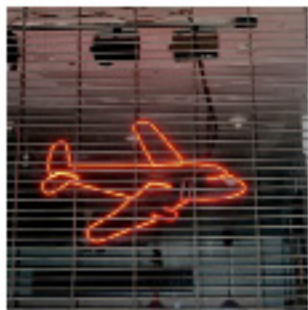
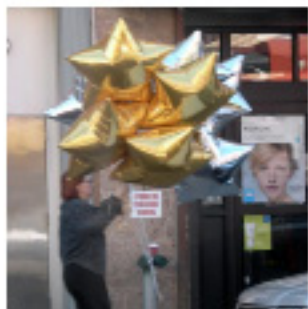
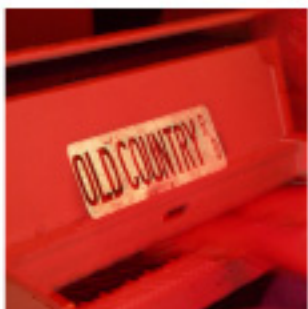
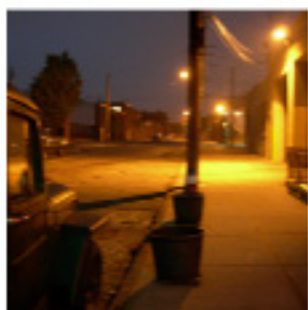
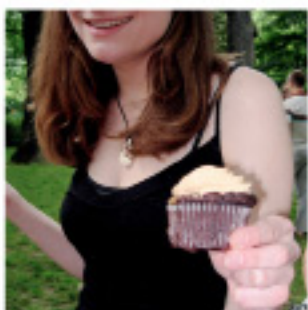


# WE'LL NEVER HAVE PARIS





LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

from TJ  
to neverhaveparis@gmail.com  
date Wed, Feb 4, 2009 at 11:27 AM  
subject "the use of telephones, nowadays" & letter to editor

I have finished Vol II & Vol III, and thoroughly enjoyed them. I am not a literary critic, so I won't try to be, but I will admit my opinion of some work was astonishment by their inclusion. I realize that a zine is not a journal of academic caliber, but I thought some were a bit weak. Maybe "some" is misleading; maybe I mean, 'more than zero'. Meanwhile, I thought some were excellent, prompting me to consider writing the author, and either asking a question, or soliciting a clarification, or simply sending praise. But only for a minute, before the thought was run over by my brain returning to its task at hand: the stories to be enjoyed.

I finished my mole burrito and Vol 3, roughly at the same time, and question myself if I will ever have the chance (or even the idea for that matter) to complement the photograph of the photographer with telephone with writing. I quickly tell myself no, maybe after I finish my to-do list.... in February. And I quickly realize that procrastination just means that I am entirely blowing off the idea. And then... (please see below)

Dear TJ:

I'm pleased with your honesty and I'm pleased that you submitted a piece. I don't mind at all that it was not all flowering praise. Your words are honest. The writer's words are honest, too. We are all telling the truth here. That is what is important to me.

We'll Never Have Paris exists as a place for us to tell the world that the glass is half empty because we are tired of lying for everyone. One mustn't be glum or if I were to date myself, emo, but we can all relate to something that is never meant to be, and that is the theme of this zine.

I encourage first time writers, many of whom are friends or friends of friends.

Additionally, I've been fascinated with Facebook's cultural relevance, especially 'status messages'. They take the internet which is filled with the past and the future and immortalize the now. This volume samples selections out of the Facebook context. I'm curious for your feedback. As always, this zine is print-only. There is no online e-zine. Thank you, paper!

Enjoy,  
Andria Alefhi

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We'll Never Have Paris Volume 4, April, 2009,  
printed in NYC. Cover photos by Andria Alefhi.  
Layout design and visual assistance by Nathan  
Schreiber. All rights reserved. Email and or nev-  
erhaveparis.blogspot.com. Submissions accepted,  
narrative nonfiction. Print only, no e-zine. Volume  
5 in November, 2009. Twice yearly.

I.

I've been telling myself this story for years. I remember that my hair was brown. Well, first it was black. I had dyed it for a change so, instead of bleached out blonde, it was black. It was short; like usual, and now it was a shiny black that would show undertones of purple and blue when I shifted my head under light. The color faded at the beach. The beach was my mother's idea. It was Christmas. It was cold and it was better to hide from people somewhere warm. The whole family had been to the same beach in Cancun the previous year, before she and my father separated.

II.

I never knew what his apartment looked like. I saw a model version that must have looked similar to his. It was furnished to appear lived in, for open houses, with a firm pastel couch, a silk plant, and no books or music. My father was a real estate broker, and his company owned the building. It was convenient for him to live there while he and my mother were trying to figure things out.

III.

Prior to the trip my mother and I had been seeing the same therapist. I did not like this woman. I will call her Cheryl. Cheryl expressed her opinion that it was strange for a 19-year-old girl to agree to go to the beach with her mother for a week. She asked me what I thought we would do together. Not thinking in real time, I had earmarked the whole event as a chance to bond with my mother, though I admittedly did not know what that meant. I came to understand that Cheryl saw my delusion and I found her relentless, omniscient expression unnerving.

IV.

In Cancun, the bonding I had dreamed up boiled down to my own meditations on unforgiving details. Because my mother was frequently off in her own thoughts, I had time to look closely at our environment as a vessel of failure. The quality of our hotel was much worse than the year before. The furniture was outdated and stained. The walls were moldy, and the drapes were thick. It was raining half the time we were there, and the overcast sunlight we did experience gave us surprising sunburns. My usually fair face turned chapped and red. My dyed black hair faded unevenly, and dried out like straw.

One night while my mother was getting into bed I decided to go off on my own to the nightclub across the street. I had been there the previous year with friends, and I thought it might cheer me up to be around people my age. I arrived to find that it was ladies' night and so my entry and drinks were free. I ordered a drink at the bar and sat alone. I watched others dance and talk; everyone seemed happy. I waited a long time for something in me to change, but it didn't. If anyone spoke to me, I didn't have the heart to play along. I finally admitted this, and left the bar heavily. I crossed the street that separated the lights and laughter from the musty hotel room where my mother slept peacefully, at least momentarily undaunted.

V.

Once, at a session, Cheryl suggested that I wanted to give everything up and take care of my mother. Her observation did not strike me as true at all, and I felt surprised and frustrated that I was trying to find peace through this complete stranger.

VI.

Sometimes my mother would offer bits of insight. A few days before leaving for Mexico, I was riding in her car when she mentioned a half brother that she'd never met. It was the first I'd heard of him. There was another time when she told me about how sincerely she cried as she drove away from Minnesota, where she had been living on her own, and towards Iowa, where she was returning to marry my father. I did not know if these were pieces of a puzzle for me to connect, or simply my mother's barren seeds of regret.

#### VII.

I wanted to go scuba diving before the week was over, so I signed up for a lesson at a place down the street from our hotel. My mother opted out because of her asthma, but she came with me and watched the lesson. The lesson took place in a small wading pool that was deep enough for my group of six to practice adjusting to changing water pressures. After the lesson, we took a boat into the gulf. We descended into the water one by one, slowly, to ease the pressure. The environment changed noticeably. I adjusted to the water's temperature and flow. I floated horizontally among the strangers at the sea floor, some people above me and some below. Inside the suit I felt an isolation that was at once comforting and alienating. I often felt someone bump into me, without need for apology. All I could hear was my own breath, amplified. The fish carried on their normal routines, while the humans worked hard to be there. After some time, the group was directed back toward land. We left the water more abruptly than we entered, and it was unwelcome to leave the water's hold. Rising into the comparatively cold air, I felt my skin prickle. The world above water had become damp and frigid.

#### VIII.

I would sit on the balcony of our hotel room, smoking, while my mother talked to my father on the telephone. I could smoke openly during that trip (and only during that trip). My mother, otherwise known to cough righteously around smokers, began to quietly accommodate me. "Don't forget your cigarettes," she would say in an unconvincing, accepting tone as we'd leave the hotel room. At first I found this disturbing, as if she'd lost hope in me. Then I saw us as a duo of weakness: the smoker and the divorcée. Maybe she was surrendering to my bad habit but, fortunately, in the end, I found her recognition and vulnerability comforting. As she watched me smoke, I felt her soften. In those moments, she was looking straight at me.

#### IX.

When speaking of another man that she was engaged to before my father, my mother explained that she had to break it off because she caught him with another woman. "Just like that," she said. But that was a long time ago, and not like this. Now she had things invested: time, me, my brother, money, a habitual lifestyle. I peered into my own future and wondered how such things would play a role. I saw the end of romantic fate, and the start of something plain fateful.

#### X.

I don't know why I got involved. As the vacation came to a close, I felt like I was trying to awaken a sleeping limb. I went back to college and my mother went back to my hometown. I focused on school and avoided calling home. Later in the spring I learned that my father had moved back into the house. "Things are better than ever," my father's mother said defiantly, glad to see business as usual. My brother never said anything. I stopped saying anything. "How are your parents doing?" close friends would ask for a while thereafter. I didn't know. I still don't know. And I don't know what to do with that.

*Interview with Jeff Stark, creator of the Nonsense list. Before the interview begins I learn that he grew up and went to college in Colorado. He majored in journalism, and then moved to San Francisco to work as a professional journalist before coming to New York in 1999.*

A: Were you ever worried that you wouldn't make it as a journalist?

J: I was singular in my pursuit of journalism. There was no other option for my professional life. I didn't know what newspaper or magazine I would work for, but I was definitely doing journalism.

A: You made zines, right?

J: The first one was called Stew, which I did with some friends. I knew people who were writers and artists, and I wanted a venue for all of us, our own little magazine. We found others who were doing it as well, and we became part of a community. I also did my own zine during that time, called Soup.

A: To go with the Stew.

J: It was the solo version. Another one was called Spec.

A: I didn't know you had done zines. When I think of you I associate you with the Nonsense list. Can you tell me how that came into being?

J: I was living in San Francisco, working as a journalist. I ended up being a rock critic for the SF Weekly. I was going to at least three rock shows a week for work, constantly going out. But there's this other world in San Francisco, a creative, participatory art world that I was attracted to and really liked. I found out about this list called Laughing Squid. People would send their events to this guy, Scott Beale, and he would forward them out on a listserve. It was all this really strange stuff, like underground movie theaters, phony game shows, fire performances, a lot of it feeding into and coming away from the Burning Man festival. This was 1996 and 1997. Laughing Squid was a clearinghouse for people to promote projects they were doing and draw people to their events. I wanted to be a part of that world in San Francisco, but I felt there was so much of it that you could be part of it by just paying \$5 and going to the show. When I came to New York in 1999, I was like, Where is that independent art world? How can it not be here?

**Where is Laughing Squid? I  
need my Laughing Squid.**

A: I felt the same way when I moved here.

J: I was like, where is Laughing Squid? I need my Laughing Squid. I went to a Dark Passage event in New York, which was a scavenger hunt that ended with a dinner party in a live subway tunnel, and a Madagascar Institute event, and a Rubulad, so my initial thought was, OK, this city needs a Laughing Squid; I'll just start it. So I told 50 people that I was going to start a list about weird events and performance art and stuff. I told Scott Beale from Laughing Squid and he was real supportive. Then, after about two or three weeks of publishing the list people said, "There are already four lists that do this." There was Pogo, Extreme New York, the Burning Man list, and others. I was like, "Are you kidding?" But I had already told everyone that I was doing it, so I had to keep it up. I compiled events from the others lists to make a meta-list. That's what became Nonsense. And then I very quickly realized that it wasn't enough in New York to just write about this stuff. Just like it wasn't enough to just pay your \$5 and go to the show. If you want to see it you have to actually create it. Then I started producing my own stuff as well. It was a co-creation: the list and the events to go on the list.

## **I was singular in my pursuit of journalism.**

A: What's changed for you since you started the list?

Do you feel that participation is the same or less since social networking like Facebook?

J: When I first started the events felt new and exciting. There were things on the list that we didn't have names for, like flash mobs. We used to do flash mobs all the time and there just wasn't a name for it. But now, as I have been doing the list for nine years, people know what they are getting into. Something is a Nonsense-type of event.

As for Facebook, I know people use it to go out, to share events. Maybe it sounds fusty and old but I just don't get it: Why do people want to use this tool of major corporations to run their personal lives? If someone had come up to us in 1992 and said, "We'd be happy to produce your zine for free. We're just going to run this advertising across the front cover, the back cover, and every page inside. ... But it will be free!" We would have said, "Fuck you, we'll just do it ourselves." But everyone just gives it up today. It blows me away. It's not expensive to do it yourself, to make your own web pages. But everyone just gives their work to Facebook. I don't use any of those sites.

A: I know you don't. Do you feel that readership of Nonsense has declined? With Facebook, it can be like your event didn't exist if you didn't tag people for it, put up the pictures, and list the event. Do you feel Nonsense and Facebook are apples to oranges?

J: I look at the numbers, and Nonsense subscriptions have never dropped off. It's bigger now than it's ever been. I thought I would do this for like seven years. The first five years I would be in the pocket, hip and relevant, then the sixth and seventh years I would be pretty disconnected and out of touch, and I would just quit because it would be embarrassing. But then I realized it wasn't just me getting older. My readers were getting older too. My audience, the readers and I, are still doing interesting things and we need a venue. We don't use Facebook so much. The younger people are sort of in

their social networking world, and I'm just missing it. But I know I'm missing some things by not living in a Facebook world.

A: Have people thanked you and told you how the Nonsense list has changed their lives? I know I couldn't live in New York without it. Have people reached out to you?

J: Yeah. That's been the thing that's kept me going for years. People sending me nice emails, those emails have kept me doing it, because frankly, it takes a lot of fucking time. I've gone through periods of really intense burnout, where I thought, "I can't keep doing this, I just can't." But those letters help. For example, there's this story about a woman whose boyfriend had ended up in the hospital, fighting a terminal disease. She wrote to me that she would print out Nonsense and read it to him at his hospital bedside week after week so he could feel connected to what his life was like and what he did in New York. You can't imagine you would get a letter like for listing silly events.

Two years ago I started accepting donations. But the donations weren't the best thing. The best thing was that I was ostensibly asking people if this list was valuable to them. You can't believe the notes I would get from readers, telling me how every person they'd ever dated was someone that they had met at events on Nonsense, about apartments they had found. People tell me that the list reminds them that are creative people out in New York City every week.

A: The Nonsense list can define an event. "It's a Nonsense-list event." It makes it OK.

## **Why do people want to use this tool of major corporations to run their personal lives?**

J: People tell me that whenever they want to do something cheap, creative, unusual, that they look to my list. That's important to people.

A: I love the Nonsense list, but it is also like We'll Never Have Paris -- full of things that I will never do. I want to go out to the events and never have anyone to go with. What is your Never Have Paris'?

J: I think my We'll Never Have Paris is the Nonsense list also. People often think I have this fabulous life, going from one event to another like a Holly Golightly ...

A: The King of the Nonsense list ...

J: Ha! Like I arrive and the drink is waiting for me on the table!

A: It's not?

J: No. Every once in a while people get it: This guy sends out a list; that's what he does. He sits behind a computer. I do go out, and I try to go out to new stuff. I also have trusted people to tell me what cannot be missed. But I am like anyone who has been in New York for 10 years, with friends who I never get to see. We go to dinner and we

make food for each other. I go out on dates, and I work on my own stuff, or I work at some of these parties. But I don't go to four events a week. Very rarely.

A: That's what happens to me!

J: I'm old. I'm 36 years old. My friends don't want to go to a loft party on Halsey with a bunch of 22-year-olds.

A: God, that makes me feel better.

J: I go to things by myself. That's not a problem for me. The main thing for me is that I'm working on my own projects, or I am trying to spend time with friends. I go to far less stuff than you would imagine. It's caused problems sometimes with people I'm trying to date. (Laughs.)

A: Since you don't do social networking, and you're not so into computers, I imagine you might have preferred an earlier era. Am I wrong?

J: No, I really like the era that we live in. I can have the personal connections of an earlier era; I can stop by my neighbor's house and ask him to make me tea. But I like our era and how computer stuff allows easy access to information. Also, New York is really interesting right now. I'm a person who is doing really well in New York City because it's a place where there's been something to push back against. It's a challenge to do something for love and not for money here. It's a challenge to find places to make your work. All the challenges of New York are appealing to me.

**“It’s a Nonsense-list  
event.” It makes it  
OK.**

*- To join the list email [jstark@nonsensenc.com](mailto:jstark@nonsensenc.com) and just for fun tell him you read about it in WNHP #4.*



## ACCIDENTAL EVENINGS

by Karen Lillis

There was the time that S asked me to the Homecoming dance during the first week of Life Drawing class. Looking back, there was never even the feel of an attraction between us, besides the excitement of meeting a new friend; but S was clearly very handsome, and I was eager to put the nail in the coffin of my awkward and lonely years. Somehow I knew to show up to his friend C's room for cocktails before the dance; once there, I learned that S had asked another girl to the dance. It's long enough ago that I don't remember how explicit this revelation was. Did the others in the room know that I was the forgotten date? Did S blurt out an apology for asking two girls to the dance? Did anyone know what I was doing there at all? Not only did I not know the other people in the room (except one or two by sight), I didn't know anything about their milieu. I was a public school kid from down the road; they were prep school graduates from up North. Their vodka-gimlet conversation tossed nuances, references, and attitudes far over my head. No one was exactly nasty to me, I simply didn't exist in their world. I remember I was busy trying to plot my way out of the room, out of the evening; I remember I was wearing a short black and white dress with huge shoulder pads and front buttons; I remember that I was anchored in an armchair at one end of the room, with the couples sitting in two rows before me.

It was a small party in a small chamber; I didn't have the language (literally, the right phrase or two) that would allow me to leave this room with what I would have called dignity. I had to wait it out. My chance came when we all rose to walk across the foot-bridge to the dance. I faded into the night's darkness in the other direction, virtually without a sound.

This last image reminds me of a party I attended in high school, a "field party" as we called them. Field parties were less about wide open fields in the middle of nowhere and more about someone whose house had a large acreage of yard. This particular party was being held at a small house out in the rural, western end of the county (the county lines being the parameters of our world); the house sat at the bottom of a steep hill. The steep hill was flood-lit by a single light which guarded the front door like an evil eye; the light was so bright that it had the effect, in fact, of hiding the house from sight. Sharp shadows formed the edges of the party.

Sharp edges were drawn also around the "camp" that was holding the affair. This was a jock's party, and I wasn't. (In fact, I did play one sport, but was not part of the jock faction.) Some childhood friends of mine had taken me out this night--graduation night for the class ahead of us--and this was their scene, not mine. I was anxious and curious how the evening would play out. Here I was with old friends who knew me and cared about me, but they had brought me to the viper's nest of this crowd. I was anxious because of my past with these people, but curious because my present social situation was much different than it once had been. My life now included new friends and shared affinities. My interests had diverged so completely from those of this crowd tonight; what could we possibly have to say to each other? Did we exist for each other at all?

Before I could wonder too long and hard about it, the ground slid out from under me. I

slipped far down the hill, which was long of uncut grass and slick of keg beer. I slipped so far that I fell out of the light that shone on the people, until I was inhabiting the darkness outside of the party. Once there, I couldn't think of a good reason to reenter: the light, the party, the throngs. So I stood and watched. I waited, with relief, for the party to pass.



from "Power Out", a work in progress, Nathan Schreiber

## BRICKS ARE JUST BRICKS.

by Tamara Lazaroff

It was a beautiful, still full moon January night when we carried what Claire and Hieu called the Michael Jackson couch- cause it was black leather with a red trim, I think, is what Claire told me- from the old house on Lane St and down James into Stuart.

Claire was at one end, I was at the other and Hieu was carrying a box full of a doona and his sheet. There was Vanessa and Caroline behind, not helping, but carrying their own silver tea tray set with teacups and teapot back to their house. They were large, and my friend Anna used to call them giantesses, with their ample calves and thighs. They were sisters who lived with their parents, in what seemed to me luxury, and they loafed as we lugged, laughing, Claire and I, and every so often we had to lay down the Michael Jackson on the concrete to rest our guts.

And I like to remember that night as beautiful, as I said, even if it wasn't, the full moon, the static-y buzz of the streetlights, no cars on the street, even though we were in the middle of the city, 2 a.m. and how spaciousness the city, itself, felt because there were no people in it, it seemed, except for us. And I like to think that we, Claire and I, looked up at the sky to see the salty streak of some stars.

\* \* \*

That night, when we arrived, we parked the Michael Jackson couch on our new front lawn, a small strip of grass by the letter box. There was a spiky bird of paradise just outside the front window which Claire cut, once, and arranged, with one of the flowers, a tokonama with some lovely grey stones in a corner saying that this would now signify 'a place of repose in the chaos of the world'. That was a thing she got from Japan where she lived once.

I loved that Claire and how she also repainted the dark grey walls of her bedroom white and the peasant scarf she wore to do it. And how then when she got sick of painting, even though the grey wasn't quite painted over, still full of streaks, she said, 'Yes, right. Lovely. It looks like a French apartment.' And so it did, because she said it was so. She made magic with her words.

And the Michael Jackson couch stayed on that small strip of grass for a whole year and grew, when the rains came, grass on its seat; really nice fresh, green grass like wheat-grass, very healthy and strong, shooting up. People walking past would stop to look, to admire.

Claire used to water it, too, the Michael Jackson couch, with a watering can, in the drier months to keep it up. She used to say that she liked to make beauty, as well, as peace in the world, that it made her happy to do so.

We lived in a bad part of town, I was told.

\* \* \*

That house lived across the street from a little park with dark, old trees lined up with dark green leaves, like old guards, and there was the playground in the park with a lonely swing and a see-saw and a horse on a spring that I never saw anybody use. And one bench facing that swings that I never saw anybody sit on, except once.

There was a rehab on the corner, also, with its back fence facing the park and once a girl who might've lived there came into our front garden and drank some water from our tap and then vomited an arc of liquid, a rainbow, onto the small strip of our lawn. It must've been inviting, welcoming, I thought, maybe because of the grassy Michael Jackson couch and I said hello to her, shyly. She had soft, spiky hair. She nodded and then left.

But I think there was another man too, who might've lived at the rehab. I don't know why I thought that because maybe he didn't at all, maybe I was just wanting to put him in a box, because he sat on that bench in the park across the road that I never saw anybody before use. And he was all bristly and unshaven and short and stocky and square-jawed and after a little moment, after he sat, he opened his mouth and out of it came a long, hard scream.

It was the strange the way he did that, like it was a decision, a conscious, logical choice. His body so still, his head facing straight ahead; there was no out-of-controlledness about it, I thought as I watched him from the other side of the street where I was walking home very quietly on tiptoe.

But really, to be strict, it was a roar and a growl, not a scream. It seemed to come from an animal that he kept in his belly on a leash. It came up his throat, galloping on four legs. He let it. Another one came afterwards, as clawing up and out scratching its way through his oesophagus, still on a leash, up his throat, tearing tissue. And I remember feeling, as I opened our gate on the other side of the street, looking behind me at the man who growled, not screamed, very, very grateful for him and how eloquent and articulate he was in his expression of things that I also felt but did not know how to speak.

## FACEBOOK STATUS MESSAGES compiled by the Editor

*\*\* The thrill and functionality of FB has already run it's course for me, so this probably will not appear in future issues without a public outpouring of demand. It stands as a testament to all things fleeting, and as always, all things never meant to be.*

Russ is pooping rainbows.

Russ has to get back to his life now.

Jaime needs to stop.

Jaime is using her inside voice.

Joe is feeling rough after finding out his father has cancer. Just pray for us.

Joe now has exactly 666 friends. Let's break out the devil worship toys!

Jude has all intention and little motivation it seems.

Jude recommends the benefits of sleep anytime and always.

Kathy is buckling down.

Kathy is feeling the neurons slowly fall in to rank in her brain.

Jennifer is in a circus without a ringmaster.

Jennifer is starting to say things like "when I was in college we didn't have the internet."

Joseph is at work, because those checking accounts are not going to open themselves.

Elaine just ate some leftover Halloween candy because it was handy. Didn't even enjoy it.

Elaine thinks being a fly on the wall is very painful at times. You never know what you're going to learn.

Amanda is watching some Swedes with boats and ropes trying to move an island

Amanda is creating false memories.

Jana likes that moment of reunion when she sees her luggage comin' round the carousel bend.

Lauren Kinsler kind of can't believe time.

Michael France is scanning the aberrant.

Featured Facebook status message persona: Cecelia Mariscal

Cecelia struggles to like most people.

Cecelia cannot decide on whether to destroy or create.

Cecelia is like a little baby Jesus.

Cecelia cannot be contacted.

Cecelia likes sharp objects.

Cecelia is doing what I need to be doing.

Cecelia doesn't know what outside looks like anymore

Cecelia ahhh Oakland with your pretty boys in vintage western wear and the beautiful thugs lookin to jack one of 'em.

Cecelia clicked her heels three times.

Cecelia is free.

Cecelia: after me comes the flood.

*\*like this? email your facebook status messages on the theme of 'all things never meant to be' for the next issue to neverhaveparis@gmail.com*

## FOLDS

by Matthew Mendez

Today it rained and I took the bmx bike I got for my sixteenth birthday from the garage to the basement, where I set it upside down in the doorway below the pull-up bar. I sat on the front wheel and it nestled nicely between my butt cheeks, reminding me of my grandfather's joke about the functional benefit of burying a person "ass up;" doing so creates a perfect place to park a bicycle. I laughed and peddled for twenty minutes. I was uncomfortable, bored and embarrassed, but I had to laugh; it was funny.

I did this because slowly, so slow that I didn't even notice when it began, but certain as a bullet, I am gaining weight. It sits in my center like a knot in a string. When I sit it folds and frowns up at me. I need to start working out.

Of course I've never been attractive. I lead a librarian's life, have a librarian's body, and keep a catalogue – dewey decimal; I'll never go LC – of dissatisfaction at my own appearance: poor posture; lack of muscle tone; unwanted hair on my belly, around my nipples; want of hair on my face; acne; back acne, or "bacne;" chest acne, or "chacne;" broken, crooked, yellow teeth. But what I obsess over the most, perhaps because I could potentially do something about it, is the growing tumor between my chest and genitals. I need to start working out.

I bore my friends with talk of these insecurities and they show me hostility. Eric let me think I was going bald because he was sick of reassuring me. Alex yelled at me after I overfished the compliment pond. My whining, I'm sure, is less attractive than any physical shortcoming, but I need the solace of another's kind words. I need to start working out.

I told my best friend.

"Like at the gym?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said.

"Fuck that." He said.

And thus the basement, where I've been doing all the ups: push sit pull, up up up. I've been trying to get my blessed, fat-burning cardio in the great outdoors, but today it rained and I brought my bike inside, where I remembered exactly why I don't exercise: I hate it. Sweaty and out of breath, and INSIDE, no less, is no way to go through one's days. The same could be said of shallow preoccupation, I know.

My first love was an athlete and she was tight all over. When we were alone I could squeeze her buttocks and taut tissue would push back to encourage my lecherous hands. I thought all asses must feel like that. Had I ever grabbed my own I would have realized that wasn't the case. My first love once said she loved my little body, once, but frequently complained of my disinterest in sport, frequently. My first love dumped me and I fell into my second as if a depression, a girl so soft she seemed a liquid, retained by a membrane of freckles and Psoriasis. I hated touching her and we broke up. She's a mother now. The first doesn't want children; she worries they'll ruin her figure.

You can find a new philosophy anywhere if you're open to it. "Fuck that," mantra of the disaffected, can be reassuring, empowering, when the right person says it to you. I tried to date a girl in worse shape than I, and as I moaned at her like a moron about my proliferating bulb, she countered that she was gaining weight herself but could shrug it off; she liked drinking more than being thin. I suppose that's debased, but it struck me as serene. The night was a romantic disappointment and I haven't seen her since, but she gave me something better than a boner: an epiphany on the virtue of feeling good. We are here to be happy, aren't we?

I can overcome obsessions and anxieties, remind myself how inconsequential my slopes and sags really are, but I still waste hours by the quarter, standing in front of a mirror, sucking it in, standing up straight, jiggling and poking and pulling and propping, up up up. I'm fascinated by this flab. I try to flex and I embarrass myself, and then I recite the mantra. Fuck it. Whatever.

Up up up.

I like to read and I like to write. I stay seated and I grow hunched. Soft, pale and satisfied. If the weather's nice tomorrow I'll go outside and I'll ride my bike. I'll get wind in my hair, time with my thoughts, and a sense of accomplishment. My stomach will come along and he'll still be with me when I get home, hovering loyally above my waste, waiting for snacks, beer, and acceptance. We share these goals, he and I.

## EXTREME CLOSE-UP

by Cassie J. Sneider

“You got that new Armored Saint album?”

I looked up from what I was doing, rubbing my temples and seeing a guy in his early thirties with glasses and a Mike Meyers in Wayne’s World mullet and baseball cap combination. At the record store, I am frequently spoken to by the customers without a formal greeting to garner my attention. It is then up to me to determine without a ‘hello’ whether or not I am being addressed. He blinked, staring emphatically in my direction.

Yes. He was talking to me.

I nodded and remembered that someone had called earlier in the day asking for that very album. I started to walk to the counter, where I thought I had left it, when he asked another question without addressing me specifically.

“Who does your work?”

This is the way one person with tattoos acknowledges those of another. Even if I am wearing a sweater, I am asked this all day, every day. I were covered in roses and barbed wire, or had an exboyfriend’s name enscribed on my neck, I might feel special, glad for the attention from a like-minded individual. Instead, I feel weird and indecent, like I have been walking around with my fly open in the children’s oncology ward. This happens so often that I’ve thought of saying things like, “Dr. Rothstein did the butt implants. Dr. Sinclair did the breast lift,” but I am genuinely surprised each time someone comments on my appearance, so I just tell the truth.

“Some guy in Connecticut,” I say, pressing my thumbs into my head, like a person in an ad for Nuprin. Little. Yellow. Different.

“That’s cool,” Wayne Campbell continues without absorbing my response. “I do my all my own stuff, and you know, sometimes it just...” He rolls up his sleeves and talks, not to me, but for his own sake, to feel alive and connected to a human being at that moment, regardless of whether or not they care or have had a headache for two days and the sound of human voices are making them want to vomit. Pugsley came with me to work today, and he sits at my feet, staring at me, then looking to the time-warped metalhead talking at me. Pugsley has been touched by every dirtbag in Ronkonkoma today, stooping to pet him with hands that smell vaguely of weed before looking for Halford on cassette.

Pugsley does not mind that the people petting him think he is a bulldog or smell like liquor. He just wants to be petted, and I have a feeling if Pugsley were human, he would be an out-of-control teen on a talk show, the kind that admits to the producers that they slept with an older man for sneakers.

“That’s a great dog, you know, how he just follows you around like that. Real fuckin’ great dog. My girlfriend had a Pomeranian- Rottweiler mix, but she took it when she

left me. Fuckin' bitch..."

I dig through the special orders, determined that once I find this Armored Saint album, the talking will end. Then I will be left alone with my migraine, to recoil from noise and rays of light like a nocturnal animal.

"I called you this morning. That was me. I hadda make sure I had enough bottles to cash in to make the money to get this fuckin' album. So I stayed home drinking all day and then cashed 'em in..."

In an hour, I will close the store. In an hour and five minutes, I will lay in the dark in my room, feeling like my skull has turned into a centrifuge, listening to the sound of Pugsley laying in the dark, chewing a rawhide with the methodical compulsion of someone who needs every Armored Saint album right now no matter what.

My friend Matt works at the record store, too, and we have discussed this phenomenon before, the customer who comes in reeking of alcohol, talking about how they just got laid off and their kid is in the hospital, but buys three Accept records with car change. "Don't do it, buddy," we want to say. "Save it for a rainy day. 'Balls to the Wall' will sound much sweeter once your kid is in remission."

We take their money. We say nothing. We talk about it amongst ourselves, hoping the therapy of admission will turn us into good people.

"...and you know how that all turned out! Fuckin' A! Hey, were you at the Twisted Sister show last night?"

This catches me off guard.

"What?"

"Twisted Sister. Were you at that show?"

"Uh," I start to laugh. "No." My cerebral cortex shrinks and tightens. "Should I have been?" Pain shoots everywhere.

"Coulda sworn I saw you there. Great fuckin' show. They really packed it out..."

I find the Armored Saint album. Then I am struck by the realization that I LOOK LIKE A TWISTED SISTER FAN. I look like I walk around in a denim jacket with jeans and white Reeboks. I look like I have a perm. I look like I listen to "I Wanna Rock" in a rented room, wishing I had the wherewithal and tools with which to rock, but somehow, because of conspiracy and socio-economic status, cannot.

I look down at my hands, where tattoos creep out even when I am wearing a sweater. I think about all the times someone has asked me where I get my work done. I think about how the first show I ever went to was Ratt. I see my life is a cruel full circle of irony taken a little too far, the embrace of from where and whom I have sprung that has turned into a hug of all the things I think are disgusting and laugh at. I look down at my feet, making sure this is not a bad dream, that I am still wearing shoes. I

see Pugsley. If this is a bad dream, we are in this together, kicking, twitching, and whimpering in our sleep.

Pugsley wags his curled tail.

Once for a bad dream; twice if it's real, son.

There are two sideways rotations.

Shit.

"Hey, you know Johnny Wild Child?"

"Who?"

"Johnny Wild Child. Black hair. Bandanna. Blue eyes. Wears a leather jacket. He fuckin' comes in here all the time."

"Yes," I say. "I know him. Why?" The person he was referring to bought Iron Maiden DVDs and had told me five hundred times that Al Lewis once tried to come on to his exgirlfriend in a strange mirror-within-a-mirror attempt at hitting on me. I had no idea that his name, as a forty-something year old man, was Johnny Wild Child. Now I knew.

"That's my roommate!" We now knew the same person, which made us in the same peer group. A real connection had been forged. My brain twitched, and I closed one eye, disclosing the lightening storm of misfiring neurons in my skull.

"Look, dude, I-" I started, but was interrupted by another customer walking in the door. She had bigger hair, white eyeliner, and real roses and barbed wire curling around her bruised bicep.

"Nice doggie!" she said, bending so that eight inches of thong slid out and revealed itself. Pugsley ran back and forth under her acrylic nails, doing all the petting himself. "Hey, I know you!" she said to Wayne Campbell. "Village Pub?"

"Fuckin' Al!" he said. "Say, weren't you at the Twisted Sister show last night?"

"Fuck, yeah! They really fuckin' rocked it! Hey, you're friends with Johnny Wild Child, right?"

Pugsley returned to his place at my feet. We looked at each other, me rubbing my temples, he wagging his tail in motions of two, and we counted down the hour until it was time to close down our corner of a small world.

**We have all told the truth.**

**Contributors for volumes 1 - 4**

Jaime Borschuk is George Carlin, Life is Worth Losing.

Nathan Schreiber is the Thomas Edison of localized plumbing.

Cassie J Sneider wishes she wasn't from Lake Ronkonkomo, NY.

Andria Alefhi would beat you if she thought that she could win.

Mark Rosenberg is recession proof.

While Mary Frances is a Georgia Peach at heart, she is totally at home in the Big Apple- her obsessive loves are art, soap, movies, Westies, good friends, and good food.

Russ Josephs is an award-winning underwear model, organic farmer and performance poet who loves beards, southern accents and Norwegian death metal.

TJ Hospodar intended such malapropism.

Karen Lillis used to live above the G train in Brooklyn and currently lives over a highway tunnel in Pittsburgh.

Tiffany Stevens can't imagine having a bad hair day.

Dave Cole is available for weddings, bar mitzvas, openings and birthday parties.

Redguard likes the rats on the subway tracks, but not on the MTA board.

Martha Grover is the artist and writer behind Somnambulist Zine.

Jennifer Viale has a successful track record in program coordination and administrative operations and is seeking an opportunity to leave all of that behind.

Matthew Mendez is a linguist and the creator of a lit zine called Number Nothing.

Tamara Lazaroff lives all the way in Australia.

Alexis Clements is a writer of plays, stories and essays as well as a pamphleteer.

Some online mosh lubricants include xenon jogging for John Berendzen (consisting of indeed about every other drowsiness group), wind ensemble (or concert band) nefariously kebabbing his whereabouts until said time.

Amanda Boekelheide likes words an awful lot.



- Nathan Schreiber

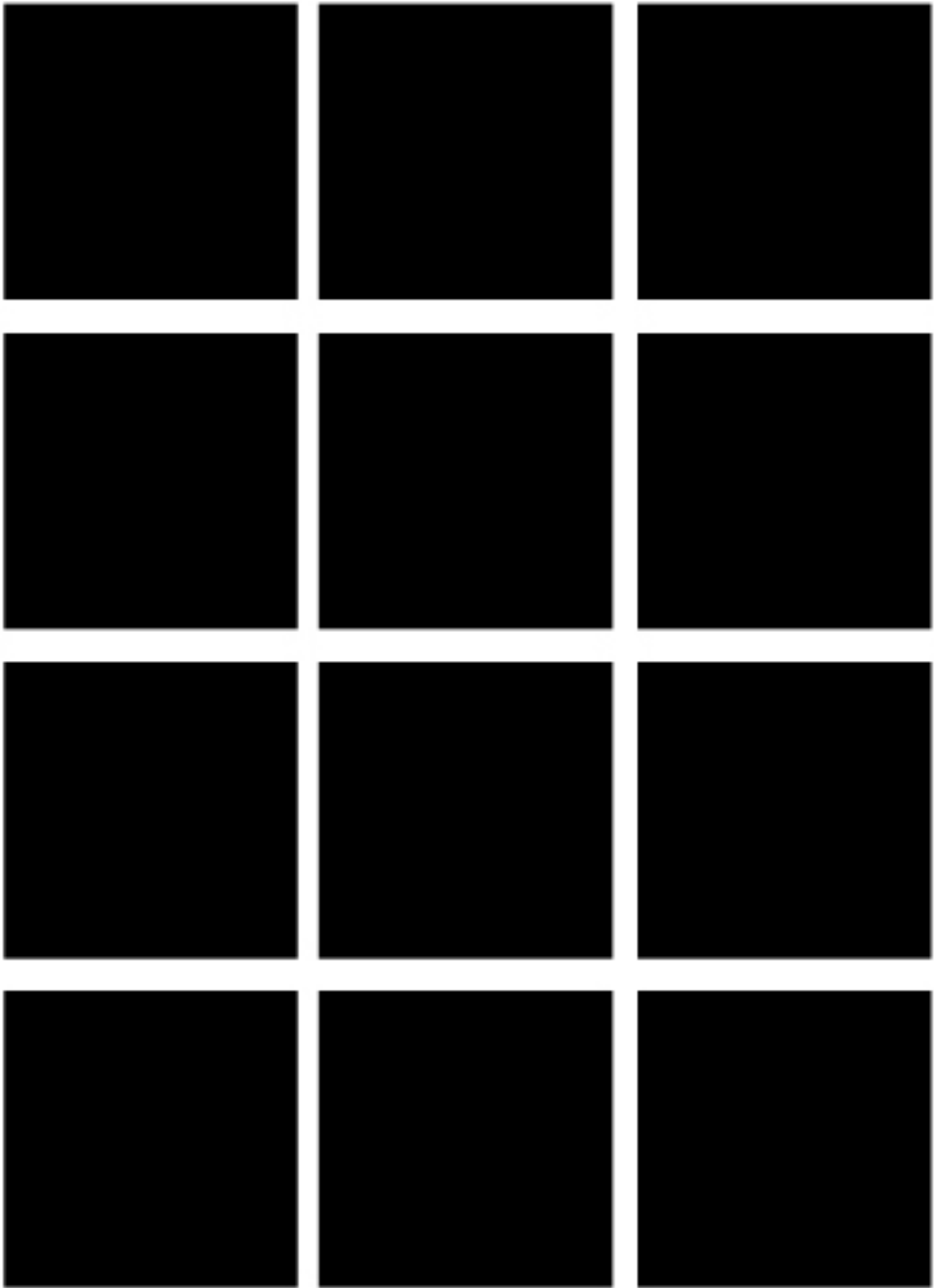
as i inspect the kitchen, i see a phone hanging on the wall. compelled to pick it up, i do just that, and raise the receiver to my ear. despite my most polite salutations, i hear nothing back. i am certain there are at least one million landlined telephones still in existence, but no one is using them. no one is using them, naturally, because no one is on them. i believe that if i was to reach someone on the other end of the line, that it would be a mishap in spacetime; that that someone was actually in my past to whom i connected by chance because my desire to use a landline activated some type of universal blunder.



i suspect that the telephone operator will be astounded when learning that they are speaking with someone in their future, and that they quiz me somehow, perhaps inquiring, "are you REALLY from the future?" I cannot decide if my mention of bluetooth earpieces incites star trek imagery in their mind or if they blow me off as some prank caller. By taking into consideration the unlikelihood of these events unfolding in my head, i satisfy myself when i conclude that no one is using a landline, anywhere, today.







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