

# the forum

ALISON KOENTJE  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

SAMANTHA HARVEY  
LAURA NIEMAN  
ASSISTANT EDITORS

ARIELL WATSON  
JENNIFER NORDMARK  
L'OREAL THOMPSON  
COPY EDITORS

LAUREN HOOPER  
PRODUCTION MANAGER

HAYLEY WULSTER  
NICOLE IOVINO  
DESIGN EDITORS

JESSE DE FLORIO  
COVER IMAGE

MOUNT ROYAL PRINTING  
PUBLISHER

RAY RICHARDSON  
JANE SATTERFIELD  
RON TANNER

SPECIAL THANKS!



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	A MOST UNLIKELY REFUGE Kerri Swan '10 1st Place Effective Writing Winner	54	THE WONDER YEARS Courtney Carbone '08
7	WITH A CHERRY ON TOP Lauren Hooper '10 2nd Place Effective Writing Winner	60	SILVER SUNS AND PAPER MOONS Peter Bartels '10
14	THIS IS WHO I AM Cassandra Wilkinson '10 3rd Place Effective Writing Winner	69	A CHANGE IN MINDSET Lauren Loeffler '11
20	CONFESSIONS OF THE OTHER WOMAN Erin O'Hara '08	73	A TIME OF CONFIDENCES Doug Polisin '08
25	PIECES OF A MARINE Matt Anderson '08	78	THE ASSOCIATIVE PROPERTY Mary Murphy '08
30	MENTIONITIS Lorraine Cuddeback '08	84	HOW TO DISAPPEAR Rachel Tierney '08
39	100 LINES ON THE SEASON OF MOURNING Siobhan Watson '10	90	ORIGINS Michael Boyle '09
ARTWORK			
	44 Kristine Boise		
	45 Allyson Carroll		
	48 Paula Morris		
	49 Jesse DeFlorio		
	50 Laura Emerson		
	52 Michael Boyle		

# A MOST UNLIKELY REFUGE

written by  
KERRI SWAN

What have you been taught by all those  
Changes all those years?  
Did they multiply your knowledge  
or increase your fears?  
Ahhhh your bench is your center of serenity  
There all alone.

Alex Thompson, The Bench

I walked by the park as I usually did, but this time I decided to turn back and go in. Sitting idly under a maple was a small park bench. I glided over to it and sat down to think about a few things. Surprisingly, one of the first things that came to mind was my setting. A park bench under a tree—a very typical image, yet one I hadn't experienced myself. I began to think of some other images of benches and how they'd fit into my situation.

We've all seen it. The old man sitting quietly on a park bench with a pipe out the corner of his mouth and a newspaper opened crisply in front of his face; the prim and all-too-proper young girl sitting with her hands folded neatly in her lap; the old beggar woman lying in the fetal position trying to conserve any warmth she may have left.

All of them use a city's bench as their own personal space in which to think and reflect. In a world of constant chaos and disorder, an empty park bench can be a welcoming sight for anyone who wishes to take a step back. ~~the~~ the word empty, however.

Think about the last time you sat beside a stranger on a park bench. Most people probably couldn't remember the last time this occurred; for many it's never happened at all. That's probably because when you, like me, sit on a bench, you would personally

many will pass, almost none will stop to enter this little space of yours. Although they might never directly connect with you, you can still enjoy the company of all these nice people.

A young couple passed me, walking ideally with a small dog on a leash. They saw me, glanced over, smiled softly, and went on their way. A few moments later, an older woman, perhaps fifty-five, with her small blonde grandson stopped next to me to feed the ducks by the lake. I felt content, I felt a sense of belonging. Although I had never seen these people before, or knew anything about them, I felt a strange yet comforting connection with them. I was sharing this lovely day with them. They were seeing what I was seeing, feeling what I was feeling. I was a part of their world even though I knew nothing about it.

Everyone knows that Tom Hanks as Forrest Gump continuously sat on a bench and discussed matters of life with strangers. People that walked by and just happened to sit on his bench usually got an earful of his opinions and quotes about life "being a box of chocolates," allowing themselves to be immersed into his world by just sitting beside him. So, really, these two people are "perfect" strangers—involved, yet detached.

In the film Finding Neverland, the bench served as an



The word "seat" originated in 15th century England, derived from two meanings: "a thing to sit upon," or more interestingly, "a residence or an established place." A park bench, for some, can be that little cube of sanctuary, specifically those who live or work in a city. In New York City, Central Park is the oasis in the desert. A specific detail that anyone will tell you about Central Park is that it is riddled with



Sitting on a park bench ensures a certain privacy—a pleasant privacy that allows personal space without isolation and loneliness. Whether it's in the middle of Central Park or simply on the side of the road, a bench can offer a small sanctuary for you to step back and enjoy the people around you. You stop, you sit, the world still moves.

I arose slowly from the bench, pondered over what I

# THIS IS WHO I AM

written by  
CASSANDRA WILKINSON

I watched my diapered little brother hit the floor. My dad had smacked him in the forehead with the heel of his hand, "Shut up, dumbass." This was nothing new; I had been "healed" many times before. Dad had probably already had a few beers that morning, but who was counting? Later, Dad would let the three of us—I have an older brother too—go p6h4sfhe floor.

I could blame my Dad for all the pain he caused, but

heavily for no reason and become alcoholics. Maybe his proneness and belief in the normality of drinking are factors in why he continued to drink. Because I am the daughter of an alcoholic, I am six times as likely to become one, and my brothers have a slightly larger risk, since my Dad was also their male role model. Knowing this, I make decisions to avoid becoming my Dad; I don't want to become an alcoholic and hurt my family. I don't want my children to grow up like I did.

What I have recently tried to discover is how I was affected by my Dad's drinking. What traits do I now have that I may not have otherwise developed? According to the writings of Dr. Jan Williams, the Director of Loyola's Alcohol and Drug Education and Support Services, there are many traits that Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) may bring with them into adulthood. Some behaviors include: irrational thinking, passiveness, avoidance and hyper vigilance. Most ACOAs also have trust issues, problems with being a people pleaser, finding it hard to meet their own needs, and dealing with a constant fear of abandonment. They may also commit to unhealthy relationships with unavailable addicts (not necessarily drugs), develop poor reactions for quick fixes, find it hard to be spontaneous or have fun, or may seek crisis situations to feel normal. Granted, these behaviors can stem from other causes, but most ACOAs exhibit many, if not all of them. I don't exhibit all of these behaviors, but I do own up to some them. Why, however, do I feel like I have some of them and my brothers don't?

It is hard to acknowledge problems within ourselves because they show our inadequacies. I always wanted to be "normal," but I have realized that being "normal" is relative. I am "normal" within the class of 2010 because fifty-three percent of the freshman class reported having alcoholism in their immediate family. Alcoholism is a three generational disease, which means that if your grandparent was an alcoholic, but your parent wasn't, you are still prone to developing the disease. That

means that there is a large number of people who share some of the same traits that I have.

The key, according to Dr. Williams, is to realize the negative behaviors and seek help to make them positive. For example, I catastrophize, which means that I blow situations out of proportion and get myself really upset because I am expecting the worst outcome. I need to learn to take the worst scenario into consideration but not to let it affect me in a negative way. I also have trust issues, which can be very hard to fix without outside help. These two attributes, among various others associated with ACOAs, affect me every day and have made me who I am.

The abuse inflicted by my Dad under the influence of alcohol has also affected my development. Abuse is divided into multiple categories, not just physical. Along with physical abuse there is sexual and emotional. Honestly, I am grateful that we were only physically and emotionally abused. Emotional abuse includes neglecting, threatening, criticizing, and rejecting. He is among the minority, however, because statistics show that only thirteen percent of drinkers abuse their children and only seven percent of all children are emotionally abused (Adviware). Each child is different and reacts to situations differently. Crosson-Tower, in *Exploring Child Welfare*, discusses how abused children respond to school. These children may be "unable to concentrate or do poorly without the necessary energy to learn. On the other hand, some abused children throw themselves into school as a way of coping with an unhappy home life. This child is the chronic overachiever, the child to whom a grade

workaholic herself. I wanted to be just like her in every way possible. My brothers did not see Mom as their influence, but rather, Dad. Perhaps they thought that Dad's actions were



# CONFESSIONS OF THE OTHER WOMAN

written by  
ERIN O'HARA

I.

I let the heavy oak door crash hard behind me and giggled as I took off running down Main Street, past the old Victorian building where I took art lessons years ago, past brick storefronts, the thrift shops that were somehow always closed no matter what time I went, and the best pizza place this side of the Hudson. "Where are you going?" I heard in an only recently familiar voice. I stopped short, almost stumbling into the intersection as I turned to see his face, his freckles, his smile that didn't yet seduce me but would soon taunt from across crowded bar rooms for months to come.

"I... don't know." And I didn't. I was just running and laughing alone, an activity only forgivable under the circumstances - my first night out with my friends after weeks of wallowing in self-pity, swimming in a sea of goose down comforters littered with Kleenex accepting the occasional visitor bearing gifts of Reese's Peanut Butter cups and pomegranate juice, my two favorite things, sobbing over movies that in a healthier state of mind I'd ridicule, vowing I'd never love again.

"This way!" He grabbed my hand, looking both ways as he rushed me across the street in another direction. "It's a short cut. We'll beat them." I laughed furiously and screamed, oblivious to the time, which I call late Wednesday night, Karaoke night, but the people sleeping in their houses called early Thursday, before dawn, before work. A sticky Hudson River wind whipped up the street from the pier and swirled around us as we spun between parked cars and front





long enough to fall down my chest in straight chutes or loose waves. I looked around subtly and stopped where he was at the end of the bar, my excitement transforming to shock before my eyes, as he screamed at her, a pretty blonde girl wearing sweatpants. No one could hear their heated words over the music, but they managed to make a scene anyway. I stared with everyone else, and laughed out loud as the thought, or rather the truth, presented itself, the way sometimes you can't help but laugh at bad news or uncomfortable realities. He has a girlfriend.

They took their quarrel elsewhere, most likely down those same streets where we had raced and squealed, through that watermelon stained kitchen, down those hardwood stairs where he always carried me like a fireman over his shoulder, and into his big bed where he committed more sins than I did.

I stomped over to his roommate after they left. "Patrick has a girlfriend," I said matter-of-factly, a statement that probably should have been a question but I wasn't once doubtful of its certainty.

"Uh... yeah," he extended every syllable in an attempt to weaken the blow.

"Cool. How long have they been together?" He looked at me as though to say "I wish you didn't ask that," then looked up, pausing, pretending to count.

"Like... five years."

Five years. I laughed again, despite those being the two least humorous words I'd heard in a long time. I should have felt guilty, or angry, or duped, but I didn't. I just laughed and drank and danced my way through the rest of the night, and didn't think much about him, other than cursing my ridiculous luck. He had me by a string that I could have easily broken away from if I wanted, but I didn't want to, and I wouldn't.

III.

We were mostly naked lying in his bed, a framed picture of the two of them on his nightstand next to us, when he told me he doesn't think he loves her anymore. "Then why are you still with her?" He didn't answer.

I would say I tried to stop seeing him when I found out about her, but I didn't. I didn't want to and I didn't feel guilty. I fell for him before I knew, but knowing didn't change anything. He was still so charming. And handsome. And strong. God, he was strong. He would pick me up and carry me around like I weighed nothing. A friend once told me that snowboarding on fresh snow is the closest to floating he'd ever been. I told him the closest ~~is~~ ever been to floating was Patrick.

"I don't wanna be a bartender forever," he said out of nowhere while we were talking about baseball. "Where'd that come from?" I asked. "You asked me why I'm still with her if I cheat on her. And I don't wanna be a bartender forever. I wanna get married and take ~~care~~ my kids." I fidgeted on my barstool, and knew he was foolish to marry a woman he didn't love no matter how much he wanted a family, no matter how much he felt his time running out and may have been right. I worried for him, and for me.

"Come here," he said, his face illuminated half by his now-weakened smile and half by the dim light of the rising sun filtering through the translucent curtains of his basement bedroom where we hadn't yet slept that night. I sat up and joined him at the high windowsill, kneeling next to him as he skimmed his hand across my lower back where I hate being

IV.

"Why don't you stop?" Kirsten asked me in a way that made me feel stupid for not having a good enough answer for her. He's never made me cry, I thought, though I didn't dare say it.

She didn't always understand, maybe because she hasn't been hurt as much as I have, because she likes women and women give love the way I wish men would. He never would have left his girlfriend for me even if we both wanted him to, but he never made me cry.

What existed between us was a long series of moments that have no real ending - when he sang "Thunder Road" at Karaoke and looked me in the eyes as he serenaded, "So, Erin, climb in." When we laughed so hard we cried as we mixed the most disgusting drinks we could concoct to see who would try them. When he danced in his robe and slippers wearing a cowboy hat and an American flag as a cape. When he told me I was beautiful.

I took a picture from the balcony on my last night there, or morning I guess, as the early light began to gleam over rooftops and fire escapes, and would soon shine on his sunflowers.

Unlike every other relationship I've been in, and maybe the relationship he's in now, even though we'll probably never be in those moments again, what we had can't end. I left at the end of the summer, and he stayed, but there was no breakup, no tears. His face lights up every time I'm home on break and cut through the dark room with the flashing lights to say hi. As he kisses my cheek, I hope he doesn't see the brief disappointment in my eyes that he's still a bartender.

# PIECES OF A MARINE

written by  
MATT ANDERSON

From the halls of Montezuma  
To the shores of Tripoli,  
We fight our country's battles  
In the air, on land, and sea.  
First to fight for right and freedom,  
And to keep our honor clean,  
We are proud to claim the title  
Of United States Marines

It is funny we have the same naval terminology like deck, aft, military time, etc. That is so awesome some of the stuff we've done. It sounds hard, but real rewarding. Different from old BE, ey? Thanks for all the encouragement. I hope the best for you as well. I do the same as you...day by day, chow by chow...and remember: 'They control pain, stress, and all that bullshit, but they cannot control TIME' Semper Fi, , and hope to see you on the open seas.

— Terry

The death of a 21 year old Marine from Pennsauken,

up because of the rarity of the call. I would usually just let it ring. The last two times my brother has called he asked when

...You give a little information about yourself and they give you a random Marine that's deployed. He was my random Marine.

... He was absolutely beyond nervous. We just went for a walk in the middle of the night, and he stopped me under a street light and popped the question...hiding her ring on the chain she wore with Terry's dog tags...was waiting for him in their new home at Camp Lejune...Katie Allen, now 18... now, a widow...

"Thanks for finding me. Thank you for writing into my life."

— Terry

In one of my favorite movies, Man on Fire, Christopher Walken says to Denzel Washington, "A bullet always tells the truth. It never lies." What is this truth and who does it tell? What if no one knows where the bullet came from? Who can tell its story? We can only wonder what the bullet whispered to Terry, and what truth he now holds.

...They were planning a big wedding celebration after his return from Iraq. Now his family is planning a funeral...

We had a fight club in high school. One-on-one brawls, no holds barred, no mercy, no grudges. Terry was a feared opponent. Just looking at him psyched out a lot of people. He was short, but he was lean, perfectly cut. His face was like stone—completely rigid until the competition was over. In one of many fights, the one that we remember most, Terry was fighting Joe—a tall kid, bushy eyebrows and glasses.

He looked like the kind of kid that was good at math, not boxing. The fight stayed surprisingly even for a little while until Joe laid a shot into Terry's temple. He blacked out. No one could move until Terry reappeared and laughed

it off. He chalked it up as a loss, and we all walked home relieved.

"We have no final answer," John Allen, Terry's father, said.

...Circumstances: Shot by a sniper while on the Al Asad Air Base in the Anbar province...

...Military officials said they could provide no additional details about the circumstances surrounding the death of Cpl. Terrence Allen, citing the continuing probe...

"Connie Allen, Terry's mother, said earlier this week that she had kissed Allen's ~~dad~~ when his body was finally returned to her on the day before the service."

The bullet came from an unknown place. An unknown gun in an unknown hand. Someone said it was a sniper, but someone else says it wasn't. His parents were told their died from an apparent gunshot wound to the head, and the death was not combat related. An anonymous letter from an unknown sender.

Rev. Anthony Manupella indicated that Allen, in recent years, had become more involved in his Catholic roots. "His faith, I'm sure, was a great consolation to him in all the struggles of his life and the struggles of war."

The big question is Why? Why did he have to go to war? Why did he go back for a second tour of duty? Why did he have to die?

Glen McManus said, "He wanted to serve his country." His mother said, "He enjoyed the challenges of boot camp and the solidarity of the Marine Corps."



they connected through AdoptaPlatoon Solider Support Effort.

There should be no more asking of why? That was Terry's question to ask, and he had answered it. He had a wife, a new place for them to live, a promotion to Sergeant, and plans to become a police officer, like his father. Circumstances. We can't escape them, even if they are unknown.

To sand go tracers and ball ammunition.

To sand the green smoke goes.

Each finned mortar, spinning in light.

Each star cluster, bursting above.

To sand go the skeletons of war, year by year.

— Brian Turner, To Sand

# MENTIONITIS: A CASE STUDY IN THE LOSS OF CONTROL OVER THE MIND AND TONGUE

written by  
Lorraine Cuddeback

## Introduction

Mentionitis is a tragic condition which affects approximately 10 out of 10 women between the ages of thirteen and forty-five. An often overlooked and dismissed disease, it is primarily characterized by the "mentions:" the constant repetition of an object of affection's name. Yet, Mentionitis has even broader effects: it can cause loss of control over thought patterns, resulting in large amounts of mental stress, making it difficult for women to focus and function in an everyday setting. The following is a study of what we believe to be a typical case of Mentionitis, and its progression and symptoms. It is hoped that increased study of this phenomenon can help illuminate its problematic aspects and begin to pursue viable treatment options for the hundreds of thousands of women affected every day.

## Patient History

Patient X, a young woman, aged 21, reports having had a number of cases of Mentionitis in her past; though none, she insists, as severe as her current affliction. The subjects of Mentionitis have ranged from men in her classes whom she never spoke to, to one long-term relationship which lasted about a year. Patient X states that she usually made attempts to hide the Mentionitis, being too shy and intimidated to inform others of her condition.

Patient X reports having met subject of current Meningitis (hereto referred to by initial Y.) when she was 18 years old:

I can't remember the first time we were introduced to

"oh, so this is who [Y] is." Only, I was wrong, 'cause there's so much to him I don't even know where to start. But that was the beginning, really, when I realized how...well, totally charming he really could be. And we did things like go to lunch together — I really enjoyed that, actually, our Sundays. We always had a nice brunch and coffee at a local place with a few other friends, a nice walk, a baseball game. I just really enjoyed his company...

It can be concluded from this information that Patient X was "interested in" Object Y for a long time before displaying the symptoms of Mentionitis but she was unaware of the extent of this interest on a conscious level. Subconsciously, he had penetrated her mind. This seems to be the highly insidious opening phase of Mentionitis: very hard to catch, and even harder to diagnose.

## Phenomenology and Epidemiology

### Stage One: The Mentions

The preliminary stage of Mentionitis is almost undetectable. It begins as a pattern of thoughts which the patient herself has very little control over. Patient X does believe that she can pinpoint the time when she realized the extent to which she had become infected with Mentionitis:

We were going out one weekend, the weekend of [Y's] big 21st birthday celebration - he called it the Extravaganza, isn't that cute? - and we went to this little local bar. It was fun, kinda relaxed, but [Y] seemed to be enjoying himself, which I was really glad to see. Then, at one point, [Y] put his arm around a mutual female friend of ours. And this...jealousy just flared up inside of me, almost from out of nowhere. I was totally ready to take that b---- out.

It seems that this moment of realization is followed by the immediate growth of several other more visible symptoms: obsessive grooming in an attempt to impress, laughing too loud or not at all at his jokes, finding irrational reasons

to visit him, systematically keeping track of his movement

hours, about anything from Shakespeare to Harry Potter. I found that we thought and processed things very similarly, even if on the surface we were very much opposites - he's a little more introverted, I'm a little more extroverted, he's all

### Stage Three: Rejection

Had Patient X not spoken up to Object Y it is possible that her Mentionitis might have continued on at Stage Two for some time before dying down; instead, the subsequent events inflamed the symptoms ~~to~~ Stage Three, resulting in the regression of the patient to the maturity level of a pre-pubescent girl. As Patient X tells the story:


So, I've always expressed ~~self~~ better through writing. One day, I just...wrote [Y] a letter, telling him how I felt. I wasn't actually going to give it to him, but then I decided I had to do it, I had to jump for it. So I set a deadline for myself, and wrote it in my planner and everything, and on the night of the deadline, I went to his room, gave him the letter. I...I remember the look he gave me when I walked in. I could have sworn there was this...glimmer in his eye, in his smile. Like he knew exactly what I was going to say, and was maybe even excited about it. Then he read my letter... and again, he looked up with this smile and said, in reply to my dinner invitation, 'I'd love to.' Love to. I thought - this is made. This is perfect. I was so damn proud of myself, thinking I'd earned myself, like, more than a few Feminist points for taking the initiative...

Unfortunately, as Patient X continues the story, there was a drastic miscommunication that really came to resemble a poorly-written sitcom's version of a Comedy of Errors.

The first day or so after I gave [Y] the letter, I was on the top of the world. I thought, hey, [Y] wants to go out to dinner with me, liked me. This must make me someone special....I don't know what I expected, really. I think I just wanted him to seek me out more, to be friendlier ~~to~~ flirtier after I asked him out. Instead he was the same...even colder, or more distant. Then, the first night we talked after I gave him the letter, he told me that he wasn't actually interested in a date. He just wanted to be friends. I was...disappointed. That's the only word that describes it. A deep, belly-twisting feeling of disappointment.

Object Y's ultimate rejection of Patient X's advances sent her into a downward spiral. Again, she analyzed every detail of the prior conversations with Object Y, looking for a time where she "went wrong." She talked about it compulsively with others, exponentially increasing the number of times his name came up in casual conversation. Patient X describes herself in this stage as: "emo-level pathetic."

In addition, Patient X would listen to music (often from genres labeled "emo," "hick-angst" or "angry-chick-







Mentionitis and the natural result of actually interacting with him regularly. Patient X is hopeful that Friendship will settle in when the rest of the more severe symptoms fade away.

One thing which Patient X is thankful for in this particular occurrence of Mentionitis:

I grew up, a lot, this year, because of dealing with Y. His response to me was a model of maturity, maturity I really needed to learn from. It's time I stopped being the shy girl who waits for the first move, and he taught me that even if that first move ends in disaster, something good may come of it. Even if it's not what I expect.

However, Patient X is at high-risk for another case of Mentionitis with a different object. We can only hope that, before that happens, the medical community as a whole will have taken note of this disease, and developed additional treatments for it. This is urgent; the sanity of the female gender depends on it.

# 100 LINES ON THE SEASONS OF MOURNING

written by  
SIOBHAN WATSON

"You'll know what the sun's all about when the lights go out."



and no matter how hard I squint—  
I can't cry.

mind, but it doesn't help. I can't dream of stars without seeing the black beyond them.

#### Anger.

I still check the weather faithfully, though I've no where to go.

The sun still insists on shining every morning that I wake—

"Lo! The most excellent sun, so calm and haughty..." rings as the light burns my eyes.

I drag around his sweatshirt as though it were his ghost;

I put it on the seat next to me and tell it about my day, ask about the cotton industry, talk about the weather.

I don't expect it to respond, but I can't help but remember in the stinging quiet:

"In the history of language  
the first obscenity was silence."

#### Depression.

Moving through my house in the days after learning of my dad's passing

(which is a word used only by those who have not seen death) is what I imagine walking through Hiroshima would be like.

Still, still, still—even the dogs have stopped barking at the squirrels

and neighbors bringing shining fruit baskets and green-gray casseroles.

There is no breath shaking this house, and the walls shrink in response.

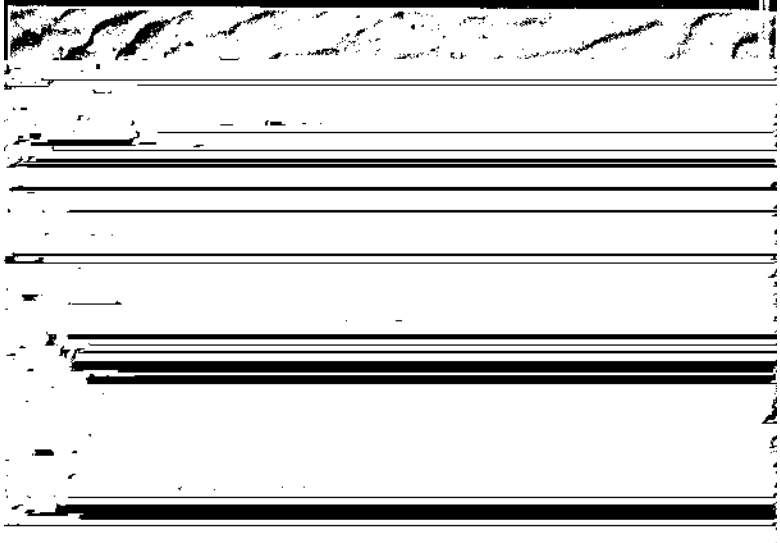
Cards are crammed into the mailbox's shallow mouth, spilling onto the steps.

Deepest sympathy for your Loss. These are Hard times for Us All.

Sympathy cards are punctuated and capitalized in un-

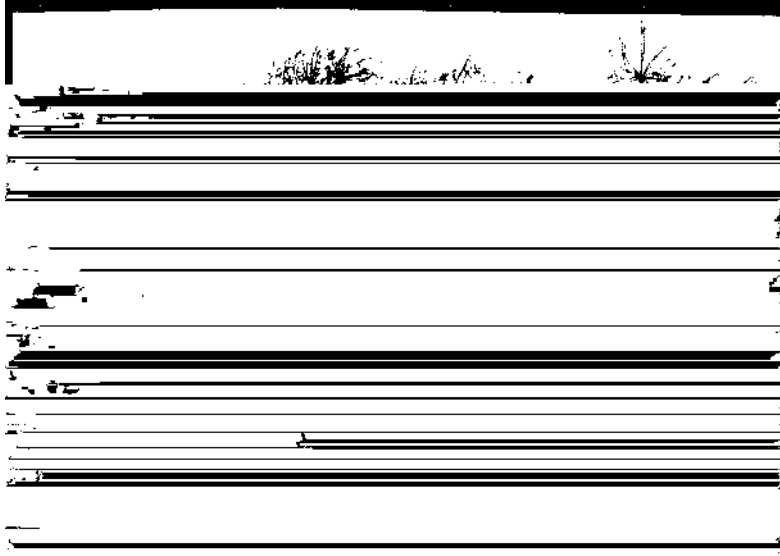
Bargaining.

I watch my ceiling for clouds and, when night falls, stars.



KRISTIN BOISE '09

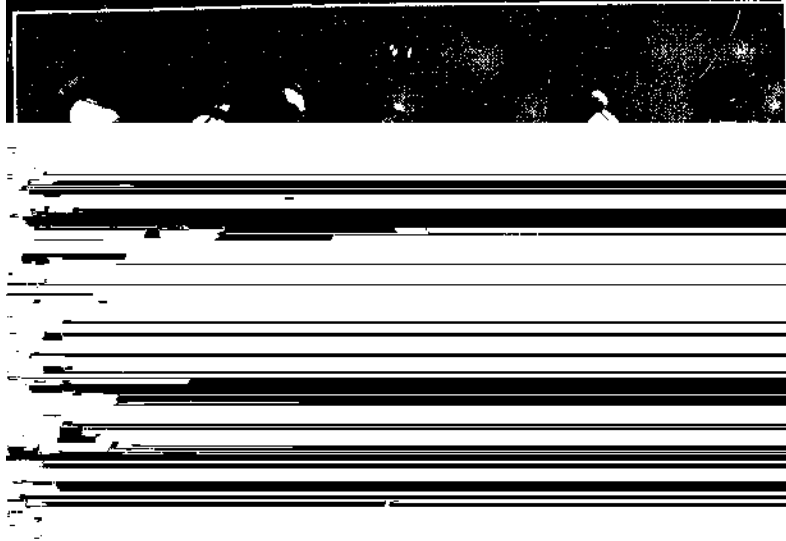




ALLYSON CARROLL '08



ALLYSON CARROLL '08



ALLYSON CARROLL '08

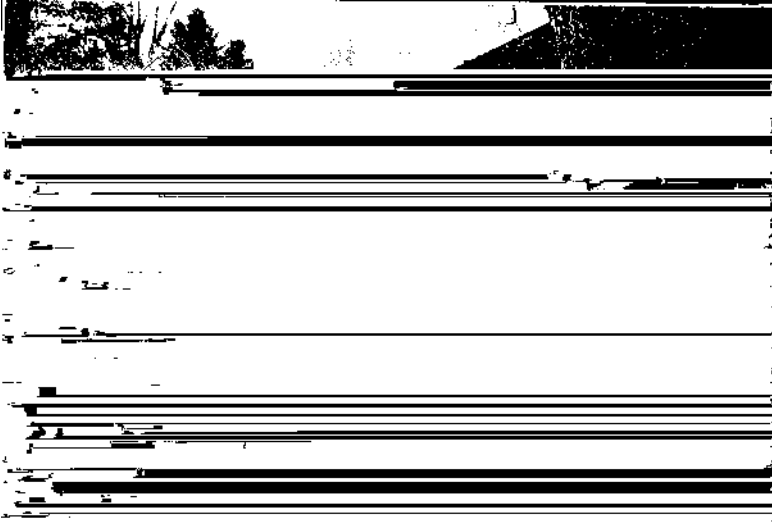




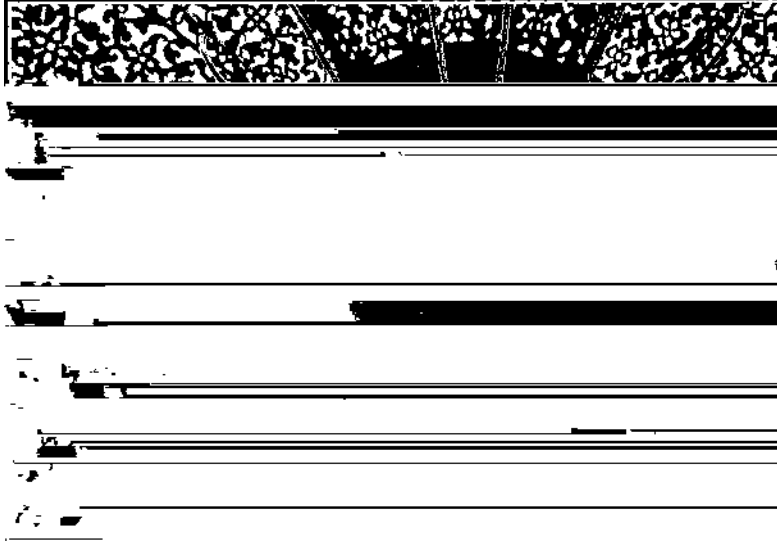
JESSE DEFLORIO '11



LAURA EMERSON '10

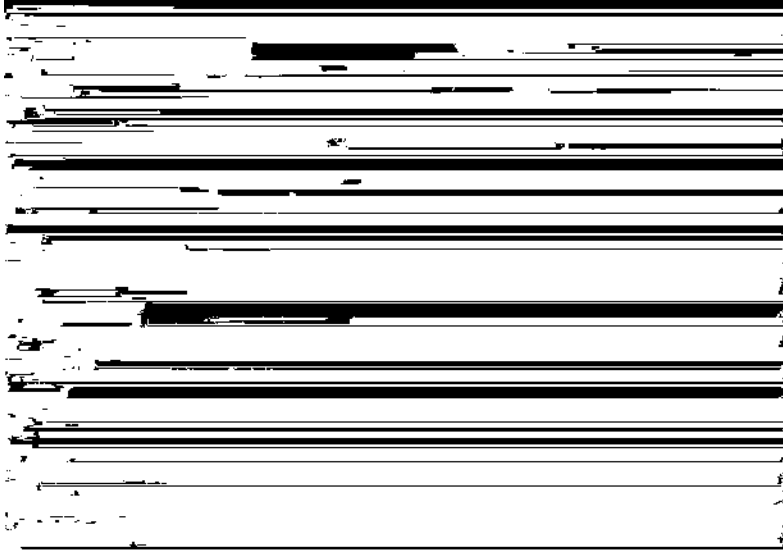


LAURA EMERSON '10



MICHAEL BOYLE '09





MICHAEL BOYLE '09

# THE WONDER YEARS

written by

I remember how hard it was to leave. And the thing is, after all these years, still look back in wonder.

The first time I referred to it as "my mother" was going to be that's just the way it was. I spent four years making good and bad decisions, hoping that the two would balance each other out. Or at the very least, I hope people won't remember the bad ones so much. I often think about all the expectations I had for myself. All the things that my family and friends thought I was capable of. I marvel at how quickly the time passed in the middle of it all I am unable to change it, but I can slow it down a little.

Next semester will be my last semester at Loyola College. Four years of papers, finals, midnight breakfasts, sailing practices, new friends, and new experiences just for the hell of it. Well, I did everything there was to do. Still, I cannot help but have that numb feeling in my chest that makes me wonder, was it enough?

When you're a little kid you're afraid of everything; Scientist, Philosopher, Artist. Sometimes as you're growing up is giving these things up one at a time.

I came to college thinking that I was going to be a business major. I was going to be a professional and successful corporate entity, with a passion, dedication and commitment to economic theory and financial planning. The first time I heard the word "Business, Court. Business is numbers."

I remember thinking what's wrong with numbers? Sure, my math SAT was over 100 points lower than my verbal, but that

Still, I'll go out with my friends on Thursday nights to Fed Hill, soaking up the attention from all the young urban professionals that have stumbled into our corner bar. This one is an investment banker. That one works for a hedge fund. They talk about nothing but company buy-outs and signing bonuses. Even buying me a drink somehow becomes a joke about supply and demand.

I could have done that. I could have been like them. I could have sold-out to what I once heard referred to as the "abusement park" of corporate America. I look back at that conversation with my freshman year advisor and think, Thank God. If it wasn't for my advisor, I might actually have turned out just like them.

All of our young lives we search for someone to love. Someone that makes us complete. We choose partners and change partners. We dance to a song of fate and hope. All the while wondering if somewhere, somehow, there's someone perfect who might be searching for us.

As she and I stood applying mascara in our bedroom mirror, my older sister, Jenna, once told me, "You always have to think, 'Maybe tonight I'll meet the man of my dreams.'" I have always kept this advice tucked up in heart. Not a day has passed where I haven't thought it to myself with at least a little glimmer of hope.

Kevin Arnold's parents, Jack and Norma, got married right out of college. So did my parents. Actually, most of my friends' parents did, too. This has left my generation with a little bit of relationship anxiety. It's nearly graduation and I haven't met anyone that I would even think about spending the rest of the semester with, let alone the rest of my life.

Not for lack of trying: I have dated my fair share of college guys. Just last night I went to Little Italy with a boy I met at my Christmas party this past weekend. He asked me for my number and I gave it to him because he was friends with my

roommate. He then asked if he could take me out to dinner and I agreed. Why not, right? He and I talked and danced for the rest of the night. When it got really late, he thanked me and my roommates for having him and then gave me a hug good-bye before slipping out the door into the cold night.

The door closed behind him and I heard my sister's words echo in my head.

I looked at my roommate, Kristen, and asked her, "Should I run after him?" Her eyes glared with excitement as she pushed me toward the door, "Do it!" So I ran to the front door, slipped through it and barreled down the stairs barefoot. He must have heard me coming because he turned around as I approached him, "Hey, what's-"

I kissed him before he could finish.

Then, turned and ran back up the steps.

In your life you meet people. Some you never think about again. Some you wonder what happened to them. There are some

with Krissy in Baltimore or Meg in PA. I would consider go-

Years" so much. It was more than 30 meaningless minutes rolled out between commercials and lines of production credits. It was a lot more.

All we could do was close our eyes, and wish that the slow song would never end.

I know that six months from now I will know better where I am going, what I am doing with my life. My life will hopefully have some kind of sensible trajectory. When my big dreams and great expectations fall short, I'll eventually need some kind of medical insurance, a stable job, real world experience. Like Kevin Arnold, I will need to understand that life isn't a fairy tale sequence of events, but rather an overlapping and complex collage of love, pain, laughter, and heartache. Things and people come and go, but it's the memory and feeling in your heart that remains.

Things never turn out exactly the way you planned. I know they didn't with me. Still, like my father used to say, 'Traffic traffic, you go where life takes you...'

And when all is said and done, all I can do is try not to sing out of key.

"The Wonder Years." IMDB. 13 Dec. 2007  
<<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094582/>>.

# SILVER SUNS AND PAPER MOONS

written by  
PETER BARTELS

At 5:30 in the morning on the last day of March, I find myself (almost literally), sobering up in the Paper Moon Diner across from Johns Hopkins University. If Baltimore harbors a more baffling environment for such an experience, I find it hard to imagine. The diner's exterior calls to mind the set of a trashy 1960's horror set mashed together with a Sesame Street background gone awry. To get to the front door, one must first pass through a bright yellow pagoda, past a tree suspending a mannequin from its gnarled branches, and around an old bathtub with another dummy—bright red—buried up to his chest in dirt. The interior is no less confusing: the pastel colored walls are lined with one-eyed dolls and action figures, toy cars and Pez dispensers, buttons, G.I. Joes, thousands of pennies, lace, twigs, leaves and vines. Christmas lights hang from the deep blue ceiling. No two tables or chairs are the same. Nothing I've seen since I've come to Baltimore has offered anywhere near the amount of character that now assaults my bleary, overwhelmed eyes. I've lived in this city for almost eight months, and, watching the sun come up behind Mary as she convinces the waitress to fire up the fryer for some sweet potato fries, I know that I have finally stumbled upon a piece of Baltimore's texture.

When I was in sixth grade, my teacher Mrs. Larson asked us to write a short story. As far as I can tell, that was the first real creative writing paper I had been assigned. When the due date rolled around, I ended up turning in a couple of pages on an awkward sixth grade romance, which, not at all by coincidence, was loosely based on my own current experi-





This transition, then, from a high school senior in suburban Chicago to a college sophomore in Baltimore has molded me into a noticeably different person and, as a result, a different writer.

In my first semester of college I was lucky enough to have Lia Purpura as my writing professor. An awesome writer, teacher, and person, Professor Purpura was also one of the most demanding teachers I have ever had. Faced with both a strong desire to prove my worth to an established writer and also with the prospect of not getting a strong grade in a writing class, I wrestled with every paper as if I were Rulon

In the movie "Good Will Hunting," Will takes a rather profound moment to explain to his girlfriend why he is so good at high level mathematics.

"Beethoven, okay. He looked at a piano, and it just made sense to him. He could just play. I look at a piano, I see a bunch of keys, three pedals, and a ~~box~~wood. But Beethoven, Mozart, they saw it, they could just play. I couldn't paint you a picture, I probably can't hit the ball out of Fenway, and I can't play the piano... But when it comes to stuff like (math, science, etc,) I could always just play"

In my life, there have been two areas where I have felt an inkling of what Will was trying to explain in that scene. The first is writing, and the second is drumming. Mind you, I am in no way claiming to be a savant like Matt Damons endowed character; I am not arrogant enough to make such a suggestion. I merely mean ~~that~~ both areas have always felt very natural to me, and I've ~~always~~ been able to "just play." But that doesn't mean that I am at all good at either one. In sixth grade, I could coast on raw talent, but not so in college. To become a better ~~writer~~ one must constantly work at complete self-improvement: as a linguist, as an observer, as a relater, as a documenter—~~an~~ artist of language. I know far too well that I am by no means an artist in anything that I do. Certain people create; I am not one of them. Only one who understands and has mastered his art can actually step back from his finished product and confidently say to the fellow artist, or to the critic, or to the professor, "I have created something."

I cannot draw. I took one art class the summer between before 7th grade, and somehow the instructor was able to coax a single acceptable piece out of me, but that was a wonderful one-time mistake. Despite this lack of artistic ability, I possess, as I believe all humans do, an innate desire to create (there's that word again) ~~so~~thing worthy of existence. In

my life the only two arenas in which I have felt I may someday be able to create are the ones I have never really had to learn. When I play with my band, I feel like I'm on the verge of being an artist, and sometimes, sometimes when I write, I feel the same way.

Of course, the tragedy is that I have chosen to neglect both areas in my life, and have remained stubbornly comfortable with that limited creativity my whole life. I am, in effect, the same drummer I was when I first sat down at my friends set seven years ago, just as I am the same writer now that I was when I unwittingly professed my love for Anna to Mrs. Larson's entire English class. The breakthrough I experienced while working on my brother's paper was a very rare and isolated incident, and as a result I have grown deplorably little as a writer. If you're looking for a fantastic 6th grade writer, I'm your man.

At Loyola, I experience each day through three different lenses. The first is my own, shaped by my relaxed Midwest upbringing. The second belongs to my friends here at school, who are almost exclusively from New York, New Jersey, or, invariably, somewhere juuuust outside of Philly. The third lens I am treated to each and every day is, of course Baltimore's very own.

For me then, creating an identity—as both a person and as a young writer—has sat 21 hours a day for five years. For me then, cre

could now go toe-to-toe with them not only physically but rhetorically as well. Loyola has sharpened my tongue: given me in effect a different voice—both verbally and scripturally—from its meeker predecessor of 12 months ago.

As often as I can (which is of course not often enough) I try to make time to venture down to Sherwood Gardens, which sits at the bottom of ~~the~~ hill just across Cold Spring Avenue. The garden, which is famous for its array and amount of tulips, is right in the middle of an affluent neighborhood, and the short walk from campus along the reservoir is unfailingly beautiful and soothing. The garden holds company with my basement and the beach across the street from my old house in Illinois as a place where I am utterly excited to just be. Whether I venture there with friends or by myself, a trip to the "Tulip Garden" always includes those telling moments of blissful, smile-laden silence.

Just last week, a friend was walking back to school from

the black lower-class. My environment has brought me up to recognize those lines and how to avoid ever crossing them.

To traverse such social boundaries immediately places me in uncomfortable circumstances. I watch the world from my side of the boundary. You're reading a young, educated, white, upper-class male's thoughts right now, sorry to break the boring news to you. The reality that I've led a tremendously sheltered life, happy with my side of the line. The ray of hope however, lies in the instances when I have crossed that social barrier here in Baltimore.

Perhaps the best illustration of my blossoming societal expansion can be seen through my weekly service learning experiences with Hispanic Apostolate during the spring of my freshman year. Working with Hispanic immigrants on their English gave me insight into a different life, and more than half a year later, one student still lingers in my mind. Melvin was by far the best student I worked with. He was a 20-year-old construction worker who had emigrated from Uruguay when he was only sixteen. His English was already fairly strong, and whenever I explained a mistake he might have made or a concept ~~that~~ we were working on, he would listen intently, internalizing and practicing the sentence a few times in his head before moving on to the next section, never making the same mistake again.

Six days a week, Melvin worked construction in the city; a job that left him tired most days and exhausted the others. Yet, in spite of this demanding way of life, in spite of the fact that he didn't own a car, he still found the time and motivation to come to Hispanic Apostolate every Thursday night, bringing to the table more focus for two straight hours than I think I have ever put into practice anywhere.

Even though Melvin and I were basically the same age, I would never dare to consider ~~myself~~ his equal. At 20, Melvin had worked harder for where ~~he~~ was than I probably ever will. At this time last year, he hadn't seen anyone from his family for four years. He had made sacrifices that I could never

imagine making. On the car ride back to Loyola that night, I remember consciously forcing myself to recognize the opportunities I had grown up with, and coercing myself into a mindset where I no longer took them for granted.

I can think of no better way to maximize my opportunities than to build upon my inclinations. I have long believed that a good writer is first and foremost a good human being. Becoming an actual writer—a creator—involves the accumulation of pertinent experiences, as well as the refinement of an eye that is capable of turning those experiences into some form of meaningful, purposeful, provocative writing. Perhaps the most important step in the maturation of an author is the





# A CHANGE IN MINDSET

written by  
LAUREN LOEFFLER

"That's just it," he said, and continued to iron his orange Polo shirt. "They're all lazy."

The word "they" is so dangerous — completely necessary; we need a third person plural pronoun. But apparently we are not prudent enough with language and we have lost control of a weapon.

"They just don't want to work. They don't want to study, and they don't want to work."

I don't think I am being overly sensitive when my blood pressure rises every time someone refers to an entire race, culture, or any array of classification with the word "they." The usage indicates ignorance and is simply not strong enough for the burden of a generalization.

So to whom did the Polo-shirt-ironing boy refer when he said "they"? In this specific instance, he meant black people.

I just don't understand. I don't understand how in an age of supposed acceptance and progression, such bigotry still exists. I don't understand what can cause some witsom wit

ing a broad and diverse education steeped in values of justice where I hear these words ~~use~~ them horribly out of place and outdated. Racial slurs and derogatory terms are hit back and forth in a game of spiteful tennis. Why are these labels tossed around without regard to their connotation or effects? These words perpetuate a mindset that is detrimental to us.

When I hear the word "nigger" it hurts me; for the word to even appear in my writing causes me discomfort. I'm a white girl, so why should it offend me? I suppose offend is not the right verb. Terrify? Maybe that's better. The word terrifies me because it conveys only hatred. Nothing more, nothing less, pure hatred, and this hatred is a ticking time bomb. I've already said that I don't understand, and it's true, I don't. Continuing to hate just does not make sense. We don't have time for hate - we have too many other issues to handle, none of which can be solved while hate is still so prevalent. Global Warming. Poverty. ~~Genide~~ Genocide. Illiteracy. Drug Addiction. Teenage Pregnancy. Abuse. Crime. Unemployment. Disease. Welfare. Racism. Sexism. Dictatorships. War. Nuclear Weapons.

engenders hate; this is not a new or new concept, but one often overlooked. Why, when there is so much suffering and pain in the world, do we still find it acceptable to hate, to perpetuate the cycle?

be heard quite as much if we come to understand how masochistic it really is to hurt someone.

The task of curing our disease of hatred is monstrous, and tough to attempt without sounding trite. Could I stand at the top of a mountain and yell, begging everyone to love each other without question? I could, but my words would be like a drop of water on an inferno. I'm not calling for butterflies and rainbows because I'm not that naïve. What I'm asking for is a change in mindset.

I'm asking for an awakening into the modern world where we have the ability, means and responsibility to fix a number of our own problems. Hatred gets in the way of solutions, placing a heavy burden on our backs as we attempt to climb mountains. When I seek an end to hate I'm not coming strictly from an angle of good nature, I'm seeking an end to hate because it's necessary.

Ending hate can be so simple, too. Start with language. The less words existing to convey hate, the less hate exists. Don't use hateful words, even if you don't intend for their true meaning. Their very utterance does an injustice to the air. Take some time to think about the ways in which we are all similar. At the most basic human level, we are all identical. Our bodies all perform the same tasks and all have the same need for food, water, shelter and love. Once you realize that we are all in this together, ending hate is not some far-fetched dream, nor just a possibility. It is an unavoidable conclusion.

# A TIME OF CONFIDENCES

written by  
DOUGLAS POLISIN

The morning I left for college was masked in a heavy fog; scattered memories of the night before vainly attempted to piece themselves together as the stench of cheap beer sweating from my pores gave an all too well reminder of last night's festivities. The final farewell to friends, or the few that remained home still, had been a last attempt to cling on to the home-life and the comfort of friends who shared the same travails of the hell that is the awkwardness of high school. Vague images of melodramatic toasts and stories of old intertwined as my eyes peered over the packed bags at the foot of my bed. I wondered if the farewell had been a farewell at all; had I said my goodbyes or just left in a state of panic from my overprotective mother's demands to be home by curfew? Memories

pillow, and my thumb popped the top open, unveiling a shin-

friendship. This was the end of road and, yet, we were all trying to convince ourselves that it would never end; that the innocence of not-knowing-any-~~ter~~ activities at the picnic table would last forever. A kinship had been born upon my friend's raggedy picnic table and I saw its legacy inevitably die in our goodbyes.

Making my way out the front door and moving towards a new life, my friend stopped me, bidding me a final goodbye and man-hug that slowly turned into the full-blown hug our friends no longer cared about giving in the final days of summer. After drunken, sentimental, forgotten words, he handed me an old CD player and walked me out the door. "It's only a matter of time. I'll see you soon", he said as I made my way down the steps, tripping over the concrete and finding my balance.

I looked back at the bottom of his driveway; he was still standing atop his steps with his blinding stoop flood-





deserted high school track where drug deals and make-out sessions frequented, the houses I believed to be haunted on my street when I was younger.

As I listened to the song, I not only understood the song as a testament of friendship in that the two characters are sitting with one another after years of companionship (whether with or without one another) but as a song about the two moving on from a point of naivety into adulthood, moving from "a time of innocence" and "a time of confidences" into a feeling of complacency that one finds in old age; genuflecting on the past's youthful experiences ("Time it was and what a time it was"), feeling a combination of sorrow and completion as the two characters not only "bookend" themselves by the youthful experiences between two but "bookend" themselves in understanding that they're fully grown and satisfied with their own individual experiences.

Lying in bed, closing my eyes and listening, I remember running fast as a french horn a cacophony of thunderous strings atop a gentle ascending acoustic guitar, guiding me home before another one of my mother's calls. I misinterpret one of the lines as the dark streets sweep me away from my friend's house and comfortable adolescence. What is "How terrible strange to be seventy" becomes "How terribly strange to be seventeen", and I realize that "it's only a matter of time" before my friend and I sit on his picnic table, having a beer, trading stories about our lives; bookending one another. Positioning our memories of times together and apart, knowing "they're all that's left."

# THE ASSOCIATIVE PROPERTY



the first time at a birthday party weeks earlier. I remember

cursed out her sister in broken Italian.

As my Aunt's battle with ovarian cancer expired, I had endless dreams about her. In dreams, she looked warm and radiant, almost lit from within — the way she'd looked before the cancer, the way my mother remembered her, before she'd become thin and withdrawn, her raspy cigarette-voice strained with every syllable. By the end of June, the phone calls started. It was a summer of cancer-speak: regression, biopsy, malignant.

"Can you come get me?" I had called my mother from a pool party only a half-hour after arriving. I got inside the van, my throat sore and my eyes glassy. We cried together the entire way home. I mourned for myself. I mourned for my mother — because everything Aunt Caroline was to my mother, she was to me, too. The associative property.

Her funeral was on the Fourth of July. My cousins went up one by one, then her daughters—six signs of the cross before the casket. When it was my mother's turn, she gripped my arm and we walked cautiously toward the open casket, red-faced and sobbing. I'm holding her up, I thought, as we knelt and prayed together.

It was the fourth grade, I think, during show and tell. The girl had laid out the daintiest pair of gloves I'd ever seen on the desk in front of her. They were a faded ivory with delicate buttons running up from the wrist.

"These were my grandmother's from the 1930s," she said, smoothing her hands over the fragile silk, beaming with pride.

"They fit me just right, because she has tiny hands like I do." She easily slid the right glove up to her elbow and wiggled her fingers inside. "See?"

I looked down at my own hands. My long, spindly fingers and pale ivory skin, a thought of my grandmother's—large with short, sturdy fingers, her bones thick underneath copper skin. I felt the jealousy build as I watched the girl slide on the left glove, the sleek material catching the light as

she held out her forearms for us to marvel. I didnt want my grandmother's hands, I thought, ashamed for feeling such

"Your grandpa says it's your mother, but I told him it was my Mary Catherine."

I could hear my grandpa scoff playfully from the hallway. I took the picture in my hands and examined.

It was me. My father had taken it in the living room of our old house. I remembered a pink floral dress, my dad trying in vain to stop me from giggling long enough to pose. "See, Joe?" She glanced knowingly toward grandpa who leaned in the doorway.

He laughed and feigned offense, "Well, I knew it was either you or your mother."

Me. Or my mother.

There was no else it could have been.

# HOW TO DISAPPEAR

written by  
RACHEL TIERNEY

Magic tricks have always fascinated me. When I was young, I'd stop to watch street performers in Cambridge's Davis Square as they shuffled cards and found coins behind unsuspecting ears, making things appear and disappear at whim. I would practice these tricks for hours, but my six-







"No way, I had it first."

"Ok, ok you're right. Who've you been talking to for so long anyway? Is it a boy? Oh my God it is a boy. Does he go to school with us? Oh man, are you guys, like, dating? You want to make out with him don't you? I can totally tell. She's into you, dude. Go for it."

I envied my friends with their own bedrooms to retreat into and obsessed over finding spaces to call my own. I buried myself under blankets, hid in closets and under countertops, even balanced myself on tree branches. Once, I marked, with every pencil and pen I could find, pathways in the bedroom I shared with my sister just so I could declare a strip of carpet as my own. Time after time, one or more of my siblings took over my two inches of space, claiming they'd found it first. Since I couldn't physically separate myself, I had to learn to tune everything out. And so, I learned how to disappear.

My brothers and sisters couldn't understand why I'd rather read *To Kill A Mockingbird* than play hide-and-go-seek. I lied, claiming I still hadn't fully recovered from the half hour I spent locked in the dryer ~~on~~ when my brother Chris got tired of looking for me. In truth, I hadn't really minded my time in the dryer. It was warm and quiet and impossible to share; if it weren't running ~~constantly~~ with never ending loads of laundry, I probably would have ~~crept~~ crawled in again frequently.

My older siblings' textbooks, my mother's paperbacks, newspapers from the firewood ~~dep~~ - every storyline swallowed me. No matter what time of day or location, the characters in books came alive just for me and entire worlds existed for my own enjoyment. I never had to wait my turn and, unlike with my siblings for our parents' attention, there was no competition in literature. In recognition of my parents, distributing attention amongst eight children ranging now from ages thirty-nine to fourteen is a ~~da~~ dating task to say the least. All of the kids realized this, and ~~we~~ would always wait patiently while they rattled off an inventory of names before finding the correct one to address one of us by.

We never expected our extended families to keep all of us straight. During the holidays, my mother dragged us to traditional family gatherings. We all stood together in a row as great aunts and second cousins we never knew existed watched us intensely, as if awaiting an inevitable Von Trapp family performance. And because names and faces were not enough to distinguish each of us, our names were lengthened to several word phrases. My older brother Charlie, for example, became Charlie-the-one-who-used-to-eat-sticks-of-butter-whole, and my younger sister Caroline, the-one-who-has-terrible-asthma. All of our most embarrassing and eccentric features permeated our identities.

My own kenning was, and still is: Rachel-the-one-who-loves-to-read-and-write. And while it sounded tamer than those of my brothers and sisters, I blushed profusely every time the title was uttered. I hated that strangers who couldn't even remember my name knew my deepest passion and shared the knowledge of my perfect escape. The information always brought streams of questions I had no desire to answer — What's your favorite book? Do you want to be a writer when you grow up? Can I read something you wrote? I learned to always bring a book with me as the easiest way to avoid an ambush and further perfect my disappearing act. Invisible, I could pretend I didn't hear Uncle Bill, slurring through his third gin and tonic, shadily comparing my sister and me to girls in magazines, or see my distant cousins sizing up my siblings and me like we were trespassing on delineated turf. We were merely a phenomenon on display, caged animals for viewing in a zoo, and I hated the spectators.

Our togetherness would evaporate once we crossed the threshold of our home. Separated by last names, my younger sister, Caroline, and I lingered on the outskirts. We were outnumbered by Furcolo's ~~to~~ to one and it showed. We looked different with our blonde hair and blue eyes and our accents picked up from years of living in Boston. Because the household consisted of two separate families, the answering

machine message always presented problems; even though  
my mother and step-father, the owners of the house, were the

# ORIGINS

(see images on pages 52 & 53)

written by

MICHAEL BOYLE

Boarding the plane in Narita was bittersweet. Six months and I was finally leaving Asia. Handing my ticket to the attendant, I crossed the threshold to the boarding gate; the tunnel to my life outside Thailand, a return to normalcy. I sighed heavily as I sat down in my seat. It was only noon, but I was tired. Six months is a long time. As I mashed my

almost two-thirds of the country, a journey that began with the sunrise, and we were wiped. It had been a long day.

"Don't worry, we'll be able to sleep in tomorrow." Her eyes glittered with satisfaction. She was returning home and I was lucky enough to tag along for the ride.

She presented the idea to me on the beach, going north. We were lounging in the midday sun. She was reading and I was attempting to get a few shades darker before we headed back to the Bangkok grind. It was a light conversation, nothing too serious, only beach banter. Why not come on up to Petchaboon for a few days to meet the rest of her family and see a part of Thailand not many foreigners frequent? That sounded different. What was there to lose? So two days later we started that exodus north.

I met Kai at the local pub, Hamra Street. She was the bar manager and I was a university student looking for the quickest way to get loaded. ~~Was~~ the start of a beautiful relationship. I remember how, from the beginning, I always thought she looked so striking, so elegant. Of course, it took me a solid two months to talk to her beyond ordering another round—my Thai was a joke and my ignorance dictated that she obviously would not know English. Had someone asked me in June if I would be ~~ee~~ meeting her family five months later, I would have laughed and scoffed.

"We've now surpassed ten thousand feet..." the flight attendant's voice came over the loudspeaker. I shook off the light sleep that had settled over me. My friend on the left was

tle started cycling through my head like a slideshow stuck on repeat. That was what awaited me upon my arrival; all those things that I went six months without. I thought of how my laundry smelled different because I could never find an adequate replacement in Bangkok. Apple picking and the changing foliage of fall in New York—two things I missed at their peak but hoped to catch the tail end upon my return.

Kai always told me she moved to Bangkok because Petchaboon was empty. "Far, farms, and farms," she described it aptly one night over dinner. She told me it was going to be small. I had no idea this is what she meant. Getting off the bus at the station in Petchaboon was a complete turnaround from the Bangkok bus terminal. Granted it was around nine at night by this point, but this place was absolutely deserted. Nine at night in Bangkok and hordes of people would be bustling about making bus connections while the main terminal looks like a Cairo bazaar. Peddlers selling everything from handbags to sweet potatoes dot the arrival hall like ants on a hill. In Petchaboon, a lone street food vendor greeted the few stragglers still arriving this late at night. The city was asleep.

We began walking down the moonlit street towards the 7-11. I went in for water as she haggled with the cab driver over prices. This was Kai's home. The contrast from Bangkok was absolutely striking. Only 400 kilometers north of the capitol, Petchaboon looked like a ghost town. Stepping out on the main road was like taking a step back in time: the main road was hard packed dirt, the wooden storefronts stood silent and dark. I half-expected Dirty Harry to come strolling around the corner. The dirt kicked up around the rear windows as we drove off towards her home.

"Would you like shrimp or chicken?" the attendant caught me off guard. I must have started drifting again. The Men's Health lay sprawled across my lap like a napkin. I requested whatever tasted better and the young woman handed me the hot plate and utensils. I checked the TV screen



mounted on the seatback in front of me. We were somewhere over the Pacific Ocean hovering between Russia and the



necessarily justifiable in another's eyes. Rather, home is where you can lay your head down at night and fall asleep smiling.

I began cleaning up the area around my seat, putting