is racing faster than any car I can see on the street outside. *Did something happen with her and Dad? Is that why he was home? Why he seemed so unsure? Why they didn't want to talk to me? Was it my fault? It's always my fault. Money problems? My tuition? Of course.*

"James, I went to the doctor today. He said I have breast cancer. I found a lump three days ago and I didn't want to say anything until I found out for sure. I didn't want you to worry."

With the little strength I have I stand up and walk to the window. I lean my forehead against the glass, supporting my weight. The sun is setting and radiant colors fill the sky: purples, pinks, oranges and yellows, all merging together, blending from an orderly quilt into a swirling blanket of color that is sketched out along the city's skyline.

The cars are slowing down, the boats are idling, the people getting onto the bus have frozen mid-step. I try to focus my eyes but the tears only blur up the sky even more, further mixing the once hand-painted layers of colors.

Wishing I could be hundreds of miles closer to home I tell her that I love her and everything will be ok—the only response I know. The conversation doesn't go on for much longer, a few details, but it is too painful to hear everything right now.

I slowly close the phone after another "I love you" and "Buh-Bye." I am standing in front of the window looking out at what I once thought was paradise, resenting it. I turn around, smugly examine the punched silver holes of the antibiotics on my dresser, unlock the door, and walk to the freezer. I grab the slushy-watermelon cocktail and pour a generous amount (disregarding my throat, I am already burning) into a plastic cup and sit back down at the poker table and try to act like I didn't miss a hand.

Mark casually asks, "Who called?"

"Who called...?" I repeat, trying to buy time.

I try to cough up a response out of my "sick" throat; sucking the air down my lungs, I inhale not a breath, but a gust of reality. Loosing composure on *the exhale...*

# Fruit of the Wine, Divine

by Michael D'Angelo

*I cook with wine, sometimes I even add it to the food.*

-W.C. Fields

From the time of Christ to the American Revolution, and now on the family dinner table of the twenty first-century, wine has made its appearance in all scenes. Despite varying styles, blends, and methodology, the fundamental process of making wine has remained unaltered through the myriad of years since its debut on the dinner table. Wine is derived from the Latin word *vinum*. As grapes are the fruit of the vine, it is fitting that wine and vine share a similar meaning and even more so that wine is made almost completely naturally.

Wine-making is an art form much like painting or sculpting. Choosing the right grapes is only one part of the whole process. To make a perfect wine, many other conditions apply: knowing the proper temperature to have the wine ferment, the right amount of yeast to use in the vats, the type of vats - plastic, oak, or glass, and, of course, the amount of time to leave the wine sitting. Each plays a crucial role in the outcome and the type of wine you will have. The fruitier merlot grapes coupled with a plastic vat yield a very fruity and sweet-tasting wine when allowed to set for a few months. If you use the same grapes while allowing the wine to ferment in a plastic vat with oak woodchips in it, the wine will taste stronger and less fruity. This, of course, assumes that the grape season was successful and produced high-quality grapes. Unfortunately, there are times when the season is unsuccessful and even the most reputable grape distributors produce only marginally acceptable bushels of grapes.

I have been making homemade wine with my grandparents since I was a young boy, the next in line of a family tradition for many generations. Due to my experiences making wine every year with my grandfather, I can never sit down at a dinner and just "drink" wine. I usually sit there, holding up my glass, swishing the wine around and slowly smelling it, as to almost taste the wine using my sense of smell instead of my tongue. After the smell comes the color: holding up the wine to the light, looking to determine if this is a clear wine or a murky wine with impurities usually due to premature removal of the wine from the vat. The shades of purple and red intertwine in my glass to

reveal the nature of the wine. Bitter wines are usually dull and do not allow much light to penetrate. Clear and bright wines that allow for a considerable amount of light to enter are usually more smooth and fruity. Observing wine in this manner can tell a person a considerable amount of information about that glass of wine without even tasting it. These tell-tale signs are found in the wine connoisseurs of the world. However, I do not consider myself to be one.

Making wine is what enables me to enjoy drinking it so much. It's always a great time of the year when my grandfather calls me up on the phone, in his broken English telling me to come over and help him with the wine. The process itself is basically the same every year. First, my grandfather places an order for a specific number of bushels of grapes (this number is different each year). We import grapes from California because of the quality and reputation of the grapes from the west coast. We try to use only the best in our wine. Traditionally, my grandparents used to begin grinding the grapes at the end of August, but thanks to global warming the process is pushed back to mid-September when it is cooler. The temperature is important because grapes naturally ferment in a cooler environment, therefore making it impossible to brew wine in the summer months. After the grapes arrive, we open the wooden crates and thoroughly rinse off the grapes and pass them through this derelict-looking grinder that my grandfather brought with him from Italy.

I laugh every time I see the thing, the derelict grinder, that is. My grandfather always makes modifications, buying new parts for the motor, and repairing the belt; naturally, we can't buy a new machine; he is Calabrese, stubborn the whole way through and it's either his way or no way. After the grapes are passed through the grinder, we leave the ground grapes in the barrel for seven days in the cool garage to let them begin fermenting.

Once the week has passed we take the ground-up grapes and press them in another ancient-looking machine. The purpose of squeezing the grapes is to separate the skins and stems from the actual grape juice. Like a vice grip on the flesh, the former grapes are stripped of their juice as it passes on into the empty barrel. Careful not to waste anything, the remains of the grapes are put into the soil of my grandmother's yard so that it may benefit from the nutrients of the grape remains. At this point, the wine isn't wine yet; it is still grape juice.

Once the wine is all barreled up, we take the barrels downstairs to the basement and pour them into the vats where the temperature is perfect for fermenting. At this point, yeast and other ingredients are added to the wine, the contents of which I cannot disclose since it is my

family's guarded secret. After a few months, the wine is ready to bottle and drink. If you were wondering, yes, my grandfather has custom labels and bottles his own wine.

Aside from the process, it's the chaos that ensues every year that makes wine-making enjoyable. All of my grandfather's cousins and friends come over to help so it is like a small reunion. During the process, there is always shouting in native Italian tongue between the cousins. There is always arguing between grandma and grandpa about how long the grapes should stay, how many bushels should be done in one day, who should do what. It's always funny watching this, sipping some limoncello with my grandpa's buddy Frank. These aren't just old friends; these are old Italian friends, which make the day so much funnier because of what it means to be Italian. They always think they know everything, they make jokes about each other, they are loud, they repeat themselves over and over again, and, of course, they drink espresso by the gallon. The entire cast of friends and family is just so interesting because of the diversity: Frank, a retired NYPD detective, cousin Rocky, a Fire Lieutenant, Monsignor Cassato, the Pastor, Uncle Tom, the retired Sanitation worker, and many more funny characters, each with their own set of stories. My grandfather is always telling stories of his days working for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), reminiscing with his old transit friends. He starts his usual rant, preaching how the city jobs are the best and this "college business" is expensive and risky. If you look at his friends they are all retired city workers in one form or another. So as he repeats himself, like a squirrel in the late fall trying to collect acorns, he scurries for support from his buddies finding none. Naturally, I laugh as he so intently preaches and looks for backing from his friends; they all side with me and tell my grandfather he's crazy and I should stay in college.

After months of waiting for the fermentation to complete, the wine is ready. The idea of it being "ready" is determined by the amount of patience my grandfather has and the difference in taste which he would know about because he tastes a little almost every day to check. But when the time comes, my phone rings, and it won't stop ringing until I pick it up: "Mike, it's done! It's ready! You better come on down here right away." He says it with such meaning in his voice like the wine is going to be all gone if I don't hurry up and get down there. Sure enough, when I get there, everyone who helped make it is there, like the assembly of the Knights of the Round Table, waiting for King Arthur. This wine is my grandfather's Excalibur; it's with this wine he brings hope to the hearts of those who helped make it. The pouring of the wine into everyone's glass always seems as sacred as if it was the

blood of Christ. He is careful not to spill any. Then comes the long pause and repetition of "what a good wine, this wine is good, right, Mike?"

Since we are Italian, there is always wine on the Sunday dinner table, and because we have a relative who owns a liquor store, there are always many different brands of wine to try. Granted, our homemade wine might not be a 2003 Robert Mondavi Reserve Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, or fit enough to serve on King Midas' table, but our wine is unique. There is something interesting about our wine. We made it. All the stories, all the people helping, years of technique perfection, and tradition, these are the qualities that make our wine flawless. When we sit down on Sunday and sip our homemade wine, with our pasta, my grandfather will still say, "This is the real deal, this is a good wine." It's his way of saying: "*Here's looking at you, kid.*" I'll look over to him, raise my glass and say, "Of course. We all made it."

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# A Pretty How Town

by Jerard Fagerberg

Nestled in Plymouth County amongst other small Massachusetts towns, Kingston sits in a nook - quietly occupying its designated sector of the map without calling any attention to itself. Its face is shaded by the shadow of Plymouth which both relieves and stifles, protecting Kingston from the poisonous Sun of tourism while simultaneously not allowing her to cast any shadows of her own. The Atlantic Ocean heaves steady, salt-filled breaths cross the laird-toned sand and parched dune grass, perfuming the town with the subtle tang of the ubiquitous tide. Unlike most coastal towns in Massachusetts, Kingston offers no major beaches to host the impromptu Frisbee games and coolers full of sweating Corona bottles that suburban teens carry fondly in the summer time.

Unambitiously, the town exhumes a colonial air; history is deliberately trapped in the atmosphere. America's earliest veins run varicose through the town. Engorging since 1620, they've fissured the stubborn concrete of Pilgrims Highway; they've been studs in the wayward architecture of the Bradford House; they've threaded together to fabricate the sail of Brig Independence. King Phillip's War spilled the deep, rich, vermeil blood of the Wampanoag people that now clouds the water of the Jones River, slipping idly into Silver Lake and reabsorbing into the same soil that housed their ancient burial grounds. Prancing through the woods in bare feet and jeans rolled to mid-calf, I recall the acute pain of a crudely sharpened arrowhead puncturing my Anglo-Saxon heel with spite undiminished by the passage of time.

According to a 2003 FBI report, Kingston has a violent crime rate tinkering around 0.7 for every thousand people<sup>1</sup> - we don't lock our doors. Property crime is also notably low; Kingston ranks in the top fourteen percent in low crime rates as compared with similar towns.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the last case of major property crime arose in the 1950s when Pilgrims Highway was paved over to serve as an extension of Route 3, successfully bridging the gap between Kingston and Boston and "robbing" the quaint townsfolk of a piece of their history. Economically, Kingston is painstakingly average - a postcard example of a middle-

class town cookie-cut from the amorphous clay of undeveloped land and blueprints. Housing developments monopolize the landscape, minivans are the predominate species on the roads, and soccer moms populate the aisles of local grocery stores in their unthreatening polos and tennis skirts.

The biggest social issue facing Kingston is absorption. There is a rational (and quite plausible) chance that our charming township will simply assimilate and become one with the uncannily similar surrounding towns. There exists a fear that one night we could be shaken from our unambitious dreams by the resounding POP! of our town limits disassociating and crawl out of our beds to discover that Duxbury, Kingston, Halifax, and Plympton have all comingled into one super-amalgam of commonality - Duxlymptingfax perhaps? More likely, we would not even notice the change, due to the imperceptible disparities. Differentiating between the South Shore municipalities by giving them sentient names is merely a formality; the only true discrepancy is geography. The belief that title determines identity is a fallacy.

We are dreamsleepers, people who live in a town absent of character. There are no family-owned businesses where townsfolk shop exclusively to help support "our own." There are plenty of chains, though. In Kingston, a town of only 18.5 square miles of land and a population density of 635.6 per square mile,<sup>3</sup> has a Burger King, Pizza Hut, KFC, two McDonald's, and a whopping seven Dunkin' Donuts. Where's the character in that? Kingston has two distinguishing features: the longest-run shipyard in America and the best special education system in the country - not exactly Guinness Book material. We own no particular reputation. Even fellow Massachusetts residents act surprised when I tell them I'm from Kingston: they peer awkwardly with their heads tilted slightly to the left. I sigh exasperatedly and clarify, "No, not Kingston, Rhode Island; not Kingston, New York; NO not Kingston, Jamaica - Kingston Massachusetts. Its right next to Plymouth."

Plymouth, Kingston's closest neighbor, is culturally separate and almost quadruple the size of Kingston. Home of the famous (and historically fraudulent) Plymouth Rock, Plymouth is by far the jewel of the South Shore. In fact, it's the only justifiable reason not to continue down Route 3, and onto Cape Cod without a second thought. Every summer, tourists (mostly Korean tourists for some odd reason) flock to "America's Birthplace" to catch a glimpse of the now-graffiti-stained Rock, or to pay visit to the actors at Plimouth Plantation. However, after nineteen years of neighboring these artifacts, their historical

glow seems significantly greyer. I drive casually past the Mayflower II, around the Miles Standish Monument, up Route 3A and back home. A curiously lost motorist stops me before I turn into me driveway to inquire: "How do I get to Plymouth from this vanilla Hell-hole?"

In his poem, "anyone lived in a pretty how town," E.E. Cummings characterized a town lacking individuation, a place where people continually "sowed their isn't" (L. 6) and "reaped their same" (L. 6). Utterly typical, the "how town" that Cummings typifies evokes familiar images for the observant Kingstonian. His words paint a portrait of Kingston, a place where:

*someones married their everyones  
laughed their cryings and did their dance  
(sleep wake hoe and then)they  
said their nevers and they slept their dream*

In eighth grade, I graduated from my local elementary school to Silver Lake Regional Junior High - a school containing children from Kingston, Plympton, Halifax, and Pembroke (all towns with similar identity issues, thus the term regional). On the first day of class, the homeroom teacher asked each student to stand up (one by one), introduce themselves and specify which town they owe patronage to:

"Billy Anderson, How Town."  
"Steve Barton, How Town."  
"Amanda Cummings, How Town."  
"Cindy DiNicola, How Town."  
"Bob Engle, How Town."  
"Jerry Fagerberg....How Town."

<sup>1</sup>"Kingston, Massachusetts." *ePodunk*. 2007.29 Apr. 2008 <<http://www.epodunk.com/cgi-bin/genInfo.php?locIndex=2995#Crim>>.

<sup>2</sup>"Kingston, MA." *CityTownInfo.Com*. 29 Apr. 2008 <<http://www.citytowninfo.com/places/massachusetts/kingston>>.

<sup>3</sup>"Kingston, MA." *Wikipedia*. 30 Apr. 2008 <[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)>.

# Roe

by Eric Abrecht

I have always liked Thursday. Many people consider this to be rather strange, holding true to long-established credence in the superiority of Saturday or Sunday. Yet, I have my reasons. My mother tells me I was born on a Thursday ("Thursday's child has far to go" went the rather asinine poem that inevitably followed this revelation). Also, I happen to harbor my own belief that Thursday is the perfect vantage point from which to anticipate and plan for the upcoming weekend. However, when I was a child, not one of these was the real reason behind my likeness for this particular day of the week: Mom and Dad worked late on Thursday, so after school I went over my godmother's house to visit.

My godmother instilled the philosophy, "Don't judge a book by its cover" into my brothers and me from the moment we could understand. My godmother, perhaps the woman I admired most only second to my mother, died last year at the young age of sixty. To the casual observer, this lady would have appeared to be nothing special. She was a very short, unnaturally heavy woman with child-sized feet. My godmother had beautiful milky white skin with flowing gray hair that she always wore her hair in a loose ponytail that reached far past her waist. Her wardrobe consisted of loose muumuus and caftans and she topped herself off with enormous eyeglasses. The woman, to say the least, had character.

RoSanne, (Roe to us) had a genius-level IQ but it was her natural way of being that was worthy of emulation. Roe was, without a doubt, the person I most loved to be with in the world, which explained my desire to hasten the walk home from school every Thursday afternoon. Although Roe never physically had children of her own, she raised most of my extended family starting with my mother and ending with my brothers and me. Her house was always the fun house where the best of times were had playing scrabble (which I would never win), baking cookies, and putting on skits for the rest of the family. Despite how horrible the cookies were or how unimportant the plays were to the audience, Roe always made you feel as though you were the most

important person in the room.

Roe loved to play cards and I must credit her with teaching me games I will never forget, such as blackjack, poker, fantan, and, of course, Old Maid. Roe especially loved Old Maid. To this day, I don't know if Roe was really bad at this last game or simply enjoyed watching me win, but she never won. As an elderly cardsharp knows, the deck is divided between two players. Each player must get rid of his own cards by picking cards of the same type from the opponent's deck and attempting to make a pair, which he can then discard. Whoever gets stuck with the "Old Maid," the one card that has no mate, loses the game. For whatever reason, Roe always ended up with the Old Maid and one other card. As clever as she was, Roe would try to trick me into picking the Old Maid card by standing the card much higher or lower than the other card. Needless to say, it didn't work, and I always won. For some strange reason, it never got old and I loved her for this.

Despite the difference in age between my godmother and me, I could go to her for advice about situations that others may deem unimportant; I always had Roe's unbridled attention. RoSanne always took the time to truly listen to what I was saying. I remember one Thursday I came to Roe crying. Chris, my second older and more devious brother, was being mean to me as usual. I tried to tell my Mom what he had been doing - locking me in the laundry room and turning the lights off from the outside - but she didn't seem to ever catch him at the right times. After listening to my story, Roe not only gave Chris what he had coming to him, but she advised me in ways to stick up for myself. She began by giving me suggestions of ways to "set him up" to get caught in the scene of the crime. Unfortunately for me, I wasn't a very good listener at the time and years of torture by Chris followed. Luckily, Roe was still patient and always lended an understanding ear. It was her great listening skills and unique outlook on life that I have tried to imitate as I grow and mature.

Roe taught me how to be tolerant of others and not to judge a book by its cover. The ability to accept the hand life deals you and to recognize that every person, although they may appear to be different, is both unique and special in their own way is one of the most commendable attributes a person can have. I strive every day to attain some small aspect of this virtue that my godmother so freely exhibited.

A famous Zen Master once said, "The trouble is that you think you have the time." This outlook is true about everything you do in life. The things you put off expecting to get to tomorrow, next week, or next month may not be there when you finally make time. I thought Roe would always be around the corner from my house where I could

visit her at any time during any day to tell her what she meant to me. Unfortunately, Roe's life ended too soon and I never had this chance. I thought I had the time, but I was wrong. I realized through my loss that life is short and uncertain. The people and the things that are important in your life must be a priority because tomorrow may never come.

Although Roe is no longer physically here in my life, I still take the lessons she taught me to heart. RoSanne's main priority was acceptance. By accepting others for how they are, she understood how important it was to never dwell on the negative. I hope to carry this message throughout life. Roe is a constant reminder to appreciate the people who genuinely care for me, to never judge anyone at face value (or try to remain aware when you do), and not take anything too seriously. It never mattered to Roe whether or not she won the game, only that she had fun playing.

# Table Memories

by Caitlyn Aymong

It is early morning and the men are just starting to line up. At least it seems like men at first, but as I look around the corner and down the long stretch of sidewalk I start to see more; teenagers seemingly alone, women clasping the hands of their little ones, even small families huddled together. And yet in a place where hope seems scarce, I cannot find an unhappy or disappointed face in the crowd. They are about to sit down for a meal together, perhaps their first meal in a long time.

These people are not alone in their hunger. Many years ago a young girl sat at a table with her family; her mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, all of them living in the same house. Her family emigrated from the southern Italian coast in the early 1920s and settled down in a small house in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. They traded one shoreline for another, pulling into Ellis Island with little in their pockets, save the hope for a better future where the streets were paved with gold. The little they had was further diminished with the onset of the Great Depression soon after their arrival. Yet the young girl sat at the family table and ate, perhaps unaware that she was missing something. Her family had made that so. The men worked, when they could find work, and the women cooked. They grew vegetables in a small garden in their backyard, each day tending carefully to the garden. As hopes around the country grew dim, this family's faith grew with each day. The vegetables in their garden grew from simple seeds, yet they supported the growth of a much larger entity than themselves. They supported the people who had uprooted their lives and were trying to grow in a new land; a barren land which discourages the integration forced upon it by the large influxes of people hitting its shorelines every day.

Yet each night, despite the discrimination, despite the hardships, this young girl and her family sat together and thanked God for the blessings of the day, if only for the fact that they were together, sharing a meal once again. It is funny to think about the power meals have in our lives. We eat in celebration and in mourning; in sickness and in health; together and apart, but most of all together. The joy that you

can get from sharing a meal with someone is like no other. The young girl and her family had barely anything to get by on except each other and the meals they shared together. They were united in their struggle and so united in their fight. They used their small vegetable garden to help them. These small family gardens are hard to find nowadays. That is, unless you know where to look.

The line starts to move forward as the food is ready to be served to the people who have waited so patiently in the cold. I can only imagine their anticipation, perhaps even excitement, and I hope with all my heart that I can help them with what they need. I know that it could just as easily be me that needs to wait on that line for food one day. Maybe not tomorrow, or five years from now, but I must keep in mind that I am no different from these men and women, and I must treat them with respect, because I would want it if I were in this situation. The prayer begins and the seated men and women are asked if they have anything in particular they would like to pray for. A woman raises her arms as if to the heavens and says "I would just like to thank the Lord for this beautiful day." People say things like this all the time; they say 'thank God for this' or 'thank God for that,' but it is different when it comes from her mouth. She says it with a genuine amount of gratitude that I admire, even envy. I only hope that someday I will be as grateful for something as she is for this beautiful day.

The eating begins; it is magical to see the way the people's faces light up, especially the children. I go to a child with two hands full of candy and ask her which two pieces she wants, and she looks at me with astonishment as I realize that candy is a rare and precious commodity. To be able to share my good fortune with someone is something I will always cherish. It is amazing, almost unbelievable to me, that I am making a difference simply by bringing out plates to these people. It becomes a robotic motion: I take out plates, ask for a drink order, get the drink, "Would you like sugar?", take the empty plates, "Have a Nice Day," and I continuously wear a smile. The cycle is broken only when I hear the first "Thank you." As with the woman who expressed her joy at the beautiful day, this one thank you has more gratitude in it than most would think. As I look around, I notice that people are not just eating; they are coming together in conversation and in support. I am reminded of the young girl and her family, and how they turned to each other for help. I start to realize that a community has developed between these people, many of them regulars at the establishment. They come together in hunger, but also in hope for the future. "I just got approved for temporary housing!" I hear one man excitedly whisper to another. "Mommy, they are giving us candy!" "I would just like to

thank the Lord for this beautiful day." It is in these small nuances that I find hope for these people. They gather around the table together to support each other, so that someday they may be able to provide the same at their own.

A man stands outside two big glass doors. He is alone, newly alone, and unsure of what to do with it. He feels comfort in the sign they have placed outside, the neon colored markers advertising his favorite meal on a large black dry erase board. Knowing that he needs the food, he enters slowly and apprehensively. "One, please," he says, thinking of the many years ago when he last said those words. He sits down and orders a coffee, looking out the window. "Would you like anything in that?" He looks up at the waitress and feigns a smile before politely declining her offer. He sits alone, waiting for his meal. When it arrives, he almost wants it to be bad. He wants nothing to replace what he has lost, he wants to believe that nothing exists which can replace it. And yet when the first bite of goulash hits his taste buds, he cannot help but smile. The taste and smell bring him right back to his childhood, long before the hardships he faces now. Suddenly, he finds himself starting a conversation with the waitress, telling her of memories of his family and the many times they had shared this same meal. He finds his roots settling in despite his initial reluctance to attach to anything. He becomes a regular, finding support and comfort in the meal they are able to offer him each day at 4 P.M. Slowly, he begins to regain his stability; he gets back on his feet. He starts to say things like "I'd like some more coffee" or even "A slice of warm apple pie would be nice," in a place he was almost too scared to enter in the first place. When life is tough, there is always a kind waitress's smile and a huge plate of mashed potatoes and gravy to make him feel a little less lonely. His hope grows with each passing day.

I smile at the people as they leave; hoping that I have been able to provide for them what food has been able to provide for many people for so long. It has provided a time of day when people can sit together in peace and enjoy a good meal. It has provided a forum for discussion and debate. Most of all, it has provided support for those who seek it. A person may not be the experience looking for support, but they will find it along the way. The young girl and her family relied on each other so much and their struggle for food only made every bite that much more satisfying. The man struggled for a new hope and found comfort and support in his familiar favorites.

*"Ponder well on this point: the pleasant hours of our life are all connected by a more or less tangible link, with some memory of the table."* This was said in the 1800s by a French author named Charles Pierre Monselet. It is

a saying which still holds true today. In the table we find relief and solace, faith and hope. It is lunchtime when the "restaurant" closes for the day, and I get back in my car with a group of my friends and drive home to enjoy a meal together.

# Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words, or a Memory?

by Sarah Sweeney

There is a picture held to my fridge with one of those primary red plastic letter magnets; a picture of my family that somehow ended up as our Christmas card a few years back, yet remains hanging in our kitchen as if glued there, mocking and lying. My chubby, two-year-old sister sits at my feet giggling, covered in a fine layer of sand; my brother's arm is casually draped across my back in a half-hug—something he would never do if a picture was not being taken. My sister Lauren is grinning, with a prized shell gripped in her small fist; and my seemingly genuine smile is surrounded by *long* ocean-drenched hair. Of course, the backdrop of white sand and the blue-green ocean surrounding Bermuda, looking unreal in the picture, helps authenticate the "feel-good" vibe that this snapshot portrays. In other words, it reflects the mood of an event contrary to what its participants will attest to, if asked.

The camera sees things as they are portrayed, not how they are perceived and interpreted into memories by the mind. Memories will always differ from pictures because memories include time - sequences of events leading up to and following the picture, whereas the camera only captures a single moment, without events before or after to explain it, without other sensory markers like sound, touch, smell, or emotion adding to it. What you see is what you get.

Looking at the picture described above, each morning has slowly changed my memory of that trip. Every time I see it, I remember how warm it was, how refreshing the salt of the ocean felt when swimming, how excited we were to build a sandcastle for our little sister, how we were collected seashells to decorate that castle. Then I remember the fight over the seashell that we now all claim to have found—the "perfect" seashell. By the time the picture was taken, because we did not want to be seen as spoiled little children, the three of us who were fighting had *come to temporary terms* with each other, willing

to set aside the war boundaries of childhood for the sake of a better memory. And that is exactly what happened: slowly, through the years, due to this lying, mocking picture, our memories of this event have been altered. The camera took a picture of one moment of time—the moment in which we were the least like ourselves, the moment where we were the people we wanted others to see us as, the good kids we wanted to be remembered as.

With luck, a great photograph can aid in recalling a memory, and a skilled photographer might even be able to come close to duplicating how the image is remembered and was perceived. But what about the rest of the world? What about all those who do not manage to get that one lucky snapshot truly reflecting an event in the same way it was remembered? I used to take photograph after photograph on our trips, trying to capture everything, from scenery to sandcastles to family dinners. I even bought a waterproof camera to take on snorkeling excursions. But as hard as I tried, the pictures would always turn out lackluster. The vibrant blues, reds, and yellows of the fish not as vibrant, the size of the corals in relation to everything else minimized by the four-by-six photo paper. And no matter how many pictures I took, I always managed to miss some essential event and, somehow, that event would stand out even more vividly in my memory than any attached to a photograph.

Now, as a photographer, it is rare to find me without my camera. As a tourist, it is even more unusual, especially on days like the first morning of my trip to Paris. Sure, I had my camera with me—in my bag. So what prevented me from taking it out and using the four rolls I had lugged from Ireland to Paris to capture such luminescent beauty? For such was the perfection before me. Yet, something stilled my hand and forced all memory of a battered manual Canon from my mind. And now my regret is greater than ever as the image seems to fade and slowly seeps through the sieve serving as my memory.

It was early; a bright, beautiful, clear morning, and we'd had breakfast, charged and ready to go. We paused at the Arc d'Triomphe in wonder at the arch within the vortex of countless cars and buses, guarded by only two sentries; an arch so perfectly lit by the rising sun, its light brown surface turning a rosy pink, raising every detail of its carved surfaces and throwing them into sharp relief. It cannot help but inspire something within, even at 200 yards distance. A mere, "Oh," and waiting around while my companion got out her camera to take pictures comprised my incompetent reaction. And though my eye was drawn ever back to the giant structure, it kept wandering away again, looking for where we were supposed to be going next.

The photographer in me begged—pleaded—that I take out one of the two cameras in my backpack, even suggesting that it would make the load on my back a bit lighter because that old Canon is *heavy*. But no amount of pleading, no rationalization could get me to move.

Silence reigned as our trek continued across four wide avenues and down the Champs-Élysées. We paused as we turned onto it, halted in astonishment. Looking back, I deeply regret my state of mind at the time. Or maybe not my state of mind, but whatever it was that created the inability to take my camera out. I had heard that the Champs-Élysées, though expensive, is one of the most beautiful streets in Paris. On this morning, it could not be compared to any other street in the world.

Having suffered a continuous rain throughout the night, the sidewalks were still covered in a slight sheen of rainwater that glowed in the morning sun, at times reflecting the regimented trees growing alongside the avenue. Here and there cafes were opening, setting up their outdoor tables and chairs, allowing the mouthwatering scent of freshly baked pastries to waft out into the street, enticing anyone wandering close enough to stop in. Perfection such as I have never seen greeted me on that street and not once did my will win the internal battle to take a single picture. I suppose the argument could be made that I didn't want to ruin the memory of it with a picture that could never convey the flawlessness and feeling that it inspired. I knew it was scenery that any photographer would jump at the chance to photograph, with the perfect conditions to go with it. I still have no idea why I had no energy, why I was so unmoved, uninspired, and I, who can go through four rolls of film in two hours or less, could not take a single image. It was not until we walked back down the Champs-Élysées later that day that I realized the opportunity I had missed, after the film of water had evaporated, taking the magic of that morning with it.

But would my regret be greater if I had taken the picture and been disappointed with the results once I developed it back home? Is it better to rely on memory, which eventually fades and is altered by other sources, or to rely on a picture that cannot even come close to expressing the emotion incited in person? Because I know now, even as I knew then, that any picture I took would not have come close to equaling that morning on the Champs-Élysées. It would have been in black and white. Fine for my tastes, and it certainly would have added a more definite feeling to it, because the contrast between the darks and the lights—what in the pictures would have been the blackest blacks and whitest whites—were immense and unbelievably sharp, due to

the glare from the rising sun glancing off the wet cement. This glare would have made it harder for the camera and its operator to calculate the necessary apertures to keep the contrast and get the same image, especially when the eye can see the details in both the dark areas and the bright areas at the same time, while it is much harder for a camera to do the same without creating a grey image. So, difficult to photograph: yes. Impossible? No. But close to it. And in analog, without the colors, it would have been missing some essential element.

Just like those vivid moments on my family vacations that did not make it onto film, this moment, I believe, will stay clearer in my memory. It will stay true to what I saw and perceived because I *lived* it instead of viewing it behind a lens, focused on taking a picture of something momentous instead of *experiencing* something momentous.

Photography is an essential element to tourism. On the one hand are the glorious images enticing citizens from foreign lands to travel. On the other is the typical tourist image, the one everybody knows and thinks of when they hear the word tourist. But why do tourists feel compelled—and it is a compulsion—to take photographs? The people who live there do not bother because they see the Eiffel Tower every morning when they wake up, or drive around the Arc d'Triomphe on their way to work. To them, it is an everyday occurrence. But for the millions who flock to the Eiffel Tower to walk up those 700 steps just to get that picture from the top (even though they are not at the top just yet), it is an extraordinary experience. However, this still does not answer *why*.

To prove they have been there, but prove to whom? And why should they have to prove anything? To show people where they went, making it easier for others to visualize the stories told. Okay, but then what? What do people *do* with photographs anyway? What do I do with all those photographs that I took on family vacations and all the ones I have yet to develop from Paris? Well, they are for memories. They get filed away until some new visitor comes needing to hear the tale about the Eiffel Tower sparkling at night or about watching the semi-final World Cup Rugby match on the Champs de Mars next to the Eiffel Tower (just to prove the stories are not made up; to add authenticity: a picture makes it real). But truthfully, they're just things that take up space and eventually get thrown away or lost. Sure, some of them become memories. But how often do you really need to take out pictures to remember it? Because, chances are, that trip, that event, that moment, was not as life-changing as you believed at the time. The truly life-changing moments are the ones that cannot be captured on film or memory cards. Those moments do not come when one is

behind a camera, passively viewing the life around them. They come when a person walks up the steps of the Eiffel Tower to simply walk and not to take a picture of the view. These unforgettable moments come when the camera is forgotten and life is lived.



## A Note on the Type

The text is set in 10 pt. Gentium, a typeface designed by Victor Gaultney and released under the SIL Open Font License in 2005. The typeface is designed to eventually allow "the diverse ethnic groups around the world who use the Latin and Greek scripts to produce readable, high-quality publications" through a vast set of diacritical marks and alternative glyphs, according to Gaultney.

Titles and page numbers are set in Optima, a typeface designed by Hermann Zapf and released in 1955 by the D. Stempel AG Foundry.

*The Garland* logo is set Harrington.