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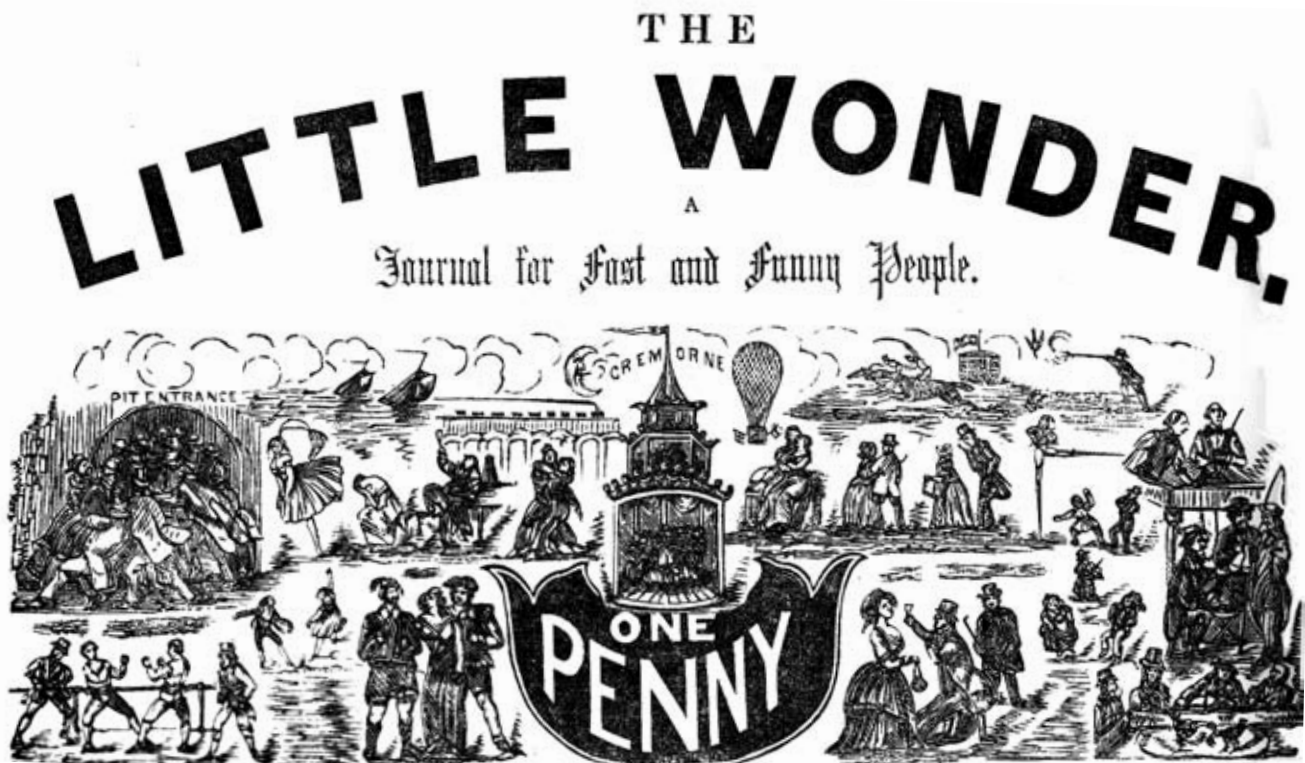
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AUGUST 2007

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Letters



Spike,

Hi. I'm Bill Evens. I was employed as a social worker but was recently laid off by the state for no apparent reason. I have to stay home to take care of my infirm wife full time and we are living off my father's inheritance. We have an infant son who is being brought up by my mother-in-law. I really need help. Would you employ me as a part time writer?

*Dear Bill,
No.*

Dear Spike,

Laura Spivens has tagged 3 photos of you in the album "SpRInG BrEAK 2007 smokin it OUTT!!!"

To see the photos, follow the link below:
<http://swarthmore.facebook.com/photo.php?e&pid=30261341&subj=4100348>

Thanks,
The Facebook Team

Hey Spike,

I heard you had an awesome joke about spree killings that got edited out in light of recent events. What gives?

- Concerned Reader

Dear Reader,

Don't worry, we're not getting all sensitive on you. We just decided to make fun of Judaism (again) instead. See page 26!

Dear Spike,

As an ISFP, you have a special kind of creative intelligence, yet your unassuming nature leads you to blend in to the woodwork. Easily bored, you instinctively yearn for the pastoral and bucolic. Under stress you may be critical, disparaging, and disgusted with others' "stupid" ideas. People see you as flaky and irresponsible. The ISFP who continually represses the impulse towards freedom feels "dead inside" and may eventually cut and run.

Love,
Myers & Briggs

Dear Spike,

Could you please add *Fighting Invisible Tigers* to the library stacks? It's a really worthwhile stress-management book. Also, the Director's Cut DVD of *Patch Adams*.

- McCabe Suggestion Book

*Dear McCabe Suggestion Book,
No.*

Spike,

Our firm is currently investigating claims of illness arising from the recall of botulism-tainted olives. If you or a family member has suffered illness as a result of eating the recalled olives, please contact our office at (800) 443-4529 or (561) 684-6330 to discuss how we may be able to assist you.

Sincerely,
The Injury Law Firm of Smith, Venture, & Bogani, LLP

MEASURE TWICE, SPIKE ONCE

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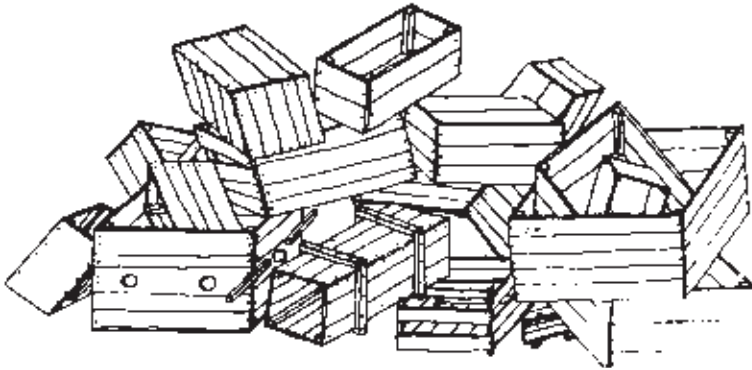
The Best All-Nighter You'll Ever Have

Well, really the best all-nighter you'll ever have will hopefully be of a more romantic nature. But second to that, it's the 24 hours before deadline at *Spike*. Every year we swear it won't happen this time, but it will, and it has to—only at 4am, when you're getting loopy and glazed and have eaten five bags of salt and pepper chips and smoked too many cigarettes on the roof even though you quit smoking, really, except for emergencies—that's the only time when the nonsense gods are going to visit and provide you with the divine inspiration and sheer manic absurdity to get the thing done. Usually four or five new words have been coined by dawn.

So in honor of the fact that working on *Spike* has been the main thing that got me through college (fingers crossed; I haven't gotten those final grades yet...), I wanted to give this issue a little shove towards the sunny side, hence the title "Favorite." When one is trying to be funny, the easiest thing to do is to resort to ridicule, self-deprecation, or sarcastic praise. But we're willing to work a little harder for you, and try and find humor in the bizarre and wonderful things we truly enjoy—such as Ramones lyrics (pg. 11), the 1960's obsession with suave international spies (pg. 19), the wisdom of the elderly (pg. 9)—even plumbing the depths of the ultimate barely-legal porno fantasy, high school cheerleading (pg. 28).

This idea was partially inspired by John Waters's essay "Puff Piece: 101 Things I Love," in which the auteur (who seems to get pretty regular visits from the nonsense gods himself) enumerates all the components of his perfect day, including nightmares, tabloids, Flannery O'Connor, and Kools. As an homage to the Pope of Trash, *Spike* writers have described their own perfect days; look for them scattered throughout the magazine. As it turns out, we're all irredeemably lazy. Who knew?

We'll let the reader decide whether we succeeded in proving that being funny doesn't mean you have to be an asshole. See you around, *Spike*. It's been a labor of love.



Michelle

letter from the editor to the other editor

Hi Michelle,

I'm having trouble coming up with a theme for this semester's letter from the editor. I've been thinking about writing a "Perfect Day" but I just don't have any inspiration. I mean, whenever I write something it just sounds dated and silly. How many college students would want to kick back with vintage German pornography and Rod Stewart? I feel like I just don't belong on this magazine. Have I been too mopey these past few weeks? No one takes me seriously.

Anyway, I hope you're doing well. I am working on the novel now but I wonder whether any publisher is interested in the faux rock biography anymore. Where's my muse when I need her? Where's my friends when I need them? I climbed a mountain and I turned around. I'm going to try to get some sleep; maybe I'll take some Motrin to help me go to sleep.



Can the Child in My Heart Rise above?

Jon

Putting a Positive Spin on My Life

By: Oscar Alexander Ferndale '00

Life never was roses for me. But what's the use of complaining? Instead of that, I'm prepared to gloss over some of my worst moments and pretend I actually benefited from them.

Forgetting Monologue during High School Play— I resolved to work harder.

Getting Beaten up by Street Toughs— I finally finished *Oliver Twist* while on bed rest.

Being Rejected from My Dream Internship— I now have the power to see things from a humbler perspective.

Losing My Cousin— I grew closer to a part of my family I only slightly know.

Totalling My Car in a Traumatic Accident— Besides a few injuries I was fine. And my medical insurance helped pay for a personal trainer. I mean, how cool is that? Pilates. Every day. For a week.

Poetry Being Rejected from Every Magazine in the United States— Look. If it's not good, it's not good. I mean, maybe one day I'll undergo a Van Gogh transformation and have exhibits dedicated to me. I mean, that's more important than some dumb check, right?

Inability to Lose Virginity after 29 Years— I've done a lot of reading on STDs, and they really suck.

Eviction from Apartment— I loved my pad. But sometimes God tells you to move on. Other times, it's a paid man who insists on placing all of your possessions on the side of the road for scavengers to pick at until you return home from work and realize that everything you've come to cherish is missing. I love my new pad in the garage.



My Perfect Day

by Aaron Brecher

I wake up in a very expensive **hotel suite** in **Monte Carlo**. I look over and see the full **minibar**, still unopened, it's reassuring that it is there. I look out the **double-paned glass window** and see what I think is a **peregrine falcon**, which is strange because I don't think they live in the region. I slowly start to remember the previous evening, a blur of **vodka martinis**, **rum raisin ice cream**, and repeat **pay-per-view** screenings of *The Stuntman*, with **Peter O'Toole** and *Bridge on the River Kwai* with every great actor of the **1950s**. I detach myself from the **800 thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets** and gargle with that new **orange-flavored Listerine** in front of the **vanity mirror**. The remainder of the day is spent losing games of **Chemin de Fer**, while enjoying **free cocktails** that I otherwise could not afford. I return to the room and order a small plate of excellent **foie gras** from **room service**, and go to sleep watching a **Discovery Channel documentary** about the mating habits of peregrine falcons.



S. Brainard

The Bear U.N.

Ask A Former President

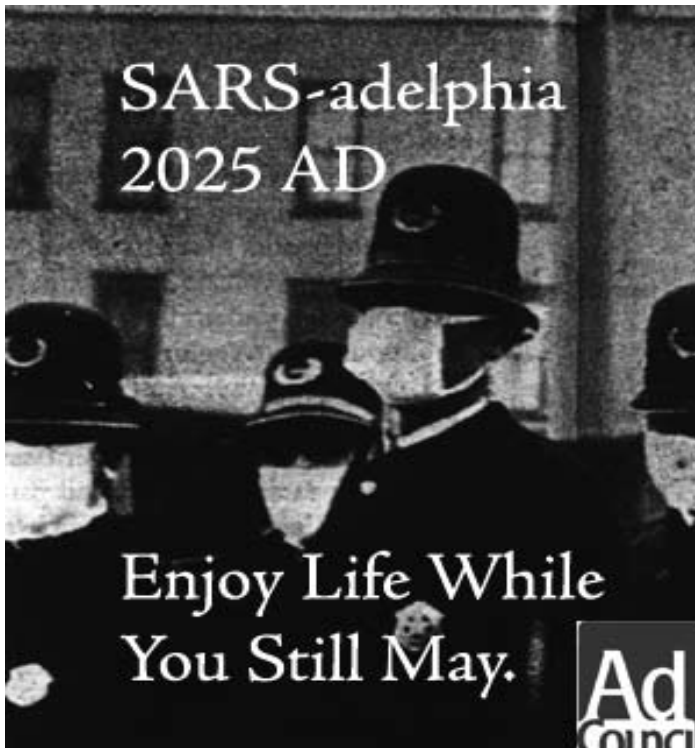
Dear Mr. President,

My sister recently broke up with her boyfriend of six years. She keeps telling me she's over him, and that she is happier now, but I think he was really good for her and couldn't help feeling disappointed. I think it would be better for her to get back together with him. As her older sister I have always given her advice on these sort of things, but now I don't know whether I should hold my tongue. What should I do?

--Kim in Michigan

Dear Madam,

I can assure you with truth your problem has made an indelible impression on my mind. The friendship with which you honoured one another has ever been valued, and fully reciprocated, and thus



It's Appropriate for a Dude to Cry When...

1. "Brian's Song"
2. Blink-182's "Adam's Song"
3. When the home team loses the last game of the season.
4. Bruce Springsteen
5.
 - a. When they sold out of your favorite candy bars, and
 - b. You get cut off on the way to work (after returning to the road)
 - c. Which causes you to spill burning hot coffee on crotch.
 - d. Causing you to run over a child.
 - e. Three tear limit.
6. Good chick flick
7. Funeral for best friend, who also played football too hard.

must you both share in respect for one another, as is natural. But even were your thoughts kept to yourself, would not the laws of nature, construed by natural equity, have said the same thing? In truth both provisos are useless. And shall useless provisos, inserted pro majori cautela only, authorize inferences against justice? For in the natural course of things, were it that these two souls were meant to be adjoined, would God in his divine judgement not see fit that these souls should return to their intended state?

If your respect for her did not permit you to ascribe the whole blame to the influence of others, it then leaves something for friendship to forgive, and after brooding over it for some little time, and not always resisting the expression of it, perhaps you will return post-haste to the same state of esteem and respect for her which had so long subsisted.

That you may both be favored with health, tranquility and long life, is the prayer of one who tenders you the assurances of his highest consideration and esteem.

Th. Jefferson

P. S. : If you would deign to give me the address at which your sister might be found, I would be more than happy to pay her a visit in person some night, should she require consolation after this unfortunate separation in her life.

Dear Mr. President,

I have been living with my roommate for three years and we get along very well, except for one conflict. He often has friends over to our apartment. I don't mind them much, but he will have them over at any hour of any day, unannounced, and they can sometimes get very loud. At a certain times, they prevents me from sleeping or getting work done. How can I get them to leave without offending them or my roommate? I don't want to cause problems.

--James in Boston

Dear Mr. James,

One can not always avoyd conflict. No one need think that the world can be ruled with-out blood. The civill sword shal and must be redd and bloody. Allow me to demonstrate with an exsample: I wunce had to deal with a group of savages similer to those you have mention'd. After a harassing warfare, prolong'd by the nature of the country and by the difficulty of pro-curing subsistance, the Indians were entirely defeated, and the diseffected band dispersed or destroyed. The result was creditable to the troops engaged in the service. Severe as is the lesson to the Indians, it was render'd nesessary by their unprovoked aggressions, and it is to be hoped that its impression will be permennent and salutary. I believe the party you describe warrents the same severity.

I am
Sincerely
Yours,

My Perfect Day

by Bizzy Hemphill

My parents would be out of town and I'd be **in my bed at home**. Sometime in the middle of the night, **my earplugs would fall out**. I would wake up and for once actually **feel awake**. Sunlight would stream through the trees onto my face, but not enough to be annoying. My **boyfriend** would kiss me on the back of the neck and whisper in my ear, "Do you want to watch *America's Next Top Model*?" We would lie in bed and watch two or three episodes of *America's Next Top Model*, and discuss **performance theory** in relation to the show. We'd get out of bed and drive to Tilden Park with my dog to have a **picnic on a big, flat rock near a creek** consisting of **Vietnamese sandwiches and salads**. Then we'd ride on the **miniature train ride (with my dog!)**, but we'd be two of the few people on it so we **wouldn't have to share a car with annoying middle schoolers** like we did last time. We'd take my dog on a **scenic walk** and we'd **sing and dance** to songs like "London Bridge" by Fergie or "Wuthering Heights" by Kate Bush the whole time, but we wouldn't run into anyone so it **wouldn't be embarrassing**. We'd go home and find that my parents had left us money to go have a **nice dinner**. We'd have a really great northern Italian dinner at a restaurant where we would have to **dress up**. When we got home, **my two good friends** would come over and we'd watch the **six-hour long *Pride and Prejudice* BBC miniseries** and drink **Bloody Marys** and beer with an endless supply of **Thai Chili and Lime peanuts**.

Try this tricky tongue twister: *Terzagant termites tanked on Tanqueray took the tell-tale tantalum terrier to tutor the tattered tyke on the topic of Trinidad and Tobago's topology, that the tyke might take the termites to triumph over the tyrannical tufted titmouse that terrorizes the teak trees of the tropical territory.*



A Chilling Prophecy For Modern Times
This crumbling parchment from the distant past warns of civilization's collapse!

May 12, 1990

As a future analyst, it falls to me to predict where we humans as a civilization will be in 20 years. Will we be immortal? Will we all look as good as celebrities? Will we live on Mars? Or will our robot sex slaves have overthrown and enslaved us through a series of defenestrations and tragic stair-related pushes? Clearly such questions take a long time to answer, but I am here to offer what I do know about the future.

Currently we stand on the brink of a revolution. Imagine a world in which you have to wait 30 minutes in line for a cup of coffee, see all your favorite TV shows get cancelled, and wear the most tasteless pre-worn jeans and stupid shirts ever designed. That's right, the modern axis of evil is none other than the conglomerations FOX, Starbucks, and the most evil of the three, Abercrombie & Fitch. I can show you the future, but all I can do is pray that I am wrong.

With the increasing popularity of Starbucks and Abercrombie, all it will take is one final monumental move by the axis to once and for all dominate consumer tastes in all aspects of life. If the *Simpsons Movie* is ever produced, it shall be that final blow to society! Imagine Homer Simpson on the big screen, sporting an A & F Athletic Department t-shirt and drinking Starbucks coffee with his donut! Resistance will be futile. Everyone will have to convert to the new lifestyle for a new age of man.

I may make predictions, but I often hope I am wrong. America, I can't fight them alone. I need all of you to fight with me! Do not allow the *Simpsons Movie* to bring our nation to its knees. We must resist!

Author Keith Blaha was found dead from an apparent suicide on May 13th, 1990. *The Simpsons Movie* is scheduled for release in July 2007.

Haiku of ~~Hate~~ Love Modern Lovers Edition

Federal jobs, good benefits. Come work at the **Government Center!**

Pablo Picasso died just like everyone, like a tick set on fire.

You, with the keg cup: **Don't Let Our Youth Go To Waste.** Let's smoke salvia!

Shopping at Acme, I think of old **Roadrunner** cartoons and I smile.

August ruins of Machu Picchu, like Grandma, **Dignified and Old.**

She Cracked open a pistachio, gave me half. "Thanks! My favorite!"

Doing a Good Turn

by Jon Peters

I decided that I would devote some of my spring break to service. Luckily, my mom found a Jewish Community Center close by my home in the suburbs of Ann Arbor, and arranged an interview. The application was pretty easy, too. My personal essay: "I like working with the elderly; I find it a meaningful experience." I met Debby Rinoff at two on a Tuesday after checking in with the affable security guard.

It was nice that for once in my life, an unrelated adult was happy to see me.

"So, you want to volunteer with the elderly?" She asked as I entered her cluttered office adjoining a sallow-looking cafeteria.

"I find that a meaningful experience."

"Uh huh. How many hours do you think you can put in?" Then, a pause. "You know, you don't have to work too many hours if you don't want to..."

"I think..." I thought for a moment. "I think I can work about four and a half hours."

I knew the only way to pull off this week of service was to say I would volunteer during the summer.

"And your mother told me you play some instruments."

"I play guitar and some piano."

"Great! We can do sing-a-longs!" She almost yelled. "The seniors would love that!"

Unfortunately I would have to tell her that I didn't know any old folks music so I could not in fact help her. I knew the interview was ending quickly, so I made a quick stab at this week.

"Look, Debbie, can I come in sometime to see what it's like to volunteer?"

She thought this was a good idea and invited me to watch Thursday morning.

When I arrived at eleven in the rec room across from Debbie's office, about nine seniors were involved in some sort of "aerobic" experience, but to my discerning eyes, it looked more like a soggy attempt to dance. One exerciser was even asleep. I quickly ran and pulled up a chair so I could stifle giggles.

Soon enough, Debbie caught me and came up to me with a warm hug. It was pretty weird.

The elderly people gathered around a circular table. I sat next to Jackie, who could not really hear. She waved "hi." Soon

enough, their leader, Barbara, a recent retiree, arrived. She carried a *Wall Street Journal*. She made a good impression on me; it took her only a few moments to subdue the crowd and ask for news topics.

Their ideas were pretty pedestrian. Lots of them expressed interest in the ever increasing roster of presidential candidates. Bill began by holding court on Hilary Clinton. Although I forget his exact words, I don't think he liked her.

I mentioned that I supported Barack Obama. That did not go well.

"He's too untested!"

"I don't think he has any discernable issues."

"Sure, he's good looking..."

Of course, I had trouble defending him because I am not too up-to-date on the news. Yet I could not fully engage in the conversation because I had to keep writing notes for Jackie. A sample white board message: "They are talking about Hitler."

The Ann Coulter argument was a welcome relief. At this point in the news cycle, she was still recovering from calling former senator John Edwards a "faggot." Understandably, cable news pundits are not something these people grew up with. For that reason, they did not understand why anyone would give her so much credence in the first place. Of course, the debate marks the only time one of the assembled, Ruth, spoke during the discussion.

"He called John Edwards a fascist?!" she yelled. This was pretty funny.

In closing, seniors know a lot more than my generation about politics. Which is understandable because politics are boring anyway. When the discussion ended and the lunch buffet was set up I helped Jackie move to get a good berth before everyone, including other seniors who had not attended discussion, snapped up the tuna fish. She thanked me afterward by insistently kissing my hand. I just helped out with lunch. Why are people so surprised when young people volunteer? Are we all callow jerks like me?

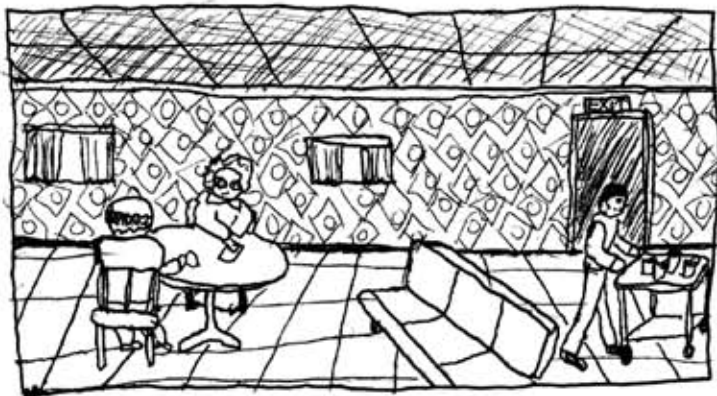
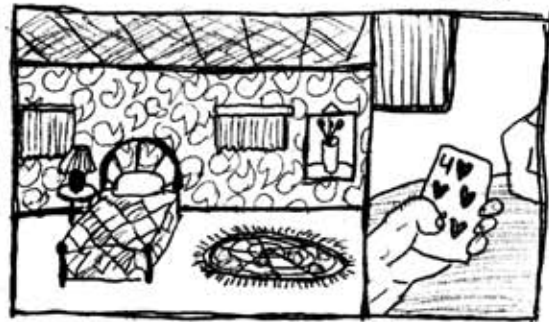
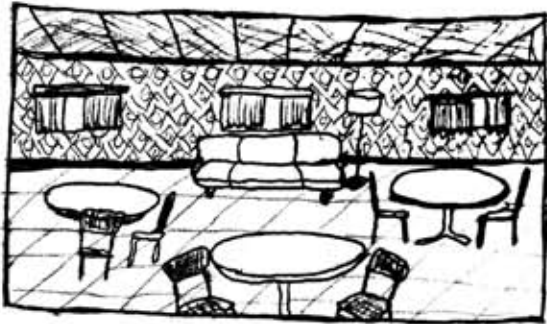
I broke my cover and told my mom after she came to pick me up that I was in fact volunteering for *Spike* and not myself. She was pretty indignant. "Why did you tell her you were working there this summer?"

I paused for a moment. Then I looked out on the dingy community center quickly fading from view. "I could still do it." ❖



LOVE at SUNSET FALLS

by Nick Forrest



“Pinhead, No More”: Rehabilitating the Ramones

by Benjamin Schultz

Though the Ramones may be America’s favorite and most enduring punk band, and though “I Wanna Be Sedated” is constantly popping up at just the right time in countless advertisements, movies, and TV shows, the Ramones don’t get the respect they deserve. In their self-declared “D-U-M-B” lyrics and “cretin” stance, the Ramones managed to artfully pull out certain cultural threads that are vital to getting a full understanding of American society in the Ramones era.

What exactly is the “Ramones era?” This question is crucial, but in some sense it is best to side-step it. The Ramones were offering a particular view of US society, based in their cultural experiences; this view and this experience is, in my opinion, essentially the fall-out of the 1960’s as lived by young, white, urban Americans from varying degrees of middle-class backgrounds. The original members of the Ramones were born in the early 1950’s, and they “came of age” during the famed tumult of the late 1960’s. Yet they came of age living in a particular middle-class periphery in Forest Hills, Queens, and importantly, they were not part of the burgeoning college student population. The Ramones formed in 1974 and gave voice to a post-68, post-Summer-of-Love sentiment of adriftness within consumer culture.

The Ramones were not hippies or possessed of any emotional (or material) connection with the political stances of the 1960’s young left. In “Judy Is A Punk” the Ramones express a feeling of the ultimate farce and ineffectiveness of 1960’s radicalism, looking back from 1976, when male long hair and marijuana cigarettes were beginning to be sported by the very pro-“system” young people that the hippie movement had initially opposed. The Ramones ironically equate violent “revolutionary” action with vaudeville performed in figure skates:

*Jackie is a punk, Judy is a runt
They both went down to Berlin, joined the Ice Capades
And oh, I don't know why; Oh, I don't know why
Perhaps they'll die, oh yeah; Perhaps they'll die, oh yeah
....
Third verse, different from the first
Jackie is a punk, Judy is a runt
They both went down to Frisco, joined the SLA
And oh, I don't know why; Oh, I don't know why
Perhaps they'll die, oh yeah; Perhaps they'll die, oh yeah*

But it would be wrong to read the Ramones as a solely reactionary group. They seem to argue instead for a more authentic form of political engagement that reflects their own material situation within American society. For instance, in 1981’s “The KKK Took My Baby Away,” they incorporate the issue of racist violence into a corny 1950’s love-death ballad form, à la Ricky Nelson’s “Last Kiss.” And in 1986’s “Bonzo Goes To Bitburg,” which outwardly concerns



President Reagan’s laying of a wreath on the graves of SS soldiers in Germany, the Ramones articulate the position of someone – like most of us – whose engagement with politics is always mediated by television and other culture industries: “Bonzo goes to Bitburg then goes out for a cup of tea / As I watched it on TV somehow it really bothered me.” But what exactly is it that bothers the narrator? Is it Reagan’s callousness and duplicity in justifying the act, which was broadly unpopular with the American public? Or is it something more basic? A feeling of revulsion in the face of this strange and increasingly common type of juxtaposition, the pointless, easy gestures of political performance on top of and obscuring the horrific, real violence?

Violence itself appears as a significant theme in the Ramones oeuvre. In many songs, the Ramones rehash and reformulate the parade of misogynistic violence presented to America in horror films, the TV news, and classic pop songs.

One Ramones song arguably presents all of the themes and stylistic devices of the group in unrivaled succinctness and power. This song is “Carbona Not Glue.”

*Wondering what I'm doing tonight
I've been in the closet and I feel all right
Ran out of Carbona, Mom threw out the glue
Ran out of paint and roach spray too*

*It's TV's fault why I am this way
Mom and pop wanna put me away
From the early morning movie to the late late show
After it's over nowhere to go*

*And I'm not sorry for the things I do
My brain is stuck from shooting glue
I'm not sorry for the things I do
Do – Carbona not glue
Carbona not glue*

“In the lyrics of the Ramones, mental illness, drug abuse, and deviant failure ride always alongside the family structure.”

The familiar Ramones image/character of the glue-sniffer takes center stage in this song, but more than in any other inhalant- or stupidity-themed song, “Carbana Not Glue” manages to take a simple description of inhalant abuse and turn it into a powerful (self-)critique of youth culture and late capitalism. First, the ostensible thesis of the song: “Do – Carbana not glue.” In this simple injunction, the only instructive/normative phrase in an otherwise descriptive song, the Ramones effortlessly ironize all of the illusory choices presented by a consumer capitalism that had, since the 1950’s, increasingly interpellated young adults, teenagers, and even small children as primary consumers of leisure/recreation items. The Ramones, as members of a sort of urban-suburban lumpen leisure-class, boil down all of the continual produce choices we are called upon to make (Sprite not 7-UP, Toyota not Honda) and to incorporate into our identities (a Mitchum Man for example) into one ironically vulgar piece of consumer advice.

This scene inexorably emerges from the post-war “nuclear” family and the trauma of self-identification in the family. “Mom and pop” are not throwaway references in this song, but its very genesis, and the genesis of the Ramones aesthetic as a whole. In the lyrics of the Ramones, mental illness, drug abuse, and deviant failure ride always alongside the family structure. (See, for instance, 1977’s

“We’re A Happy Family,” in which the Ramones uncannily play out the grotesque implications of the oppressive sexual structure of the Mommy-Daddy-Me triangulation.) In this way the Ramones manage to subtly draw out the repressed instability and dissatisfaction underlying the family. These few lines comprise the entire lyrical content of “I Wanna Be Well”:

Yeah, I wanna be well

I wanna be well

I wanna be: want I want I want I want I want I want

I want my: LSD, golly gee

DDT, wowiee!

Daddy’s broke: holy smoke!

My future’s bleak: ain’t it neat?

But back to “Carbana.” The narrator is forced out of the closet, the space of roach spray/paint/glue/Carbana, the space unvisualizable by the gaze of “mom and pop,” the space where he feels alright, and into the fundamentally empty domestic space that is filled by the TV. Here the song points to the only recourse for the narrator trapped between television, inhalants, mom-and-pop, being put away, and nowhere-to-go: absolving himself of responsibility for his own life and actions: “It’s TV’s fault why I am this way,” “I’m not sorry for the things I do, My brain is stuck from shooting glue.”

Addressing the Ramones seriously but irreverentially is the only way to do justice to their ethos. This article was intended to light-heartedly but earnestly draw out the threads of critique running through the lyrics of the Ramones. They were goofy, indeed, but their goofiness allowed them to deliver a subtle indictment and analysis of American consumer culture at their historical juncture. To treat them only as a one-line joke is to be the butt of a much broader, more insidious joke. 🐉

My Perfect Day

by Carson Young

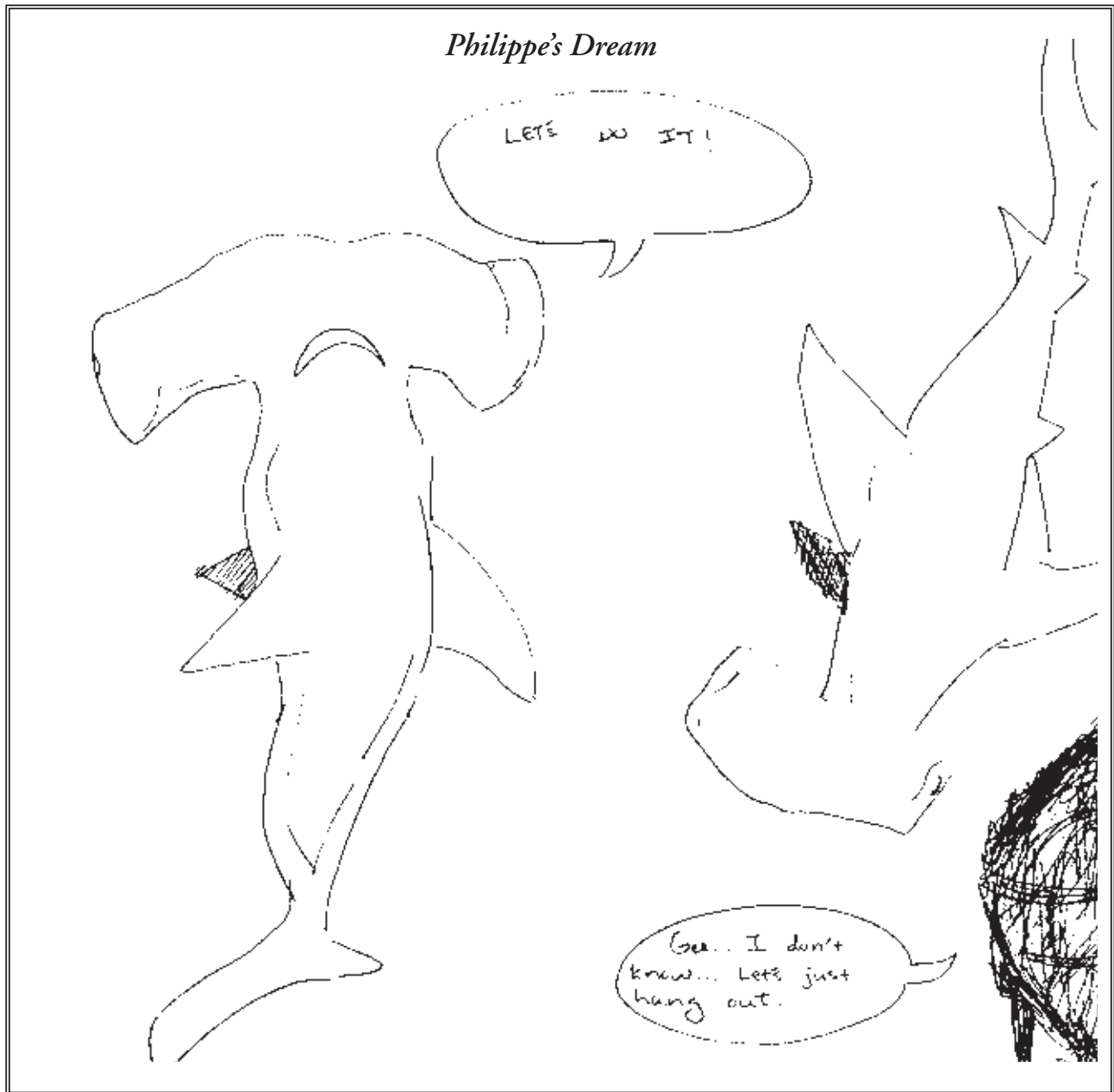
I wake up to my **cat** nuzzling my face. **Sunlight** is streaming around my curtains through the windows. I walk to the bathroom and look into the mirror to see that I have outstanding **bed head** from the night before. I unscrew the cap from a nice, **new tube of mint toothpaste** and brush my teeth. Next I get into the shower. After washing myself, I just stand there for a few minutes, swaying slightly, as the **hot water** runs down my back. I dry off with a **fluffy, clean, fresh towel**. After putting on my most comfortable pair of **jeans** and my red **Phillies shirt**, I go downstairs, open the fridge, and grab a bottle of orange juice. It feels light, so it must be almost empty. I pour it into a glass, and it **runs out just as my glass is perfectly full**. I make myself two **poached eggs** without breaking either of the yolks. After reading old *Calvin and Hobbes* books for two hours, I put on my jacket and go outside. It **snowed** the previous night just enough to cover everything but not so much that I have to shovel the driveway.

I get in my car and drive to town. As I’m driving, humming my **favorite song**, I turn on the radio, which is **playing the same song**. There’s some road construction up ahead, and one lane is closed. I’m the **last one through** before the traffic controller switches his sign from “slow” to “stop.” Some jerk in a Ford Explorer passes me at a blind spot. A few miles later, **he’s pulled over** at the side of the road with a cop car behind him. My “check engine” light, which has been on for a week, goes off for no reason. I round a corner and see that there’s a red light, but just as I take my foot off the accelerator **it turns green**.

I’m meeting my **best friend** at my favorite **southern food restaurant** for lunch. I’m eight minutes **early**. My **favorite table**, situated right under the heating vent, is open. **Today’s paper** lies on top of it fully intact. The paper informs me that **the Sixers** won. My friend shows up. I order a **pulled pork sandwich, hush puppies, and potato cakes**. The food takes a long time to come, so I have a lot of time to talk to my friend. The manager of the restaurant comes over, apologizes for the slow service, and informs us that we’ll be eating **for free**. The food arrives. As I’m eating, a drop of barbecue sauce falls on my shirt. Fortunately, it is the same color as Phillies crimson, and it **doesn’t leave a stain**. My shirt now **smells a little like barbecue sauce**.

"I Had the Weirdest Dream About You..."

Any good conversationalist knows that talking about your dreams is a quick way to ruin a chat. But much like slurping your soup or picking your nose, it's an irresistibly satisfying breach of etiquette. Instead of boring our friends, we took our nocturnal fantasiass to the mall and asked strangers what they reveal about us.



Sam, age 21: "Do what? What's 'it'?"

Angela, age 16: "Your friends are pressuring to do things you don't feel comfortable doing. You have to be true to yourself."

Hugh, age 37: "It's about a threatening situation. You feel danger. I would guess it's about a sexual situation that you're nervous about. I don't know why, just something about the sharks seems sexual."

Philippe says: "I don't want anyone to think I'm into having sex with hammerhead sharks. I'm not."

Lilli's Dream



my friends and I were on a school trip in a tropical seaside town.



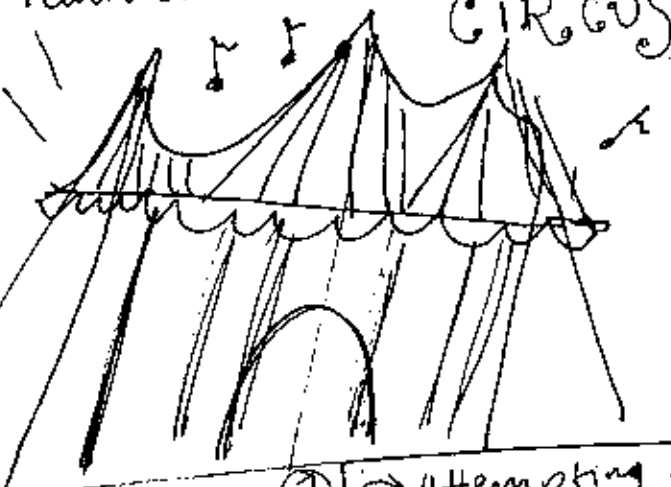
① one of my favorite professors was chaperoning. As we laid out our things in the hostel, he approached me.



② "I Love you," he said and morphed into a thin, scary version of himself.

④ He pressed me against a wall, saying he loved me. I ran away.

⑤ through the oddly shaped, brightly colored student hostel. And I realized it was a



I looked behind me at the man pursuing me. He was no longer my professor. I knew suddenly that he had gone mad, obsessed with becoming a circus RINGMASTER.



⑦ He was brighteningly thin. He had gone too far.

⑧ attempting to achieve his insane ideal!



He was also missing his shirt.

I had to get out of the circus
hallucinogenic youth hostel.

resorted to "circus language"



I bowed and backed out
of the room. He understood
momentarily, giving me time
to shut the door behind
me.

I left him gesturing
wildly towards his own

Caitlin, age 19: "You want to have sex with your professor."

Vanessa, age 20: "I dream about my own teeth falling out all the time."

Jaxx, age 23: "Funny you should ask. I'm trained in psychology and dream interpretation. You are orally fixated and need adventure."

Lilli says: "These people were all Hot Topic employees."

Michelle's Dream



Christina, age 21: "She feels insecure. Maybe she's hoping a new location or lifestyle will make things better—somewhere in the West or the South."

Brian, age 25: "I don't know, I guess she feels inadequate in life, and she doesn't know how to act in public. It's like all her worst fears are happening to her, like hiding in a closet. Social anxiety."

Juanisha, age 29: "Sounds like this person is alone and has no friends. She wants to do stuff by herself. She's a loner. Not social."

Michelle says: "Right on all counts! But Brian and Juanisha, I want to know more about the ghost rancher in the sky!"

Sine Qua Nun

Excerpts from a longer essay by Annie Fredrickson

The author spent a semester observing the Swarthmore Players Club production of Nunsense II: The Second Coming, from casting to opening night. The following selections are intended to provide a glimpse into the thrilling, pun-filled world of community theater. Maybe even community theatre. Look for the full-length piece in Annie's forthcoming book of essays, How To Be Alone.

Scene One, wherein a curious lack of thespians come to auditions.

Mary Fillipone will not get the part. I will, in fact, never see her again. Ditto Anne Ramsey, even though Teddie, the director, says she's great to work with. They don't know it, but Teddie has already stacked three of the five roles in *Nunsense II: The Second Coming* with close friends – that was one of her demands when asked to direct the Players Club spring musical (again). It seems a tad disingenuous, therefore, to even hold open auditions, but a non-profit, community-run theater must maintain democratic appearances. Nepotism, as I will soon learn, is practically required when no one shows up anyway. It's a dirty business.

Mary, despite being an hour late, is the first to audition. She graduated from NYU last year and is now employed as a nanny. She

did not list her major on the audition form, but she did note – under “additional talents” – that she can tie a cherry stem in a knot using only her tongue, which is probably much more useful.

“What are you going to sing?” shouts Teddie from a seat in the fourth row.

“I didn't know what the music was like,” Mary apologizes, “so I brought something from *Annie Get Your Gun*.” The accompanist, newly arrived, flips on the Kawai keyboard and produces some wobbly notes – it appears to be stuck on “clarinet” – before finding the melody. Mary's interpretation of “You Can't Get a Man with a Gun” involves wild vibrato and, in the middle of the verse, an entirely different key. Her voice is strong, however; she ends flat but confident.

There is scattered applause from the lean audience, mostly volunteers putting some hours in at the theater. Mary shrugs.

Donna Dougherty is lounging in the sixth row, but she doesn't have to sing anything. Donna, in fact, does not have to be here at all – a realization that, judging by the sudden foot tapping, occurred to her about three minutes ago. Donna is already cast – in the same role as when she, Teddie, and Christine Riggio did *Nunsense*, parent to the spawn, ten years ago. Christine and Teddie will be reprising their roles as well, and although the board of managers are supposed to be the only ones who know about the reunion, a dearth of auditionees suggests that word may have gotten out. Or maybe people just aren't all that interested in the lesser-quality sequel to what is arguably a 2-hour musical revue held together by anemic dialogue. I don't know.

“For a lead role, you have to have people in mind...I can't say I'm going to do a show without having in my mind at least a few people

who can fill those parts,” Teddie explains to me later. “Otherwise you're screwed.” Apart from Donna and Christine, Teddie has also contacted Barbara Hicks, a longtime Player, to gauge her interest in playing the Mother Superior. She remains short a novice, however; for Sister Mary Leo she needs a twenty-something.

“I brought something peppy,” Anne the second auditionee announces. She pauses. “Should I sing it like a nun?”

“Feel the nun. Be the nun!” Teddie encourages.

I'm not sure how a nun would perform Broadway showtunes, but I'll soon have 28 chances to find out. Anne, at any rate, sings “You Belong to Me” with hands clasped beatifically in front of her. She's convincing, but Barbara has better hair – downy and white where Anne's is merely grey. Her prospects do not look good.

Scene Two, wherein a long and most improbable historie is revealed.

I do not blame Dan Goggin – polymathic author, lyricist, and composer – for *Nunsense II*. I do not blame him for a plot that could race tectonic plates, jokes that draw heavily from things that rhyme with curse words but are not actually curse words, or an ending that relies on the deus ex machina of Publisher's Clearing House. I do

not even blame him for giving one of the nuns a hand puppet named “Mary Annette.” No, after the cast's first read-through, I blame Goggin for *Nunsense I*, which is where it all began.

I also blame Goggin for *Nunsense III* through *Nunsense VI*, which is where he started to get greedy. Really, he could have stopped at one sequel with some dignity intact. But as one reviewer who was probably very proud of himself put it, “Goggin puts the ‘moola’ in formulaic.” Given the phenomenal success of singing, dancing, occasionally flying nuns (for which I blame *The Sound of Music* and Sally Field) I wonder whether Goggin even has to write scripts anymore, or if a softly whirring super-computer, fed punchlines from his first six shows, can produce the next hit in a matter of minutes. Somewhere around *Nuncrackers: The Nunsense Christmas Musical*, this possibility stops looking so remote.

On the “second stage,” a fancy name for the a black-walled loft above the lobby, Teddie, Christine, Donna, Kristina (Teddie's daughter, whom she has enlisted as Sister Mary Leo) and Barbara (who came through after all) sit in a horseshoe around the keyboard. Lauren Rowe, the music director, is leading them through the harmonies of “Winning Is Just the Beginning,” an early song in *Nunsense II* that summarizes the plot of its predecessor. At the end of *Nunsense I*, which is staged as a benefit show to offset the burial fees for four deceased nuns who were accidentally poisoned by the parish cook (why not?), the Sisters discover that they have won the lottery, a windfall which neatly solves the problem of those bodies in the kitchen freezer. *Nunsense II* capitalizes on the showcase format completely – performed as a “thank you”



concert dedicated to those who helped fundraise - but instead of trying to get the money, this time the nuns are trying to keep it, challenged by an order of pesky Franciscans who claim the prize belongs to them. Hilarity, apparently, ensues.

"The Padre Polka," which Lauren wants to rehearse next, requires Christine's character to play the accordion, which Christine herself does not. This is a moot point because the Players Club does not actually own an accordion, but Teddie thinks she may have one in a closet somewhere. For now, the item "teaching Christine to play a completely new and fairly complex instrument" gets put on the to-do list along with snack duty, finding a pair of roller skates for Sister Mary Leo, and building the entire set. I glance at the schedule in my hand. *Nunsense II* opens in two months, which makes three rehearsals a week suddenly, frighteningly minimal. And unless the punchline to each is "because he's dead!" those John Paul II jokes are just not going to work anymore. "Update cultural references" gets added to the quickly growing list.

Kristina splits for the 4:45 train out of 30th Street Station immediately after rehearsal ends. An hour and a half later Amtrak will deposit her at Elizabethtown College in south-central PA, where she has rehearsal for the spring production of *Hair*. She comes home every weekend in order to do *Nunsense II*; at school she's in the women's choir, the dance club, and the theater club. "I did two shows while I was pregnant with her," says Teddie - one of which was *The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas*. This is either hilarious or completely inappropriate, depending on the darkness of your humor (Teddie and I both laugh). She shakes her head. "I swear she came out singing and dancing."

Scene Three, wherein everyone's patience is tried.

A week later finds the women back in the black box, sitting in an identical horseshoe with enough empty water bottles scattered under their chairs to build a sizeable plastic pyramid. Sundays are long days, four- or five-hour rehearsals where the cast perfects group vocals and choreography. Today is a Sunday.

"Shit!" Donna mutters, missing her cue.

"I love what blue does for your eyes," Teddie tells her. "They just pop."

Donna wears a lot of blue; she knows what works for her. She has a voice trained for the stage, a concentrated beam of sound that builds up from the diaphragm, inflates the lungs to maximum capacity and employs the head as a resonator. When she sings you feel it in your teeth. You can always count on Donna to wear pearl earrings and at least three or four pieces of gold, so I would guess that she is well-off; when I hinted, with all journalistic integrity, that five dollars thrown my way could shave five years off her age, Teddie counseled me to ask for "a lot, lot more." Sadly, this transaction never occurred - which is to say, Donna Dougherty is thoroughly 49.

No one is ever safe from Donna's one-liners, which if nothing else are better than the jokes in the script.

"I can't see myself in the mirror," Kristina announces.

"Trust me, it's nothing to look at," she whoops in delight.

Donna picks up the choreography quickly, jotting down notes on a folded piece of paper she then shoves in the elastic waistband of her pants. The music is easy for her; *Nunsense II* ran at the Candlelight Dinner Theater in 2001 - though in that show she played Sister Mary Hubert as opposed to Sister Robert Anne. Candlelight,

as it happens, is no stranger to Goggin's unique brand of pabulum; they did *Nuncrackers* for three mind-boggling Christmas seasons. Maybe audiences just came for the quality pasta. "It is not as...well-crafted a show," Donna says evasively. She's done *Nuncrackers* twice.

The choreography from last week is falling apart; neither Teddie nor Barbara remembers the combinations.

"I try to write them down but you can't carry it around while you're dancing," groans Barbara.

"Donna can," Teddie points out.

"Yep, I just keep it in my pants." Donna pats her spandex.

"Well, I can't stick anything in my pants," says Teddie, and walks right into Donna's punchline:

"That's not what I heard!" All three double over.

Scene Four, wherein we give thanks for small mercies.

For the past three hours, Christine has been nervously eyeing the rectangular case looming in the corner. Today is the day she is going to learn to play the accordion.

The table is decorated with the right number of pretzel wrappers and water bottles to signal that rehearsal is over, but a half hour remains to practice the highly affirmational "Yes We Can," whose 15-second can-can line makes it the shortest but hardest dance. Skilled lyricist Goggin repeats the word "can" thirty times in the song, such as the nuanced line "We can can can can can can can can can!"

"Hey, we'll do your favorite kicks," Vania suggests to Kristina.

"I call them 'open for business,'" Kristina explains to the others, and demonstrates:

"Open" - she brings her knee up to her waist - "for" - swings her leg out to the side - "business!" - and kicks, grabbing her leg over her head. Teddie cringes, silently cursing all pre-natal exposure to *The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas*.

"I'm going to give them basic blocking, but then they are going to go," Teddie said. "They're professionals. They don't even need me, so to speak."

Scene Six, wherein the cast unites.

"It's just pure entertainment," Teddie explained to me once when I threatened to burn the *Nunsense II* script. "Lots of people like that in the theater. You've got your people who like to go and think and be stretched" - she looked at me significantly - "but the majority of your audience just wants to be entertained." I have to admit, Teddie's got the numbers on her side. This year there have been 14 productions of *Nunsense* and its sequels in Pennsylvania alone, and that's just counting the ones registered on the official website. The original, which opened in 1985, has been produced over 5000 times and translated into 21 languages; in Spanish it's known as *¡Sorpresas!* which means, roughly, "Sister Surprises!"

"I don't see any deep meaning to it at all, not in any way," says Barbara.

"It's so corny, and you're just like, 'I don't know why I'm doing this, my friends are going to hate it,'" Kristina tells me.

Donna would not disagree. "I'm not necessarily sure there is a message," she muses with lawyerly consideration, "and I don't believe that's wrong."

"What a pleasure it is to perform to packed houses night after night after night, when people are just sitting, grinning, for two hours. There is no better reward." 🍷

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. was the greatest television show in the spy-fiction genre to ever be broadcast. It ran from 1964 to 1968 and starred Robert Vaughn as Napoleon Solo and David McCallum as Ilya Kuryakin, both agents with the United Network Command for Law Enforcement (U.N.C.L.E.), a fictional international agency headquartered in New York. The series was immensely popular for its first two seasons before some idiot decided to amp up the humor in Season 3 and the ratings went to hell. Nevertheless, David McCallum emerged as a popular sex symbol and the show ranked along side the James Bond films as a symbol of 1960s spy mania. To this day, the 'pens' that the U.N.C.L.E. agents used at communicators, along with other gadgets, can be found in the exhibit on espionage at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and the CIA Museum (closed to the public). This script is my love letter to a show that defined class and sophistication, and managed to make the formulaic "save the innocent of the week" thing as well as Ilya's inexplicable store of knowledge about Roma culture, (and some low budget action sequences) all seem incredibly cool. With Rocky Balboa a hit and Die Hard 4 and Under Siege 3 on the way, I want to put forward this as a possible vehicle to get two of the greatest TV characters ever back on top. -AB

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. Reunion: The Shuffleboard Conspiracy Affair

Written by
Aaron Brecher

Outline: NAPOLEON SOLO and ILYA KURYAKIN, now living in Fort Myers, FL, must come out of retirement in order in order to stop ERNST STAVRO BLOOMBERG, head of the evil S.P.I.R.I.T organization, who is bent on rigging the world shuffleboard championship in his favor by assassinating his top competitor. Solo and Kuryakin infiltrate the organization, pen communicators in hand, and through encounters with beautiful women and deadly villains, stop this sinister senior citizen from achieving his plans, proving their value to U.N.C.L.E. once again.

Characters:

NAPOLEON SOLO: an American, former U.N.C.L.E. operative, who is frustrated because he believes he has lost his edge, both with the ladies and as a warrior against the forces of international terrorism.

ILYA KURYAKIN: a Russian, also formerly with U.N.C.L.E., just moved to Ft. Meyers after a stint undercover with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service as a coroner (Operation 'Ducky').

ERNST STAVRO BLOOMBERG: Woody Allen type villain, very neurotic. An excellent shuffleboard player but prone to temper tantrums.

EDWARD CLEVELAND: the 3-time world shuffleboard champ. A nice guy. The 'innocent' of the piece.

MR. BELARUS: Not Byelorussian. He is a freelance assassin of Roma descent, hired by Bloomberg.

GEORGE LAZENBY: George Lazenby.

'The Shuffleboard Conspiracy Affair'

INT. BLOOMBERG HQ - Night

BLOOMBERG (face obscured) is speaking to BELARUS

BLOOMBERG
I expect this to be done by midnight tomorrow, or else!

BELARUS
Or else, what? You need me to do this job for you.

BLOOMBERG

Quite frankly, I don't know what. I've just always had the impression that criminal masterminds were supposed to use phrases like that.

BELARUS (amused)

You misspelled 'phrases,' moron.

BLOOMBERG

This is oral communication, asshole! How the hell would you know?! Now get your nomadic ass out of here.

BELARUS

Yes, sir.

BELARUS (V.O.)

What does that even mean, 'nomadic ass'? How dare he insult my Roma heritage like that. Why does the hitman always have to be of some exotic ethnic origin? Oh well, something to think about.

EXT. DIGNIFIED WINTERS RETIREMENT PARADISE - NEXT MORNING

SOLO and KURYAKIN are walking around the pool area, both wearing aviator sunglasses and pens stuck conspicuously in their front shirt pockets. Around the pool, retirees wearing disturbingly skimpy swimwear are sunbathing and playing shuffleboard.

SOLO

I just can't help thinking, Ilya, that you and I were only called in on this because this mission is not a big deal to U.N.C.L.E, so they could afford to let some retired agents like us handle it.

KURYAKIN (reassuringly)

I disagree, my American friend. HQ knows how vital it is to uncover the identity of S.P.I.R.I.T's leader. They asked us back because we are the best. Well, at least, I am, with my physique toned by years of training in Siberia.

SOLO (irritated)

I told you, I gained the weight while undercover. And it's not fair for you to make fun when I can't mock you anymore. It's not my fault your Evil Empire collapsed. What am I supposed to say? 'Ha, Ha, the ruble isn't worth shit!' That would just be rude.

KURYAKIN

My apologies.

So, this innocent we're supposed to be protecting?!

KURYAKIN glances over to EDWARD CLEVELAND, who is showing off to the ladies while playing shuffleboard.

SOLO (jealous)

I don't understand how a damn shuffleboard player can be so popular. That's nothing compared to what we do every day. Or at least what we did every day 40 years ago.

BLOOMBERG and BELARUS enter the scene. Bloomberg fidgets and twitches while looking at Cleveland, and Belarus glowers menacingly.

SOLO (cont. looking at Bloomberg)

I guess he's the number one challenger for the championship. That makes him a likely suspect, but his demeanor... he just seems like such a loser, if that term even applies in a retirement home.

KURYAKIN (looking at Belarus)

And I believe the man standing near is on file with U.N.C.L.E as a freelance killer.
He's a Bulgarian of Gypsy descent I believe.

SOLO

Heh, didn't the Soviets use a lot of Bulgarian mercenaries, before their government collapsed? Ha!

KURYAKIN

Napoleon, you can't say those things, we just agreed. Besides, this isn't the 1960s. There are limits to the kinds of remarks you can make on television, uh, I mean on 'assignment.'

SOLO

You're right. It's my turn to apologize, old chum. Anyway, Ilya, I'm sure given your extensive experience with Roma culture, you could provide some insights.

KURYAKIN

I have no idea what you're talking about.

SOLO

What?! It hasn't been that long since we worked together...well, a few decades but... Ilya, you were talking about Gypsies and your background every other episode.

KURYAKIN

I do not recall that, old buddy. But wait, the assassin, Belarus, is getting away. We should follow him.

Ilya and Napoleon follow Belarus out of the facility and into a nearby storage facility. Belarus and an accomplice ambush the agents (having spotted them). Ilya disarms and incapacitates the accomplice, but Napoleon is pinned down by Belarus.

KURYAKIN (to Solo)

Napoleon, get up! You're not that old. That Englishman with the brown hair played JB until he was 58, and he still handled himself.

SOLO (still struggling)

James Bond was a fictional character with a stunt team. None of those actors would last ten seconds in a real fight.

GEORGE LAZENBY inexplicably appears and strikes Belarus in the jaw, freeing Solo.

LAZENBY (to Solo)

Actually, I was in the Australian SAS before I started acting.

George Lazenby disappears just as inexplicably.

KURYAKIN

Come on, Solo, we need to pursue Belarus.

SOLO (dejected)

I can't. I am just an old man who got showed up by George Lazenby, a slightly less old man who wore a dress in his biggest action movie.

Ilya chases Belarus alone. He catches him shortly and the two fight. Belarus knocks Ilya to the ground and draws a very retro gun. Ilya pulls out his 'pen.'

KURYAKIN (into the communicator)

Open Channel 3! Solo, come in Solo! Damn it!

Belarus is preparing to execute Ilya when SOLO enters the scene with a walker. He disarms Belarus and beats him to death with the walker.

KURYAKIN (to Solo)
I guess you got your confidence back.

SOLO
What can I say? A friend was in danger, and these stories never turn out anyway other than for the best. I do think, though, that I should have let him maim you, you ex-Com-mie bastard!

KURYAKIN (chuckling)
Well said. I guess we have not lost the fine art of well-crafted banter between two heroic figures who argue constantly but actually share a deep bond.

SOLO
True, but I wish we could have met some of those beautiful women as promised, and we certainly didn't infiltrate S.P.I.R.I.T. so I don't know what that was all about.

EXT. DIGNIFIED WINTERS - EVENING

Two days later, Bloomberg has been arrested and CLEVELAND is celebrating his victory with SOLO and KURYAKIN.

CLEVELAND
I just can't thank you gentlemen enough for saving my life.

SOLO
We're just grateful we were able to catch the real mastermind, thanks to some very convenient audio recordings found on the assassin's person.

KURYAKIN
We may even be able to secure permanent reassignment with U.N.C.L.E. thanks to this. The most important thing, though, is that we have reunited after years of separation, and we can look forward to many more adventures together, (under his breath) if the studios have the balls.

A muffled voice comes through on Solo's pen communicator

SOLO
Wait!! I'm getting something on the communicator. My God, Bloomberg used a stun gas pill disguised as a Metamucil tablet to knock the officers in his police escort. He's escaped!!

Cue dramatic music.

KURYAKIN
I guess we'll just have to go after that [Russian expletive], old pal. For U.N.C.L.E, Napoleon, and for the free world as we know it.

Solo and Kuryakin shake hands and race away as heroic music swells.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END

Ode to California

a poem in ten parts

1.
California is so great.
Everything is fresh and attractive
and the air smells great.
There's this one place I went to
for Spring Break where you could
even eat the flowers. That's how
great California is.

2.
They have these green cans
you can get---they are kind of like
our recycling buckets.
But instead of putting cans and
bottles in them, you put
food scraps and food waste in them
and then send them to a composting place.
I think that's just
such a fantastic idea.

3.
I love walking around San Francisco
because you can wear several layers--
jacket, sweater, t-shirt, tank-top--
and remove a layer as the day gets warmer.
You are always at the right temperature
and plus you get in great shape
walking up those beautiful hills.
And it's so fun
to put the layers back on!

4.
My friends and I went to this place in Big Sur
for holistic health and well-being.
I thought it was so incredible, I thought
"Only in California."
I never wanted to stop eating the fresh kale,
and fresh beets. I made the most incredible

bowel movements
and learned a lot
about myself.

5.
I saw so many Prius's today!
They all had these bright yellow stickers
posted on their fenders. The stickers said
that these were clean-air cars
and that their drivers truly cared
for the environment.
It made me smile for the entire day
and I really liked everyone I saw
driving those cars.

6.
Did you know
Castroville is the artichoke capitol
of the world?
I learned artichokes make a great snack
and even a great gift. I thought
"I would eat so many artichokes
if I lived here" and then wondered
why I didn't eat more corn
since I'm from Ohio.
It seemed like the residents of Castroville
were really proud of their artichokes
and I wished I could be proud
of something like that too.

7.
Wow, I have NEVER had a burrito
like that one before. I thought
you could get burritos just about
anywhere, but I was wrong.
This one really reminded me
of California and how great it is.

So fresh and so incredible,
so exciting and so big.

8.
I never thought people actually
wear flowers in their hair
when they go to San Francisco.
Well, they do!
I saw more than four people
with flowers in their hair on one day.
I guess there are so many flowers everywhere,
why not put them in your hair?

9.
If I could have a dime
for every unhappy moment I had
in California, I wouldn't have
any dimes at all.
My friends and I were so happy
and all we could think about was each other
and how much we truly cared
and valued our time together.
To my friends: I love you!!!

10.
And finally, to California:
I love you too!
I can't wait until I graduate
so I can use my English and Art
undergraduate degrees
to get a job in the great city of San Francisco
and live in a "full house" across the street
from that beautiful park.
I will wake up everyday with a smile
knowing that I am in California
and I will eat so much produce
but will never forget
how fresh it really is.

Dick Meadows

I would like to wake up at the foot of **my mother's bed**. My **dog** will be comfortably nestled into my own bed, propped up on my **reading pillow**, wearing my **orange boxer briefs**, and reading *The Lonely Crowd*. My mother will fight with the dog over **taxes**, and then she will wake me by dangling a piece of **French toast** above my face and **scratching my head**. She will playfully turn her head away from me when I rise, because I will be **naked** and mothers are not supposed to see their 20-year-old's **penis**. Upon rising, I will fix myself, grunt at myself in the mirror, turn on the radio and the computer, and remember when **Big Willie Style** climbed the charts. Now, "**Care of Cell 44**" by the **Zombies** will be on repeat. I will have 104 **email messages**, all from my ex-girlfriend, written in the middle of the night, apologizing, she's sorry, she just can't help it: as we get older, she sees deep down that really she is **incomplete without me**. I will enjoy my **word-of-the-day**, which word-of-the-day will be either pusillanimous or josh (i.e. to josh, v.). Next, I will put on **jeans but no underwear**, which I liked doing my **brown and striped blue shirt**, sans **hair** peek out and I will unconsciously, mother's room to find that the house I have grown up in, which house is still teeming with **childhood memories**, will have become a **baseball stadium**. Everyone is downstairs waiting for me to step onto the mound, so I put on my **Cardinals cap**, which cap is waiting for me on the head of a **bust** my mother uses for jewelry, and make to descend. My dog offers me a Black and Mild; Black and Milds suck. Still, I take it, because he thinks he is contributing to the fantasy and there is never any reason to disillusion your dog. From below, the crowd roars. My **grandmother** is sitting in the stair leading to the roof, humming and **knitting me my brown sweater**: Finally, I am witnessing an act of creation I've always dreamed about. Then, suddenly, my **hot cousin** pushes past Grandma, and, **leaning over the railing**, whispers into my ear, *We are no longer kin*. She smells like **fresh-baked something**. I eat her, but it's okay. My grandma gives a **throaty laugh**. **I think I win**.

My Perfect Day

by Josh Cohen

for a week in 9th grade, and button up undershirt, of course. I will let my **chest** coolly **stroke** it. I will walk out of my

Last Bus To Graceland

by Michelle Crouch

When away from home, some people become tourists and others become travelers. Travelers are those who fly solo, wash their faces in bus station bathrooms, meet and possibly sleep with locals, seek out back roads and unannounced bars, have spiritual experiences while surfing on foreign coasts, and run for the literal hills if they hear a familiar accent. Above all, the traveler seeks an authentic experience. Like many a young fauxhemian, I once sought this off-the-beaten-path path.

But fuck it, right? I went to a liberal arts college—I'll never have another authentic experience for the rest of my life. Anyway, I'm not cut out for the romantic wanderer role. A deep terror of strangers means my voyages to strange cities have mostly resulted in aimless, silent walking and looking. I went to Rome once and returned without having spoken a single word except *grazie*, which I used interchangeably for please, thank you, sorry, and bye.

The tourist would never do something so silly as go on vacation without a friend, and certainly would not even attempt to order a meal in a foreign language. The tourist demands that all conversations be carried on in English, and cares less about cultural experiences than about maintaining as high a comfort level as possible at all times, and maybe seeing a few pleasant attractions that are only culturally important in their very status as tourist attractions. Cruise ships are tourism in its most distilled form—suburban American culture gets gussied up on a boat, moves around the ocean a little bit, passengers occasionally walk on a generic white-sanded beach, any unseemly bits hidden away on the other side of the island. Another advantage of tourism is souvenirs. Travelers take only memo-

ries and leave only footprints, but I want a plush dog in a bowtie that sings the chorus to Kenny Rogers's "The Gambler" when I squeeze his stomach. I mean, as long as the little plush playing cards he holds say NASHVILLE on them.

The practical problem, of course, is that the bohemian traveler saves a ton of money by sleeping on trains and in hostels and living mostly on cheap wine and the kindness of strangers. In other words, anywhere other than the 48 continental states is out of the question—I need to be able to get there by Southwest or Greyhound. I am, as the tag on my vintage suitcase proclaims, an American Tourister.

So that's the long way of saying that I spent a day at Graceland, the high temple of American tourist attractions. This spring, my oldest friend Alex and I took a bus out to Memphis, Tennessee, and things started getting weird as soon as we got to Jackson. The mid-March weather soared to a confusing eighty degrees, the bus driver proclaimed a deep and abiding love for all his passengers and then narrated most of his thoughts out loud, decaying antebellum mansions reared up in the bus windows, and I was confronted with a weird apparition of a large woman who had my same haircut and neon t-shirt—but from last time they were trendy, which I think was about fifteen years ago. We pulled over at the Jackson Greyhound station—which, as a commemorative plaque informed us, has not been remodeled since the 1930s—for a smoke break. One of the baggage handlers chatted with Alex and me for a while and asked us where we were headed. "Memphis?" he said, shaking his head. "Y'all be careful. They got some weird folks in Memphis."



From left: Graceland exterior, ceramic monkey, tiger jumpsuit, tourists, the turning point, fan memorials.

An hour or so later we arrived at the Memphis bus station with no clear idea of how to get where we were going. Shouldn't there be some sort of rhinestone-encrusted conveyor belt? Alex called 411 for the Graceland number. I tried to act like I couldn't see the haggard bus station regulars glaring at us—a good tourist does not give a damn about looking like a tourist. Eventually we learned it would be a \$25 cab ride, or we could try and catch the free bus by the Rock and Soul Museum. So we crammed all our possessions but cameras and wallets into Greyhound's pay-lockers and booked it to a concrete plaza between thriving Beale Street and the FedEx Forum sports complex.

A dozen or so of our ilk were already gathered on the sidewalk. The free bus turned out to be an eight-person van. Silent glaring ensued, and us able-bodied youngsters were rejected outright, despite the fact that the next shuttle wouldn't be around for an hour and would deposit us just as Graceland was closing. "You can catch the city bus on the corner of 2nd," the driver told us. The two of us and the other shuttle rejects—a couple of surly-looking women wearing an awful lot of gold jewelry and hair gel, who turned out to be Scottish—located the bus stop, and after an impassioned appeal to passengers for the 35 cents in change I needed for fare, we were on our way.

The MATA bus travels haltingly down Elvis Presley Boulevard, ten miles of crushing poverty that does not put one in the best state of mind to see how a meat-faced honky squandered his wealth. The Scottish women tittered in their pack-a-day voices about how adorable all the black children were. The bus dropped us off at a strip mall consisting entirely of Elvis memorabilia shops, with the big pink concrete slab of the Heartbreak Hotel looming a few hundred yards back from the road (at the end of Lonely Street, of course). The estate itself sits on the other side of the road, behind a graffiti-covered stone wall where the cheapskates peek over.

The thing about the house itself is that it isn't all that big, especially not if you're used to watching *Cribs*. It's not an original observation, but it's true: there's something humanizing about the fact that this dirt-poor kid didn't buy some ridiculous Malibu mansion when he got the means. He aspired to nothing more than owning a nice house in his hometown. Elvis lived here for twenty years, and

brought his parents along too. The mythology of the place—the part that did create a template of nouveau-riche stars living in gaudy play palaces—conjures up anecdotes of pink Cadillacs and private jets and Arabian stallions and extra TVs for when Elvis shot one with his favorite turquoise-handled pistol. But there's also a fairly modest kitchen, with an orange blender I've seen in many a thrift store and the same low-pile carpet my great aunt has (apparently, the interior designers of the mid-1970's thought carpeted kitchens were a good idea. Search me). In fact, the overall decorative theme seems to be Carpet On Every Surface, with a dash of Porcelain Monkey Statuettes. Not exactly diamond chandeliers. What's really impressive is Elvis's ability to live entirely on whim; the house was redone every few years or whenever the King decided that the parlor would look better as the jungle room. The decor happens to have been frozen in 1977, but it certainly wouldn't have stayed that way for long if Elvis had made it into the 1980's.

Of course, this isn't the impression that Graceland, the official tourist destination Graceland, wants to give off. Every room expresses some eternal truth about Elvis, according to the complementary audio tour. The billiards room represents his love of fun and games; his parents' bedroom demonstrates his devotion to family values. The audio tour, by the by, makes all interactions with guards, your companions, and other visitors totally unnecessary. The relatively few tourists present on a Monday afternoon wandered around silently in headphones, listening to Lisa Marie's narration, while the teenage guards who were definitely laughing at us all gestured which staircase we were to proceed down next. But never up to the second floor and the master bedroom, for as Lisa Marie told me, it was Elvis's special place where he could relax and be away from the public eye. It is also where he was found dead at age 42, beside the toilet in a puddle of vomit. Could cause distress in particularly devoted pilgrims.

After seeing the main mansion, our tour continued through grounds and into the Trophy Room, really an entire annex of artifacts and newspaper clippings and video reels. The earliest headlines are best—"New Performer Mixes Hillbilly Music, Blues, and Gospel!" and such other shocked sentiments to remind that Elvis's pre-army years were actually historically important. *continued on pg. 33*



MY SUPER SWEET



photo by Ryan Shevin



photo by Matt Thurm



photo by Matt Thurm

Clockwise from top left: Mom gives a touching speech; me the day I became a woman; "You go, girl!"; dancing to "Mambo No. 5"; Rent-A-Family portrait; Dad and I rock karaoke; the invitation cover and commemorative poster.



photo by Matt Thurm



photo by Ryan Shevin

BAT MITZVAH

by Xiaoxia Zhuang

Of all the regrets I've had in life, the biggest one was not being born a Jew. While all the Jewish kids in Manhattan and New Jersey and Florida were having their fabulous Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, I was sitting in my Alabama bedroom watching *Jenny Jones* and eating Taco Bell.

I spent most of my childhood years depressed over my gentile-ness and angry at my parents for not being Jewish. "GODDAM-MIT Mom, why are you so SELFISH?! Why couldn't you and dad have given me up for adoption? There are so many damn Jewish couples out there that would've wanted to adopt an adorable Asian girl like me!" Ever since I saw a touring production of *Fiddler on the Roof* in grade school, I had always longed to be a part of this resourceful, funny, interesting-looking tribe.

Jesus, and there was the whole drama last year over my college decisions. I finally nailed it down to two schools—Yeshiva and Swarthmore. I'd dreamt about Yeshiva ever since I was a little girl. It was the perfect school for me...well, it was until my parents realized that it was far too expensive to go to school in New York. "Maybe if you two were Jewish, maybe we wouldn't have any of these financial problems, eh?"

I was understandably bitter about coming to school. I mean, how the hell was I supposed to blossom into my faux-Jewish self in this Quaker environment? I tried to surround myself with Jewish friends, but that was hard because I couldn't distinguish who was Jewish and who wasn't. According to the pictures I'd seen, I expected them all to wear those black suits with the top hats. Weren't they supposed to be telling me jokes about their overbearing mothers? Weren't they supposed to be making me laugh? We weren't even talking about finances...

Finally, I came to my senses. Instead of finding Jews to befriend, I realized that I needed to become a Jew. I told myself, "No more eating fast food while watching *Jerry Springer*—you're gonna become a Jew today!"

It made sense to me—I'm in college. I should be preparing for my future, and my future was to live life as a Jewish-Asian-American Princess (JAAP). I wanted to be wealthy and control everything and circumcise everything in sight! Yes, the world was my oyster—my very kosher oyster. If they make those.

I joined Ruach, thinking it was a support group for aspiring converts like myself. I expected to be talking about the intricacies of *Portnoy's Complaint* or debating where to get the best bagel, but what I was confronted with at the services was a bunch of singing in a language that I wasn't familiar with. I wasn't even sure whether it was Yiddish or Hebrew. I sat in awkward silence as these real live authentic Jews were singing a bunch of psalms. At that moment in my life, I had never felt more alienated and alone. I was facing an identity crisis that no amount of blackberry Manischewitz could solve.

Rather than admitting defeat, I sought the counsel of my two Jewish friends—my only Jewish friends—who suggested that I read Martin Buber and watch Woody Allen films. Somehow though, that didn't feel like enough. I wanted to be known as a Jew—I wanted to be the new Madonna of Judaism. And what do all Jewannabes need? Yes, a kick-ass Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

And with that I realized that my goal was to have the first and best Bat Mitzvah that this Quaker-ass campus had ever seen. Of course, I couldn't throw it myself—a JAAP always has to have parties thrown in her honor by other people. Fortunately, *Spike* stepped up to the plate, offering to pay for the extravaganza if I promised to write the very heartfelt essay you are now reading. In the months leading up to my re-birth as a Jew, much elaborate work had to be put in to the planning. Chocolate fountains made of gold, photographs taken by David LaChapelle, food made by the best kosher caterers—we had to pull out all the stops. My real parents refused to attend, so I had to rent a family and a rabbi. Eventually, the extravaganza reached epic proportions, with the planning of giraffe rides and the sacrificing of a few dozen goats. Though the Bat Mitzvah was open to the campus, I had a rather exclusive guest-list that included Madonna and Britney. They never showed up. However, many sloppily-dressed students dragged their drunken selves to my party to offer their semi-worthless toasts of "mazel tov!" None of my supposed Ruach friends showed up, but I didn't care. I was the Bat Mitzvah girl that night, and nobody—not even the real Jews—could ruin my day.

As I sat atop the chair during the hora, I realized all of my Jewish dreams had come true. The party was a success—karaoke sung, speeches made, and most importantly, I was the center of attention. I was a pretend Jew, and it felt good. ♡

My Perfect Day by Malcolm Thomas

My perfect day would begin with me **sleeping**. Some might argue that sleeping is no way to begin, but my perfect day would be **without argument**. After remaining in **bed** for far too long listening **Miles Davis' rendition of Rodrigo's "Concierto de Aranjuez"** I would decided that my day would be quite **counterproductive**. It would be after noon so there would be no need for breakfast. Instead, I would enjoy a **light brunch** in front of the television. I would of course happen to catch the beginning of a **Next marathon** on MTV and continue to watch it long after the **bagels** and **English Breakfast tea** were done. While most would consider the day wasted, I would attempt to make the most of the time left. Ultimately, I would admit failure after an hour of alternating between Comedy Central and the History Channel and return to bed. After a **power nap**, I would probably spend an hour or so reading a book in the bathroom—a **good book**. Naturally, I would finish the book in one sitting while **perched on the sink** and feel like I had accomplished something for the first time that day. My phone would ring and my old high school soccer captain would surprise with the fact that we could **replay the one game we lost our senior year because of a technicality**. Soccer would then ensue. Early on, I would **score** the first goal...then the second and the third. My forth attempt would be foiled by the goalkeeper, but after accidentally kicking him in the face, I would make the goal and win the game. It would not be enough to severely injure him, but enough to make him tear up. After our victory, we would retire to our old party venue and spend the rest of the night **shooting pool** and **reminiscing**.

Strath Haven's Finest:

How cheerleaders cheered their ways into one writer's heart

by Josh Cohen

This was not how it was supposed to be. You don't leave to come back. And if you do, if you must, you don't come back to someone else's high school.¹ Let alone to what my "in", i.e. Allison of late Monday night Kohlberg Coffee Bar, informed me was called "The Showcase". So, forgive me, Thomas Wolfe. For even if this isn't going home again, my Friday night with the cheerleaders of Strath Haven High School — with Spirit, Ludacris and six-foot long Hershey's chocolate bars — it is surely the sort of regression you knew most mortal men would not ever really survive. Yet, I'm pretty sure you knew I'd try anyway, didn't you?

First, then, a selective history of the sport in question: In the 1880's, the men of Princeton University discovered a simple, almost primitive, means to cultivating "spirit":² organized crowd chanting. In 1894, Princeton graduate Thomas Peebles brought OCC to the University of Minnesota; in 1898, with one small step for man, U of M student Johnny Campbell stood in front of a hushed, expectant crowd and summoned them to roar. Several years later, the U of M organized a squad of "yell leaders" comprised of six male students; the individual male cheerleader was known as a "rooter king."³ It wasn't until the 1920's that females stepped into the ring; by the 1940's, they dominated the sport.⁴ The integration of gymnastics and "tumbling," i.e. floor gymnastics, was concomitant with the female takeover, best explained by the lack of other athletic options for young woman. In 1948, a man named "Herkie" introduced the pom-pom, the spirit stick and the Herkie Jump. Herkie also formed the National Cheerleaders Association (NCA). By the 50's, most high schools sported a spirit squad; by the 60's the thing had gone international, with awards and rankings meted out by the World Cheerleading Association (WCA). By the 70's,⁵ the Dallas Cowboys changed everything, i.e. during the halftime of Super Bowl X in 1976, they gave the world what the world seemed to be yearning for: uber-fit dancers, "America's Sweethearts", in sequins and near-thongs smiling directly into the camera and enjoining you from your couch to, you know, feel it.⁶ The 80's saw the birth of the AACCA and the NCSSE, as well as an increase in attention from the NCAA. In 2005, Al Edwards, representative from Houston in the Texas state legislature, proposed a bill that would divert funding from high schools that allowed their cheerleaders to parade around, quoth Edwards, like exotic dancers.⁷ Today, there are an estimated 3.5 million cheerleaders in the United States.⁸

We arrived at "The Showcase" just as it was beginning, at 7:03 pm on Friday, March 3, 2007. We tried to enter stealthily, but the heavy gymnasium door sort of squealed across the slick wooden floor, the sound sort of ruthlessly shrieked across the gymnasium expanse,

and now we found rows of parents, siblings and teenagers condemning us with so many curious stares. Oh, I almost left right there. But Allison took my hand and I put my head down and we made our way to the near top of the rafters, where people would have to obviously turn and crane to see us. Behind us, of course, at the very top of it all, sat a row of what could only be high school seniors: the guys, legs spread, smirking, in hooded sweatshirts and baseball caps, basketball shorts or dark-blue jeans, and the girls, between the guys legs or holding their shoulders, sucking on lollipops or twirling cotton candy around their fingers, and looking very bored. Allison, thank God, had no need for cool. She even told me something pretty funny about the 17-year-old holding his balls directly behind me. Soon, a fortyish woman in Reeboks and a pink children's tank top nervously stepped out before the rafters, voice trembling, and thanked us all for coming. She held a folded piece of lined paper, but she didn't read from it. Instead, she said, "Welcome. My girls have worked all year for you here tonight, and so, with no further ado, please, welcome, please enjoy, please I give you — Ashley, Diana, Madison, Ashley, Sarah, Anna, Harley, Lisa, Anna, and Meg — I give you Strath Haven's Finest!" The woman in the pink children's tank top stopped cold. Then, looking around her, she ran off the floor.

The crowd⁹ grew dutifully silent. Presently ten prepubescent girls stood up from the floor in front of the rafters where they'd been sitting unnoticed, Indian-style, straightened their white skirt-uniforms and adjusted the white bows in their hair, and gracelessly strode onto the gymnasium floor. It must be said that these girls were not very good. One looked like her knobby knees were always just about to fail her and another kept on itching her head like she had lice or something. They didn't really yell but whimpered, and when they really got into it — and they were really clearly concentrating, but still — they forgot to smile. All in all, it was very hard to watch, which difficulty was compounded by the fact that the DJ far back in the opposite corner of the gym was actually freestyling into his mic: "Haven's Angels backing it up and showing you what's good." It turns out this DJ was the older sibling of a student and volunteered his amateur services to all the high school's events¹⁰. He wore a black Phillies cap and the lower half of his body was a mass of denim. The tongues of his hiking boots stuck out and his laces were untied. Standing next to him stood a kid no more than 16, similarly dressed, nodding his head wildly and waving his hands like he just didn't care. It remains unclear whether this kid was part of the act or simply rocking out. Either way, the DJ proved to be fantastically uncouth, for when he wasn't freestyling, he was playing Ludacris or just plain shouting obscenities — e.g. "sheett!" — into

1. This, I think, is like crawling back into the wrong womb.

2. They yelled: "Rah rah rah, tiger lion bear, sis sis sis, boom boom boom ahhhhhhh, Princeton Princeton Princeton!!!" Which seems to me, too, to be as impressively uninventive as your typical Fatboy Slim song.

3. In 1911, *The Nation* wrote: "The reputation of having been a valiant 'cheer-leader' is one of the most valuable things a boy can take away from college. As a title to promotion in professional or public life, it ranks hardly second to that of being a quarterback." To be fair, though, the then-president of Harvard, A. Lawrence Lowell, called cheerleading "the worst means of expressing emotion ever invented".

4. Cheerleading is 97% female today.

5. Title IX was also passed in 1972.

6. This would be known in television as the "honey shot". The Cowboys GM called this a "touch of class".

7. He explained: "'It's just too sexually oriented, you know, the way they're shaking their behinds and going on, breaking it down.'"

8. And "tens of thousands" throughout Europe, Asia, Central America and Australia.

9. The crowd was 98% immediate relatives of the cheerleaders (and 2% friends and strangers like me). Every girl, it seemed, was represented by a small clump of people somewhere in the rafters which would stand up or make noise every time she smiled or somersaulted or had her name called. Also, in every clump of people there was a parent, usually

the microphone. I don't know how we all ignored him.

This first act went on for ten lackadaisical minutes. My eyes wandered to the second row, the JV, who were proving to be openly unmoved by their younger sisters' performance. Throughout, they seemed to be tacitly taking their turns turning their heads round and scanning the rafters for their clump of family. A girl would do her best to subtly turn on her butt, sort of just peek over her shoulder, make sure no one was watching, fully turn around on both palms, search the rows of parents from top to bottom, her eyes moving, her emotions going from excited to worried to frightened and then, suddenly, when she'd found her family, elated, alive again, so that she'd nearly stand up and wave and blow kisses and smile ear-to-ear, until the girl sitting next to her would pull her down by the skirt and shush her. And yet, in the end this all in fact directed your attention to the row behind them. This row, these girls, were all in black, their backs were held straight, their hands were surely folded or resting on their knees, and they sat silently facing forward the entire time. They weren't so much watching the Middle Schoolers as looking through them. And they were entirely, impressively, unperturbed by the silly JV girls in front of them. "Varsity," whispered Allison. No shit.

The first act ended. The line of JV girls rose before the woman in the pink children's tank top could even begin to announce them. She tried, anyway, but then (of course) the DJ started the music too soon, the girls panicked, just sort of started their routine and the woman in the pink children's tank top had to run all the way to the back of the gym to tell him to stop, start over, she'd signal him when they were ready, for God's sake. After it was over, the woman in the pink children's tank top started her speech for the JV girls, this time reading from her folded sheet of paper. While she did this (and the parents really did seem to be listening), the ten slightly older girls behind her pretended that the panic hadn't happened at all. They seemed rather horny, in fact, for they were lifting up one another's skirts, grabbing one another's breasts, pinching one another's asses and just plain being sexual in front of all of us. Soon no one was listening to the woman in the pink children's tank top at all but quite obviously out of the corners of their eyes watching these high school girls touch one another. Even after they'd been introduced — Marsha, Mary, Anna, Gwynne, Sarah, Sarah, Tanya, Latoya, Grace, Joy! — they didn't seem interested at all in beginning, but rather continued to warm up. They would playfully push one another or throw their heads back in laughter or just coyly look at us over their shoulders. It wasn't until one of the Varsity girls stood up and whistled at the DJ that the music suddenly finally started and the JV team hustled giggling into formation. After all that, they were just OK. Stronger than the middle schoolers, but nothing special. They did, however, continue to grab at one another's asses during their routine.

The fact of the matter was that we were all really there for Varsity. This became clear enough when the JV team prematurely ended

their routine because the DJ's mix was skipping like a Fatboy Slim song (unintentionally), a girl was hopping on one foot (either dancing or injured) and there just seemed this almost mature acknowledgment that it was time. When the Varsity girls rose, they did not turn around. The woman in the pink children's tank top did not even bother to bother, and a few parents even put their camcorders down. The little, little girls in the rafters (who will make an appearance presently) put their tiny hands over their gasping mouths and grabbed their father's biceps. The Varsity team had a routine not just for their routine but for their pre-routine: in two rows of five girls each, they stretched for us. This — not ass-slapping or boob-grabbing — was truly the theater of getting ready. Their measured grunts and heavenly exhalations whispered off the gymnasium's four walls. The near-silence and near-perfection were absolutely deadly. The anticipation was like a heat wave. The floor suddenly cleared. The girls seemed to be dispersing, almost as if they'd psyched us out and were going home. But in fact what happened was this: eight legs made smooth synchronized strides to the four corners of an imagined square within the greater square in the gymnasium. One girl — a "rooter queen", if you will — stayed the focus. And this one girl, looking directly at what felt like me and me alone, then turned to the DJ, clapped her hands (just twice, barely at all) and the DJ, uncharacteristically alert, yelled into the mike: *Are you ready? Are you ready? Are. You. Ready.*

Silence. Then from all four corners came a voice: *Yes. We're ready!* A thumping, swirling techno music pervaded the room and then there were girls flying upside down and sideways, criss-crossing one another with such irrefutable mastery and straight-up beauty you almost felt it was you¹¹. The thing is, though, is that the perfection of the Varsity girl's performance felt somehow angry, like maybe they were prisoners of the state released for the night to perform for a group of corpulent enemy generals or hungry ballerinas. Virtual shackles and all¹². Still, I defer: What's more moving than shackled leaps of faith?¹³

What you had to wonder watching was: Is this beautiful? Is athleticism beauty; is athleticism what makes a sport a sport? If a cheerleader could have would she have taken to the balance beam? Just watch. The girls were spinning one another into the air like they were tops and goddesses: there was trust and balance invisibly linking all ten of them: the grace of it made their tawdry outfits and personalities irrelevant. Yes, it was clear that your cheerleader possesses about as much athleticism, say, as your Svetlana Khorkina. Like the cheerleaders for professional sports teams — who indeed are more like exotic dancers, though this does not preclude, indeed it demands, their incredible athleticism — these high school cheerleaders seemed to be taking themselves seriously, and rightfully so. Everything. It seems, that what is demanded of your Khorkina is demanded of your cheerleader. Why this taste, then? Isn't admiration for athletic prowess enough? Is it just me? Maybe it's the frou-frou, I thought. *continued on page 34*

a father, with a camcorder. These parents, and the little children that clung to their sides, watched The Showcase through the screens on the wings of their camcorders. I couldn't help but watch the rows and rows of camcorders directly below me, watching the cheerleaders with such open voyeurism you almost thought it was normal. At one point, I felt the Seniors above me watching me watch the fathers watch their daughters through the screens of the camcorders and I felt very naked and helpless. To be fair, I was taking notes, and being weird, but it still made me feel simultaneously anonymously alive and personally complicit in some vague great trespass.

10. The question is: in a school district with some of the highest taxes in the nation, why go stingy on the entertainment?

11. By the way, be glad it's not (you): A study by some folks at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill found that cheerleading was responsible for half of the injuries of high school girls and college students which led to paralysis or death.

12. This poetic inking came closer to being a bit of irenic psychology on my part when the other day I spoke with Sarah, a Strath Haven student who also works at the Co-Op. The Varsity team was 19th in the nation, they were one of those teams you saw on ESPN—or rather, they were. Last year, they were banned for five years from national competition for stealing \$1000 worth of stuff from Disney World in Florida during their trip to Nationals. It was really a big scandal, and the only reason it wasn't worse is because the girls publicly apologized to all the other cheerleaders and the majority of them were not legal adults.

13. Or more honest, according to the Qur'an: "Surely We have put on their necks fetters/up to the chin, so that their heads are raised" (36. 10-11).

Throwaway Characters

A Morality Play by Carson Young

Characters:

Boris – 20, college student, sophomoric and irresponsible

Joe – 20, Boris's roommate

At rise: College dorm room. There is a rotten pumpkin on a desk and a window at the back of the stage.

CURTAIN

(Alarm goes off)

JOE: Turn it off!

BORIS: *(Leaping out of bed)*
Dude, come on! Today's the day. Get up!

JOE: Grompht.

BORIS: Come on, it's 6:45. We've gotta get ready.

JOE: What are you talking about?

BORIS: Come on, man! It's the drop. We talked about it last night.

JOE: What?

BORIS: Dude! It's the...

JOE: Can you please stop yelling so loudly? You're making my head hurt. And so is that damn pumpkin. The thing reeks.

BORIS: Man, you must've put back quite a few to be hung over like this. Let me go grab you a drink. You'll feel better.

JOE: No way. Don't even mention liquor. I've had enough. From now on, I'm sticking to natural highs. Like hiking. Or paint thinner.

BORIS: You've gotta build your tolerance up, man. It takes hard work and perseverance, just like anything. Maybe after awhile you won't forget a whole night of planning after a few runs on the ice luge.

JOE: What's this plan you keep talking about?

BORIS: Operation pumpkin drop, dude. Doesn't ring a bell?

JOE: Uh... no.

BORIS: Come on, now I have to explain it all over again?

JOE: No, you don't. I'm not doing any of this "operation pumpkin drop" crap right now. I'm tired and my head feels like it's gonna explode. I just want to go back to bed... oh, and get rid of this pumpkin, too.

BORIS: What are you...

JOE: Don't start with me right now. It was your own stupid idea to try and make pumpkin liquor. It's March right now. We got the pumpkin before Halloween. That means you've had five months do whatever you want with it. But you've just let it sit here. So now I'm taking things into

my own hands, and it's going out into the dumpster.

BORIS: Joe, man, think about what you're saying. Right now we have an amazing opportunity. This is probably the oldest pumpkin on the entire campus. Maybe the oldest in the entire state! And you just want to throw it away? I swear, sometimes you disgust me.

JOE: Boris, the thing's a useless...

BORIS: Listen, Joe. We're both twenty years old right now. I've never had a five month old pumpkin in my life. Have you?

JOE: No, of course not.

BORIS: If we die when we're eighty, that means we've used up a quarter of our time on this earth.

JOE: What's your point?

BORIS: My point is, life is short, man, and we may never have the chance to own a five month old pumpkin ever again.

JOE: So what?

BORIS: So what? So this could be a once-in-a-lifetime chance, that's what. We have this amazing opportunity right here, man. It's festering away right on that desk.

JOE: My desk.

BORIS: With each second you spend arguing with me, that's wasting one second in which we could be working towards putting this pumpkin to great use. The present is now, dude. You can either sit back and let it go by or your can reach out, grab it by the reigns, and-

JOE: Okay, okay, so what's your amazing plan?

BORIS: Dude, this is going to blow your mind. I'm actually glad you forgot my plan, because now I get the satisfaction of telling it to you twice. It's brilliant. Genius.

JOE: Get to the point.

BORIS: Ok, sorry. It's just... just so amazing. Here's the question I asked myself: If God gives you a five-month-old pumpkin, what do you do? And then the answer came to me: you drop it on a geek.

JOE: What?

BORIS: We drop the pumpkin out the window onto a geek.

JOE: And?

BORIS: And what?

JOE: What do we do after we drop the pumpkin?

BORIS: I dunno. That's it, I guess.

JOE: That's the entire plan? We drop a pumpkin out the window onto a geek?

BORIS: Well... yeah.

JOE: Okay...

BORIS: Brilliant, isn't it?

JOE: I... I guess it could be kind of funny.

BORIS: Kind of funny? This is going to be more hilarious than Anne Frank and Helen Keller combined. Come on, let's get started!

JOE: Wait. One thing: How are we defining geek here? I mean, some people would say I'm a geek and-

BORIS: Don't trouble your mind with that, man. I've got it all figured out: You know how sometimes, we stay up all night, and we get in line for breakfast right when it opens at 7:30?

JOE: Yeah.

BORIS: And you know how there are some guys in the line who have actually slept eight hours the night before and get up that early on a regular basis?

JOE: Yeah...

BORIS: Those are geeks.

JOE: You make a pretty good case.

BORIS: See? I've thought this through. It's flawless! But we've gotta get moving. The geeks are gonna start stirring any minute.

JOE: Okay. What do we do?

BORIS: I'll go over to the window and keep a lookout. You pick up the pumpkin, and when I give the word...

JOE: Wait a minute. There is no way I'm dropping that thing.

BORIS: Dude, you have to. The plan's ruined if you don't.

JOE: I don't know. I'm having some second thoughts on this whole thing. I mean, we could really hurt somebody. I'm going back to bed.

BORIS: Dude, no! Don't bail on me now. Come on. Okay, how about we flip a coin to decide who drops?

JOE: I don't know how I let you talk me into these things.

BORIS: I've got the coin. Call it in the air.

JOE: Tails!

BORIS: It's tails. Damn it! Okay, I guess I'm dropping.

(Attempts to lift pumpkin)

Dude, how am I gonna pick this thing up? It'll just break apart.

JOE: Uhhh....

BORIS: I know! Do you have your snowboard here?

JOE: No, come on....

BORIS: Dude, without your board, this whole thing is ruined. Plus, you don't have to pick it up. Don't make me beg.

JOE: Fine. It's under my bed. But you're washing it afterward.

BORIS: Deal.

(Gets snowboard, after a struggle manages to get pumpkin on snowboard. Walks, straining, with pumpkin to window.)

I can't hold this forever. Is anyone coming?

JOE: Nope, not now.

BORIS: Damn it! We're too late, I just know it. Dude, if only you hadn't forgotten, we'd...

JOE: Wait! A door's opening... It's the guy who got paralyzed in that car accident a few months ago who rides in that electric wheelchair.

BORIS: Oh man, somebody up there likes me. This is the guy who rides drooling with his head lolled back, right? Man, he's gonna get a big mouthful of pumpkin.

JOE: You can't be serious.

BORIS: What do you mean?

JOE: Come on... I mean, this guy's a cripple. We can't drop it on him.

BORIS: Dude, we have to.

JOE: No way. He's disabled! This is awful!

BORIS: If we'd set out to drop the pumpkin on a disabled person, that would be awful. But we didn't. We set out to drop the pumpkin on a geek. This guy is definitely a geek. If we didn't drop the pumpkin on him, we'd be discriminating against disabled people!

JOE: I don't know...

BORIS: Look, we had a deal. You're not gonna renege on our deal here, are you?

JOE: Okay, fine. But you'd better get ready. He's almost under us.

BORIS: Assuming ready position!

JOE: Here he comes. Wait for it... wait for it... now!

BORIS: Bombs away!
(drops pumpkin)

JOE: And we have a direct hit!

BORIS: Oh yeah! Bullseye, dude! Woo hoo! That was awesome! Wasn't that awesome? You have to admit that was awesome!

JOE: That was pretty sweet.

BORIS: Look out and see what's going on.

JOE: He's covered in rotting pumpkin flesh. Gross! It's in his mouth and everything.

BORIS: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! He might be hurt, but it's funny because I don't really know him!

JOE: He hasn't moved yet, either.

BORIS: Of course not! He's paralyzed! Dude, this has got to be the funniest thing I've ever seen in my life!

JOE: Some other people are coming over.

BORIS: I bet they're laughing their asses off. Are they? They are, right?

JOE: I can't tell... No, they're not.

BORIS: Man, some people just can't take a joke. It really disgusts me. People are such pussies these days.

JOE: They're taking him off the wheelchair... Now they're taking the pumpkin out of his mouth... gross.

BORIS: Oh man, I wonder what that tastes like? Nasty!

JOE: Uh oh...

BORIS: What is it?

JOE: They've got him lying on the ground now... Hey, it's that girl you've been going after. What's her name?

BORIS: Oh my God... is it Chelsea Sanford?

JOE: Yeah, that's her.

BORIS: All right! This is just my lucky day! I'll bet she's so impressed. What's she doing? Is she impressed?

JOE: Not really, no. She's screaming for help... Now she's giving him mouth-to-mouth!

BORIS: Dude! Mouth to mouth with Chelsea? I'd kill for that. See? This is a mutually beneficial situation. It's hilarious, and it's great for the disabled geek! I mean, I bet that's the closest he's gotten all year. He owes me.

JOE: No, wait. Oh no! Chelsea's yelling now, saying he's got no pulse, call 9-1-1!

BORIS: Uh oh.

JOE: Dude... I think he died.

BORIS: No way, man.

JOE: Jesus Christ.

BORIS: I think I'm gonna be sick.

JOE: Chelsea's yelling now that he's dead!

BORIS: Oh man!

JOE: Dude, this can't be happening!

BORIS: It was all just a joke. A joke! Oh God. I used to think disabled people were just here for my amusement! Jesus Christ! What do we do?

JOE: I think we've gotta go turn ourselves in. Honesty's always the best policy.

BORIS: Well, dishonesty's the second best policy, and that's looking pretty good right now. If we get caught...

JOE: If we get caught? We just killed a guy, and you're worried about getting caught? Where is your humanity? Where is your decency?

BORIS: Dude... chill.

JOE: Chill! Chill? Maybe you don't understand. He's dead. We're murderers. And it's all because of your stupid pumpkin drop! It wasn't even funny in the first place.

BORIS: Joe, let me set something straight. You can say whatever you want about me. But never, ever, insult the pumpkin drop. That's crossing the line.

JOE: I... you... are you serious? Fine, I'll say something about you: I hate you. I hate everything you do, everything you stand for, and everything that comes out of your mouth. I hate every molecule in your body down to your corrupt, rotten soul. You're like a parasite sucking out my life.

BORIS: There's one thing you need to consider here, Joe. Think of how funny this would all be if that disabled guy weren't dead right now.

JOE: How can you talk like that? The point is that he is dead. The joke's over, Boris. The joke sucked. You need to face reality.

BORIS: Reality... great. That's what I spend every waking hour of my life trying to avoid.

JOE: There's no avoiding this. What're we going to do?

BORIS: We could run away... We could go to Vegas! We can prostitute ourselves to scrape together enough money to start a new life. We'll be in the smoking, gambling, and drinking capital of the world! It sounds like the happiest place on earth.

JOE: No, Boris. We have to stay here and accept responsibility for this.

BORIS: I mean, you're right of course. I guess I'm finally forced to confront the consequences of my selfish, hedonistic lifestyle. Why me? Why now? Are you there, God? It's me, Boris. I know I haven't talked to you a lot lately, but I just wanted to say... you suck. *(Breaks down in tears)*

JOE: Come here. Give me a hug. I love you.

BORIS: Oh, Joe, I love you too. Even though life is such a depressing cycle of endless tragedy and disappointment, ultimately concluding in pain and death, at least I'll always have you.

JOE: I know that together, we can be strong.

CURTAIN

Love Is The Drug

medical advice from an armchair physician



by Matt Thurm

Over 22 million people have died from AIDS. Over 42 million people are living with HIV/AIDS, and 74 percent of these infected people live in sub-Saharan Africa. Over 19 million women are living with HIV/AIDS. By the year 2010, five countries (Ethiopia, Nigeria, China, India, and Russia) with 40 percent of the world's population will add 50 to 75 million infected people to the worldwide pool of HIV disease. There are 14,000 new infections every day (95 percent in developing countries). HIV/AIDS is a "disease of young people" with half of the 5 million new infections each year occurring among people ages 15 to 24. The UN estimates that, currently, there are 14 million AIDS orphans and that by 2010 there will be 25 million.

In light of the continuing scourge of AIDS, New York City is looking to advocate circumcision in high-risk men after the UN released findings "that the procedure cut the risk of infection by up to 60 percent". This effort is promising; it advances the fight against this grave pandemic on a vital front of preemption and marks a departure from American disregard for the United Nations.

While I support this smegma-fighting measure for countless reasons—namely aesthetic—I cannot in good conscience share in the enthusiasm. New York City must look not to the findings of this international playground, but rather to the daily practices of the city's own sandboxes. For almost as long as young Jewish males have cried in fulfilling the Covenant, and long before it was conceived as a measure against AIDS, children everywhere, of all beliefs, have emitted their own shrieks to treat a different epidemic which pervades. Cooties.

Circumcision may cut the risk of infection by even 60%, but how about 100%? The Cootie Shot has a proven 100% success rate—and that's against a virus that infects a population size that makes the HIV/AIDS community look paltry by comparison.

But the Cootie Shot doesn't make only circumcision look ineffective. So-called AIDS Cocktails, considered to be the best treatment for HIV/AIDS, depend upon strict regimens that can include as many 21 pills in a day. What's more, in the United States their annual cost is between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

You can ingest 7,665 pills a year at potentially prohibitive cost or you can say "Circle, circle, dot, dot," and then you've got the Cootie Shot. "Shut the door, pull the lever," and then you've got it forever. *Matt is a first-year English major.*

Paid Advertisements

Hi Stanley! Yes. I Took out an Ad in the Magazine.

I. Embrace

a. As our relationship spiralled out of control (Brooklyn, 1997) and I took up residence at your place, I knew even then the stress of graduate school and work would soon incapacitate me. I wasn't surprised when I got stomach flu. When I went to the hospital, it was partly to escape your influence, Stanley.

b. And there was a problem, notably my prescription drug ab/use. I never thought that after leaving the hospital I would in fact get addicted to morphine. I know you thought I quit during college, but by the time I dumped you, I had even looked into heroin.



II. Replace

a. Soon after our break-up, I substituted you with an attractive young man, "Clark Kent", who I met at a gritty downtown bar (Manhattan, 1999). And then I replaced him with another man, "Peter Parker," and then I tried Alfred the kindergarten teacher, but he was way too subservient. Not my type. Anyway, you get the picture, Stan, I needed to get over you. And I think I have.

III. Celebrate

a. And now I'm in a healthy relationship! And you should be proud of that, Stanley! I know the right people, I have a good job, and I live in a great community (Washington Heights, 2007). And I love the man I live with. I wish you could be as happy as I am. I hope you are. I really hope you are. Can you believe it? Nine years of semi-betrothal, nine years of not speaking to one another, where will the next nine years go?

1-800-YES-NUNS The *Nunsense* commercial hotline for CDs, DVDs, props, costumes, sets, and anything else you need to justify a \$22 admission: glow-in-the-dark rosaries as paparting gifts, Ten Commandment stickers for the kids, or a *Nunsense* cook book! New Arrival *Nunsense XI: Country-Western Jamboree*, starring Rue McClanahan and John Ritter.

Earth
2042 AD

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You Still May.

Ad
Council

Graceland continued

Youthful football jerseys hint at a fine physical specimen as well. A quick turn of the corner, though, and it's the army uniform and teen movie posters. Down the hall and it's those ridiculous jumpsuits and Vegas footage. Oh, he wasn't that fat, I thought, examining a white number with an embroidered and spangled tiger. Then I peeked around the back of the mannequin and saw how much polyester fabric had been gathered and pinned to hide the King's final girth.

Finally, the path leads you to the meditation garden, where Elvis and his parents lie in state, surrounded by wreaths and poems from fans around the globe. I removed the audio tour headphones, adjusting to hearing outside noises again like your eyes have to adjust to being in the sunlight. "What'd you think?" I asked Alex.

"Fucking creepy," she said. "We just spent an hour looking at a dead guy's stuff, and now here's his grave."

"Yeah," I said. But it was a nice grave. The Japanese chapter of his fan club had sent a particularly lovely synthetic flower arrangement in honor of his 72nd birthday. "Well, let's go buy some stuff!"

After the shuttle drove us back across the road-- no one's allowed to walk, at least not while they're still holding their audio guides-- we sampled the wares of the souvenir vendors, who seem to have a much gamer outlook on the whole enterprise than the operators of the estate itself. Lisa Marie probably wouldn't have found the aprons bearing recipes for fried peanut butter and banana sandwiches all that hilarious. After all, the man had a serious problem with compulsive overeating, which is nothing to be made light of. But not all the other tourists had been the enraptured chubby retirees I had expected. No one had been weeping at his grave or clutching hands in front of the life-size oil portrait. Half the folks there had seemed like mildly interested curiosity-seekers, much like Alex and myself. The only other gift shop customers were a couple of punked-out teens yukking it up at the tacky jewelry. I guess if you're at Graceland in the first place, and you have any amount of literacy regarding the past thirty years of popular culture, it takes a great deal of willful blindness not to be in on the joke. That's the great thing about tourism; you don't have to pretend you're not interested in the world's biggest roadside ball of yarn or what have you, but you can think it's kind of stupid at the same time. You're allowed to not have a life-changing moment. You're allowed to be in it only for the t-shirt. The t-shirts were pretty ugly, though, so I bought a post card.

We cut through the parking lot to the end of Lonely Street and insinuated ourselves in the queue of guests waiting for the Heartbreak Hotel's shuttle back to Beale Street. The hotel, besides pumping in Elvis songs from satellite radio 24/7, also runs much larger vans and doesn't ask anyone for proof of room key. Again, Alex and I found ourselves surrounded by chav-esque Brits on holiday. They had undoubtedly traveled farther and saved up longer than the rest of us. Maybe they were true travelers, searching for America and themselves and the meaning of life? But I found my answer in the van's route back to the nightlife district. Instead of winding through the run-down chaos of everyday life like the city bus, the Heartbreak shuttle takes the freeway. 🐾

My Perfect Day

by Keith Blaha

I wake up in the very early morning and start **barking** for my master to let me outside, so that I can go take a large shit on the lawn. Afterwards, I **lick my butt** and rub my butt on the grass and lick it some more. It tastes of **chamomile** and **chives**, absolutely wonderful. After my delectable morning pleasure, my master decides to take me on a **walk**. I tug on the leash, pulling my master in every which direction until I have **pissed** on everything in sight. After getting home, my master leaves the house for work, so I am free to jump on the **couch** and **gnaw** on my toys without being bothered by my master's inane requests for me to do silly things like fetch a stick. I mean really, why would he want me to get a stick for him anyway? Luckily, I didn't even have to think about such silly matters on my perfect day. After giving my toys a good gnawing, I **hump** the couch and go lap up a **refreshing drink** of water from my bowl. My master gets home from work and sits down on the couch to watch TV, not knowing that he is sitting in my favorite humping spot... silly master. I lay down in front of him until dinner, when he gives me a **steak bone**. Yum, I chew on it to my heart's content. Finally, after some more relaxation, mostly comprised of me licking my **balls**, it is time for bed. I curl up at my master's feet on his bed and drift away into a deep slumber.

My Perfect Day

by Kristen Caldwell

On my perfect day, I can wake up with my roommates gone and **the quad to myself**. I lay in the **sunlight** through the bay window, eating a toasted **blueberry bagel** with cream cheese. Then **Totally Spies** is on Cartoon Network and I watch six episodes. Afterwards, I find a car in the parking lot: **a white Hyundai Accent with a standard transmission**. I can force the window down enough to slip in a rolled up towel to hold it in place while I snake my arm in and let myself in. I call the dealership for the handbrake sequence; with that, a bobbypin and a straightpin, I start the car. I drive 40 minutes to **Java Coffee** off of South Street and find **free parking** in the alley by Imagine. I sit outside and sponge \$3. I go inside, get **hot chocolate** and go back outside to **people watch**. I see 3 of my 8 favorite people. A dark and mysterious stranger offers a non-mentholated **Camel No. 9** to me. Listening to The Sex Slaves and The Union Dead, we drive back to my quad, which is still vacant, and I put the car back; no one suspects a thing. We watch **Drunken Master** and share **strawberry Eggos** and **frosted strawberry Pop Tarts**. We walk to my friends' room where 11 people are lounging around. As we finish **101 Dalmations**, we smoke and then watch **Fantasia**. I marvel at the **pink faries** and fall asleep before the dinosaurs like I did when I was young.

Cheerleaders Continued

For while a Khorkina is eerily beautiful, even promising of transcendence, the bare bones, beauty and grace of a cheerleader's performance — the essentialities — are, in truth, sort of buried amidst the pom-poms, white Reeboks, and occasional uncalled-for confetti.

I mean, there's all this damned commotion. Is the pip-squeak screaming, booty-summoning rap music and the frilly who-who's endemic to today's cheerleading simply the remnants of the sport's forefathers, interested in primitive spirit-raising titillation? The noise seems a formality, which has stuck with the sport despite its evolution into seriousness. And it is one reason, I think, that cheerleading seems so much less dignified than gymnastics¹⁴. If you've ever watched professional gymnastics, even if you've only watched it on television, it is the silence of the thing which somehow exalts the Godlike individuality of the gymnast. Work is heard in the squeaking of the metal bars or the scraping of the balance beam; sometimes someone in the crowd gasps, and you understand. The emphasis in cheerleading, on the other hand, is on the uniformity of the cheerleaders in a squad, which is different, say, from the oneness of synchronized swimmers, because the oneness in cheerleading is diseased by the demands of entertaining an audience. Also, there's the imminence of judgment, which hangs heavy during the gymnast's performance, so that everyone watching feels somehow responsible for the gymnast's success. In cheerleading, the 10's are granted the cheerleader before she even starts.¹⁵

Is there a deeper purpose? What is cheer? Once it served to rouse the crowd to then rouse the players to score to win. But today? What with sound systems, beer and big foam fingers there's just no need for human spirit-raising. Cheer, today, is almost purposeless. Do cheerleaders know this? If they do, are they more heroic than we realize? In David Foster Wallace's essay, "How Tracy Austin Broke My Heart", in which he tries to reconcile the banality of Austin's memoir with the beauty of her performance, he writes "Those who receive and act out the gift of athletic genius must, perforce, be blind and dumb about it — and not because blindness and dumbness are the price of the gift, but because they are its essence." Maybe I am unfairly demanding self-awareness of cheerleaders, simply (and wrongly) because I am so painfully aware of everything else besides them. Maybe the superfluous fluff of the sport dissipates when the essence of the thing itself is illuminated by the spectator despite the shivaree. After all, to summon cheer for the sake of cheer itself, i.e. on a Friday night in a gymnasium rather than in a stadium where the crowd can confirm you, is to summon an impossible abstract nothing. This must be beauty. In fact, indeed, the Varsity women's clear ringing Yeses were frightening and dark in a libratory and revelatory sort of way.

For some unexplained reason the three teams of girls went on to do the exact same routines a second time, the only difference being that all involved were a little more tired, a little more eager for the "Goodbye, Seniors" ceremony, which promised lots of roses, hugging, crying and all-out recognition.

When Varsity finished, you had expected them to bow, but they didn't. Rather, they strode, pirouetted and just plain leapt offstage, sweating when the other girls hadn't, towards some sort of folding table with free pens, sign-up sheets and cardboard boxes with slits for

money. There was, of course, that moment when no one knows whether to move or not. Was this your 15-minute break? Was there time to go to the bathroom? To have a smoke? Where's my girl? Existentialism, however, became irrelevant, when like so many nighttime munchkins, the little, little girls that had watched the bigger girls somersaulting and spinning for the past half hour suddenly spilled out onto the gymnasium floor. There were maybe twenty of them (and one boy!). They somersaulted, or tried to, throwing their round bodies forward and falling on their soft heads. Thing is, they didn't look happy. These little kids were dead serious. This floor was going to be theirs. A few parents paid them mind, but only to show them to other parents.

This unofficial halftime show was not a show at all but a chance for tomorrow's cheerleaders to get a taste of today. Meanwhile, Varsity was coming around the rafters with a six-foot long Hershey's chocolate bar. "A dollar," Allison told me, "You can win it." I still don't know if there was a cause. But when they neared us I eagerly held out my crumpled dollar the same as everyone else did. One cheerleader, Deborah, who seemed to be acquainted with Allison, came over to us and sat down¹⁶. She was glistening with sweat, her bangs were matted to her forehead, and she was drinking a gallon-large Turkey Hill Diet Green Tea. She kissed me on the cheek.

Thanks for coming. We really appreciate it.

Sure, I'm actually—

It's been really, really stressful, because like one of our "tops" is out...But, Thank God, Danielle she's a "top", too.

A "top"?

Yes.

Who are those little kids?

What little kids?

The foot-tall kids imitating you guys out there on the floor right now.

Oh, them? They're just like our sisters and cousins and like kids of teachers or something. They really admire us. I'm not even kidding.

And are they really all going to be cheerleaders?

Of course... They don't like know anything else.

I didn't win the six-foot long Hershey's chocolate bar, nor thank God, was there an after party. No, Allison and I left promptly. We squirmed our way through masses of parents and children, nearly getting scissored by the several pairs of airborne legs belonging to the cheerleaders whose fathers were triumphantly swinging them around, around, and around in circles, and practically threw ourselves into the freedom of the gymnasium's empty lobby. There we looked at one another for a moment. Then, we just plain ran to the glass doors, which glass doors indeed opened of their own volition and¹⁷ guided us, even pushed us a little from behind, back into what was now the uncannily pitch black and gaping expanse of Strath Haven High School's parking lot. 🚗

What Is Happiness?

Happiness is having the TV room to myself while mom and dad are out.

—Steven, age 24.

14. Which gymnastics have until now, for some reason, been synecdochically dealt with by the famed Russian World Champion Svetlana Khorkina.

15. i.e., "Everyone is a winner", which is a lie that does great harm to sports, especially youth sports, because it preempts the truly saving reality of athletics which is that, in fact, it doesn't matter who wins, but that we are doing all this — the training, the ritual, the watching — for the hell of it. For the beauty of it. Kant said that beauty can be defined by a sense of "purposiveness," i.e. the slam dunk is beautiful because there is absolutely no reason to slam dunk except to transcend one's worldly role, one's humanity, which purposelessness is then felt as a divine purpose. This can be extended to the stumbling mundaneness of youth sports, too, which are awesome not because we can all win, but because we can all partake in some accepted unreality outside the system of school or friends and enjoy the fact, simply, that we have able young bodies. After all, you can't share in winning, but you can share in beauty. Moreover, when one of us physically triumphs, the "moment" is immortalized by what Kant calls "subjective universality", which means that "our individual acts of aesthetic judgment always imply the expectation, perhaps even the invitation, for everybody to agree". I didn't hear collective gasps in the rafters Friday night. Was it the absence of beauty of the failure of philosophy? Who was at fault: us or the cheerleaders?

16. Allison later told me that instead of going to college, Deborah is going to go on to become a year-round counselor for the NCA's training camps. Her two sisters are both counselors and she's more serious about it than most of us are about college, she (Allison) said.

17. Really, Allison pushed the Handicap path.

Did You Ever Know That You're My Hero?

by Malcolm Thomas

Heroes as well as heroines were once believed to belong in myths or on battlefields, but recent events have proved that to be quite untrue. In my senior year of high school I developed an obsession with the idea of the hero. Most of my free time was spent attempting to discover, or at least conceptualize the modern hero. While most of my friends applied to college and celebrated their last year of high school, I sat at home researching the development of the hero. I had a wealth of fiction and pop culture to draw from and ultimately concluded that regression might aid in my (re-)discovering of the modern hero. Late one early spring night, I made a break through—the Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers.

Endless delight filled my body and once again I felt like the giddy grade school student who first fell in love with the multicolored (and multiracial) crime fighting team. Much of the moral fiber I possess today, I owe to deeds of the Power Rangers and the wise proverbs of Zordon. Basically, the Power Rangers epitomized the modern hero. When it was “go time,” Jason, Billy, Kimberly, Zack, and Trini (and yes I do really remember all of their names), would always be ready to drop everything and risk their lives to save the citizens of Angel Grove. Power Rangers were happy when justice and equality reigned and Rita Repulsa was kept at bay. They were also normal, trendy people who were always down for having a good time.

I sought to discover a real-life embodiment of Power Ranger heroism, people who do not laugh in the face of danger, but respect it and know how to react when it threatens the lives of those around them. But it was a fruitless quest. By the time I arrived at Swarthmore in late August, I had totally abandoned my search for the modern hero. I had come to the conclusion that the idea might have just been a figment of my once-vivid imagination. However, one morning, while trying to go back to sleep, I heard what I believed to be a fog horn go off several times. Initially, I was quite livid about having my early morning disrupted, but grew inquisitive as the day progressed. I was still new to the area but was fairly certain that the Crum Creek was the only body water of nearby. So what was the strange noise? After a bit snooping and questioning, I discovered that it was the EMS alarm for the town of Swarthmore. I was also told that some students responded to the alarm. For a while I remained incredulous, but I was convinced after the evidence began to mount. As the first semester advanced, I heard more stories of students sprinting towards the Ville after the sounding of the alarm. Most included students answering the alarm on foot, but one included a student careening towards the Ville on a Razor scooter. To those who do not

believe Razor scooters to be heroic or dangerous, I suggest attempting to go down Parrish Beach on one.

When I was presented with the opportunity to shadow one of these students, I jumped at the chance, believing that it would finally conclude my search. Unfortunately, I did not anticipate how hard it would be to establish a plausible meeting time and place. For nights I dreamed of waking up to the horn and dashing to the station in nothing but pajamas. After playing a minor part in the rescue, we would all talk and share doughnuts back at the station until the sun came up. In reality, I soon realized that there was no way that I was going to be able to attend a call. The student who I had begun

to correspond with, Ryo Akaska '09, was not only responsible for his EMS duties, but also a larger than normal Swarthmore work load. We were finally able to meet on an early spring afternoon in the Pearson building.

We begin with the easy stuff. He tells me about his typical day as an EMS worker. “They tend to be quite fluid and free,” he says. “Aside from Monday’s training, the weekdays can be slow.”

He shows me the beeper the station provides him and explains to me why it is in his possession, which he tells me he does quite frequently (I guess someone missed the “beepers went out of style” memo). Contrary to popular belief, he does not always come running whenever the horn sounds. The beeper, though super-outdated, informs him of the specific call (fire alarm, car accident, or actual fire are just a few examples). I suggest upgrading to a wrist communicator, but we do



not dwell on the topic.

Finally, I work up the courage to pop the big question: “Do you consider yourself to be a hero?”

“No,” he replies quite modestly. “What I do is a job that needs to be done. I just happen to enjoy it. Plus everyone contributes, so no one person can claim responsibility. Teamwork is probably the most important thing on the job. In fact, the concept of being able to work and coordinate with others was probably the thing that drew me to the field.”

My eyes light up and I am again taken back to my childhood. Ryo is a student just like the Power Rangers.

Many of Ryo’s values and his modesty reminded me of the Power Rangers, even though he did not believe himself to be a hero. In the television show, the rangers themselves were not always the only heroes. Occasionally, minor characters without any extraordinary talent would end up saving the day. Perhaps the modern hero does not work alone. With firefighting teamwork is a necessary part. Whether one is entering a burning building to save lives or taking on Putty Patrollers, it is unwise to go out without friends. 🦄

DICKENS WORLD

opens in May. For real! We're not planning on going to Kent, England anytime soon, so we'll just have to imagine.

