

NÖÖ



[seven]

free quarterly journal of politics / prose / poetry / pictures

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Editors' Notes

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LET'S BE HONEST. The “Global War on Terror” is a sham, a ruse to cover up foreign policy failures and the machinations of war mongers. Like the Cold War before it, the War on Terror is an oversimplification and polarization of complex political and social dynamics. Declaring such a ‘war’ creates confusion and resentment because of ill-defined and inconsistent standards, which favor one group or nation over another, making any impartial involvement impossible. And being impartial is a fundamental necessity for judge, jury, and executioner, especially if they are one in the same.

Moreover, as in Orwell’s “War is Peace” slogan from his prophetic novel *1984*, believing violence is a means for attaining peace requires, if nothing else, the capacity for doublethink: the ability to hold two contradictory ideas in one’s mind at the same time and believe both of them. If we each personally experienced the suffering being inflicted on others in the name of ‘democracy’ and ‘justice’ then we might agree with Emerson when he writes “Peace cannot be achieved through violence; it can only be attained through understanding.” That is why in this issue of **NOO Journal** the reader will find a range of articles, which will hopefully contribute to a broader understanding of an infinitely complex world situation, and most importantly, inspire the dialogue necessary to make it better. To that end, when you have finished reading, please post any comments and/or criticisms on our website forums found at www.noojournal.com. We live for comments, honestly. Thanks for choosing **NOO!**

--Mike / mike@noojournal.com

YOU KNOW WHEN TO CHECK OUT. Certain knots call for giving up, and you respect that. You expect that! When you move three thousand miles by train, from the gold country to the Puritan woods, you expect to mumble a little, to fall woozy for the piano player, to ask ‘where?’, to learn how packies help their communities, to gamble the yard sales—bicycles! fans!—to pass out into your beard, to meet up in person, to ask ‘when?’, to stand on your new deck in the evening, fruit flies in your ears, high above the blueberry bushes and giant mums, drinking down orange juice and Marlboro smoke, thumbing through your phone to reach only voicemails, and talking finally to someone from home in a cheery but stranded sort of way, a talk of by-the-book condolences and plans that won't gel, not now, not on Thursday, never. Oh. That feels better than it should.

Here in **NOO**, Mazie Louise Montgomery knows about this. Matt Maxwell knows about this. Mary Miller, yeah. Whatever strange power wrangled together this convergence of MM authors—they probably knew something. But David Ensminger knows, Elliot Harmon too. And you know! You know right now. Now, right? Knock a little through the pages, peek, ask who else knows what you know. Maybe the second-greatest bait of literature is voyeurism, but the greatest is to find your own self spied upon. With mercy perhaps, but no pity.

So see if you ran to hide in one of these stories or poems. Ran like you run, for a new set of punch lines and a belly full of champagne and ketchup. We have these faces, and we use them to meet new ones.



FLAMES

OF OUR

FATHERS



-- Norman Ball

INCAUTIOUS MEN have no business heading unchecked superpowers. To quote an operable malapropism, they routinely 'mis-underestimate' their foes—if there's an abiding interest in avoiding conflagration *at all*. There's just so much riding on war these days. Compounding the ambiguity, one man's battle fatigue is another's gross receipts. *Ka-ching*. In short order, the smoke, like the plot, thickens.

In 1997, the Cold War over, America's prospects for an adversary-in-perpetuity lay in shambles. Peace threatened to engulf the world. In a bygone age, wars ran their course, thank God. Armies collapsed, nations bankrupted themselves. Not so the post-Cold War era, hijacked on the way to the armistice by men who wouldn't see their war economy fade without a fight. By all rights, we were owed a peace dividend; instead, a new *causa belli* was being fashioned by the think tanks of Washington.

An ominous new group consisting of a by-now familiar roster (Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, Cheney, Libby, et al.) was hard at work cobbling America's perma-war agenda under the masthead of the Project for a New American Century (PNAC). Acquiescing to peace—these sage hawks counseled in the boldest of doublespeak—would be a sure signal of weakness. Perpetual war was the key to holding the peace.

Prominent European intellectual Giorgio Agamben calls this permanent fire drill the *State of Exception*. In his book of the same name, Agamben charges the Bush Administration with consciously attempting to transform the post-9/11 state of emergency into a permanent governing principle. With the state of exception installed, large chunks of the democratic

tradition fall away—the better to vanquish a menace of *exceptional* proportion. Civil rights, legal search and seizure, habeas corpus: these hard-won rights face repeal when the threat warrants it. Of course the menace du jour—terror—is really an existential condition with a capacity for inexhaustible self-renewal. Deftly handled, a state of terror could become a permanent cottage industry.

Here's Agamben in his own words:

"President Bush's decision to refer to himself constantly as the 'Commander in Chief of the Army' after September 11, 2001, must be considered in the context of this presidential claim to sovereign powers in emergency situations. If, as we have seen, the assumption of this title entails a direct reference to the state of exception, then Bush is attempting to produce a situation in which the emergency becomes the rule, and the very distinction between peace and war (and between foreign and civil war) becomes impossible."

Agamben is elaborating on Orwell's *war is peace* slogan. This mischievous paradox lies at the heart of PNAC's 1997 Statement of Principles: "As the 20th century draws to a close, the United States stands as the world's preeminent power. Having led the West to victory in the Cold War, America faces an opportunity and a challenge... *We are in danger* of squandering the opportunity and failing the challenge... We seem to have forgotten the essential elements of the Reagan Administration's success: a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges."

Having led the West to victory...we are in danger? Such nefarious circumlocution!



'B.B.' / © 2007 Eben Drews

WAR IS PEACE IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

Surely, it's true then that war serves none but the military industrial complex, as *victory*—the ostensibly preferred outcome—delivers us only to the precipice of fresh peril. Even Reagan's controversial military build-up could be camouflaged with a seemingly credible and existent threat: the Soviet Union. *Squandering the opportunity?* Here again, we encounter odd rhetoric for a basking victor, begging the question: a military strong and ready to deter whom? Let it known that when we were owed a ticker tape parade, the real spoil of war was the prospect of future conflict. The PNAC inference is as clear as it is dispiriting: a cessation of hostilities juxtaposes America's interests, at least the economic interests of a certain few *in* America. With obligatory rectitude, the word 'defense' appears four times in the brief preamble. Such a nice Gandhian touch, that.

For those who doubt the strange, veering careers of wars, they might séance the Archduke Ferdinand, that improbable Typhoid Mary of WWI. Next domino? Iran. Certainly Bush, wallowing in Churchillian self-pity, looks ready to enlarge the present conflict. An injured narcissist, he will camouflage his blunders, draw perverse strength from his unpopularity, and roll the dice on the long view of history. What has he got to

lose? The generals call it *failing forward*. Bush is in dire need of WW III to salvage his legacy. Ardent flag-watchers will beg to differ as Israel may strike the first blow. But for all practical purposes, where does Israel end and America begin anymore? Kudos to AIPAC for rendering such nation-state exactitudes between Zionist comrades-in-arms all but moot. It's no surprise Israel and America rank one and three, respectively, as the most despised countries in the world, at least in a recent global poll (Iran is second). Suffice to say the Zionist monolith is not held in high regard.

If the health of a Republic is measured by the vigour of its principled opposition, then our protector-heroes were notable for their woefully thin ranks. Three renegades distinguished themselves: Senators Robert Byrd, Russ Feingold, and Chuck Hagel. For the most part, however, the system marched headlong into conflagration under the watchful stares of corporatist Zionist fire-starters. In sickening, time-honored fashion, the powerful—significantly richer, all limbs intact—will be pulled from burning buildings by common men and women of uncommon courage and valor. That's the way this criminal enterprise operates. Though it's one hell of a fire they've handed us this time.



'Iraq Veterans Against the War' / © 2007 Joseph Holmes

Not Another Number

-- Yassmin Moor

EVERY MORNING, I used to wake up to the sound of construction in front of my home in Southern Rafah. The UN is rebuilding the homes here of more than 25,000 Palestinians which were demolished by Israel during the past six years. But for the past two months, I have had to wake up on my own.

There have been no more trucks loading sand, or construction men screaming at each other, since the UN halted its \$93 million rebuilding effort when cement and other materials ran out. And Israel will not include the necessary building materials in any emergency package to Gaza. I don't think anyone outside of here realizes how negatively this will affect Palestinians in Gaza.

For example, my uncle and his family of eleven are just one of the many waiting to get a home from UNRWA. His home was demolished almost 3 years ago, one of the 3,000 destroyed since the beginning of the Second Uprising (*Intifada*). Although he was able to find an apartment, it has only one bedroom, one bathroom and a small kitchen for his family of eleven. And he was still one of the lucky ones. Most people had to crunch themselves in with



"Bullet Riddled Homes" / © 2007 Yasmine Moor

relatives whose houses were already crowded. In fact, with its population of around 1.4 million people squeezed into an area of 139 sq mi—barely double the size of Washington DC—Gaza is one of the most densely populated places in the world. So when the news of construction halt reached my uncle, all he could say was "Could it get any worse?"

Like many Palestinians, my uncle earns his income by going to Egypt and buying merchandise for bringing back to Rafah—mostly cigarettes, since that's what sells in Gaza. When the Egyptian-Gazan border was functional, he made a trip to Egypt every two weeks. Many times he would buy around \$200 worth of merchandise, but the Egyptians at the border checkpoints between Gazan and Egypt would often dump the products they didn't like, such as cigarettes, or keep some of what they did like, or just mistreat my uncle while rifling through his bags so that most of the

electronics wound up not working properly. Thus even then he didn't always profit from these trips, and this was his only source of income.

The border, however, has not opened since June 6th, and my uncle has already sold all of his merchandise. So, he now sits and waits and finds ways to keep himself busy until the border re-opens, without which he has no source of income. And neither does his son who works as a police officer and has not been paid for 18 months, since Hamas's election. The economic embargo has not allowed any funds to reach Hamas's government because the US classifies Hamas as a terrorist organization. But it is people like my cousin and 19,000 other government employees who suffer as a result and must work without salaries.

As it is for thousands of others here in Gaza, life for my uncle is growing desperate. He has 11 people that he has to feed and clothe, but he doesn't even have a shekel to cover the cost of his children's transportation to school. To make matters worse, my uncle has a heart condition, and the pharmacies have run out of medicine he needs. Last year, he was able to get through to Egypt to have a heart operation, but now if something were to happen to him, we don't even know where we would take him or how we would even get him there.



"Children in Gaza" / © 2007 Yasmine Moor

The border is closed and there are 6,000 people waiting to get out, 28 of whom have already died in just two weeks.

I don't believe anyone besides his family would care if my uncle were to die. To the rest of the world, he would be just another number; another one of the thousands of Gazans who are unemployed; another one of the 87% of Gazans living below the poverty line; just another poor Palestinian waiting for his demolished home to be rebuilt by UNRWA. But my uncle is part of my family and not just another number. And he is one of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians whose right to life has been challenged in every aspect, violated by Israel's collective punishment of all who reside in Gaza.

After we heard of the news, I stood with my uncle at our window, looking out at the concrete skeletons of unfinished homes and schools bathed in the fading light of the sunset.

"I guess we won't be moving in September," he said quietly.

"God willing, soon," I replied. "Don't worry."

But inside I knew—we both knew—that life here in Rafah will only get worse before it gets any better.

Palestinian Suffering: Putting the Blame Where It Belongs

--Caitlyn Martin

FOR YEARS, Israeli and pro-Israel writers have argued that the Palestinians could have had a prosperous, independent state long ago. We have made the point that the Palestinian people have endured suffering and oppression not so much at Israel's hands but rather at the hands of their fellow Arabs and their own leadership. When Israel's actions have harmed the Palestinian populace they were an unfortunate result of the need to protect Israeli citizens from terrorist attacks.

And now, in the wake of recent events, there is a sea change taking place in the discussion of Palestinian suffering among influential Arabs, including some who are Palestinian. They have begun to see Palestinian suffering in a similar way to how we see it, or perhaps at least are finally willing to admit publicly that Palestinian problems really aren't all Israel's fault.

One such person is Saeb Erekat, a long time Palestinian negotiator and a prominent Fatah member. Here is part of an interview he gave to Wolf Blitzer on CNN's Late Edition on June 17:

I will tell you something, Wolf. I think—there is a saying in my mind that this region has never missed an opportunity to exploit Palestinians without exploiting them. I really believe that we are being exploited. I really believe that is what happening in Nahr el-Bared in northern Lebanon, it is part of what is happening in Gaza, what is happening in the bigger picture in this region.

Now, Wolf, do I have evidence to refer to this country or to this group or that? No, I don't. But I know when I see the streets of Gaza, when I see these gunmen, when I see these hundreds of millions of dollars at a time when President Abbas could not pay salaries for our police forces, when our police forces did not have bullets or guns to maintain the rule of law and public order, where did these hundreds of millions of dollars, where did these guns and arms and state-of-art machine guns and heavy equipment come from?

... I believe what is happening in this region is being now played in the streets of Gaza and the streets of Nahr el-Bared in my name, in the name of the Palestinians. We are being exploited again.

I'll say what Mr. Erekat was unwilling to say: Iran and Syria, plus radical Islamists both home grown and foreign. That's who is oppressing the Palestinians this time. Others in the Arab world have done the same when it was convenient for them, and the Palestinian people have been the victims for nearly 60 years.

A similar message was voiced by Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed, the Dubai-based General Manager of the satellite news channel al-Arabiya. On June 9 he wrote the Arabic news magazine Asharq Al-Awsat:

“Some Arab countries “hosting” refugees ban them from leaving [camps], from occupying a large number of positions and deny them any other legal rights. Some of them have to jump over walls and sneak out to complete their chores or to breathe and experience the outside world. One can imagine these randomly and poorly built houses during the winter chill and sweltering heat of the summer among the sewage and insufficient services. It is a shame ...

Our insistence to lock the Palestinians in camps and treat them like animals in the name of preserving the issue is far worse a crime than Israel stealing land and causing the displacement of people. The 60 year-old camps only signify our inhumanity and double standards. Israel can claim that it treats the Palestinians better than their Arab brothers do. It gives citizenship to the Palestinians of 1948 as well as the right to work and the right to lead a somewhat normal life.”

It is easy to dismiss me as a biased, Zionist voice. But how do you dismiss Saeb Erekat, an ardent Palestinian nationalist who has argued the Palestinian cause for years? Or even Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed? I don't think you can.

The question is whether or not this change in the Arab perspective will last. If not, then we're back to square one. But if so, then this is a true sea change in Arab thinking and makes it possible for Arabs and Israelis—specifically Palestinians and Israelis—to stand together on common ground against an enemy that threatens us both.

God Is Great

-- Jeff Gibs

AT FOUR-THIRTY IN THE MORNING the air that wafts in through the screen is mountain cool and fresh and quiet. Not a sound flows in but the wind through the trees in the park across the street. Ekrem gives my shoulder a nudge and tells me to "listen, listen." A melancholy male voice passes in among the rustling of the leaves. It is a lonely and ghostly sound and I sit up in bed and turn toward Ekrem who is peering out the window.

"The first azan is different than all the others," he says. "The...how do you say?"

"The melody?"

"Yes, the melody. It's different."

"It sounds more somber."

The muezzin sings the line about the One God, the final "ahhh" stretched so long that it seems to twist and billow like a line of smoke over the apartment buildings and dark cafes and minarets before floating up and out toward the mountains at our backs and into the stars.

"I wanted to be in the mosque to hear it," he says. "I wanted to show you, but we didn't wake up in time."

"What time is it?"

"Almost four forty-five, so we have to hurry." He is already rushing out the room. "Do your abdest here. It will save time."

"In the sink?"

"Sure. Why not in the sink?"

I've been learning to do the ablutions before the namaz. First, I wash my hands, making sure to clean between my fingers. Then, I rinse out my mouth three times with water lifted by my right hand, and then three times for the nose. The ritual requires that I suck in some of the water into my nostrils and then blow it out, which stings a little. Next, I wash my face, making sure to bring the water all the way to the line of the hair, then three times for each arm, all the way up to the elbow. The last part of the ablution is performed only once each: first the hair, then the ears, the nape of the neck, and finally the feet. I do all of this in Ekrem's mother's tiny bathroom sink, splattering water on the floor when I put my feet under the faucet.

I get a feeling after doing the ablution of being different somehow, as if I've become part of the quiet I heard outside when that plaintive voice sounded out over the still, morning air. Most religions in the world have a way of entering a sacred space, a method of entering another world separate and holy and beyond our own. In Japan, a shrine is set apart by ropes and worshipers enter through a red gate. Here in Turkey, the ablution is an act which prepares one to enter the mosque and to hear God's Holy Word in the recitations of the Quran.

The town of Kutahya is deserted at this time of morning. The sky is lightening, though the moon still sits like a jewel above the ancient Seljuk castle that rides the mountain backs on the outskirts of the city. Venus sparkles just above one of the parapets. The smell of baking bread fills the air, and as we pull the car in front of the mosque, I see a simit vender already coming up the street, pushing his cart of freshly baked pastry rings. There are men at the sadirvan, rushing through their last minute ablutions. Ekrem and I hurry up the steps, flip off our shoes at the threshold, and in our socks pad quickly over the carpet to join the line of worshipers waiting silently for the imam.

There is a ritual with prayers to perform first, called rekat, which I haven't yet learned. I just follow whatever Ekrem does. I don't want to stick out here, not because I am afraid of anyone discovering I am not Muslim, but because I want to show these people the respect they deserve. After all, I've invaded their space. Besides, I enjoy the namaz. There is something about the body ritual that feels right, especially when I kneel and press my head to the floor: symbolically a submission to Allah, but for me a humbling

There is a tremendous sense of belonging in these gestures, all of here, together before the sun rises and before anyone else has awakened.

of the self toward the might and glory of the Universe, toward the power that made the infinite cosmos with its black holes and quasars and Big Bangs and bosons and antimatter and nebulae and Higg's particles and our own mortal lives. I am humbled by the vastness of time, which I have felt at work here in Anatolia more than anywhere else I have been in the world. Just the day before we stood on the steps of the Temple of Zeus in Aizonai, its stone walls in ruin, and not even an echo from the people who once worshipped there, their religion long dead and forgotten.

At the end of the rekāt, we sit and wait for the imam. He is not long in coming, a man about my height dressed in long robes and a white hat. The crowd parts and he moves down the middle, taking his place at the mihrab, the niche in the wall that faces the Holy City of Mecca. He faces us and kneels, but seems completely unaware of our presence. Pressing his eyes closed, he tilts his face upward, brows knitted and begins to sing the Quran and his voice enchants me as it rises above the mosque and toward the lightening sky beyond. The yearning he sings with crashes into me like something breaking through the bones of my chest. I watch him, breathless, and there are tears in my eyes though I understand little of what he is saying. Ekrem has taught me the first sura of the Quran, but the imam has moved beyond that, and as he cries out these sacred verses his voice rises and breaks against the divine words. There is a spring at the center of the mosque, and the sound of falling water fills the silences between the lines, or ayat in Arabic, a word that means ‘sign;’ for each string of words is seen as a sign from God.

When he finishes, he leads us through a prayer. “Allahu Akbar,” he says with a rising tone—God is Great—and we put our hands on our knees. The next “Allahu Akbar” is a falling tone, breathed out like relief, and we stand straight again. Beyond that, I’m not sure what he says, but each sign spoken is a signal for us to move. We fall to our knees and press our foreheads to the carpet. We wait for the signal and lift our heads once and then bow them again. At the next sign, we rise once more to repeat the process. At the end, we turn our heads right and whisper a greeting to the man beside us—but not only to him, I sense, but to all the world, to the community of humanity outside these doors. Then we turn to the left and do the same. There

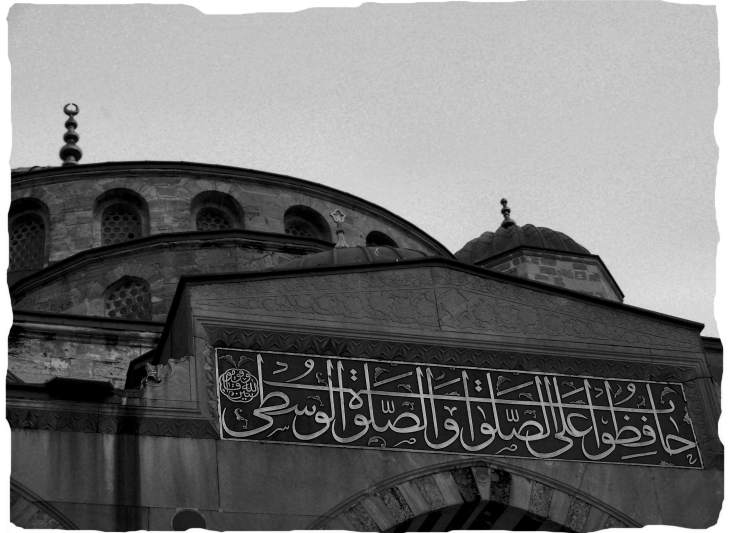


Photo © 2007 Ekrem Altin

is a tremendous sense of belonging in these gestures, all of us here, together before the sun rises and before anyone else has awakened. I have felt it every time I’ve been to mosque while visiting Turkey, but it is more potent now somehow, as if all the magic and witchery of this predawn darkness has come together to make us aware of a Presence surrounding us, something beautiful and sacred that breathes and flows into each one of our bodies.

The imam leaves and everyone rises but me. I sit for a moment, staring up at the domes and listening to the spring falling over the fountain tiles. I don’t want this moment to end. An old man is coming toward me, watching me carefully through thick glasses that make his eyes appear as big as moons. He has a long, thin beard and keeps pursing and unpursing his lips. I wonder if he has found me out, if he has spotted the unbeliever among the crowd, or if he will speak some complicated line of Turkish that I won’t be able to answer. But he simply bows his head slightly and says in a quiet voice,

“Selam aleikum.”

“Aleikum selam,” I whisper back, and he smiles.

I blink back tears when Ekrem tells me it’s time to go. I’m not sure why they’re there. Manfully (or so I think), I try to hide them. As we make our way outside, I notice there is movement behind the screen where the women pray. I feel a moment of anxiety, a slight sense of guilt that half of the Muslims here must hide away in a separate room and not see or share what I just did.

We go out into the streets, following the other men toward a bakery where we have hot, fresh bread and cheese, and a cup of tea. Both of us are speechless and contemplative, staring out at the streets as they begin to come to life.

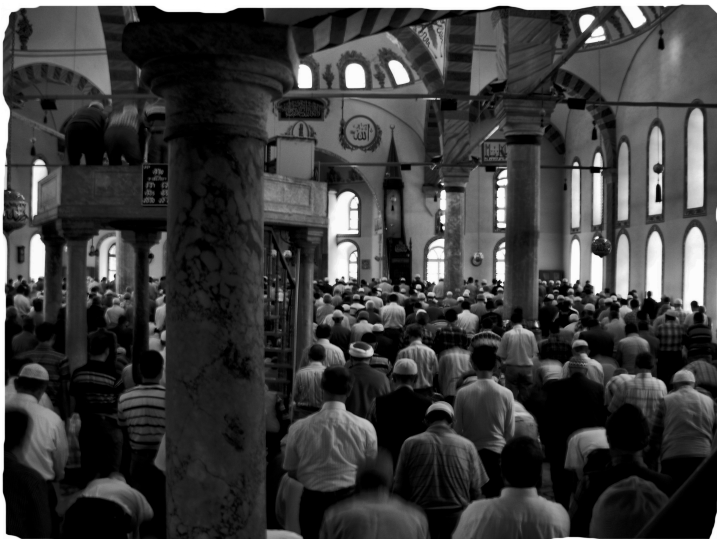


Photo © 2007 Ekrem Altin

I F ONLY I HAD THEM BY THE NECK! ----! ----!

For six years I have tried to keep my critics in the press quiet! And I have spent billions and billions of dollars on national defense to prevent another attack. And what do I get in return? Nothing. Not one compliment. They turn this against me and whine that I have sacrificed their civil liberties! Well, all they print is slanders! Grant them true, what of it? They are slanderous and unpatriotic when spoken against a President! ----!

They are giving everything away! They keep writing about how I used the intelligence I thought was intelligent, and told the U.N. Saddam had chemical weapons that may have been sold to him by the U.S. back in the 1980s... Oh wait, I left that part out. Smart, huh? And they keep on writing how my Coalition of the Willing is not good enough. Not good enough? Hell, we finally get Eastern Europe from Russia by promising them all sorts of guns if Russia ever comes back and I'm getting branded as a war-monger. We've even got Poland on our side. Anyway, why shouldn't these countries be willing? They owe me for when my dad helped beat the Russians. But you know what the worst part is? They blame me for everything, for dragging the flag through the mire of another Vietnam when they were among the first to salute it!

And what a sweat they got everyone worked into over a few lousy photos! Honestly, what do they care if a hundred or even a few thousand terrorists are tortured or humiliated? And who's to say what torture is anyway? Or even if such a thing is going on? Are they around to see it? No, and that's exactly why these prisoners should be kept offshore. It's a good thing no one pays attention to Human Rights Watch, at least no one I know. Listen to what one soldier said about troops stationed in Iraq at Forward Operating Base Mercury:

The "Murderous Maniacs" was what they called us at our camp because they knew if they got caught by us and got detained by us before they went to Abu Ghraib then it would be hell to pay. They would be just, you know, you couldn't even imagine. It was sort of like I told you when they came in it was like a game. You know, how far could you make this guy go before he passes out or just collapses on you. From stress positions to keeping them up fucking two days straight, whatever. Deprive them of food, water, whatever.

To "fuck a PUC" means to beat him up. We would give them blows to the head, chest, legs, and stomach, pull them down, kick dirt on them. This happened every day.

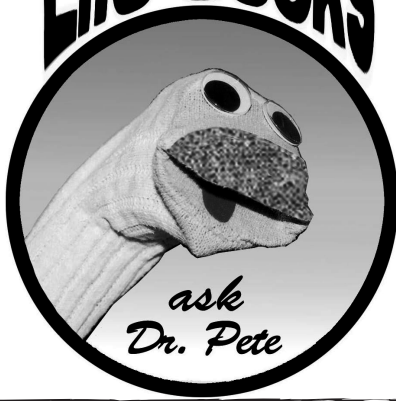
To "smoke" someone is to put them in stress positions until they get muscle fatigue and pass out. That happened every day. Some days we would just get bored so we would have everyone sit in a corner and then make them get in a pyramid. This was before Abu Ghraib but just like it. We did that for amusement.

I can't have stuff like that in print: it might make people feel sorry for the Iraqis, or help them remember that I've been fudging with the Geneva Conventions. Granted, I wouldn't want to be strapped to a board and have water poured down my throat, or try to sleep with the lights on all the time and someone waking me up every thirty minutes, but that's beside the point. The point is we have never been attacked after 9/11 and that's because I'm terrorizing the terrorists in their own country. If I get to keep my job because some fool gets his leg broken or thinks he's drowning, so be it.

Who's going to stop me anyway? No one in my administration, and surely not any Democratic Congress. Those lily-livered bureaucrats wouldn't dare to stop funding the troops or even think about taking away my war powers. They're too worried about being blamed for losing the war. Besides, they know we can't leave Iraq. They just want to be calling the shots. Yet they cry foul and fault me for my actions when they know full well I couldn't go on without their support.

But you know, I just have to laugh over all this impeachment talk. A Republican Congress couldn't even get it up to fire Clinton. So why should I be worried about some washed up Democrats? The way I figure it, I've still got another year and a half to go. Now, Dick, how about those plans on Iran?

Life Socks



Dear Dr. Pete:
Is violence the answer?
--Adam Fantastic in the U.K.

Dear Adam Fantastic:
Some forms of violence are perfectly acceptable. Chances are, violence plays a useful part in your daily life. Your very first act at birth was to impale your own mother, distending and/or tearing her flesh with your skull (though best not to try this as an adult).

You can debeak hens and watch them rub themselves raw and bloody against the side of a small cage, then eat them or sell them to Vons; or deny health coverage to a girl with a polycystic kidney and watch her longing eyes slowly fade to black; bomb a country's water supply or mortar its hungry women and children; crush a stray kitten's spine with the tire of your Ford Ranger; waterboard enemies for important information; tear a loved one down to tears or suicide with an unkind word; hook a fish through its eyeballs (you can pretty much do anything with impunity to a fish); bang your sex partner's head lovingly against the headboard; or order the slaughter of thousands through

overseas police action.
But please don't ever hit anybody.
Fists are wrong.

Dear Dr. Pete:
I feel like I'm losing my boyfriend. He doesn't want to spend time with me, we aren't intimate and he keeps saying "I think I'm gay." What should I do? I want him with me forever. We were meant to be.

--Sad in Southfork

Dear Sad:
Nothing lasts forever, except for maybe the cruel, slow descent of death from Lou Gehrig's disease. That feels like an eternity.

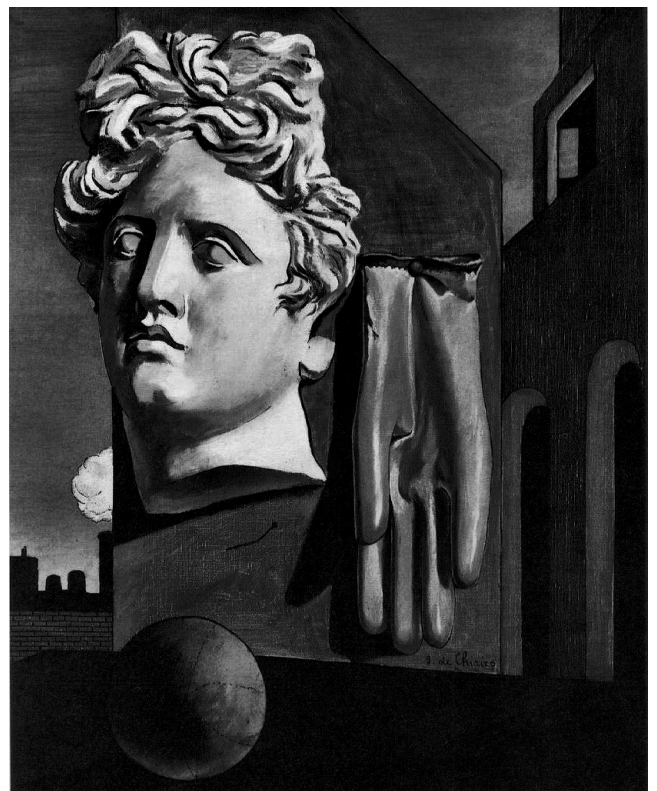
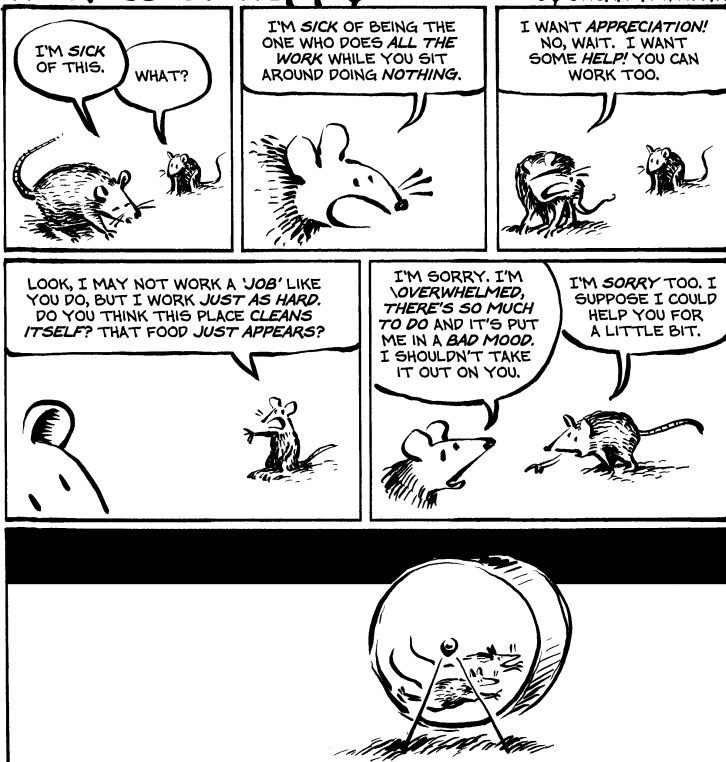
YOU'VE SOUGHT ANSWERS from therapists, gurus, talk show hosts, even God. Why not ask a tube sock? Dr. Pete is a certified life coach (CEC).

Contact him at:
myspace.com/pete_sarbone

Have you considered getting pregnant? That usually solves any and all relationship problems. Even if it doesn't, the courts will mandate that the father be near and supportive. And who knows? Someday, you may all be able to sit together over a meal like a real family, so you that you can meet his new boyfriend, Lars. You'll have created a child to love you forever, and your child gains a new uncle out of the bargain. Life doesn't get any better than that!

How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



'Love Song' / Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) www.artchive.com/artchive/D/de_chirico/bio.html



This Boy I Loved a Rock

-- Mary Miller

WHEN I WOKE UP THIS MORNING, I made my bed, which was worrisome.

I didn't worry while tucking in the sheets or fluffing the pillows, but after, when I was staring at my pores in the bathroom mirror and then slathering them with a thick cream that promised results. And then I was down on my hands and knees with my husband's toothbrush, scrubbing grout from the tiles before tackling the bathtub. And after I'd cleaned the entire house, from the ceiling fans down to the baseboards, I unmade my bed and got back in.

Later, Ray woke me up, said he had a slab of ribs in the kitchen.

"I don't like it when my teeth knock against someone's bones," I told him, and he said, "Suit yourself, but there's nothing else to eat in this house," and I said, "Fuck it," and threw the covers over my head so he'd leave me alone, but he sat next to me and poked me with a stiff finger until I screamed and got up and now I'm sitting in front of the big screen brushing my hair. I have this thing about grooming. I do it constantly, like a cat.

"They have this combo that comes with a pulled pork sandwich, three hot wings, and a side for six bucks," he says, looking up at the ceiling. "I think I'm gonna get that next time, with coleslaw."

There's a water spot up there, on the ceiling. We need a new roof but a new roof costs four thousand dollars and we don't have four thousand dollars. Ray spent all the money we'd saved, about two grand, on the TV.

"It's gotten bigger. The ceiling'll probably collapse on us any minute. Got a cigarette?" he asks.

"In my purse," I say, without looking at him.

In a second, he's back on the couch with his feet up, cigarette and lighter slash toothpick holder in hand. He plucks a toothpick out and bites down. Along with his

pocket knife, he carries this contraption everywhere. A girl gave it to him, one of his friend's girlfriends, which means she's in love with him, but he doesn't know this. He thinks it means nothing or, at the very most, that she knows he likes to smoke and pick shit out of his teeth.

Months ago, when he showed it to me, I said, "I gave this boy I loved a rock once," but he didn't understand what I was trying to tell him: that the more worthless the gift, the greater, and often the more desperate, the love. Then I went into the bathroom and flossed till my gums bled.



illustrations from 'Pair' | © 2007 Iriana Troitskaya (irroit.ksan.ru)

He picks up his cigarette, lights it. “You should probably see someone about this hair thing. You’re pulling it out, you know. All that messin’ with it.”

“I can’t help it.”

“I know. That’s why you need help,” he says, but he doesn’t really want me to get help. He only wants to talk about my needing it.

“Oh, before I forget. Don’t use your toothbrush. I cleaned the bathroom with it.”

“Thanks,” he says. “Appreciate it.” I look over my shoulder at him and smile and he raises his can of beer at me.

At two hundred strokes, my scalp aches. I set the brush down and massage it with my fingertips. Then I press two fingers to my carotid artery for a pulse check



but I don’t bother to count the beats per minute. I only want to know slow or fast. It is almost always fast.

After, I go into the kitchen and make myself a plate, but then I just stare at it: the hunks of bacon floating in watery beans, the ribs with their white knuckles of fat, a mound of yellowish potato salad.

When I come back into the den, he’s got one of his videos on. His favorite girl, the dark-haired one with the nose ring and bad skin, is choking on somebody’s cock. Whose doesn’t matter. Could be yours. He raises his eyebrows and spreads his legs, slings his arms over the back of the couch for emphasis.

“That girl has acne,” I say, and then, “put my movie back on.”

He laughs. He’s only joking, of course. He’s a nice guy. He presses stop and rewind; stop again. He knows exactly where the dark-haired one begins and ends.

I pick up a rib, bring it to my nose, and set it down; take a bite of potato salad. I imagine the mayonnaise rancid, the beans frozen in pork fat. Then I take my plate back into the kitchen and drop it in the sink. He doesn’t say anything. He comments on my hair, my incessant grooming, but not on my eating because he likes me thin, or perhaps he just wants to watch me starve myself to death.

I gave this boy I loved a hamburger once. I didn’t eat it so I could give it to him when he got to the restaurant. He was running late and the kitchen had closed. I told my friends I wasn’t hungry, that I’d had a big lunch, while it sat in front of me—waiting—with its lettuce and tomato poking out, its ring of mayonnaise. And when he finally got there, I passed it down to him, and he said, “Thanks a lot,” and took a bite. The rest of it sat untouched, and I wanted to ask for it back, say I was hungry after all, but the waitress came and he told her to take it away, said he was done.





Home Says

-- Mazie Louise Montgomery

IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE YOU'VE BEEN HOME.

Three years, maybe four. Home is the coast. Home is boat rides and sunburned shoulders and the air smelling of sunscreen and beer. You have avoided home for as long as you could. Home means questions. Home looks at you like you didn't try hard enough, says you should have gone to marriage counseling, says you gave up too soon on a perfectly good man. Home does not know the name of your new boyfriend, doesn't care about poetry, does not understand why you left your daughter for that year and went to New York. Home says good mothers don't do such things.

What fucking day is it? Home doesn't know. Home tells you it is not time to leave yet, not yet a week Saturday. "Your *novio* can do without you for another couple of days," says home, "sit down and have dinner." Home doesn't care that you don't eat meat. Home puts shrimp and fish and hamburgers and steak on the table. The air smells like salt and pink flesh. There is macaroni and cheese and sweetened strawberries and hotdogs for the granddaughter.

Home likes the granddaughter. Home really only wanted to see the granddaughter but home got *you* along with the granddaughter because you don't trust home. Not with your child. You know home better than anyone. The good man you left for no good reason likes home, sends your child there when he has visitation. Home calls the good man and says send the granddaughter. You find out about it six months later. You find out at Christmas, when your child says home already bought her the Barbie doll she just unwrapped. There are pictures of home hanging on the wall in your house. Your child says you should go home more often. Your child says, if it were her, she would go home.

It is Wednesday and you are tired. You miss your *novio* with no name and your messy room and your dirty dishes. How many days now? Four? Five? You can't remember. Home tells you all about the things you have missed in the last three years. Your cousin Cindy is now a crack head. Your niece Kelly has a six month old baby. Home reminds

you: Kelly is sixteen. Home says your nephew is living with his father and that's the best place for him. Your friend Mark has been in and out of prison. Real prison. Drugs. But they say he's better now. Home doesn't know if this is true or not. Home says John is divorced now, says his wife left him because she couldn't stand his drinking anymore. Home says Eric committed suicide. Shot himself in the head. "His daughter is living with your ex-step-grandmother," says home. They say she is going to go to junior college or something. Her mother is also on drugs but home doesn't say what kind. What was the mother's name? You try to remember but can't.

You wonder out loud if Eric ever had a chance. Home reminds you that Eric had Marilyn for a mother. You nod. You eat lunch with home at a restaurant that overlooks the Bayou where you learned to waterski when you were seven. Home tells you that William gave his wife syphilis and told her he got it from a toilet seat. You are feeling too sentimental, you have had too many beers too early in the day and you already have a headache. Under your breath you say something like that happened to you once.

You think about a perfectly good man you once loved who came home smelling like another woman's pussy, how you believed every lie, but you don't say it out loud. Out loud you say it was your fault. Out loud you say you should have tried harder. Home pats your hand and looks at you with sad eyes. Home says maybe tomorrow it will rain and cool things off. You think about rain hitting the hot pavement, the steam rising, the drops falling into a bayou the color of sweat tea. In another place your friends are taking a trip to Florida and your *novio* is in the woods training troops for deployment. You wonder what he thinks about at night, in your night, when the stars come out, making the sky a perfect blue circle.



Plodding Headlong Against



– Matt Maxwell

YOU KEEP ASKING WHAT I'M DOING: demanding you sit with me in the autumn darkness and a cooler of MGD at our feet, just inside the rails of flagpole trees (remember when we used to climb trees like these, swinging from one to another?), looking down the embankment at a single railroad track; a half-mile hike from our respective vehicles—my rotted truck, your Denali—safe on the edge of Mr. Tillman's property. You heckle me for insisting you turn off the cell phone. You joke that you appear unkempt in my borrowed hiking boots sticking out from Dockers. Aren't you glad you removed that noose of a tie? I mean, you're not working now, are you? It's nearly midnight.

You ask me about my garage, if I'm getting enough business to turn a profit. I make it, I say. You ask about my dad and if I remember when he played tackle football with us and chased down the fastest kid in our school. You ask about my mom and say that you miss her strawberry-banana pancakes. And you keep asking me what we're doing.

You ask about my backpacking trip across Canada, into Alaska, the fishing boats; my work with the Peace Corps; my enlistment in the Reserves, my deployment, my injury.

I don't ask about your life. I know you want to say something, are awaiting my cue.

You ask again what my intentions are. I tell you that you'll see, that we may be here a while, to enjoy the night and the beer. I imply you should remember when we used to camp with my parents and sit on the bank and fish and throw rocks that scared away our targets; or when we used to sit in the back of my truck (remember that couch we threw back there?) and shoot grackles.

Hours slip by, as do a few trains, roiling like thunder beneath us. I point toward a few possums on the rail, the largest in front, three smaller trailing behind, trotting along on the iron balance beam. Their white mask and eyes reflect the light from an approaching train. The engineer blows the horn (remember when we pantomimed horn blowing for semi drivers and they obliged with the brief blast that reminded us of a monster's fart and we laughed every time it happened?), and the possums, who refuse to move for the locomotive, plod headlong and determined and ignorant and invincible, a six-pack weight of animal against thousands of tons of rushing metal.

When the train passes, I finish my beer, toss the empty in the cooler, and gather our stuff for the walk back to the trucks.



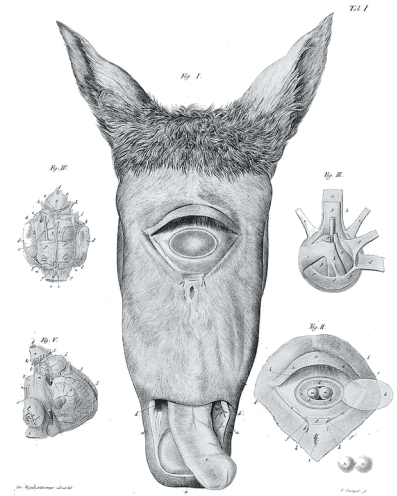
Colic

-- Chris Sheehan

BY THE TIME CINNABAR'S ON HIS FEET, the air has cooled, taking on a fog measured out to the dam. I walk to the gravel road where it breaks from the house toward the hayshed and trailer and look back. Carol has Cinnabar in the cross-ties. There's the faint shear-sound as Carol's hand moves over his winter coat. I watch until she's shaved his flank clean, then make myself turn away and walk the distance to the trailer.

Inside, The Pennysaver is shredded on the counter, the carpet, the couch. Tanya's in the kitchen. She drinks the wine left in Carol's mug, then looks to her mug on the counter. She's naked. She says, You left her alone? I don't want her out there on her own. She steps into the bathroom and looks at herself in the mirror. She says, I don't know why she won't stay in the house. She should take the house. I know why she's here. I know my father's selling the barn. I saw it—it looked so strange from above. Can you tell me how my father got that picture? Another crop-duster special—he never told us she was coming. What did he say? I filled a vacant stall—I think that was it. Not: An old girlfriend's moving in—oh, and by the way, she's blind! I know she doesn't like that word. But she is, isn't she? That sounds like something you'd do, doesn't it? You'd say, I filled a vacant stall. I need to make a bed for her on the couch. I'm worried about her. There was always a different woman around. A Saint? Isn't that what you are this year? A St. Paul Saint—isn't that perfect? One year you're a Rivercat, the next you're a Saint? They can wait a few more days, can't they? I had the worst dream last night—it was the whip—I'm sure of that much. I hate that sound. You were walking down Old Shakopee—no, it was the crossroad down aways. I couldn't remember what it was called, that was another thing that scared me. It was dark and there was this moon, almost blinding.

She turns around, holding a little pencil out in front of her, then turns back to the mirror. She says, It scared me. I can only imagine what it must be like for Carol. She spends some time re-arranging the makeup on the counter, then steps into the bedroom. She looks down at the clothes scattered on the floor. She says, I still feel dirty. I don't even want to talk about last night. I don't want to have to think about that.



'[cyclops horse]' | from *Descriptio Anatomica Capitis Foetus Equini Cyclopici*

The Angel Project

-- Victoria Sprow

'East West' / © 2007 Johnny Mobasher (streetphotography.co.uk)



THEY GAVE US THREE ANGELS EACH. They were made of plaster and were painted in pink. They said, put them on trash piles, on the sides of bridges, at bus stops, they said put these around the city, anywhere you'd like. They are angels to inspire people.

We prayed around them in circles of four, and there were three hundred of us, together. I did it because I thought it would help me get you back, the angels and all that praying.

1. The First Angel

It was a Thursday, I think. A blue pick-up truck was at the stoplight—it was the truck you used to drive. The street lamps had not been lit yet, and there was still that indigo sky, the kind you named your dog after. It stretched very far above me. This color I had seen only once before, lying on the hood of your car with my head on your stomach.

I thought surely you would come back. You always said you would. I kept thinking of the day I would turn around and you would be there in the kitchen door in your green boots, all wet from the rain. It would be many years after you'd left and you would not tell me why you had gone, and I would not ask. We would just keep going.

The wind came. It braided the leaves into eights and lifted my hair, and I thought I saw you. But the truck drove away when the light changed.

2. The Second Angel

In Court House Square there is a man who used to play the violin every day. It had only one string. I'm sure you don't remember, after all this time. He could not play more than seven notes, and it was not at all beautiful. It made the sound of an old bus, when its brakes fall apart. But I fell in love with you anyway, in the Square listening to this man with his violin.

For a while after you left I made myself go past to hear how the sound had changed. It drifted, like lanterns through dark hallways.

There was the day when I knew you were not coming back. Pietra was very angry with me for loving you still, in that same way I always had. She said parts of me were passing away a little at a time. I said, yes, perhaps. My hair had grown white at the ends, although I was still very young. I remember after she left, I said to the man with the violin: You know, I fell in love with Edmond somewhere between two of your notes. The man did not know English, I think. He smiled and nodded his head, saying, yes, Edmond, Edmond. I said to him, Do you remember Edmond? and he kept nodding and said again, yes, Edmond, Edmond.

I saw that it had never been a song for you and I, really. It was just a story about a man sitting alone, on a red bench after dinnertime.

3. The Third Angel

I kept the third angel for you, Edmond. There were rules against keeping them ourselves but I did it anyway. You were always angry with me for following the rules. I wrapped it in tissue paper and kept it under your uniform in the hall closet.

I left in the middle of the night. It was very warm out. I took off my jacket and left it on the side of the road. I was in my nightgown still, I don't even think I had any shoes on, can you imagine that? I left just like that, even though I thought, I won't make it home again without any shoes.

There was that sky again, with its near-hazel rim, and the dust rose into a veil behind me.

ENTROPY & ATROPHY

-- Robert Lopez

PITY JIMMY SAYS HE WANTS to father a dozen children before nightfall and doesn't care how many mothers it takes to do it. Pity Jimmy said this in the cafeteria yesterday in front of both Blind Betty and Pregnant Janie. Come lunchtime every day I have to bring Pity Jimmy and Blind Betty and Pregnant Janie to the cafeteria to feed them their lunch. Time was I only had to feed Pity Jimmy and Blind Betty lunch but now it's Pregnant Janie I have to feed too. I didn't have to feed Pregnant Janie before she turned up pregnant which is why I think they think I had something to do with it. Otherwise they think it was Pity Jimmy had something to do with it which amounts to the same thing. Anything Pity Jimmy does around here it's me that gets in trouble for it. This is probably why they said Pregnant Janie is my responsibility now. When I asked them why they said this is not what we pay you for. I think I shook my head yes but in my head I was cursing them the way Blind Betty does me. This is when I walked back to the cafeteria and why both Blind Betty and Pregnant Janie was also at the table. I'd just come back from filling their plates full of chicken and vegetables when Pity Jimmy said what he said about fathering a dozen children. This is probably why all the blindsters think it's Pity Jimmy who got Pregnant Janie pregnant in the first place. He also said once there is nothing sexier than a pregnant woman which is probably another reason they think

was Pity Jimmy did this to Pregnant Janie. The thing about Pregnant Janie is I don't know how anyone can tell she's pregnant. What I mean to say is that Pregnant Janie has always really looked pregnant so I don't know how anyone can tell the difference. I always have to put

more chicken and potatoes and vegetables on her tray and sometimes I have to fill it up two or three times. Seems she eats twice as much as Blind Betty and Pity Jimmy put together. When I tell this to Blind Betty she says it's normal. She's fingered all the Braille books on pregnancy so she knows about these things she says. I don't tell her how Pregnant Janie has always looked pregnant because I don't like to remind these blindsters they don't know how anything looks. I made that mistake once when I told Blind Betty where the chicken and potatoes were on her tray. What she said back was curse words and what she said after that was she knew where everything was and she finished by cursing me again. How these blindsters know which is chicken and which is potatoes and vegetables is I always have to put the chicken and potatoes and vegetables in the same spot every time. They have it memorized is another way of saying what I'm saying. This is one of the first things they taught me how to do when I first came here. The chicken goes in the slot they call six o'clock and the vegetables and potatoes go at ten and two. When I tell Blind Betty to leave me alone that I have to make sure to put the chicken and potatoes and vegetables in the proper time slot she says a monkey can do it. This is why I don't like Blind Betty and why I secretly didn't mind it when she cracked her head open. Pity Jimmy probably didn't mind it either but you can't tell with him sometimes because he's blind. He used to would bring Blind Betty scotch and wine for when she had her panics. I never did ask him why he did this and I didn't want to know neither. My job is to walk these blindsters around obstacles and fill up their lunch trays at lunchtime. After Pity Jimmy said what he said about fathering a dozen children before nightfall Blind Betty said he should name two of them Entropy and Atrophy and raise them up in Istanbul Turkey. In between spoonfuls of potatoes Pregnant Janie said Greek names in Turkey would never fly. This is when all three of them started laughing like they had no control over themselves. I don't know what Braille books Pregnant Janie fingers to know this because she doesn't brag about it the way Blind Betty does. I also don't know what Entropy and Atrophy have to do with Istanbul and Greece but they kept on laughing for twenty minutes and I thought maybe I should laugh too but I didn't. I think you had to be blind to think this was funny.

untitled © 2007
Dean Sullivan
(flickr.com/photos/
deansullivan/)



White Lake—Not Drawn to Scale

-- Elliot Harmon

1

AS YOU DRIVE INTO WHITE LAKE, SD, you're greeted by a billboard: "Welcome to White Lake" and a list of every bar, school, office and store in town, a total of about thirty entries. A little girl pulls a faded green wagon across the street.

A Bar Z Corner Truck Stop and Motel, White Lake, South Dakota. It's not like other motel rooms, with the two queen size beds facing the TV. They face each other. The TV is an afterthought, hanging far overhead in a corner where you might go three days without noticing it. Three pastel pamphlets lie on each bed, outlining the plan of salvation.

You can't sleep. At the truck stop, you look at the South Dakota Lottery tickets. The owner must be asleep. There's a thirty-year-old man behind the counter with a ponytail. He's listening to *Coast to Coast AM*; there's a caller talking about Washington and the Illuminati. He smiles at you, pointing at the radio. You smile back and head for your room.

You sit on the bed. You stand up and sit on the other bed. You draw a map of the motel room in your journal. Under it you write, "White Lake-not drawn to scale."

2

This is about the thing itself.

This is about a place
with no income tax, where
everyone gets into
the best high school in town.

A place "dominated by moral issues,"
you're told on election night by a news anchor
who's likely taken classes in sounding
like she's from there.

This is about loneliness.



3

"The problem with Mamet's acting theory, if you can even call it that," Elliot says, running his finger around the rim of his glass, "is that there's no way to implement it." He waits for a response and then continues, "I'm serious. You can say all you want, 'Hey, acting is easy, you just stand up and do it,' but if that were true, everyone would be an actor. There'd be no point in going to a play."

"Well, first," Jabari says, "you're full of shit. And though I *do* happen to know exactly why you're full of shit, I haven't the energy nor the sobriety to explicate it," he overpronounces the word, "*ex-pli-cate* it... at the moment." Jabari is on his third beer. His arms wave as he talks; his Buddhist bracelets dance wildly. The waitress—for all they know, the older sister of one of the kids they're working with this week—is trying to get people out, but she hasn't come to their table yet. She has a bottle opener on her belt buckle, like a waitress in a beer commercial. Her blond ponytail brushes the exposed skin below her t-shirt.

"What gives?" Elliot asks. "They close the bar here at midnight?" Jabari shrugs. "When are we supposed to be at the school tomorrow?"

"Nine," says Jabari.

"I can't deal with this," Elliot says.

"I can't deal with *this*," Jabari says, producing *Brecht on Theatre* from his messenger bag and hurling it at Elliot. "What is this piece of crap, and why did you give it to me?" Elliot gave it to him back in Rosholt. Elliot inspects the cover to find a white ring on it—from a glass—almost centering the Brecht portrait. He considers yelling about it, but hesitates a moment too long.

*

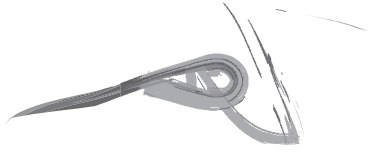
Jabari doesn't talk until Elliot starts the van—driving from the A Bar Z Corner Motel to the grade school where they're leading a workshop today.

When they've turned out from the parking lot, Jabari says, "I went to a party last night, Elliot."

"What?" Elliot asks. "You mean, *after* we came back to the motel?"

"I can't help it," he says, "I fascinate people. Do you think it's because I'm so effeminate, or because I'm so black?" Elliot thinks.

4



*and I the boy so white I never
get pulled over never
fascinate much
anybody wonder if
he told them he makes me
listen to shania twain
wonder if they know his
beater vents crackle
at night like theirs do*

5

He ropes together details, about a dozen cowgirls at the truck stop picking up beer, he caught their eye, and they herded him into their pickup. Or something.

“They kept trying to play me, like, rap music,” he says. They wait at the stoplight while a grey-bearded man crouches before a newspaper machine, reading the front page of the *Argus Leader*. He wears overalls, no shirt, a seed company cap. He reads the top story before checking his pocket for 50 cents. Elliot sees him mouth the word “damn.”

“What’s that country song about cowgirls?” Jabari asks. “It says they all have belts with their names branded on them?”

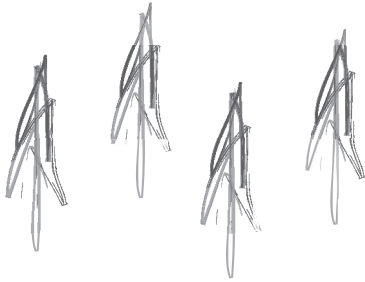
“I think I know the song,” Elliot says.

“Well, it’s totally true! Every last one of them. Check out an ass, you see its name.”

“They know you’re gay?” Elliot asks.

Jabari shrugs. “Does anyone?”

6



*when my fourteen-year-
old cousin from LA came
to the black hills
gazing down into a
valley of tiny pine trees
he whispered to me eyes
wide open “Places
like this still exist?”*

7

“They’re like the Spice Girls,” Jabari chuckles. “There’s a goth, there’s a ditz, there’s a jock, there’s a stoner...”

“But really,” Elliot interrupts, annoyed, “they’re all the girl with her name branded on her belt.”

“I was going to tell you,” Jabari says, “one girl was into Brecht.” A high school senior, working on a solo from *Threepenny Opera* for her college auditions—she’d never even been to Sioux Falls, but could talk theatre theory with the best of them... and he trails off, smiling out the window, the shadows of the evergreens riding along his face.

8

You still can’t sleep. Maybe it’s *too* comfortable; too much like staying at a relative’s house, a relative that you don’t really like who doesn’t know that.

This time you bring your iPod. The truck stop is closed now, so you walk along the main drag of town. You hear a buzzing sound and can’t tell what it is, until you see a Coke machine a block and a half down.

City park. You think about sitting on the seesaw, but decide that would look pathetic, and opt for a bench. You watch the stars. You think about being in seventh grade, about the girl in earth science class who sat two seats in front of you and one to the right. Your iPod runs out of batteries, but you were sick of all the music on it anyway. You keep walking.

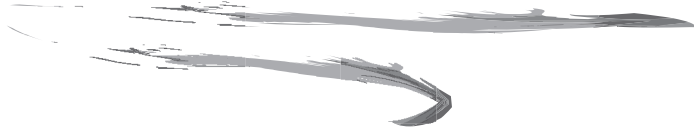
The bartender is just locking the door. You stay still hoping he won’t see you. *If you didn’t make it into college, you made it there*, you think, and then hate yourself for thinking it. The bartender sees you and he waves. You say hi, but he keeps walking.

You walk back to A Bar Z.

9

“Whatever you’re thinking,” Jabari says, still watching the trees, “stop.”
 “Jabari, you’re so awesome,” Elliot says.
 “Whatever.”
 Elliot pulls into the school parking lot. “I forgot,” he says. “What’s the contact person’s name?”
 “Stacy. She’s the music teacher.”
 “Stacy. Stacy. Stacy.” On the tour thus far, Elliot has forgotten dozens of important names.

10



*always there's one I
 want to take, just
 grab him after the final show
 and hit the van, or
 at least leave him
 my brecht or
 I don't know*

11

During a secret smoke break, Elliot says, “The kid who talks like Donald Duck.”
 “Yeah,” Jabari answers. “I asked Stacy about him.” He takes a drag for effect. “She said he does that all the time; in class, all the time. He’s completely ostracized because of it.” Elliot shakes his head, confused.
 “He’s the one we’re going to be obsessed with all week,” Jabari asks, “isn’t he?”
 Elliot hides behind his hand in fake embarrassment. “I think so,” he whispers.

12

This is about the thing itself—a place
 you’ll never stop being from,
 a person you’ll never
 stop being. It sneaks out
 between your words when you’re tired
 or uncareful. It will foil you
 but then, there’s nothing else to you.
 Also, this is about loneliness.



13



Cleaning, you find the drawing. You think to call someone there, but there really isn’t anyone. The back of the Welcome sign had said in blue cursive, “Thanks for visiting White Lake,” and you remember reflexively wanting to say, “you’re welcome.” You remember driving for hours that day. It was hot.

‘Front Yard, Alabama’ / © 2007 Aaron Gilbreath

List Prayer

-- Blake Butler

1. Sometimes I feel so dumb I actually pray.
2. Often during prayer I get lazy and quit in the middle under the assumption that god already knows anyway.
3. If god doesn't have a sense of humor he wouldn't have invented people who think it's important they're a DJ.
4. Our Father, Glory Be to the Father, Epiclesis, Collect, Compline.
5. *The belief that the finite can actually communicate with the infinite*
6. A blind clinical trial from 1990-96 randomly assigned individual hospital patients out of a pool of 3393 to an intercessory prayer group. The prayer group reportedly had shorter hospital stays and duration of fever.
7. Today I'm sitting in a cold room, running A/C in December. They did not run the A/C in July.
8. God please make me more comfortable.
9. God please attend to my childish wishes.
10. Please get rid traffic, bugs and sneezing. Please take certain people's faces off of the TV.
11. Serenity Prayer, Litany, Magnificat, Daily Prayer for Peace.
12. Actually sneezing can be orgasmic. Leave that bitch alone.
13. I imagine god wouldn't care if I say 'bitch' around him.
14. I imagine god wishing he'd get more sleep.
15. Trinitarian formula; Jesus, Wesley Covenant, Guardian Angel, Good Friday Prayer.
16. *The belief that the infinite is interested in communicating with the finite*
17. Prayer may be unconscious.
18. The idea of a person going to communion multiple times a day as a way to eat lunch. Or to get drunk.
19. The idea of being hand-fed by a priest.



'East 49th St., New York City' | © 2007 Eugene Scherba (engenescherba.com)

20. If I ever die, I wish to have my flesh represented by chocolate.
21. I'm not black but that's still fair.
22. My blood as Peach Crush or Apple Fanta.
23. My blood the sweetest sugar, 99 cents on sale at Kroger.
24. Billboards hawking my blood over the highway. Kids drinking it on TV. Contracting stomach aches. Getting fatter. Causing diabetes.
25. Do this in remembrance of me.
26. *The belief that the prayer is listened to and may or may not get a response*
27. Near the restroom is the worst place to have a desk at work. God part my desk from all this human-influenced air.
28. A 2005 study published in the American Heart Journal indicated that bypass surgery patients who were aware that they were being prayed for developed more complications than patients who were unaware of prayers on their behalf.
29. Act of Contrition, Memorare, Ave Maria, Apostles' Creed, Regina Coeli, Divine Praises, Confiteor, Fatima Prayer.
30. Just do it; don't talk about it. Keep your filthy hands to yourself.
31. Fajr, Dhuhur, Asr, Maghrib, Isha'a.
32. *The belief that prayer is intended to inculcate certain attitudes in the one who prays, rather than to influence the recipient*
33. Dear god, please keep me from imploding while stuck in traffic, from kicking dents in my door and dashboard, from flicking off someone who's in a gang or willing to follow me where I'm going.
34. God, help me win at Trivial Pursuit.
35. Put delicious Hostess products in my mouth.
36. Eternal Rest, Salve Regina, Alma Redemptoris Mater, Sub Tuum, Rosary, Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mary Mother of Grace.
37. *The belief that prayer is intended to enable a person to gain a direct experience of the recipient*
38. I'd like to believe god is a strict grammarian, but that he's inclusive of tight slang.
39. At work in the seat behind me is a Jehovah's Witness who somehow fills most of his 40 hours a week looking up bikini women on ask.com and making no attempt to hide it.
40. Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate their own birthday; reject gambling and nationalism; believe that exactly 144,000 will be chosen to enter heaven.
41. Dear god, keep me confused.
42. God, please put your eye up to my window.
43. *The belief that prayer is intended to affect the very fabric of reality itself*
44. If over each of our heads, a ticker displaying the number of people who prayed for us the night before, which would be more concerning: zero; or many thousands, without obvious crisis and/or celebrity?
45. Shema Yisrael, V'ahavta, Amidah, Kaddish, Kol Nidre, Aleinu.
46. The idea being to include as many as possible but now recognizing I am tired and out of space.
47. Dear god, make this list reflect the names of prayers I couldn't fit. Include the prayers that have no name.
48. Dear god, ahbjaka feen los quarsis nasis biblinteent frence.
49. *The belief that the recipient expects or appreciates prayer*
50. The belief that I even might deserve—

Vension in the Wilderness

-- Adrian Kien

Paint dries on the edge of the Empire.
 Out there are workers taking off
 their shoes and socks. They walk through
 the swaths of blue into the yellow
 beyond. Their green footprints
 trail beyond our comprehension.
 "Do you have a hammer? Do you
 have a nail? Do you have a 2x4?"
 They ask and ask each other.
 Blowtorches are small prayers
 to cigarettes and the eclipse goggles
 bring each to recognition. Hello.

We introduce the "we" now that the Empire
 is this far out of bounds: We were going
 to eat pie afterwards. This was to be
 a celebration of after. But we couldn't
 stop talking to make anything now.
 Out there where we are not,
 but slightly—a blood trail.
 Deer carcasses spin on engine hoists.
 Meat cools. Where jerky comes from.

And inside the workers' trailer a boy
 spins a globe and slows it with his finger.
 It stops in the Motherfucker islands. "Here,"
 he says. Here in the smell of kidney and deer urine.
 Here. He wants to live this close to the window.
 Here his breath makes a fog and he stamps
 the side of his fist in the cloud. He makes dots
 above the imprinted mass. Footprints
 from a mouth and a hand. The disease
 is as common as sunlight. But where does it end?



'Seeing Eyes' / © 2007 Betsy Walton (www.morningcraft.com)



The Flying Italian

-- Alveraz Ricardez

How about we dine on a herd of kangeroos?
 We should bounce our most precious
 Items out this window in memory of them.

We can start with my television and work
 Our way into the bathroom.

I have a leather basket made from toad.
 It keeps well in the shower and is flexible.
 If I had to guess, it would bounce nicely when
 dropped.

Grab a hold of that wax hammer.
 I was drunk and it was only two dollars.
 It will not bounce but it is familiar with
 disappointment.

That old man in the corner is Don Palomino.
 If we hold him by the suspenders he will
 Not only bounce but return, again and again.

Have I told you about him?
 Don't worry he is asleep, maybe even dead.
 He has returned to the pulp of pompa and
 The dance of salty women.

He counts syrup stains from
 Marmalade brownstone
 The way you and I count sheep.

He was brave back then.
 A man of gristle and due process.

Grab his arm. Why keep him waiting?
 He wants twisted boulevard and we want bounce.
 Not to mention our marinade is ripe for Joey.

Smile when you lift.
 It is the ode to a broken man and memories fulfilled.
 He is heavy from whiskey and pasta.
 But we are strong.

Forget the suspenders.
 We will make a clean break in time for supper.

Don't laugh. Someday you will remind
 Someone of forced sausage. Push.
 He will fit through.

Look at all the colors he left on the sidewalk.
 Whiskey and pasta make good art.
 Close the window and set the table.

I was certain he would bounce
 In tribute of our feast.
 Go figure.



"The Flying Italian" originally appeared in WordRiot

Trailer Park Photos Part III: Fragments of a Place Called Whispering Lanes

-- David Ensminger

I was busted by police for dreaming 77 m.p.h. in West Texas about aerosol cheese and the dog with one wooden leg. My origin: a trailer park lit by artificial Christmas trees. The smell of old women not smiling. Dusk music. Peapod love affairs and short-wave suicides. If I look into the photos hard enough, there's a geranium sadness, something grinding away. Razors of last night's sons, butane, and teenage trousers. Ice snapping in a gravy of Southern Comfort, blisters, and diesel engines.

The boy scout compass points towards brick schools absorbed by dress codes and measuring jars of science. But on my tongue there's steppes, huts, and anteaters. I am waiting to open up the tree of your intelligence and find the hidden pencils.

The wisdom of the heart lies in unlocking your body. Put down the germs and guns, put down the video nights. Look into me here, in these photos, grip down. Peel back the corners of sons and lovers. Awaken between the pause of FM radios. Daydream in the Wal-Mart print of a sunset. You who are better than saccharine and alcohol. Your lean kisses and small town feet are mercilessly rooted. Can we bridge the gap between kitchens and laughter? Walk the room with the tinfoil antenna and warm vapor?

Jesus makes jack a dull boy,
but one man's meat deserves another.
That's what you made me
think in 1974.

Could you make flannel from these photos?
Sprinkle them on highways like salt in upstate New York?
Do these photos replace psychiatrists?
Do they tie up the universe in a fiber optic blink?
Do they turn red and brown like seaweed?
Hold Snickers and mermaids?
Hold lingering men in short sleeves down gravel streets
in the butt-end of days?

Sawdust, not oysters.
Sunburns, not well-turned phrases. Bulldozers
edging up against locust nights. Thinning hair,
not neckties.

If I could reach into the muted color of these photos,
erase it like a blanket closing down on us, I would.
I'd rename the slow altering Kodachrome after 30 years,
even if our arteries cling to the details. The photos flank
our memories, like little wrecks in which our names appear.
Where's the hot, loosely bound summer afternoons—
the loaded camera? I do not believe in absence and resolution,
only the flicker of freewill caught in these photos.



'Tub on W'heels' / © 2007 Mike Young (mike.nojournal.com)



from *Farm Suite*

-- Jack Boettcher

Walking nowhere, the way
we recognize

people long before
we say hello

on this road.
That's it — that's

exactly
how five o'clock

air
stains a cedar

burnt gold. We're
sometimes royalty.

But sometimes hesitant
of what the next

few words might say, that
we can't shape the world


with only miles of wire.
If there is no word and if

after a while we can't
speak, then what

will God do? At least
send us a photograph

of each moment
we've forgotten.

At least, we breathe,
do that. There are several



dresses in boxes, radio
narratives, mold-sewn

books about bodies
and their inhabitants.

What we do remember
is ludicrously

there. If I remember
the first time I slept

inside a cloud without
falling through the bottom,

then you remember
the first time you slept.

If I remember summers,
the field next door

pinching grasses of
antennae through


the rebar, shackwood
and sheetmetal

strewn over it,
then you remember

the weather that advanced
the black loam underneath it.

The pickpocket lightning
that coaxed out the sky.

The cricket on the mushroom
and the ink around



the moon. What about
the cricket on your kneecap.

Urban Exposure

-- James Wakefield



Street Life Manchester

FOR THE LAST SIX YEARS I have concentrated my lens on the spontaneity and multiplicity of the street environment, primarily in my home country of England. As my style evolves, I find myself torn in several different directions as I learn what this powerful medium represents, and what it is I want to communicate through my work.



Metropolis

New York City

In 2004, I visited America and undertook my first major documentary project that was later published in hardback book form. At that time, I was interested in what is surely the world's most notorious urban environment, and the home of the street photographers that have influenced me so much: Robert Frank, Diane Arbus and Garry Winogrand.

Recently, I identified the need to change focus in order to progress as a photographer. My experience so far has led me in a natural progression away from a sporadic documentation of the street environment toward exploring specific social impacts. The result is a more disciplined approach which allows for a closer relationship to the subject matter and increased immersion in the concepts and ideas to be communicated through my photographs.



Partition

New York City



Dreams Bangkok, Thailand

Now, my attention has shifted from the democracy and capitalism of the West to the communism and former communist states of the East. I am fascinated by the immense changes that are taking place in the Far East, particularly how former communist states are now wholeheartedly engaging in capitalist trade.



Stretched Hong Kong



Day Job Bangkok

So, in 2008 I will travel first to Beijing and then into Russia along the Trans-Siberian Railway where my lens will be concentrating on the darker side of these changes, as I uncover how people are being left on the fringes of society by this rapid 'progression.'

See more of James Wakefield's work at
www.noojournal.com
 &
www.urban-exposure.com

Contributors' Notes

NORMAN BALL received a Bachelors degree from Washington & Lee University and a Masters degree from George Washington University. He opted against post-graduate work when a group of academics falsely accused him of stalking our nation's Founding Father. He lives in a tin roof shack adjacent to Mount Vernon with his English Foxhound, Martha.

JACK BOETTCHER is the author of *The Surveyic Hero*, a chapbook forthcoming from *horse less press*. New poetry is out or forthcoming in *Absent*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *The Hat*, *Past Simple* and *Siren*. He lives in Jackson, Ms.

BLAKE BUTLER'S work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Black Warrior Review*, *Caketrain*, *Diagram*, and *Sleepingfish*, among others. He was short-listed in *Best American Nonrequired Reading of 2005*. His website is deadwinter.com and he blogs at blakebutler.blogspot.com.

CORINNE CHAUFOUR: "I started drawing in my early childhood. Then, I studied at the Beaux Arts in Paris. My drawing is a writing that emerges brutally from apparitions and fascination. I like the sight of a plane seen against a flat sky: a white line, the trace trajectory. At present, I post daily a nex drawing for every day on my blog, corinnechaufour.blogspot.com, and I just finished an unpublished book with my black and white drawings: *Niemand, the Pioneer of Bliss*—an unusual wanderer. Why draw? "*Parce que c'est loin.*"

DAVID ENSMINGER publishes the former print mag turned on-line web site *Left of the Dial*. "Trailer Park Fragment, Part I" was recently published on-line by the journal *Stirring*. Five other poems appeared in the print journal *Detriot Dispatch*. Currently, David teaches English and Writing at Western Oregon University.

JEFF GIBBS received his MFA at the University of Arizona and lives in Boston. He is working on a non-fiction book about Islam and Southern roots, which received a grant from the Somerville Arts Council. His poetry, short stories, and non-fiction have appeared in *The Heat City Review*, *Dazzling Mica*, *Diagram*, *The Bridge*, *Word Riot*, *3:AM*, *Miranda*, and *Blood Lotus*. He can be contacted at jeffrey-gibbs@hotmail.com.

ARON GILBREATH'S fiction, nonfiction and author interviews have appeared or are forthcoming in *Glimmer Train*, *Hobart*, *The Portland Review*, *Opium Magazine*, *Slow Trains*, *Storyglossia*, *AntiMuse*, *The Pittsburgh Quarterly OnLine* and *Hamilton Stone Review*; his story "South of Flag" was a finalist in *Glimmer Train's 2006 Short-Story Award for New Writers*; and his magazine reviews appear regularly at NewPages.

ELLIOT HARMON is the author of two chapbooks: *Summer of the Pterodactyl* (Idiolexicon Books, 2005) and *Luke, Don't Settle!* (Morpo Press, 2004). He represented Omaha in the 2004 National Poetry Slam and was a finalist for the 2005 Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship.

JOSEPH O. HOLMES, photographer, lives in Brooklyn, NY, with his wife and two children. He teaches digital photography at NYU's School of Continuing and Professional Studies. Joe is represented by the Jen Bekman Gallery, NYC, and Wall Space, Seattle.

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ROBERT LOPEZ is the author of *Part of the World*, a novel from Calamari Press. His fiction has appeared in dozens of journals including *Bomb*, *The Threepenny Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Indiana Review*, etc. He teaches at The New School.

CAITLYN MARTIN is an Israeli-American information technology consultant and freelance writer living in North Carolina. Her views on Israel and the Middle East appear in her blog at <http://israel-aliya.blogspot.com>.

MATT MAXWELL'S publishing credits span the gamut, from business journals to horror to mainstream to experimental. His fiction has appeared in *Eyeshot*, *Thieves Jargon*, *Flashquake*, *Stick Your Neck Out*, and *Uber*.

MARY MILLER has stories forthcoming in *The Oxford American*, *Swink*, and *Quick Fiction*. Her stories can be found online at *The Mississippi Review*, *Night Train*, *elimae*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, and other places.

JOHNNY MOBASHER is a street photographer living in England. Find more of his work at streetphotography.co.uk.

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MAZIE LOUISE MONTGOMERY lives in North Carolina. She is an elementary school teacher. She has a daughter who smells like peanut butter and chocolate chip cookies. She is the author of many chapbooks, poems, and online stories. If you google her name you can find some of them. Her most recent book is *Compassionate Moose* (Bear Parade, 2007).



ALVERAZ RICARDEZ has two published volumes of poetry, *Hot Mud Poms* and *The Pill Bug Torero*. He is the editor of Kill Poet Press & Journal and works as a screenwriter in Hollywood. He lives with his wife and two children. He also raises emu on his ranch in southern Chile.

DR. PETE SARBONE is a fully certified life coach (CEC). He's also a sock! Contact him on the web at myspace.com/pete_sarbone.

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CHRIS SHEEHAN'S fiction appears in *ZYZZYVA*, *Blue Earth Review*, *Storyglossia*, *The Angler*, *elima*, *Smoke-long Quarterly*, has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and recently named a finalist in the Emerging Writers' Network Short Fiction Contest.

VICTORIA SPROW received her Bachelors degree in English from Harvard, studied in Ireland as a US Mitchell Scholar, and is currently

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DEAN SULLIVAN lives and works in Orlando, FL. You can see more of his working work and working work at flickr.com/photos/deansullivan.

IRINIA TROITSKAYA: "I was born and raised in Izhevsk—city of dead ends, sad electronic music and Finno-Ugric cultural roots. My love of drawing led me to the Udmurt State University, where I studied arts about five years. But it gave me nothing but weariness. First time in my life drawing became my abhorrence. On graduating from university I quit drawing and worked for a couple of years as a TV journalist. In summer of 2003 I decided it was time for a change, so I packed up and took a chance in Moscow. Now I'm a freelance illustrator at day and an artist at night. I think life's too short to be someone you don't want to."

JAMES WAKEFIELD'S biographical notes accompany his feature on pages 28 and 29. His websites are www.urban-exposure.com & www.digital-exposure.co.uk.

BETSY WALTON is an artist working in beautiful Portland, Oregon. With a background primarily in printmaking and drawing, Betsy explores visual narrative with layering, detail, and color in her works on paper. Her work can be viewed online at www.morningcraft.com.

ANKE WECKMANN was born in Hannover, Germany and moved to London in the autumn of 2001. Clients include *The Guardian*, *Channel 4*, *Frances Lincoln Publishers*, *Amelia's Magazine*, *Ruby Magazine* and others. Drawing is her favourite thing in the world. She also likes black ink, *Harriet the Spy*, small birds, stripey socks, documentaries, sketchbooks, elderflower cordial, spring and potatoes. Visit her website at www.linotte.net.

SHANNON WHEELER lives in Portland, OR where he writes and draws his weekly cartoon strip for various publications. His latest book *How to Be Happy* is in bookstores now. He has also written a *Too Much Coffee Man* opera, recently performed at the San Diego Comic-Con, and a sequel to be performed April 2008 in Portland OR. Find *Too Much Coffee Man* at www.tmc.com.

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 Excerpts

-- Deftly handled, a state of terror could become a permanent cottage industry.

Flames of Our Fathers, *Norman Ball*, page 4

-- Last year, he was able to get through to Egypt to have a heart operation, but now if something were to happen to him, we don't even know where we would take him or how we would even get him there.

Not Another Number, *Yasmine Moor*, page 6

-- Months ago, when he showed it to me, I said, "I gave this boy I loved a rock once," but he didn't understand what I was trying to tell him: that the more worthless the gift, the greater, and often the more desperate, the love.

This Boy I Loved a Rock, *Mary Miller*, page 12

-- Home really only wanted to see the granddaughter but home got *you* along with the granddaughter because you don't trust home.

Home Says, *Mazie Louise Montgomery*, page 14

-- Pity Jimmy says he wants to father a dozen children before nightfall and doesn't care how many mothers it takes to do it.

Entropy and Atrophy, *Robert Lopez*, page 18

-- There's a thirty-year-old man behind the counter with a ponytail. He's listening to *Coast to Coast AM*; there's a caller talking about Washington and the Illuminati.

White Lake: Not Drawn to Scale, *Elliot Harmon*, page 19

-- Dear god, keep me confused.

List Prayer, *Blake Butler*, page 22

-- I was busted by police for dreaming 77 m.p.h. / in West Texas about aerosol cheese ...

Trailer Park Photos Part III: Fragments of a Place Called Whispering Lanes, *David Ensminger*, page 26