Black Rock & Sage

Issue 10, 2011
Idaho State University

Black Rock & Sage is a journal of creative works published annually through the Department of English and Philosophy at Idaho State University with assistance from the Art and Music Departments. All artistic contributions, from design to literature to music, have been produced by graduate and undergraduate students in departments from across the university. Submissions are received from September through February. For more information about the journal, see our website at www.isu.edu/blackrock.

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Black Rock & Sage

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Steven Hall

Editor's Note

Ten years. I recently saw where one experienced editor compared the average lifespan of literary journals to that of a gnat. So this milestone indeed deserves reflection. But something also feels counterintuitive about looking back on a decade's worth of other people's labors and accomplishments in only my first year as editor. Transience is the inescapable reality of campus journals like this one; during the past ten years of its existence, seven different editors have overseen the production of *Black Rock & Sage*, including myself. When I began trying to place this tenth issue within the context of the journal's history, I soon realized how little I had to work with, other than an overabundance of unsold journals from the past nine years (available for sale through our website, of course). As a result, I began thinking less about comprehensive history and more about the journal's current evolution and possible future.

In 2002, *BR&S* published its first issue, under an open submission policy. The policy lasted for six issues, until Dr. Susan Goslee joined the English department in 2008 and became the faculty advisor to the journal, implementing a student-only submission policy. This single decision, more than any other, affects the current form of *BR&S*. At the time of the change, many expressed concern (even the staff of editors, it should be noted) that the student body at Idaho State University could not produce enough material to publish a quality literary journal. But within the first few months of the production period for the transition issue, editors began to realize the vision of a campus journal of creative arts. Having enough material of merit did not become the issue. As a surprise to everyone, narrowing the submission guidelines eventually resulted in expansion and

growth.

Making *BR&S* a journal for the creative output of ISU students gives it a role and relevance for students, for the campus community, and, I hope, for the region. During my interview with Dr. Ron Hatzenbuehler he mentioned the campus-specific quality of the journal over and over. In his view, a campus journal of creative arts like *BR&S* should be reflective of students' studies at ISU—of who our students are at this point in their lives. But ISU students exist within the broader artistic, scholarly, and literary world as well, and as Dr. Hatzenbuehler made clear, good artists find universal themes and insights wherever they are, provided they observe the world around them. In our case, that often (although not always or necessarily, as you'll see in this issue) results in profoundly human creations that just so happen to speak to the geography, history, and concerns of the area.

I hope, both for the artists included here and for students who look over these pages, this journal does just that: allows them to make artistic exploration a part of their educational experience here and to examine larger, universal themes. This is one of the reasons, I presume, the journal has expanded over time from a traditional literary journal with creative writing and a few visual images to a creative arts journal. *BR&S* is an inclusive venue, displaying the wealth of talent on this campus in as many forms as possible. With the assistance of Professor Kori Bond of the Music Department the journal has included an audio CD since 2009, containing recordings of vocal and instrumental performances. Professors Angie Zielinski and Rudy Kovacs edit the journal's visual art and are always looking for innovative forms never before published here. In 2010, in order to give visual artists deserving representation of their work, the journal began printing each piece in color. We've included maps and, in the next year or so, may incorporate performances on video and original short films.

Issue 10 reflects what I feel *BR&S* has been growing toward since the transition to student-only content. In this issue, student artists engage a diversity of genres and forms to explore themes from the immediate to the futuristic. A few examples: in his short story "Steadfast!" Keith Foster decodes questions of origin using a pair of robots; Sharon Collins considers the specter of aging amid an evolving physical and cultural landscape in "Idaho Gothic"; Bill Chalmer's personal essay, "Down and Out in Dorset," juxtaposes rich descriptions of Weymouth and Chesil Beach with the harsh lifestyles of a resort town's underprivileged youth. In the journal's poetry you will find an assortment of topics and styles: Mitch Christensen's "Small Talk" uses humor in a playful poem about protecting one's inner self through hyperbolic self-aggrandizement; in "*Ars Poetica*: My Ink" Karee Garvin lightly veils a poem about the form itself to consider the awkwardness of youth during the growth from girlhood to womanhood; Jeff Pearson describes a seemingly ordinary chore in "Yard Work" to measure various kinds of distance, including the most permanent, the separation of death.

Serving as editor during the tenth year of publication has allowed me to experience first-hand the breadth and depth of creative ability and artistic vision present on ISU's campus. We will continue to expand the journal's diversity of forms and themes. So I offer you Issue 10 of *Black Rock & Sage*, confident you'll find within these pages of student artwork something to stretch your imagination, something of insight, something of intrigue. Here's to ten more years.

Jeff Pearson

forbearers

the sun spirals and loveliness berounds
something grand will
come to pass in the near future
instead uncles have 80th
birthdays likened unto grandma's
goodbye birthday in '93 show
me a pie grid chart of the life expectancy
of old age and the cancer fighting
properties of squash and we will
get married to old maids who
have held onto their cards until right where
the game became fresh and linoleum
echoes give revelation to all forbearers
to hold out till dark thirty
when the sun has long since relaxed its
shine and outside you can barely see
blinded by the motion-activated floodlights
the time where you shouldn't leave the house
but reside in the brick bunker waiting
for sleep for a new day for
visitors to arrive for the horses in the
back to be fed for the newspaper and
finally for an atonement to correct
your failing body all the while you think
of the swing off from the old
dairy pole where the rope wore notches
after so long

Sharon Collins

Idaho Gothic

I lifted the lid of cousin Kat's cigar-box bug collection; most of the insects had disintegrated into dust. The basement windows were covered with cobwebs where the old man had sealed the broken glass with cardboard stamped Safeway Foods. "What's next?" I asked.

"Take them damn cats to the dump." His glass eye stared over my left shoulder. The farmer pointed his old fingers at a flimsy pet carrier with round air holes; it was tied shut with plastic twine. I remembered when twine was made out of real sisal; nothing was the same any more.

"How could we haul 'em in that?"

"Ya want the plastic one?" he asked.

"Don't you remember?" I reminded him. "You put the gray cat in the plastic carrier to keep Sam away from her."

He thought about that a minute, then recollected with admiration, "Them dogs shore tore up that cage. Ya wanna see it?" The old man tripped up the basement steps, pumping his artificial hips. I followed, relieved to leave the odor and the underground gloom. The stench was worse than rotten Idaho potatoes.

Outside, the wretches yowled, dashing around the homesteader's feet. He trundled to the pickup bed where he piled his trash; it was an '84 Ford straight-six, mostly white, partly rust. The vehicle didn't run, and a crescent wrench graced the front like a hood ornament. The cats followed; the white creature's fur lumped in mats; I'd have to help her out.

He croaked a joke, "I say, 'Go catch mice' and they look back and say, 'What's mice?'"

I didn't laugh. "They're too hungry to hunt," I pointed out.

The purple animal carrier lay smashed in the back of the pickup. "Well, you can't use that," I commented, relieved. A striped cat rubbed furiously against my calves, heaving itself up on its hind legs; the tips of its ears were frozen off.

He went on, "I found the cage out in the pasture; I never saw that pest again. We'll use the box."

Unhappy with his unalterable determination, I humored him, saying, "We have to make sure the dump will take them; we should call or go see."

"You wanna ride to the dump?" The farmer liked that idea: he reached two gnarled fingers into his Montgomery Ward bib overalls, scraped out keys, trudged to the VW van and crawled in. He used to call the vehicle his pussy wagon; I didn't know what he meant. I clamored into the passenger side, hoping he could see the road.

The old man backed past Auntie's lilac bush and whirled the vehicle around so he barely missed the pasture fence. He'd pasted a large shaving mirror where the side mirror used to be; I could see the unhappy animals behind us twitching their tails; the black-and-white cat swatted the yellow tom and ran off. The VW bounced down the ragweed-fringed driveway; the old man turned left onto the graveled road, then angled the vehicle past the neighbors' fields of grain, beets and hay. Desolate dust churned behind; we lurched around fifty-year-old farmhouses, tiny and in disrepair, and rode past ostentatious houses of nuevo-rich farmers in debt up to their necks. The fields were yellow-gray under a thin blue sky; monstrous center pivots gushed out their water rights. There was nothing appealing about farm country, in my estimation; just a lot of sweat-equity, high-interest financing and disregard for farm cats. The inside of the old VW steeped like a sauna, but he didn't roll down the window; the old homesteader had a high tolerance for heat and related discomforts.

We turned left onto a paved road, clipped right into a driveway, charged past a No Vehicles warning and came to rest dangerously close to a pile of recycled electronics. A nondescript laborer appeared out of nowhere to direct us away, irritated at the old man's disregard of the rules. "You need somethin'?" he hollered.

The farmer cranked down the window and squinted out. "Ya take cats?"

The worker studied the old man's artificial eye, then took off his Idaho Auto Parts ball cap and wiped his sweaty face on his sleeve, finally sawing the cap back down over his scalp.

"What d'ya mean?"

"I know ya take dogs; do ya take cats?"

"We don't take dead dogs, cows, horses, pigs or cats," the worker said sarcastically. "You've got to call Livelie's Carcass Removal."

"I don't mean dead cats," the old man persisted.

The worker stared down at the white Idaho dirt, looked up and squinted into the glass eye as if he could see his miserable future in it, then sheepishly confessed. "People bring kittens in their trash; if I find 'em, I'm supposed to take 'em to the vet."

I groaned, "People do that?"

The old man ignored me. "What vet ya take them kittens to?"

"Loving Hearts," the worker answered, "to find homes."

"Gotcha," the old man rolled up his window and cranked the VW around the dump, bouncing back onto the asphalt. "Madge thought they took cats," the old man mused. He turned down the gravel road toward the home place, pulled into the rutted drive and parked the VW under the ancient lilac bush; I noted that the old farmer drove just fine with one eye.

The heat heaved in waves. "Well, that's that," I said, my hand

glancing off the scorching VW door handle.

He couldn't get the wretches out of his monomaniacal head: "We'll dump 'em off," the old man announced.

I heard the harvesters groaning their pulsating rhythm in the distance. "Then they're a problem for someone else," I protested. "They'll get chased by dogs or hit by cars; you might as well shoot 'em."

"Don't have a gun," he said. The old man climbed stiffly out his side; immediately the monsters tripped around his feet, howling; I noticed the spotted cat didn't have a tail.

I slid out of the ancient vehicle, irritated with this pusillanimous problem solving, slammed through the back door with the flapping screen, and threw myself in a kitchen chair by the old black rotary-dial phone. A broken dish lay on the floor by the kitchen cupboard; I picked up the shards and put them in a Cum-N-Go grocery sack; the old man was getting sloppy, I thought. The dog-eared phone book listed Animal Control for the next county; creatures yapped in the background when a voice answered.

"We have cats we can't keep any more. Where should I bring them?"

"We don't take cats," the voice answered impatiently. "There isn't an ordinance."

"What do people do with cats?" I quizzed, frustrated.

"Dump 'em off," he said.

I thought I saw something thrust under the bedroom door, then jerk back, thrust out and jerk back again; a kick of uneasiness jolted down my spine. I glanced at the sack of broken glass; when I looked back down the hall, whatever stirred had disappeared.

"That's inhumane." I couldn't keep the annoyance out of my voice. "Does Cash County have a cat shelter?"

He sounded bored. "Two Falls is the nearest place; even the Humane Society lady has cats she can't get rid of." He hung up; my head throbbed. The screen door banged and the yellow cat trotted past. I chased it outside.

I dialed Loving Hearts with my finger stuck in the gritty rotary dial; the phone must have been fifty years old; the average life of a cell phone was a pathetic two years, according to the Verizon man. A horsefly buzzed around the ceiling; the living room walls were glazed with black dust from the coal stove. "We have cats we can't take care of. You euthanize?"

"Thirty dollars per cat," responded the Loving Hearts lady. The old man would never pay that; he remembered the Great Depression. I put the receiver back in its cradle and snuck a look down the hall; a shadow flitted under the door. Agitated, I hurried outside; bedraggled bouncing Betts wilted in the flowerbeds; redroots stabbed the dried-yellow grass; the aquifer was almost pumped out.

A black cat limped to the garage door; the old man emerged and creatures writhed around him. He sprinkled a few Kibbles and Bits in the chipped-granite bowls hidden in the weeds; the vagabonds thrust their heads in the food.

The old farmer lugged himself up the crumbling steps into the house. I sneaked in after him, glanced at the bedroom door, slid the junk drawer open so it didn't squeal, and pulled out the scissors with the broken tip. I slipped outside, then melted into the darkness of the garage; it smelled of stale automotive oil and mice; the half-gone bag of cat food moldered in the murky light. I filled the plastic measuring cup to the top and eased out the garage, scraping the door shut behind me.

The white cat stared at me with malevolent yellow eyes, the center black slits rounded from the sun. I slammed the food into

the cat bowls, hoping the old man wouldn't catch me. The felines pushed their scraggly heads in the food, growling; I seized one of the animal's mats of fur, hacked close to the skin and flung the thing into the desiccated flowerbed. The half-wild brute swatted me, and then settled back to eat. I grabbed another mat and sawed away with the blades; the cat pulled away and spat. The fur hung, half-on, half-off. The creature ran to the other side of the pan; I reached, lifted the fur mass and made one last stab with the blades, hoping I didn't hack too close to the flesh. The leg of shedding fur sloughed off in my hand, and I tossed it away. The wretch flinched, but continued gorging.

I was back inside just in time: the old farmer came out of the bathroom hiking up his overalls. He pulled his eyelid over the glass orb and stared at me suspiciously. I thrust the scissors into the squealing junk drawer. "Wash the sheets," the old man commanded.

• • •

I listened at the bedroom door, then thrust it open; newspaper lie scattered all over the floor and the lampshade hung cock-eyed. I checked hastily under the bed, yanked off the sheets, slammed the door shut and hauled the bundle downstairs. The old man followed. My stomach reeled from the stench. I stuffed the laundry into the washing machine. The old farmer had to start it; he jury-rigged everything.

I searched for the smell: a 50s stand-alone closet sported cans of food years past the expiration dates; mouse droppings sprinkled the shelves, but the stench didn't originate there.

The old man sifted a few soap flakes into the machine tub, picked up his screwdriver, shuffled into the well room and stuck the point of the tool into the pressure control; he got the spark he wanted

and the ancient pump kicked into action; the washer poured water onto the dingy sheets and towels just like monstrous irrigation lines discharged water onto the fields.

I inched past the moldy couch piled with 386s, outdated computer books and disassembled printer components. Cautiously, I opened another door—and gagged. The sight hit me with a surge of nausea; I had to breathe through my mouth so I didn't retch. Sam must have fought desperately to get out; the door was gouged and feces littered the room; he lay like a disintegrating dust mop by the door. How could the old man not have known?

"Look," I pleaded.

He tottered over and peered with his good eye into the murky light. I exhaled, and then inhaled, slowly, almost tasting the smell. The old man's glass eye gleamed in approbation: "He shore tore up that room," he commented, "I'll be damned. Serves him right for gettin' in." He frowned, then commanded, "Put more water in the washer; use the pail in the sink."

I retreated from the prophetic scene and stared into the bucket in the basin; it was full from the dripping faucet. Something floated in the water; there was no doubt what it was.

"What's ailing ya?" The old man shuffled next to me and gazed into the pail of water with his sighted eye. The washing machine groaned.

"Drowned mice," he said with disgust. I heard something thud upstairs.

"They must'a wanted water. Damn those cats."

Mitch Christensen

Late Night Couch Genesis

I fell asleep
in Genesis Chapter 17.
She fell
asleep in
Genesis Chapter 15.

To me, Abram was now
Abraham.
To her,
his name
was still his name.

I knew Abram begat Ishmael,
the Wild Man.
She knew
Melchizedek
blessed brave Abram.

I read from down in my chest.
She muttered in a faint
girl's voice,
telling her dream to stop.

I didn't worry much.
I was already circumcised.
She worried
in her sleep

of becoming Sarai.

I wouldn't tell
the Pharaoh
that she's my sister.

Keith Foster

Steadfast!

The explosion leaves him in a crumpled shock. He can't hear anything, but he can still see. Good enough. The burned out husk of the bus is still spewing flame. Eks has to get out of there. Silence. He gets to his feet. So heavy. Dead weight. He can't use his left arm. Tighten. Readjust. Keep moving forward. Find Wye. Rubble. Concrete. Everything appears grey around him. Up there. Just past the street, on the sidewalk. A motionless frame. Wye. Primary mission. Get him off the streets. He can't lift him. Not with one dead arm. Buzz. Ring. He thinks he starts to hear something. More rifle fire. Has to move quickly.

Pause. Rewind. Playback.

"You're the only one I can really trust with this. So, I guess it turns out I will need that hired thug after all."

All of mechanical kind knew about human beings. Whether or not they chose to believe in them was an entirely different situation. As Eks sat in his office, his attention drifted to the robot on the news. Apparently there was another bombing on the east coast. He didn't understand how this situation could keep going. The cities in the east were always fighting, it seemed. Guerilla warfare and insurgencies kept popping up. Every different kind of religious and political group had its own stake in the area. The Manhattan Islands were the worst. There were so many different hypotheses as to the roles that humans played in the existence of mechanical kind. But just about every one of them assigned the New York area some key importance.

"Would you believe this?" Eks said, his heavy metal frame slumped back and his feet propped on his desk.

"I know, it's a tragedy," Wye's delicate steel fingers fidgeted with the cuff of his sleeve.

"Tragedy? I meant that they still consider a bombing in the downtown area newsworthy."

"Eh, a lot of mechanicals died down there. Isn't that a little insensitive?"

"Now, I was never really designed to be sensitive, was I?" Eks was an old soldier junker model designed to fight nearly thirty-five years ago, but he had been replaced a long time since. Newer and faster models were churned out every five years or so. They kept streamlining the designs, cutting down on the bulkier ones like his, and he had been forced into retirement. "So, what's this about some kind of fossil?"

"It's not a fossil. All of our research indicates that there is a huge power transformer operating in an underground bunker beneath the ruins of New York City. It has everything required for a freezing facility." Wye's hands were coming to life.

"What are you telling me here?" Eks tried to keep up with what Wye was proposing.

"There is significant evidence of an actual, living, breathing human," Wye articulated.

"You found God?" Eks took his feet from the table and sat up.

"We found God."

Flash Drive

Eks manages to hoist Wye over his shoulder. Rifle fire closing in. Eks is slow, but moving. He spies an alley. Too risky. He doesn't know where the explosion came from. Rocket? Mortar shell? Eks can't afford to walk into a hornet's nest. He hunts down an empty looking office building in the opposite direction from the rifles. He makes

his way. Heaving. Stepping. Crunch. Crunch? He looks down, and sees that he's just stepped through the hard steel shell of a body. He won't stop. Eks is not going to die here. He gets to the doorway. Glass. Little cover. There is a large rounded security desk. He quickly comes around the bend and sets Wye down. He looks out of the corner of his eye, and on the other side there is a robot hunched down with a high caliber automatic rifle pointed at his head.

Ctrl. Alt. Del.

"I'm quitting." Eks told Wye rolling up his shirt sleeves.

"You're kidding! Why?" Wye set down the equipment he was working with and stared at Eks.

"Look, I appreciate what you did here. Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful you gave an obsolete model like me a chance," Eks said, scratching the back of his head. "It's just the work . . . ."

"Am I working you too hard? Is there something you're having trouble with?" Wye placed a hand on his elbow and threw out a gesture with the other. "I'd be willing to come in some extra hours to give you some extra help."

"It's nothing like that. I just . . . I need to get my hands dirty. I can't be cooped up in this lab all day, trying to find answers to questions I don't even care about." Eks looked away from Wye; he couldn't look at him.

"What do you mean, you don't care." Wye folded his arms.

"I care about the job; I do, like I said, I really appreciate it. I just don't believe in any of it. Sure, humans left plenty of ruined old cities and cars and whatever. But, really, how do you know they created us?" Eks mimicked Wye in the folding of his arms.

"That's what we're trying to find out! We know that they are connected to us somehow. We have all the right pieces, we just need to

put it all together," Wye said, challenging Eks.

"But what does it matter? What does it matter if we were created by a human or if there were multiple humans, or if we were evolved out of other mechanics—"

"Hey! I didn't come from a radio," Wye interrupted, gesturing in one fluid motion.

Eks put his hand to his forehead and said, "I'm just saying it doesn't really matter, that's all. It's not worth what they're doing out east all the time."

"I'm not condoning any of that kind of radical behavior, that's completely different than what I'm doing here." Wye held his hands out in defense, "I'm trying to use the tools the humans gave us, the information they left behind to help bring all that to an end. I'm trying to help all mechanical kind here."

"I know. And in a way I envy that. But it's not for me. I have to do my own thing; I have to do what my programming is telling me," Eks implored.

"But they retired you. They don't need you out there anymore. Let the younger models blow each other up."

"I just . . . I have to do something else with my life," Eks said, looking away from Wye. "I think I'm going to become a private tech. Open my own firm and just do whatever work comes my way. With my service background, it'll be easy to get the licensing."

Wye just kind of laughed. "Alright, you want to go be some hired thug, that's fine. Just remember you said that when you try to come crawling back after I've proven my human theories and caused world peace."

"Alright, but then you have to remember you said that when it turns out you need some hired thug."

It is Now Safe to Remove Your Hardware Device

Eks is caught. There is nothing he can do. He is just waiting to be torn into tiny pieces by a couple hundred rounds. But he is still alive. He shifts slightly to get a better look. The gunman isn't moving, and Eks sees why. The enemy is hunched over with his vitals spilled out all over the ground and is long since dead. He grabs the rifle and slings it over his shoulder. He turns his attention to Wye.

"C'mon. I need you to recover. I can't do this on my own."

Direct Operating System

"This is going to be a fully sanctioned government operation. You will have the full resources of the American States LLC military at your back when you go into the hot zone. Needless to say, the federal government has quite an interest in what you lab boys are doing down there, so they want this situation supervised and taken care of correctly. We are going to air drop you about fifty miles outside of city limits, then an armed caravan will escort you boys to the extraction site. You will be riding in style in this Mobile Laboratory Armored Bus, or M-LAB, which will have all the necessary equipment to transport the package safely back here, where of course it will be held under tight lock and key, and where you can perform all of the proper studies." Then the Commander Unit shifted his attention directly to Eks. "The good doctor here says that you are vital to this mission. I don't seem to share his understanding of the term vital, so I'm only going to tell you this once. You are an outdated piece of garbage in my opinion, and if you hold us up as dead weight, I have absolutely no issue cutting you loose in the middle of hostile territory. In fact, that is my own personal guarantee, so you better keep up to keep your doctor friend here happy. Understood? Good."

Desktop is in Standby Mode

"Wye? Wye? You have to wake up you stupid piece . . . ." Wye starts to come around. His eyes light up.

"What's going . . . where are we?" Wye says as he looks around. He is having trouble sitting fully upright, feebly shifting his weight.

"We are in the middle of Times Square. The M-LAB got totaled, and we are still a couple blocks from the entry to the underground bunker," Eks says, looking down.

"We have to get there," Wye says, trying to get to his feet.

"No," says Eks, putting his hand on Wye's shoulder.

"What are you talking about!? We're almost there. Don't let this be for nothing," Wye says, throwing his hands out in an explosive gesture.

"We won't make it. There is a full-on insurgency going on out there. It's only because of me that we even made it this far!"

"Exactly, and I don't want to waste that. I have to go and get the proof I need. That *we* need. I've already had to convince two separate administrations not to firebomb the entire city. After this, there is no going back."

"Is this really worth dying for?"

Malware Detected

The caravan was about two blocks from Times Square. Eks was surprised with how smoothly things had been going. From his experience, the government was only capable of fucking everything up. And from the news reports about this place, he'd gotten the impression that it was nothing but a bunch of violent savages.

But the drive had been pretty quiet. He had even looked out the six-inch Plexiglas windows and seen the locals going about their daily business. He was astounded by how the city had been grown

over. There were vines growing over old buildings and cars; the locals didn't bother them. They weren't hacking the overgrowth with machetes and spraying it with poisons. Eks was surprised how pretty the area actually was. He'd never seen so much green in his life, and he swore he had even seen a flower bud popping up out of a crack in the concrete. Wye promptly reminded him that this would have been impossible because flowers had been declared extinct for a few hundred years now.

"Commander," the bus pilot called out from the front, "we've got something coming in on the radar, and we think you'd better take a look at it."

"Isn't that what you idiots are programmed for?" the Commander Unit muttered, trailing off as he entered the cabin.

Eks wondered if he could have imagined a flower without any kind of visual reference.

Bit Torrent

Eks opens the door leading with the front of the assault rifle. He sees a scene that reminds him of thirty-five years earlier. The situation had escalated drastically in the time it had taken to get Wye up and running again. He is witnessing total chaos. There are robots on the ground, running and shooting. Robots are popping out of buildings and windows. Grenades are flying through the air. There are explosions. More gunfire peppers the ground. And Eks can no longer tell the military robots from the insurgency. They are the enemy, and they are standing between him and his mission. Wye stumbles out from behind Eks and the relative safety of the office lobby, and together they move forward. Eks is in the lead with the rifle extended before him. His dead left arm hanging flaccidly next to him. They only have to make it a couple of blocks to reach the entrance of the bunker.

They turn right into a back alley. An insurgent is firing into the crowd. Eks destroys him without hesitation. They keep moving.

Windows Task Manager

"I know it's hard, but it *is* hard, especially in the military industry. They are constantly updating. They have new models every couple of years now," Wye said joining him on the couch in Eks' apartment.

Eks lifted his head from between his knees, "I just don't know what I'm going to do now, you know? You don't know what it's like, to be replaced like that. After all the time I gave them."

Wye put a comforting hand on Eks' shoulder, "You were dedicated, that's right, and you've had a good run, but is it really worth risking your life all the time? I mean is it really worth it, what you do, is it worth dying for?"

"It's all I know."

"Why don't you come work with me? In the lab. We can always use extra bodies."

"Me, in a lab? Can you really picture that?"

"Sure, why not. You're more than capable. I know you're smart enough for it. Why don't you just try it out for a little while?"

"I . . . I guess there's no harm in stopping by, checking it out." They sat for a moment in silence.

"Thanks, man."

QWERTY

Eks drives forward. They move from building to building. Almost there. Eks feels the crack of the rifle in his good shoulder, he kills another and another. He will not be stopped. Not when he is so close to the end. He just pushes forward. Wye has difficulty following; his

legs still do not entirely return to him. He tries picking up a pistol off one of the bodies, although to him it is about as useless as Eks' left arm. They keep on like this. Crack. Turn. Crack. Run. Crack. Crack. Run. Run. Move. A couple blocks in downtown Manhattan only takes a couple of minutes, the kind that actually last for hours.

But they come to it. They are there. In front of them stands a building which does not seem spectacular in any way. Eks didn't know what he expected, but it wasn't this. He thinks that it seems too small and indistinguishable to contain God, or Gods, or whatever secrets of time and the universe that this place supposedly held. They go in, and there is another round security desk, and just past them on the wall is a large set of black metal doors. Eks figures they must be about sixteen feet tall. That's more like it he thinks. Wye pulls out a small device, which he places on the key code combination lock. It overloads and there is a small explosion. The doors glide open for them, and a long and narrow staircase is revealed. Eks descends with his rifle at the ready, Wye shortly behind him. They come to a landing which opens up to another room. As they go forward the motion-sensitive lights flicker on, a pale purple from their lack of use. And there against the wall stand seven tubes, containing four females and three males. One of the male's tubes has a crack in it, and the occupant has been reduced to a dried-out skeleton.

"So, this is God." Eks says.

"Yeah. I guess so."

"What happens now?" The broken pair stand together.

Jeff Pearson

After drilling a hole in my finger

I went to the hospital and found out
it was more of a puncture wound
the Phillips bit drilled straight through
the soft tissue in my left birdie finger.

The hospital waiting room collects
mourners, sicklies, casualties, and
a woman with a large purple mark
over her face like a tribal tattoo
not yet set in. Her wanderings around
in her hospital gown haunted the
waiting room as the doctor patrolled
the people dying. I rated my pain
as a 6 but wasn't sure if this was
an imagined pain scale or what I have
felt pain scale.

The birthmark lady listed every single
medication she was on. Perhaps an
hour of listing and the only rival to
this list was my dead father who carried
a fanny pack with all his high blood pressure/
diabetes/cholesterol pills. How much pain
can one be in who takes so many pills?

My mom comes from a family of pharmacists,
so she doesn't believe in chiropractors.

Memory Loss? Mood Swings? Hypochondria?
PTSD? Do I have any or will I in a few years?

Pondering is not a waste of time, I think to myself.
So many people are in worse pain than I am, with
my one finger hole. This nurse sexy, she brings
me a ham sandwich and splenda cola. She
apologetically soaks my finger in a bath of some
clear liquid cool where blood from my finger strands
out like little worms on the bank of a creek. Only
those that free open space Holloways scare me
with my level of hearing beyond me in all open
rooms and halls. Nurses and workers ask
each other to rate their squeamishness on a scale
of 1-10 and one asks, "As far as blood or puke and shit?"
"Puke and shit is the worst," the other person responds.

What sort of class systems decide which patients
get to be treated first? The x-ray that I got must
finally be ready to look at, 4 hours ago.
I wondered if there were little metal shavings or
cement rocks in my finger. Would the ghostly image
show tetanus?

I remember once waiting in the emergency
TV room drunk. That night my girlfriend
kissed another girl, careened off the kitchen counter
then she fell into an orange suitcase
chipped the inner molars
bit through her cheek

a smile extension with blood pouring out.

There were plenty of people to pour vodka
into her cheek, but she needed to be patched up
so I went to the ER, and in the waiting room,
I watched some animals behave like humans
and drunk, I didn't want to be there.

How many of these people are drunk?
This woman who looks like a young, black Pollyanna
but probably must be at least 40. We laugh together
at the speeding motor scooterist as she flees out of
the front automatic doors. "This California song makes
me think of summer," she tells her daughter.

Even with enough blue facemasks for everyone, we cover
our mouths when we cough. These masks protect
against swine flu. It's not the cough that carries you off;
it's the coffin they carry you off in.
We all dress up as physicians.
Black scrubs and blue
scrubs they mean something. The doctor happens
to be like Shannon back home who dressed as a
lobster for Halloween. Only Shannon just cures
salamanders that can regenerate limbs and breeds
chickens for her biology
master's thesis.

In the morning I drove from Allentown back
to Philadelphia through a fog that

gathered around the tops of hills. I followed
along the road, the mists of darkness
a dream prophecy to guide me home.

Erin Gray

Waking Up in a Bar

I wake and my staggering is blurred. I walk, open doors, bump into walls, and enter the cool, dark bar. Video games line the left wall, and a mirrored liquor rack with matching barstools lines the right. I put a quarter in Dig Dug, jerk the small joystick back and forth without grace or art. Pixel dragons burn me through my jumpsuit and I lose all three lives in under a minute, scoring a paltry 18,850 points. The high score is higher than anything I've ever seen in an arcade anywhere else: 476,270 points. Pros play here.

I rub my face, my hand moving from left to right, top to bottom, squishing my forehead, eyeballs, nose, lips, rasping across my chin and neck. The floor is black-lacquered wood. I find the bathroom and wash my face, warm water first, then cold, then warm again. An indecent number of paper towels end up littering the sink and floor, and my shirt is wet. I wander out.

Hannah is mopping up the floors; another girl performs a headcount on bottled beer, checking her results against a slim receipt.

"Hey. What's up?" I'm not sure what kind of response I'm going to get—probably told to leave and let out into the alley.

"Oh, Christ. I almost forgot about you. You know we're closed, right?" Hannah rubs her forehead, pauses, and my heart beats seven times in my eyes. "Your backpack spilled out on the floor during our shift. Cd's are beat up pretty bad. We stepped all over them before we had a chance to pick them up."

"Oh, that's ok. Did my cd player get broken?"

"I don't know. We didn't really test it. Your Nirvana cd is cracked, though. We had an extra one under the counter, so it's already replaced. Archers of Loaf, the Pixies, the Dwarves, and the

Descendants, but no Misfits, huh?" She taps a snapped case against the bar and rolls her tongue over her teeth. "Anyway, this is Jasmine. Jasmine, meet Jack, he's one of Clint's buddies. Guess he's from Idaho."

I'm still expecting her to kick me in the ass for puking all over the bathroom she has to clean up, so getting a compliment on my music is a weird surprise. If I waste time apologizing they'll just get annoyed.

I sit down on the red vinyl barstool, and extend my hand to Jasmine. "Oh, my head hurst . . . I mean, hurts." She laughs. She's got tattoos decorating her long olive collarbone, and even though her face is pierced in more places than I can easily count, her features are delicate, her eyes black-brown, her hair dyed glossy jet black. "Is there any way I could get one last beer?"

Jasmine scoffs. "No, dumbass. I'll get you coffee, though. It'll be all black and burnt." She's already moved, a chipped mug with graduated coffee rings sits in front of me, steam twirling lazily beneath my face. It tastes like a wet mess of wood shavings.

"I don't really know my way around Seattle yet, and I didn't really think I'd get lost in the same bar I'd get drunk in on the very first night." I'm trying to make the words come out of my mouth the way they sound in my head. "I think I know my way back to the bus stop, if I go out the door, then I can get there, if I just go down the street."

Hannah is putting chairs up on the table right behind me, moving mechanically. "Busses stopped running an hour ago. Cab is your only way back, or you can crash in Jasmine's apartment or something."

Jasmine moves her hand to her throat and rubs it, looking intently at Hannah.

"No, thanks, I guess . . . I just need to take a shower, eat something, maybe some breakfast. You two ever eat breakfast really late at night after you've been drinking? I'm so hungry. What if I bought us some breakfast?"

Hannah perks up, but her eyes stay calm. "Is Slayer the best ironic tattoo ever?"

I think she's being clever, or I'm hallucinating. "I guess, if you didn't like Slayer, and you got a tattoo of them somewhere prominent, that would be a pretty ironic tattoo, but it seems like that joke works better if it's a t-shirt, otherwise it's more like a pathetic tragedy. But if you tell me it's ironic, then doesn't it lose its implicit contradiction?"

"Ugh," says Jasmine. "Irony can suck it, and so can her bullshit pretentious sweater vest."

Hannah says, "Hell yes, I want to get breakfast. But, yes, telling me something is ironic does actually spoil the irony."

"I saw Slayer at the Snoqualmie County Fair when I was twelve," Jasmine says.

I say, "Slayer's actually pretty sweet. Some of the best cover art really."

"No way, Idaho. If we're talking best heavy metal covers, it's Metalica or nothing." Jasmine's face is relaxed; her hands are counting money, right to left, snatching each bill rhythmically.

"I always loved *Kill em All*," Hannah says. "My older brother had a Damaged Justice t-shirt from like '88 or '89 or something. So sick."

"You are both yanking my chain," I say. "Iron Maiden has the best heavy metal covers of all time. Metalica is shit. I mean, *Kill Em All*, which is their best by the way, can't even hold a candle to *The Number of the Beast* or *Run to the Hills*, or *Somewhere in Time* with that crazy robot zombie."

The conversation continues, shifting out the door and into the street. The buildings are huge. Windows light and dark in a meaningless pattern. The streets are almost empty now. A man wearing a dirty green sleeping bag with holes and legs cut out wanders along the other side of the street in the same direction. We pass coffee shops, Mexican restaurants, second-story gardens, apartment buildings, small parks with dirty drinking fountains and move down 3rd Avenue to Denny Way where Mini's, an all-night diner, sits perched on a corner.

We sit down in booths whose patched vinyl flesh seeps an unyielding, tacky black fluid. Jasmine finishes the conversation, "I love comic book art, but really, you can't say Frank Miller's Batman is better than Derek Rigg's art for Iron Maiden. It's an impossible comparison."

Breakfast is relatively cheap, incredibly greasy; the conversation stays semi-centered on music and art. Everyone seems to be done with Nirvana, but obsessed with Indy labels. Grunge is dead, and Independent music, implicitly under the radar, is in. Pavement, Guided by Voices, Archers of Loaf, Man or Astroman, Sebadoh, Modest Mouse. We pass the names around the table, talking about our favorite songs, or why some albums suck and some are brilliant, about how sometimes Indy music is inconsistent. I insist on Beck, arguing that he's one of the most casually brilliant musicians of the last 100 years, existing perfectly within a genre while destroying it. His mash-up lyrics achieve a level of pop culture that's both satire and loving homage. I use all my five-dollar words and weird comparisons hoping to impress them, but in the end their skills are sharper. They've lived this kind of life more than I have. It's fucking awesome.

3:17 AM. I'm wide awake when we walk out of the coffee shop, scanning both sides of the street for something to do. On the

right, there's a costume shop next to a parking garage. On the left, quarter-million dollar cars, both imported and rare classics, sit behind gleaming glass, like leering mannequins with perky tits and razor sharp hips filled with no life of their own, only the promise of mine. I could wear that car, be a different person, if only I knew how to make money.

"Hey, Jack. We're sharing a cab, you want a ride halfway or something? Where are you staying?" Hannah brushes back her blonde hair.

"Um, Magnolia. I've got the address. I have no idea how to get there. I think I just want to walk around a little bit though, you know, check stuff out."

"It's late, there's nothing open, and Denny Way is for traffic, not tourists."

"I don't really mind. Do you know if Clint is coming back tomorrow?"

Jasmine scratches her head, fingers coming away slightly blackened with hair dye. "Yeah. He comes in almost every single day. You should call him. I mean, can he come get you or something?"

"No, he doesn't have a car. None of us seem to have a car. I kind of thought, I guess, took it for granted, that when I came to Seattle, someone would have a goddamn car."

Hannah purses the right side of her mouth as she squints slightly, stopping to light a cigarette, leaning against a waist-high planter circled by an ornate grate, holes stuffed with bits of plastic waste. "It's expensive to live here. Most of the people that hang out around the college and come to play pinball at Shorty's are either living off of daddy's trust fund, or just scraping by in some shit apartment. Cars are expensive, and you've got to park them somewhere, and that makes them a nuisance. You have to pay for a

whole day, park twenty blocks away, and remember where it's at when you're done. If you drink a lot, there's exactly no reason, not even one, to own a car in a big city."

"That makes sense when you say it." I light my own cigarette with a match, toss it into the gutter. "So, how much for a cab if we share? I got a cab from the airport yesterday and it was kind of pricey."

"Well, probably $10 or $15. Let's walk down to the payphone."

"Sure, that sounds good. So, besides working at Shorty's, what do you two do?"

Jasmine answers first, "I'm an artist. I've got a couple paintings in a gallery downtown, not a big one or anything, but also not one owned by the Seattle Art Institute either."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It's a pricey institute, so there's a lot of mediocre art. I mean, when was the last time you heard about any major artist coming out of Seattle?"

"What about that Chihuly guy? Blows glass or something, I've seen these crazy looking glass flowers somewhere."

Jasmine steals Hannah's cigarette and lights one of her own as we arrive at the phone booth. Hannah digs a few quarters out of her pocket and grabs a dirty-looking black phone drilled into the side of a concrete building, covered with chewing gum in a rough bullseye pattern.

Jasmine inadvertently blows smoke in my face. As she's fanning it, she says, "I knew you were going to say Chihuly. That's exactly it. Seattle's known for music but not art, which really means that almost all the art that comes out of the Seattle Art Institute is mediocre. But the parents pay a lot of money, or people work two or three extra jobs, and they want something, everyone wants some kind of recognition. The Institute buys gallery space within a mile of the

campus, and displays almost everything, all in one shot."

Hannah hangs up the phone, "Yeah, like a vanity press. Cab's on the way."

"So, I don't even go to the Institute, and I got some of my stuff up in this little gallery, and I'm excited, it's like a big fuck-you to all the people who thought I would fail."

I laugh inadvertently. "Seems like those big red cherries tattooed on your collarbones are a pretty big f-you."

Hannah sits down on a black iron bench. "Everybody rebels. I guess I just hate the sullen ones. You know the ones that think the world is all some kind of conspiracy theory." There's construction across the street, rubble in a pit half-a-block long contained by a sloppy fence. A darkened crane dominates.

"Yeah, people are kind of creepy sometimes. I knew this one guy, Zack, he thought all the world was being controlled by a race of lizard people. I told him that he was really just remembering that old TV show *V*. He didn't believe me."

"How does that even happen? How could he take a television program and internalize it to the point that it became a belief? I mean, why are humans even susceptible to that kind of stuff?" I plop down too, a roll of sock flops out over my dirty black shoes. A dull wound in the center of my arch throbs.

Hannah says, "Television's been around long enough that a few really smart people manipulate information. For whatever reason, it seems to work better when it's presented as entertainment. So, instead of taking a history class on the Vietnam War, people watch *Full Metal Jacket*. What they see becomes a weird . . ." she circles her right hand around in the air, searching for an explanation, "kind of like, acceptable account of fictional history." She pauses, looking for support, but both Jasmine and I are just listening. "I don't know.

That's my theory. If you're asking why it works on the brain, then I have no idea." She shrugs, stands, stubs out her cigarette in the chewing gum bullseye and looks down the street.

Jasmine shuffles her feet and yawns. The air billows in chill gusts as cars pass. I make a pass at stubbing out my cigarette in the wall of fame, squishing into a pink and black Hubba Bubba daisy chain. A taxi driver pulls up, looks at us through the passenger window. The walls of the city climb steep and dark into the sky. We pile in, directions are given.

4:12 AM. The lights pass in the window, reflecting backwards and forwards, upside down and right side up at the same time. Hannah and Jasmine talk in the back seat about someone I don't know named Kenji. The cab driver looks annoyed that I'm riding shotgun, doesn't make eye contact while whipping his head around in traffic and changing lanes. He hits the gas, swerves, steps on the brakes, all while listening to Boston on what looks like a handheld cassette player hooked to the stereo through thin black cords plugged into the cigarette lighter. I stare out the window until Hannah gets dropped off in Capitol Hill. Jasmine rubs her eyes, carefully, around a nose piercing and an eyebrow piercing, one silver, one black. I look up from the side mirror, wave goodbye. Hannah passes me a five through the window. She walks towards a brick building painted over with faded yellow and beige, peeling around the windows.

What a day. I can't believe I passed out. Jasmine is cute. I wonder what her art looks like, probably something scary mixed with something innocent looking, like maybe a teddy bear wearing a Joanie Loves Chachi shirt while carving up a deer carcass or something with a bread knife; re-empowering cartoon characters with their natural ferocity, or something. Hell, it could be square-shaped polka dots riding camels through Lake Superior for all I know. I can't believe

Clint didn't wake me up when they left. Weird. I bet he got drunk and forgot. Oh, wait, I bet he went to his class and then went straight home. Fuck. Phil and Bob don't even know me well enough to care. Jesus, Phil can really drink. What a character, what a laugh he's got. I've got to play more pinball tomorrow, but only after I get a bath somewhere and take off into downtown on my own.

"Hey, Jack. Or is it Jake?"

"It's Jack."

"I get off up here, and you're not getting off with me. You still got several miles to go. You care if I skip out on the cab fare? I only got big bills, and nowhere to change them."

I must be pretty easy to read. Big city bad girl thinks I'll pay for her. I guess I might as well though.

"Yeah, sure."

"Thanks. I'll see you tomorrow; get you a couple free beers or something."

"See you later."

The cabbie scoffs at me, just barely under his breath as one epic guitar ballad comes to an end and the tape stops. "So where you going?"

The meter's already at twelve bucks. I take out the slip of paper, start yawning, and hold it up in front of him, tendons stretching. He nods, still doesn't make eye contact, and takes off into traffic while flipping the tape.

"It's weird that there's traffic, but there's almost no one on the streets." Why am I talking to this guy?

"Huh?"

"Nothing, forget it."

We drive in silence. The train yards are lit up brighter than any of the skyscrapers. We drive over, city on the left, but I don't feel like

looking past this guy's face, so I stare at the glove box. It's boring. In front of Clint's apartment facility, I pop out, throw a twenty on the seat and shut the door, walking slightly downhill on a cobblestone sidewalk up to the entrance and buzz.

It takes a few minutes. I walk out to look up at the window. Dark. I buzz again. Nothing. I step back out, examining the stones on the wall leading up to his second-story balcony. It's only ten feet. I wedge a toe, grab an edge, pull my legs up, grab the bar, and hoist myself over. The sliding glass door is open. I go to walk in but my shirt is caught on the railing. It pops, tears and I fall in a clumsy pile on the same floor that left welts on my face earlier. Phil jumps up from the couch, flips the light on, hand on a crude machete wrapped in blue tape, sees my face, and starts laughing.

"Dude. You got wasted tonight. Fastest I've seen anyone get so drunk."

"Yeah. I didn't really eat anything all day."

"You gonna stand up or what?"

"I don't know, maybe. It's not too bad down here."

"Alright man, see you in the morning."

As he shuts out the light, I decide to get up, ditch my backpack in the hall entrance, take my shoes and socks off and dig around in the closet for a blanket. "Hey Phil, you want to share a pillow, maybe some blankets or something?"

"Sure. Here you go." He flings some stuff on the ground. The couch squeaks. I go down on my knees, rolling over, wrestling to get under a thin blanket, thankful for a pillow, and wipe out hard, drooling even before I'm fully asleep.

Karee Garvin

Ars Poetica: My Ink

When my blade touches ice
you are nothing but slick
as a red balloon bobbing
beyond my grasp. As if
you were a chapstick tube
resting on a high shelf
and when I reach
you roll. When I grab your picture
you ripple. And I can't skate
any better than I could order
wine for the first time in that lounge
off the main street
of town with the dim blue lights
filtering onto ash
colored tables and my menu.
Or any better than I first date.

But you have scissored your way out.
You have inked onto my paper and now,

you are that same red balloon bobbing,
buoyant and full till I press you
to paper. Then you deflate, flat
as the world view pre-1492,
flat as a sixteenth birthday
party which should have been
sweet as pink

candles lit bright.
But instead you are teenage acne.
You are my spilled ink.

Joanna Cleveland

Party in My Body

Acrylic, vinyl on canvas

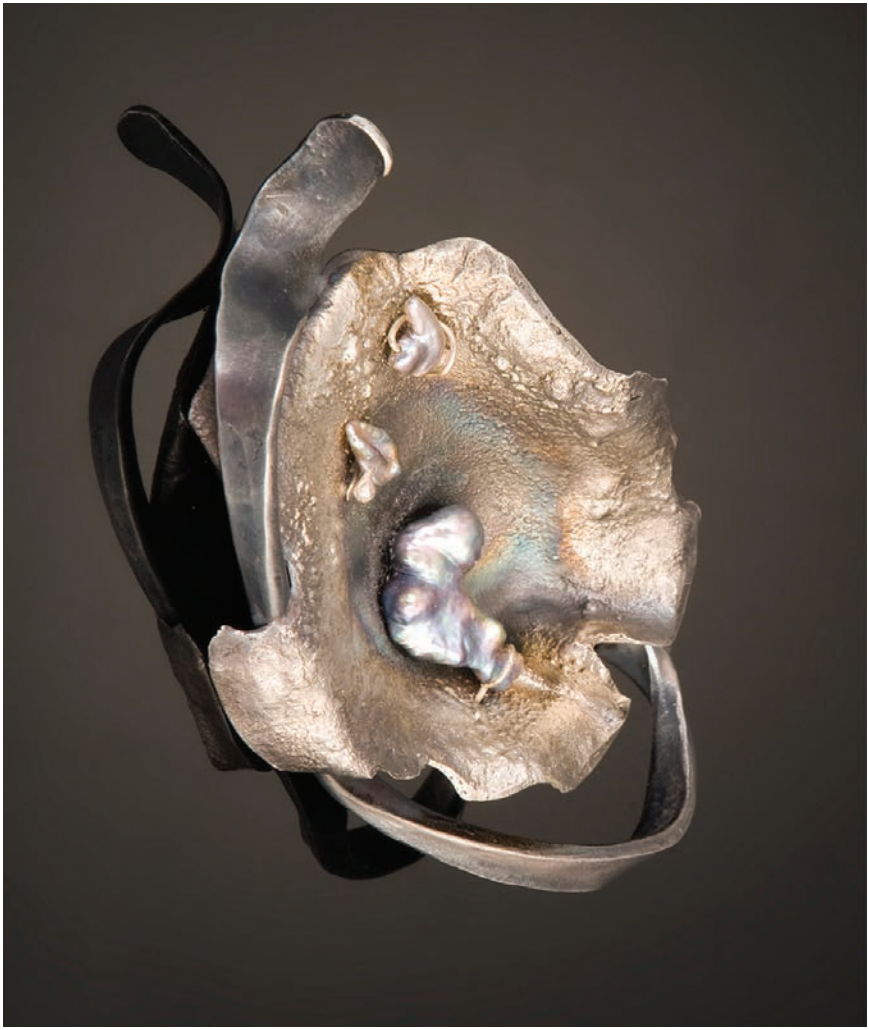
Alina Bonci

Bright Webs

Digital photography

Kierstin Smothermon

Untitled



Pendant created from reticulated silver, forged silver wire, liver of sulfur patina, iridescent keshi fresh water pearls

Catherine Reinhardt

Re-collect

Mixed media on paper

Tracy Eastman

Restraint

Cattle markers, oil pastels, crayons, markers on paper

Kim Khan

Dyad

Digital photography with image editing

Nikcole King

Solstice

Acrylic on paper

Adam Clegg

The Paths of My Ancestors

Created in ESRI's ArcGIS 10

Lyndsey Barnes

Hover

Acrylic on canvas

Dustin Hinton

Divide I

Charcoal, graphite, acrylic, latex paint, vinyl on panel

Tyler Chadwick

Wayplace

at the city's limit,
straddling the hill
Elder Chris could

barely manage
without getting off
to walk. Not tourist.

Not sea-veined kiwi.
Something between.
Though standing

ten years distant
from this photo, I'd
call you foreign. Alien.

Vagrant from a self
Time surreptitiously
forgot. It's not

the slacks, the tie,
the shirt sleeves. Not
the name badge, words

white on black on white,
or the bag straps heavy
as a parachute harness

on your shoulders.
Not even your unnatural
lean against the pole's

lean, legs cropped at
the knee by the photo's
edge, or the gestures

you've twisted around
each hand: right arm
square to the abdomen,

pinkie and thumb hung
loose from your fist,
left hand timid toward

sky, index finger raised,
set to punctuate
the Give Way sign overhead.

But how your smile of a pose
says anything but content.
How your paper-thin passions

betray the burn
of breaking in new skin.
How you eventually

carved "Body + Pushbike"

in the pole then pedaled
after cloudfire

until it seared your veins
like the opening phrase
of apocalypse.

—From a photo taken January 1999 in Henderson, Auckland, New Zealand

Mitch Christensen

Lunch Time

We are sitting in math class, and I mention Coltor owes me money. Coltor says he's hungry for Chinese food. Hayden and I agree. Then we realize something very important: we can have it. But I still want to know where my money is. Coltor owes me four dollars, and Hayden owes Coltor ten, so Coltor says to get my money from Hayden. I call Austin to see if he wants to go. He wants to go to a different Chinese restaurant at first, but the one we want to go to is cheaper and closer. We get out of our next hour; Coltor has release time. Hayden is a student aid. Austin and I have seminary. Hayden is the only one who has to call his mom to check him out of school. Then we are free.

On the way, Hayden realizes he forgot to put gas in his car when his engine stops running. We get out and push while Hayden steers. I think it weird that when a car runs out of gas, the person that neglected putting in fuel never has to push. I voice this observation as I push, and Hayden apologizes, then brake checks us.

A couple minutes after Hayden begins to push, a homeless man starts to follow us. He asks for money. Hayden says he would give him some, but that he owes Coltor and me money. We say we would give him some, but Hayden hasn't paid us yet. Austin gives him ten.

We finally arrive in the big, purple car at New Hong Kong, where they give us free egg drop soup. The waitress walks by, and Coltor asks if she will refill his water. She does, and then we laugh at Coltor for not realizing there is a pitcher of water on our table. When the waitress comes back, we order. We talk about nothing extensively until the food comes. Then someone mentions covering M-80s in Cheese-Wiz and feeding them to fish. Then someone mentions going to Lake Powell for our Senior Sneak. I hate the term "senior sneak."

It has too many "s" sounds and high-pitched syllables. We all agree it would be awesome to get twenty people to pay for a week on a houseboat. We dedicate ourselves to making it happen, though I see many problems and know it most likely will not work out. The fortune cookies come, along with the check. Austin's says he will come upon some unexpected money. Hayden gives him ten dollars. Now Austin owes me four and Coltor six. The hobo owes Austin nothing.

Jeff Pearson

To Reading, (Pennsylvania) with Ease

With holes in the walls,
the outside can be clear
and filled up with glue and
plaster covered by picture frames;
the month of May, you will stop on all the white lines.

Wallace Stevens' house looks like anyone else's house.
Wallace Stevens would like a hot dog from Rejinaldo
in front of the state house on 425 Cherry (pronounced
Jerry).

Forget about drying off
with the towel from the flooded toilet.

Forget about dead relatives.

Forget all around you.

Forgive all around you.

The recycled cords from old televisions become placed
into a garbage sack, recycled at the outsider recycling place
because the inside-city one pays little to the crackheads,
and become my son's pineapple juice.

I have just become upper-middleclass.
I have just become ransomed by a security system company.

The settled down eyes stop focusing and just drive:
the sensitive little things see headlights. Left out
from the living race home. The speaker offered up all
belongings in an attempt at love. Asleep underneath
a grate-like bench in an old goggle factory turned into an
art center.

There needs to be something concise about my first day
drilling holes throughout the city of Reading.

Melinda Evans

Day is Done

Winter evenings come early to Calais, Maine. By four o'clock the sun is low on the horizon, and long shadows stretch over the snow, laying their gray shroud across the northern landscape. At four-thirty, the last dying colors of the sunset bury themselves deep in the tomb of another long winter night. These early nights bring behind them even earlier mornings, and the constant ebb and flow of snowy time in the northeast gives to late January a quiet sort of peacefulness, a rhythm that Lillian Stowe only really stopped to notice on Sabbath.

Lillian loved Friday night. It was her favorite out of the entire week. The night before the last day, the Sabbath, brought an end to another lived week. She saw it as a sort of farewell, a closing chapter at the end of everything. But it was also a beginning. On this night her family welcomed in the Sabbath, the day they believed afforded them a closer walk with God. A day when His presence pulled in close to the earth, embraced them, and blessed their worship. Lillian would pull her family around her at their kitchen table for a candlelit supper of steaming soup and fresh bread. They bowed their heads, hands clasped in a circle, and as Grey's strong voice led the family prayer, she had often opened her eyes to watch the flickering light cast her children's faces in a glowing bronze. This was a holy night. And for Lillian, it had been everything. Everything that mattered.

She began preparing the Friday evening meal on Thursday when she floured the counter and rolled out dough for bread. Then, before she went to bed, Lillian poured beans into a dish and covered them with water to soak overnight.

Friday dawned with the buzz of vacuuming, dusting, and laundry until Grey came in for lunch to a house that smelled of lemons and detergent. The beans simmered all afternoon, the garlic and spices sending a savory aroma around the kitchen while she worked on cooking the rest of the family's Sabbath meals. When the children returned from school, they were sent to tidy their rooms, take baths, and at seven o'clock the Stowe family sat down to dinner.

But outside of Lillian's memories, that night no longer existed. On this Friday night, it was mostly just very quiet. There were no children. There was no chatter about the week's activities, and the soup she put out for Grey and herself had been unthawed from a batch she made three weeks ago. After supper they no longer went into the living room to light candles and sing around the piano. He no longer read stories to the kids, and they no longer knelt together for family prayer before bed. On this night, Grey was half hidden behind a newspaper and Lillian was watching snow tumble down from the tall blue spruce trees in a white veil—blown free by the northeast wind—while one cat sat on her lap and another stretched out across her feet.

The only thing that had not changed about Friday was the preparation of her Sabbath casserole. In the kitchen, on the top shelf of the refrigerator, covered in aluminum foil, sat the Special K loaf she would take to church potluck tomorrow. Behind Friday night with her family, potluck was the next best thing. Potluck was where Lillian took her otherwise silent show of kitchen-bound domesticity live. That was where Grey had first known he loved her, watching her at a church potluck the summer they were nineteen—her easy conversations with everyone, from the elderly head deacon Jerry to little Samantha, who always colored her a new picture during church that she would keep in her Bible for the rest of the week. Of course, Samantha was a nurse in Houston now and Jerry had long since passed away and left

it to younger men to carry on his duties. But the change of names and faces didn't really change the potluck. It was still her time to talk with the Martins, squeeze Grandma Leah's hand, and show the Headley twins how to smear peanut butter on pinecones, roll them in seeds, and hang them on trees for the birds.

But, and she would never admit this out loud, her favorite part of potluck was the casserole. Every week she put the bulk of her Friday afternoon efforts into chopping, dicing, shredding, and assembling the ingredients for the pride she found in presenting another mouth-watering dish to the potluck table. When she first married Grey, he used to say that she could make a casserole out of everything, from breakfast cereal to old tires, and he was almost right. Every week, loaf after loaf, Grey carried her blue and white casserole dish into the church kitchen, and by the end of potluck the contents had always disappeared. This morning she began working on her Special K loaf as soon as she finished putting a load of sheets into the washing machine. She had chopped an onion, put it into a large glass bowl, and added cashew meal, cottage cheese, Special K cereal, margarine, and seasoning before breaking four eggs into a smaller bowl and whisking them into a foamy yellow that continued to spin around the imagined whisk in the eggs' memory even after she had rinsed and laid the tool into the sink. She added the eggs to the rest of the mix and drew a large wooden spoon from the drawer. She stood over the bowl, stirred it rapidly with the spoon, and noticed, as she often did, the way her breasts swung side to side with the rhythm of her work.

She thought it was sort of funny the way she hardly noticed her breasts at all anymore except when she was cooking. They had fed her children, that was sure, and it made her wonder if all women noticed their breasts when they prepared food.

The wind outside blew the bird feeder back and forth in front

of the living room window and Lillian watched snow and the crisp, empty seed casings fall quietly to the ground. At nine-thirty, like so many Friday nights before, Grey lowered his paper to his lap, asked Lillian if she was ready for bed, and winked. It was his favorite Friday night tradition.

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Lillian missed Grey's sermon. She usually did. She had never been all that comfortable in the front row, listening with undying attention like the other pastors' wives she knew. She hated feeling trapped in front of everyone, forced to sit still and be quiet while the eyes of the church bored into the back of her head. It was too much pressure and not what church was about for her. For Lillian, church was about family. Although her children had grown through the Sabbath school classes, moving from felt boards to Bible sword drills to guitar-backed Singperation, she still felt like she belonged most in the cradle roll and mother's room. She would rock babies, take the younger children outside to hunt for bugs, or chat with another mother at the end of a lonely week. This Sabbath she saw a need to sit in the empty cradle roll room with Ruthie and her two children. Ruthie's oldest was less than two years old, so Lillian held the squirming boy on her lap while Ruthie nursed her newborn.

Lillian knew how hard it was with two small children—her own kids were born only fifteen months apart, and if it hadn't been for the waiting arms and laps of the ladies at her husband's first church, she might never have survived.

When church ended and members started spilling out into the foyer, Lillian held on to Seth, not wanting to hand the child to his father until she absolutely had to. After what felt to Lillian like too short an hour out of the week to experience the joy of holding a

child—only the space of her husband's sermon—she kissed the boy's head and passed him to his dad, her fingers lingering on the child's small foot until the pair walked away. Her hands fell limply to her lap and she sat there, dumbly, feeling a faint ache in her chest for another child to hold, for another hour blessed with the sweet chatter of a toddler.

Lillian rose and folded the small quilt she had been holding on her lap. She walked through the room, sliding her fingers over the edge of a crib and the back of an empty rocking chair, then hung the quilt over its wooden spindle next to the other blankets and afghans. She switched the light off and stood for a minute, imagining the room filled with small children, barely able to hold onto their rainbow flags as the teachers tried to teach them to sing praise songs. She began to walk down the hall and past the mother's room when she noticed a scattering of forgotten toys strewn across the floor and stopped to straighten the room so it would be ready for the next week. She put blocks and dolls into a large basket in the corner and arranged the stuffed animals inside the crib. Holding one of the bears, she sat down in the old cherry wood rocking chair and began to softly sing a quiet lullaby.

Her fingers played unconsciously in the twists and threads of the afghan that sat folded over the arm of the chair, and she thought about the weeks she had spent back in this room with her own babies: her children and then the children of other mothers. She sat there for a long time before standing and leaving the teddy bear in her place. She caught her reflection briefly in the glass and straightened her hair before heading to the fellowship hall to join the church at potluck.

Grey caught Lillian's eyes from the other side of the room almost immediately. He grinned that goofy smile that always made her feel like they were nineteen again, standing out behind the church

eating watermelon after potluck and spitting seeds into the stony churchyard. He pulled out the chair next to him, and put his arm around her shoulder after she sat down.

"Want some food? Sit still for a minute while I go fill your plate."

Grey went to the table while Lillian chatted politely with those around her. Not fully free of the loneliness that had been plaguing her, she felt as though her face was smiling and talking automatically, while inside she felt small, insignificant, like her presence was a waste. Grey came back, and she remembered the Special K loaf she had made on Friday. Finally, here was the last of her efforts, her contribution to this meal and this gathering of family and friends. At least she could still prepare a meal and feed the people she loved.

Lillian held the plate in front of her for a moment looking at it.

"Is something wrong?" asked Grey.

"This doesn't look like my casserole."

"Sure it is. It's from your dish."

She took a small bite, tasting it for a minute before swallowing. "No, this really isn't my casserole."

Lillian stood up and walked into the kitchen with Grey close behind. There, in the top half of a naval orange box left over from the church school's winter fundraiser was her casserole. Cold. Covered in plastic wrap and aluminum foil. Unnoticed by the crew of deaconesses who warmed and set out the food after church, sat her carefully prepared Special K loaf. Wasted. A sudden heat pressed against the back of her eyes, and tears almost instantly broke away and slid down her cheeks.

"Oh, it's just all wasted," she cried. "It was all a waste."

"No." Grey put his arm around her back and pulled her close. "It's not wasted, we'll take it home, it's okay."

"Didn't you see?" she asked tearfully. "Didn't you see that it wasn't on the table?"

He cleared his throat.

"No. I saw your dish. That's all."

She instinctively walked to the sink, washed her hands, reached into her purse and drew out a tissue to wipe her nose. "Oh, I'm so silly." She choked out a tight laugh. "It's just a casserole. It doesn't matter."

Grey reached out and pushed a curl back from her face and kissed her cheek.

"I wanna go home, Grey. I'm so tired. It's been a long day. Can we go home?"

"Of course."

He reached down and lifted up the box. "I'll take this out and bring the car up to the door," he said. "The parking lot is pretty slick."

Lillian dried her hands on a checkered towel, wiped her nose, and tucked the tissue into the pocket of her skirt. She turned just as Ruthie entered the kitchen holding an empty blue and white casserole dish.

"It was your dish?" Lillian asked. She cleared her throat quietly, "Oh look, and it's all gone." She tried to force out a smile.

Ruthie laughed with an open warmth that caught Lillian by the chest and backed her into the stove where she gripped the oven door behind her. She felt betrayed by the young mother who so easily smiled and laughed, while she choked back the misery of her wasted effort.

"I know—it looks so much like yours. Steve knew how much I wanted a bigger dish, 'specially now that I have to start cooking for a family every night. I guess he figured if he bought one like yours maybe I'd start cookin' like you."

Ruthie's wide smile made Lillian feel like an icy hand was clawing up her back, reaching for her neck, and preparing to wring it like a ragged old dish towel.

"You have to cook for a family now? Oh, of course." The tears she had been holding back erupted into a sudden sob, "You have a beautiful family. Mine is all grown and gone. I hardly even cook now except for potluck. It's just Grey and me."

"Lil, are you alright?" Ruthie stepped forward and put a hand on her shoulder. "Is everything okay?"

"I'm fine, dear." Lillian straightened and shook her head. "I'm fine. Just tired. And sometimes I just miss my children is all. After the holidays most." She reached up and wiped her eyes with her tissue. "It's so wonderful when the house is full and loud and I have so many hungry mouths to cook for."

"Oh, but how nice that you and Grey have time to spend together now," Ruthie exclaimed. "How nice that you can live like newlyweds again, without babies wailin' and disturbin' the quiet nights."

Lillian felt a hard rock fall against her stomach and took a deep breath. "You're right. I know. It just takes getting used to."

Ruthie gave her a hug. "Happy Sabbath, Lil," she said softly.

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The setting sun's long red fingers were already stretching across the sky when Grey and Lillian pulled into their driveway and switched off the car's headlights. Grey reached for his Bible in the backseat before rounding the front of the car to open Lillian's door. She gripped his arm as they moved slowly down the icy walk to the front porch, their breath forming misty clouds that spun and ran

toward the sky. Indoors, Grey turned up the thermostat and left Lillian alone in the kitchen while he changed his clothes. She stayed in her coat, staring out the window over the sink. Her mind drifted through memories of her children, of their birthdays, graduations, and marriages and landed on a memory she held of Grey coming inside on summer afternoons, grimy from mowing the lawn and sneaking up behind her when she was washing dishes. He wrapped his arms around her waist and kissed her neck while she breathed in the aroma of sweat and cut grass. She let out a long sigh and the corners of her mouth turned up into a smile. Their future would be fine. She could focus on him now. She could stop mothering. She would have energy for her own desires. They might travel. She would add more flowers to her garden in the spring and finish pasting her dusty boxes of old pictures into photo albums. She would organize. She would start tomorrow by cleaning all the extra Tupperware with no lids, broken rims, and stained bottoms out of the cupboard. Then she would cook. Just for her and Grey. She'd make a new dish from one of the ethnic cookbooks her daughter kept giving her.

The casserole!

She remembered it suddenly and rushed to the door to bring it in from the cold before it froze. The ice was slick underfoot and she gingerly stepped across it toward the trunk of the car. The naval orange box was too big for her to carry on the ice and she knew it, but she carefully lifted out the casserole, cradling the dish in her left arm while she closed the trunk. She had to look. She needed to see it, the wasted casserole, her silly obsession with cooking for other families besides what was left of her own. She lifted off the aluminum foil and laid it on top of the closed trunk. It was a beautiful casserole. Perfectly golden with just enough crispy edge to accommodate plenty of gooey center pieces. She leaned her head towards it, closed her eyes, and

took a long deep breath. It smelled wonderful. She lifted her head, opened her eyes, and found herself staring into a brilliant sunset of reds and purples, streaked with orange. Sabbath was ending and tomorrow would be a new week. A new week. And a new Lillian.

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She turned to go inside, but as she did her left toe slid sharply on a patch of ice and she lost her balance. Gripping the edge of the dish with the same sudden ache of desperation she had felt when she had to hand Seth back to his father, Lillian could not force her fingers free in this last quick moment and felt herself falling forward, out of control. Her forehead struck the edge of the dish, the force of the fall knocking her unconscious. Lillian's face landed in the casserole, its creamy golden center oozing up into her nose, mouth, and eyes.

Grey discovered her like that less than ten minutes later when he emerged from the bedroom and realized she was missing. He called for her, and when the thought of her forgotten loaf crashed into his chest like an icy brick he rushed outside, his screams for her echoing across the frozen expanse of snowy farmland. He rolled her over to find her mouth wide open in alarm, and held her hand, instinctively stroking her hair as though this last gesture would give her some comfort in her death. Tears cascading down his rough cheeks, Grey found himself still sitting there when the ambulance arrived, his mouth forming the quiet words to his wife's favorite lullaby, "All is well, safely rest, God is nigh."

The coroner gave the official cause of death as suffocation, but Lillian's plain tombstone said simply: "Lillian Martha Stowe, Mother."

Jeff Pearson

Yard Work

The two buckets to be filled
were stuck together, but the snow
didn't care. I piled the woodchips
created by the service of the missionaries
from my mom's backyard into the garbage.

The last chore my dad and I did together was
replace the washer and dryer.
I unburied the old washer and dryer from the
snow on the deck.
Do I just throw the washer off the edge of
the truck bed? Dump it into the metal section
of the dump? Instead of a possible detour:
fill the washer with gasoline and toss it
off the black canyon bridge.

My mom disappears every couple of days.
"I go to the land of my dear."
She spaces off with the sporadic Idaho weather.

The missionaries are only allowed in if a male is
here. So mostly they have to do yard work.
They work the hammer of an ax hitting a log
the way my dad split firewood.
Branches of fallen winter trees are islands in the yard.

I raked leaves with a flat head shovel

and piled them in a bucket. Spilled the filled bucket
over the fence into the black spraypainted garbage can
black with remnant stencils of some of my favorite bands from 3 years
ago on the lid until it overflowed.

I still remember the treasure map I made on
orange cloth with a black sharpie that bled
the dotted paces together so I couldn't dig
up the Delaware state quarters then my brother
volunteered his new metal detector to find the
treasure and we dug up the mud-covered coins.

Bill Chalmers

Down and Out in Dorset

BR&S Prose Contest Winner

When you drive down to the coastal resort town of Weymouth, a straight shot due south from Dorchester, past the stepped earthen walls of England's largest hill fort, Maiden Castle—a thriving little community when the Romans invaded Britain—you come to the edge of the plain and overlook the sweeping sand beach of Weymouth Bay, Portland Bay, and Portland Island. The island is connected to the mainland by a long neck of land, from which Chesil Beach, an improbable eighteen-mile-long pebble beach, sweeps away to the west along the English Channel towards Cornwall. It is a lovely, dramatic sight, and takes no act of imagination to understand why King George III chose to spend his summers here and why generations of holiday-makers have been doing the same ever since. The sweeping sand beach of Weymouth Bay and the long shallows and the walk along the Esplanade, past tea shops and gift shops, are still big draws.

Weymouth Beach is heavily populated from the first warm days of May to late September. The punters stake out little plots of land in the English tradition, with portable fences made of cheaply woven nylon and wooden stakes, to colonize their bits of beach as they make their holidays. Along the top end of the beach, next to the promenade, the commercial stands are set up for the duration of the tourist season—heavy wooden timbers are laid in the sand to act as footings and plywood shops are erected in order to vend buckets and spades, ice cream and sweets and, of course, fish and chips. These seasonal shops hold long-standing leases on the beach and are significant sources of income for the leaseholders.

Tim slept beside the crematorium last night. No, it wasn't

warm—no fire, no body in the furnace. It rained most of the night, as it is wont to do in English coastal towns, and he shivered as he pressed himself against the cinderblock walls to avoid the steady drip from the eaves. His girlfriend's mother wouldn't let him stay because it would jeopardize her benefits if the Council found out. This morning he's as desperate as I've seen him, having used up all of his credit with the Council's housing authority. There are few resources left that I can draw upon for him now, beyond the hope of kindness and compassion from someone—anyone—with a roof and a room.

Tim is a scrawny guy with straight blond hair that he keeps flipping out of his eyes. He looks much younger than his age, which seems to be one of the things that causes problems for him. His mood is always either one of unstoppable confidence or bitter despair, blaming everyone/thing for his troubles. When he's up, his sharp blue eyes and cockiness can be charming and engaging. He has troubles, though. The stories he tells me of his family—mom in Weston Super Mare, dad nearby in Littlemoor—are convoluted and confusing, so it is difficult for me to get it straight. His mom has been the main caregiver in his life—though with some dysfunctional episodes, he reports—but for some reason he wants to be near to his dad who has never, it sounds, had much time for or interest in him. Tim had his own place for a while, a decent little Council flat up on Broadwey Close in Littlemoor with a remodeled kitchen. Near his dad but not too near. That place was trashed by Tim's friends and needs a complete remodel.

I have helped Tim obtain housing too many times now, and every time it goes pear-shaped, and he ends up back on the street, sleeping rough on someone's couch or, as he did last night, hunkering down in the rain next to the crematorium. The Council, my employer, isn't willing to offer him anything else; he's barely managing to hang

on to his JSA benefit, the "Jobseeker's Allowance" that requires that he maintain the appearance of an active job search, and he frequently borrows against the next payday. It's a steady downward spiral that, remarkably, he manages to pull out of every now and then—dad gives him twenty quid; Helen and Jeffrey lend him a fiver or tenner—only to begin the cycle again.

One of the longest-standing presences on Weymouth's beach is a tiny red-and-white-striped hut that houses Professor of Punch Mark Poulton's puppetry stage. Only one show is ever played upon this tiny stage: "The Comical Tragedy of Mr. Punch," more commonly known as "Punch and Judy." It is the longest running show in the world. The first performance in London's Covent Garden was recorded by Samuel Pepys on May 9, 1662, and the show has run continuously—every summer on the beach—in Weymouth since 1880.

Mr. Higgins has been performing on the Weymouth beach since 1974, which is still not as long as Frank Edmunds, who held the lease from 1925 to 1967. Mr. Higgins gave it up in 2005 and was succeeded by Mark Poulton, the latest in a long line of Professors of Punch in Weymouth. Poulton's show is one of the few remaining beach performances of Punch and Judy in the country.

The housing legislation in England, though well intentioned, has not been able to keep pace with the need in many parts of the country, Dorset leading among them. It's ironic that in this resort town, with hundreds of bed and breakfast rooms vacant much of the year, there is precious little appropriate housing for sixteen and seventeen year olds, which it is my job to find. Bed and breakfast rooms, I can assure you, are not appropriate for teenagers: the rooms are isolating; the only meal provided, breakfast, is usually served too

early for teenagers; and there are no cooking facilities (assuming one even knows how to cook). Most kids are unemployed and not in school, which means they tend to stay up late, have friends to their rooms and disturb other guests and landlords. Regardless, we frequently have to place young people in bed and breakfasts because it is often all that is available, and the more tolerant landlords see it as a source of steady income, particularly in the off season. But it has a predictably short lifespan for most individuals. My role is frequently one of diplomacy: removing the young person, providing assurance that we will select more carefully next time, and hoping the landlord agrees to future placements. And then I try to find another place for the kid to stay.

Andy is sixteen and like a big puppy dog. But with drug and medication issues. He rides a BMX bike and is often waiting on the sidewalk in front of my office when I arrive in the morning. My colleagues tell me that sometimes he will stand outside and call for me when I'm not there. I think he thinks I can save him from whatever it is he needs saving from. He's a nice kid, but he's not always the same kid—his personality fluctuates or goes AWOL on him from time to time. When he's around I do what I can for him, which never seems to be enough, before he goes off the radar again.

He's a stocky lad, with short-cropped reddish hair and pale blue eyes—the stereotypical Irish ancestry visible in his complexion, square jaw, and bulldog face. He sees his dad once a week or so, and his dad gives him money and checks that Andy is taking his meds. I never hear much about his mother. Andy is fond of smoking pot, which in itself is not life-destroying, but it is incompatible with the medication they have him on. He navigates a fine line between taking the edge off with a few tokes and removing the edge so completely that

there's nothing to keep him within himself. He is in and out of the hospital.

At the Portland Island end of Chesil Beach—a shingle barrier known by geologists as a tombolo—the pebbles are the size of new potatoes; at the Abbotsbury end, eighteen miles to the west, the pebbles are pea-sized. The south coast of England has a long history of smuggling, and it is said that smugglers could tell where on the eighteen-mile continuum of the beach they had landed, at night, by the size of the pebbles. The noise from the waves working the pebbles of the shingle is incessant, and it is also said that on certain still nights it can be heard all the way up in Dorchester, five miles inland. (I live much closer to the beach than Dorchester and never heard it, but it makes for good press, I suppose.) This is not a beach for swimming; the east end of the beach is steep and drops off quickly into waters worked by the currents of the English Channel, as well as the curling undertow created by the waves as they trundle along the gravel shore. At the water's edge the steep pebble surface is unstable and gives way beneath your feet; it's almost like trying to walk in mud except it is steep, and the waves crash and dump and keep the pebbles rolling and grinding beneath your feet. A few swimmers are lost here each summer.

Behind Chesil Beach lies The Fleet, a brackish lagoon nearly the length of the beach, which provides protected waters for wading birds and wildlife, including the royal swans of Abbotsbury. The Fleet was used for machine gun training in WWII and is where the bouncing bombs were tested for Operation Chastise. Exploded and unexploded munitions are still unearthed frequently as tangible evidence of the war.

One of the other things Weymouth is known for is the wind.

Sailboard speed records have been set here. The colorful chutes of parasailors swoop and dive alongside you as you drive, and the sailors dangle above the water as they are lifted by wind-filled swatches of nylon and Kevlar when they change their tack. The grey prison ship, moored on the south side of the bay and home to some 300 prisoners, offers a sobering visual contrast to the colorful sails that spin and dive.

Chelsea is also sixteen, and a Brummie, which is what you call a person from Birmingham. (Birmingham used to be something of an industrial backwater and so is looked down upon by non-Brummies.) It's still true that your accent gives away your heritage in this country, and you are judged by it. Chelsea's heritage and accent are Brummie—think Ozzy Osbourne without the substance-induced slur. When I meet her she has been living with the mother of a girlfriend for about six months and, after a fallingout, has been given notice to leave. Chelsea is sweet and cheerful—big, brown eyes and bright smile—and working hard to make things work. A visit with her never fails to be a bright spot in my day. Her mother can't take her back because she (her mother) lives in a two-bedroom flat with two boys at home still and is pregnant with her fourth. The Council is obliged to house Chelsea, fortunately for her, and, even more fortunately, there is a flat available at precisely the moment she is at the top of the list. We find some charity funds to buy her some pieces of used furniture and help her move in. She finds part-time work at the nearby grocery store, and, except for a few mild bouts of depression—usually brought on by her boyfriend's letters from prison—she manages to cobble things together for herself, for a while.

Council housing, if you've never heard of it, is housing owned by the local Council—city or municipal government—and provided for

people who qualify for subsidized "rent." Typically, the flats are built in rows of identical brick, narrow and tall, sharing common walls, and they are old. Just like in the pictures. I have visited homes that still have no central heat source beyond a gas fireplace. The modern places have radiators installed in every room. "The damp," as it is called, is persistent and insidious, and there seems to be an epidemic of eczema and chronic coughing here.

The housing legislation also has a provision for young people—sixteen and seventeen year olds specifically—where, under a certain set of conditions, they must be provided with suitable accommodation. The problem for too many young people is that some parents think they can, and do, kick the kid out when he or she turns sixteen and fully expect the Council to house their child. (I had one mother tell me, months in advance, that the day her daughter turned sixteen she would be dropping her off at my office. True to her word, the woman showed up with her daughter in tow, bag packed, on the girl's sixteenth birthday. That one broke my heart.) My job is to negotiate with parents to keep kids at home, or get them back into their family homes. When this fails, as it too often does, I try to find them suitable accommodation—"suitable" being the operative term here. For all the bravado some of the teenagers present with, only a very few of them have any clue about how to maintain any sort of independent living arrangement.

Geordie is bound for self-destruction. Yes, he's sixteen, too. His father is doing a stretch after a big drug bust here a few years ago. Geordie lives with his grandma and is not kind to her. He has done everything to abuse her short of physical violence, and he has threatened that. She has threatened him back. He's kicked in her front door, stolen her food, and sold her knickknacks and tools he's

taken from the garden shed. I think the only reason she tolerates him is because she knows no one else will, and if she doesn't, God knows what will happen to him—it will quite predictably, I think she knows, be the worst. I also think it pisses him off that his grandma will take him back every time (though she often calls me and asks me to take him out of her home) which means he'll never get housed as long as she does. Where's his mother? She's around, as near as I can tell, but is basically unaccountable, not welcome, and known as a "tosser."

Grandma lives in council housing in Chickerell, and I have sat at tea with her, in a small, crowded living room: picture years of accumulated knickknacks, magazines, and boxes shoved under the chairs and shelves and piled on tiny coffee (tea?) tables. There is a grey pall over everything. The light coming through the glass of the windows is grey and it lights the tattered carpet and worn upholstery in grey. I have nowhere to set my tea except to hold it in my lap, and she makes no effort to clear a space and offers no apology for it. This is just how it is. Space is so precious and so used up. Geordie is upstairs in bed. I have not seen the upstairs and have no desire to. The kitchen has room for one person only and no available counter space. The front door does not close properly from one of Geordie's drunken rages last night. There is little I can do but convince his grandmother that I will continue to try to find a place for him, try to help him find a job, and continue to placate whoever needs placating. There are precious few successes in this job.

"The Comical Tragedy of Mr. Punch" is a story of infanticide, domestic violence, and aggravated assault against a police officer. A timeless tale; a tale for the times. When you stop on the beach to watch the show, a woman approaches and strongly encourages you to pay two pounds for the privilege, even though you're standing on a

public beach. Must be some grey area there that is being cultivated. I don't begrudge the Professor of Punch making his living, but I do resent the 'pay or move along' marketing approach. I always move along, and piece together the show by walking by as often as possible.

By the time Chelsea's boyfriend got out of prison I was no longer working for the Council. But I would see her in town, walking dejectedly behind the greasy lad, looking thoroughly downtrodden and defeated. I could not even bring myself to say hello when I saw her like that. I don't know what happened to her flat, but I'm sure he was planning to move in, and when the Council found that out, they would stop her housing benefits and she would lose it.

By the time Chelsea's boyfriend got out of prison Geordie had been arrested for battery and was in lock-up.

By the time Chelsea's boyfriend got out of prison Andy had not been seen for a week.

By the time Chelsea's boyfriend got out of prison Tim had made a new friend and was sleeping rough on his sofa for a few days. Helen and Jeffrey had loaned him another fiver, and his new friend knew someone that had work.

Mr. Punch is a hunchback with a hooked nose who wears a court jester's costume. The comical tragedy plot line goes like this: the baby won't stop crying so Mr. Punch throws it down the stairs. Mrs. P comes looking for the baby and learns from the audience of kids what has happened. She beats Mr. P with a stick. Mr. P hits her. ("Hit him again!" shout the kids in the crowd. "Smash him in the face!" shouts a father standing beside me.) A police officer gets involved and he gets clobbered by Mr. P. Can you say "uncontrollable rage"?

In the original ending of the story, Mr. Punch goes before a judge and hangman. He is condemned to hang but persuades the hangman to put his own head in the noose and Mr. P hangs the hangman. "That's the way to do it!" says Mr. P, cheerfully. He then meets the Devil (as, I suppose, he should); they have a big fight, and Mr. Punch kills the Devil. "Huzzah! Huzzah! The Devil is dead!" he cheers. The crowd cheers with him.

The end.

The original ending, though, is considered too strong for today's kids. It does send a rather questionable message to its impressionable audience. The current, not quite "Disney-fied" ending goes like this: After Mr. Punch kills the Devil a crocodile appears, quite gratuitously, and eats Mr. Punch. The end.

Mitch Christensen

Ford Swetnam Poetry Prize Winner

This year's poetry contest judge, Jim Irons, is one of the featured artists in the forthcoming *Idaho Artists: A Contemporary Selection,* published by the Hemingway Western Studies Center. Irons served as Writer in Residence for Idaho from 2001-2004. In his current incarnation, he teaches English at the College of Southern Idaho.

He writes about the winning poem:

"Small Talk" is a poem that surprises each time it is read: funny, daring, sardonic and surreal. The poet has a strong, original voice, and hopefully we will hear more from him in years to come.

Mitch Christensen

Small Talk

Born during a thunderstorm,
I silenced the winds
and darkened the lightning
straight out of the womb.

At age five,
I became mayor of my city.
I didn't even run for office.

I married a supermodel when I was ten,
because she would NOT
stop calling my house.
We divorced two years later,
and I got full custody of our two jungle cats
(I like to wrestle with the tiger,
but the jaguar is too weak).

My fifteenth year brought with it pain
for my enemies.

Currently, I live with my parents and play a lot of Mario Kart
(Using only my mind).

Scientists have my brain in a jar, like Albert Einstein's.

Nobody knows who my real father is,
but they've narrowed it down to either

Chuck Norris, Samson, Abraham Lincoln, Bill Gates, Muhammad Ali,
or a combination of all five.

I sleep with my eyes open,
so I can stare at myself in the mirror on my ceiling.

I ran with the bulls in Pamplona,
and now I am banned from that event.

I have eight freezers full of beef.

Not even I can outdo myself.

When other people sneeze, they bless me.

I'm out of touch with Reality,
because she said I was too harsh and practical.

I have three balls,
one for playing sports,
one for telling the future,
and one for reproduction.

Last time I went to Sea World,
I successfully did an underwater triple bypass
on a baby seal
who had wandered
into
the crocodile exhibit.

I don't play games.
I dominate and crush them.
There is no element of chance.

Buffets let me use doggy bags.

Every fighting style is an adaptation of my fighting style.

When I pass kidney stones,
the process turns them into diamonds.

I shouted, "Tell them about the dream, Martin!"
on the steps of the Washington Memorial,
not Mahalia Jackson
(Look it up).

To me, gravity is more of a suggestion.

I bench pressed myself
bench pressing the man
bench pressing a new world record
that never got recorded
because I broke that record
when I bench pressed myself
bench pressing the man
bench pressing the would-be
world record weight.

Infinity is a lie, trust me.

When I eat Big Macs, McDonald's gets fat.

I know where Jimmy Hoffa is buried,
because I buried him.

I
climbed
Mount Everest
without supplemental
oxygen, shelter or food, naked
except for a blindfold and granola bar rapper.

When I use a microwave, the timer starts at zero.

I don't date, but there is a very stringent application process and
long
waiting
list
to get
through
before
you
get to be
one
of
my
girlfriends.

I just typed this sentence with no hands.

My breakfast is a box of Twinkies washed down with a gallon of room temperature milk.
I eat whatever I want for lunch and dinner.

No one ever asked me about my thoughts on world peace,
but I told them anyway.
Nobody asked me about my thoughts on the problem of starvation and homelessness,
but I told them anyway.
I won the Nobel Prize three times.

They gave me a Nobel Prize for my two other Nobel Prizes.

People who don't even know who I am ask me for my autograph.

I don't always drink beer,
but when I do,
I never get drunk,
because it is physically impossible for me to lose any control of my faculties.

I told William Henry Harrison not to wear his coat,
because I knew he would be a terrible president
(Look it up).

The History Channel began doing a special on me.
They are now changing their name to the (Insert author's name here) Channel.

I run through sprinklers to get clean.

I shower for fun.
I am immune to slip-and-slides.

I play dead for the Grim Reaper,
and he thinks it is hilarious,
because it is so true to life
(True to death?).

My gallant white steed is Bluetooth-compatible.

I was abducted by aliens,
and we partied.

Babies are not above my judgment.

I don't get sick, sick gets me.

In conclusion,
I am doing well.
How about yourself?

Steven Hall

An Interview with Ron Hatzenbuehler

Dr. Ron Hatzenbuehler has been teaching at Idaho State University, in the History Department, since 1972. He has served as editor for the ISU Press, *Rendezvous*, and the Idaho State Historical Society magazine *Idaho Yesterdays*. Also active off campus, Hatzenbuehler regularly presents on Idaho history to various workshops, institutes, and conferences, in addition to serving as consultant and historian for local humanities projects. In 2008 he received the Idaho Humanities Council's annual award for "Outstanding Achievement in the Humanities." This interview was conducted in his office on April 11, 2011.

Steven Hall: *I mentioned to you before meeting how this is the tenth edition of* Black Rock & Sage*. I have been considering the significance of the journal, its future, and its current role on campus. The anniversary has turned us somewhat inward. Considering your experiences with the ISU Press and the journal,* Rendezvous*, I've felt anxious for the chance to meet with you. Would you mind describing your background and experience working with these two campus operations?*

Ron Hatzenbuehler: Well, the ISU Press has been in existence for a very long time now. I went on the ISU Press board probably thirty years ago. It has been interesting to see the changes that have occurred over time in that initiative. In the beginning, it was primarily designed as an outlet for ISU faculty who might not have an entrepreneurial interest. And so instead of going with somebody where they were going to make some money they would have an outlet

for their scholarship and research. That worked well for a number of ventures. For example, we did things on Idaho history. Also, a compilation of dissertations. It seemed to work well. But then other people began contacting us and so we saw our mission expanding to take in especially local studies that nobody seemed to be doing much with, but also intermountain and Pacific Northwest issues. So our publication list expanded for a few years in the eighties and we created a surplus of publications that we're still trying to get rid of now. In recent years, with all of the cutbacks that have happened with regard to university presses, we find ourselves in the position of being one of the longest lasting presses and now ready to take new opportunities because other people have gone out of existence. So we're never going to be a large operation, but we've managed to keep going by shifting, adapting, taking things from here and there, and putting things together. That's been interesting to see over time.

As you mentioned, I've also worked with the journal, *Rendezvous*. It was originally designed as an outlet for ISU faculty, but then there would be other people who would hear about it and send something in. I was published in it when I first came to ISU. Then I served as guest editor for an issue, and eventually I became editor for a while. When this was happening in the eighties, all of our issues were special issues. I acted as the general editor, and then we would have a subject editor who would go out and arrange for things. That was fun. And it was innovative. The name *Rendezvous* had within it the connotation of the old-time thing and people coming together for trading purposes. Also to swap stories and perspectives on life. After a while, other people came in and took over editorship, but I stayed on the board.

SH: *Your professional expertise in history and textual studies is another*

reason I've looked forward to meeting with you. Relative to Rendezvous *or smaller university presses, what thoughts do you have about the importance of a university documenting itself?*

RH: I do think that institutional memory is important. A lot of times things come up and we'll get a call from somebody who's been here for a long time who will say, "Do you remember a committee happening on this particular topic?" Like governance. When was the governance established we're under? What were the circumstances? So I do think that it is beneficial to have that institutional memory. There's also what historians refer to as occlusion, which means not necessarily a negative pushing things aside so much as a tendency to emphasize some things over others. Those things may be fact-based or may not be fact-based. So there's reason to have an institutional memory to make sure we get down the important things. As historians we're very sensitive to the fact that people create cultures. So an institution does have a culture associated with it, and when you're trying to change something, especially, you need to be sensitive to the institutional culture and how much acceptance of change there has been over time and things of that nature. And different cultures have different track records in that regard. I think we've done a lousy job as an institution of institutional memory. Examples are few and far between. There have been two studies of the university. One was published as the history of Idaho State College, which came out in the fifties. And then there was another one associated with the centennial celebration. And they were very different. The one done in the fifties was a traditional institutional history. It asked questions like: Who were the presidents? Who were the vice-presidents? What committees were there? The one done for the centennial celebration was more of a coffee table, glossy publication, with lots of pictures. Those are

the only two that I'm aware of. And that means there's a big gap that needs to be filled.

SH: *Speaking of there being a gap in documenting the history of this university, from a historian's perspective what would be the ideal format for accomplishing that?*

RH: Historians, of course, are interested in change over time. You can take a slice of time and get some measure of that, but the question we're always interested in is whether there's more continuity or whether there's more change. To what extent can we label it one way or the other? When we throw a term around like "revolution," for example. Well, what does that mean? Change is always happening. Is it a true revolution? How do we measure that? How do we understand it conceptually? Historians are preoccupied with questions like that. Again, you can sort of stop time and take a picture of it at any particular period. But then you would always want to be asking, now that we've seen that slice of it, what's connected and what's different? And it's especially important I think, in eras like these, with regard to higher education, to try to capture some of that. I'm the last one to say that history gives us the best view of things. I would never say that. But some of that questioning is important or else every generation thinks it's new, every generation thinks that it's special. Or there's the tendency sometimes for people who are in my station of their career to think it was better back then: students were better, everybody knew how to spell, and everybody wrote in just the King's English. We know that's not the case, but unless we have a record of it we can delude ourselves. So as historians we're interested in changes over time, but we're also interested in the concept of myth. We don't juxtapose myth and reality; in fact, we say that a myth is something that is accepted

as being the way things are but doesn't have an empirical basis for it, doesn't have a factual basis or something that people can validate through experience. This is another area where a publication could give some help. For example, there are all kinds of urban myths about those pillars up on the hill that are fun. They're important, not to debunk, but to investigate. Why would a person think that? Why would they create that story? So narratives say a lot about a culture and about individuals.

SH: *As someone who has worked for so many years with university students, do you believe a small journal like* BR&S *can also play a role in the identity of a campus?*

RH: Certainly. Academics are preoccupied with the idea of progression and of growing and of learning. As long as your publication is reflective of learning, however you want to define that, then I think you have a role to play. And we have to document that as a university. We have to be able to show what we're doing, just as students have to be able to show what they're doing. As long as it's more than just somebody putting something on their CV or their resumé—which is fine and good and we have to do that. But by the same token, at the end of the person's career, at the end of the day, what does it mean? So if a student says, "Well, it's reflective of my studies at Idaho State University; it's reflective of who I was at that point in my life," then you're fulfilling an important aspect of the learning curve that people are on. As academics it's the reason we put such value on peer-reviewed publications. It's not just somebody saying it's good because I wrote it. Somebody else thinks that it's worth having. Somebody else thinks it's reflective of thought and learning and trying to push knowledge forward. And knowledge takes

many forms. Sometimes knowledge is discrete and sometimes it's indiscrete. I gave a graduation address and in one of the lines I said, "I hope that at least some of you created something here that nobody else understood." I didn't mean that in a vain way but in a reflective way, that you can look back on it and say it was good, it was worth having.

SH: *Does the fact that ISU resembles a commuter campus, where many students are living away from campus, impact the role our journal can have in the campus's identity?*

RH: Our student body, of course, is multi-faceted, so diverse. We're supposed to be a non-traditional campus if you look at all of the profiles of our students. But that doesn't capture things. We've got traditional students, we've got non-traditional students. Most of our students work, but not all of them. So how do you capture that range of experience? How do you put that into some picture? I'm not sure I have much there to give advice about, other than maybe to say: be sensitive to it. You wouldn't want your publication to be too limited.

SH: *Let's move off campus for a minute. What relevance can a student journal like* BR&S *have to the region, particularly considering the rural nature of the region?*

RH: So what's the possible scope of it as well? Would it be just southeast Idaho? Would it be rural? Urban? I think those are good questions to ask of your publication. One of the fascinating things about the West is that it's the most urbanized portion of the United States, because people live in incorporated areas. But then that doesn't capture who we are, because you leave one incorporated area and how far do you drive before you get to the next one? It's not urban in the

way that most people think of urban, but it's not rural either compared to the South where people live along roads and are spread out all over the countryside. And southern Idaho is so different from northern Idaho in terms of terrain and climate. So I think you're asking the right questions. To what extent should we be just for this university and for this area? And to what extent should we be looking more to making a contribution perhaps to wider discussions and covering wider issues? I think those are important questions to ask. Maybe a forum or something for exploring some of those questions. The more I'm involved in education the more I believe that we should stimulate questions more than we should say that we have the answer to things. If we're going to be serious about learning, we have to, as educators, be willing at some point to back off and say it's not so much how *I* put things together as how do *you* put things together. How can we stimulate people doing that sort of thing?

SH: *Yes, those are the sorts of questions we hope to be considering and finding insights to. Regardless of the breadth, or lack thereof, of our distribution, we certainly don't want to feel provincial in nature. We don't want to feel like a vanity press—hey, look what we can do. We try to print the best work we can find on campus. We've been making attempts to include more forms. As we reflect on our past ten years and look forward to the next ten years, what bigger role do you think we can take?*

RH: This makes me think back to Miss Marple [fictional character from Agatha Christie crime novels] where she said that everything that happened in the world was happening right here in this little community. And so life is happening here that is reflective of people struggling with larger themes. That may be true, that any spot can

be reflective of larger things, but there is something distinctive about a place also. We feel that as historians. Place is important, can be important. And defining what that place is and what impact it has on people. The extent to which writing is touching on universal themes, you would want to have that, I think, but you would also want to leave open the possibility that there would be something that would come up that is reflective of a local situation.

SH: *The production period for each issue of* BR&S *coincides with a spring semester course titled "Literary Magazine Production," during which each student serves as an assistant editor. Recently we've been reading accounts of small literary journals running into censorship, even to the point of the USPS holding a particular journal during the late fifties, preventing it from being shipped out. What thoughts do you have about small campus publications and academic freedom?*

RH: You don't want to push the envelope just to push the envelope. There's nothing to be gained from this. We've got enough discord already. There's nothing to be gained, to make a name or to be inciting or something or other, by using language or visuals or whatever for sheer shock value. I'm not sure you're being that creative if that's the case. But if creativity comes out of important questions people want to explore, of important discussions people want to have, I think that's great. If you're reflective of discussions you hear students having, if you're reflective of visuals that you think people are wondering about, I think that's great. You just would want it to be tied to something, as opposed to thinking, what can we do that would make a name for ourselves? What can we do that would be provocative? Those things to me are ephemeral. They are not easily defended. I think people would want to make sure that it was attached to learning and to important

things, rather than things that aren't that important. A lot of what we do, even though we flatter ourselves otherwise, is pretty mundane and sometimes trying to be provocative can be mundane, because other people have tried that too and haven't had that much success with it either.

I was listening to Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech the other day. It just struck me how creative it was, how innovative it was. It struck me also that one of the ways it was innovative was to say: we're going back to where we came from, we're not leaving it here on this mall, this day. We're going back to Georgia; we're going back to Alabama; we're going back to Mississippi. So it's always about moving forward but also having to take things with you at the same time. You asked about what it meant to be an American and an American historian. And I answered a lot of it was local. I think a lot of Dr. King's "Americanness" was local as well. It was deeply rooted in the Christian gospel; it was deeply rooted in the words of American history. He always said that all the country has to do is live up to its ideals. That's all we're asking for. There's a huge amount of tradition built into the enormous change he was a part of, that he was reflective of, a personification of. It's both of those things: tradition and change. In many ways he's very like the leaders in the early twentieth century who were pushing the envelope, wanting more for African Americans. But he's also a lot like people like Booker T. Washington and saying, if you're a street sweeper, be the best street sweeper you can possibly be. Making something out of the situation.

SH: *So you're suggesting he's so innovative and radical because he was saying the traditions and values are here, right in front of us?*

RH: Right, and are important. And the "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is the same way. Why are you criticizing me, you ministers of the gospel? I don't understand. Christ was an extremist. Why are you doing these things? So he's touching back to those things.

I don't know if this might be of interest to you. I've got this article by Bill Hall who was the editor of the *Lewiston Tribune*. He graduated from this institution. We gave him an award five or so years ago and those are the remarks he gave.* A bunch of us nailed him after his remarks and said, "You've got to publish this." So he then published what he said in the *Idaho State Journal*. You might take that with you. You know, it might be fun to see what students today think about those, I think, very poignant words of somebody who found meaning in this place, in this institution. Are his words still valuable? To what extent are they still valuable? Were they not relevant to most people's experiences when he wrote them? I don't know. Something like that.

SH: *Thank you. I'll look over it. I thoroughly enjoyed talking with you. Many of the things you've said are completely insightful and interesting relative to the things we've been thinking about.*

RH: Oh, I enjoyed talking to you. I appreciate the opportunity.

*The newspaper article Dr. Hatzenbuehler gave me as our interview ended, "Higher education lets us reach for the sky," is based on Bill Hall's remarks given at an ISU alumni recognition dinner and published in the *Idaho State Journal* on October 17, 2002. Hall's observations also dwell on localness and on the distinct resources available at institutions like ISU. He points out that "to families like mine, state colleges and universities have been especially noteworthy

as the bootstrap schools." Further on he describes schools like ISU as "second-chance schools," the places where "the young get their first shot at success." In his conclusion, he expresses his hope that ISU will never lose sight of the opportunities it has always offered. He warns that ISU never place "too tall a means test on higher education," and as a result become one of the "de facto private schools" where "parents with carloads of hope can no longer drive their children to Pocatello dreams."

Brandon Hall

An Interview with Roger Schmidt

As the end of the semester approached, and the final snowstorms of April melted off to make way for the first slush storms of May, I sat down with English Department stalwart, Dr. Roger Schmidt. A veteran of many administrative and editorial positions within the department since 1989, Schmidt has seen the evolution of various department publications, as well as the evolution of his own students' responses to literature and writing in general. I sat down with him on the occasion of *Black Rock & Sage*'s tenth anniversary edition to discuss the current state of those issues.

Brandon Hall: *If you don't mind, I thought I'd start somewhat longitudinally—What changes have you seen in students' attitudes about writing and literature over your time here? Have you seen any shifts in how our discipline has been conceived of within the university?*

Roger Schmidt: One big change I've seen and am trying to understand is the decline in attendance. I've seen it in my classes, and my colleagues talk about it in their classes. I think there's probably a variety of reasons for it, really. I'd like to point my finger at technology—

BH: *Point away.*

RS:—it's mainly the idea of its intrinsic value. I feel there's a push towards more online classes. While that works well in some disciplines, I think it is a really bad development for literature courses, where it's important to have classroom discussions—those are at the

heart of literary studies. That's where you impart your love of what you do as a professor to your students, and that's where they begin to understand why it's so important.

BH: *What do you mean at the "heart of literary studies"?*

RS: I mean, we're humanists, and we need to relate to our students as humans, if not humanists. Literature has so much to offer them in terms of making sense of their own lives as individuals and as social beings, understanding the problems they're going through that other people have gone through—so I think the classroom experience is really important, and yet I don't understand why they're not coming to class. They'll say, aren't you going to post it on Moodle? Why do we have to come to class, why can't we just get it online? And that, I think, is a change in the way we teach literature and the way it's perceived. It still happens, but it's not like it used to be, where you'd have a full class and a fully engaged discussion. I mean, students today still enjoy hearing what other students have to say about literature—it's like they just don't feel it's important to make time for it. I think students would find the experience more coherent and enjoyable if they came to class; but again, that's the direction many programs are heading away from.

BH: *Do you feel that movement is institutional, or cultural?*

RS: Well, part of it too is that students don't have the time to read—or the habits of reading, anyway—so they find it difficult to keep up with the reading. I mean, I always find it difficult too. I assign less reading than I used to, but still find it hard at times to keep up. I read recently that the average teenager in this country spends fifteen minutes a

week reading books. The average American adult reads less than one novel a year. But other culprits? I think we might consider the way literature is taught. Perhaps working it more fully into the composition program. I mean, I often have literature students take multiple classes because of their interest in the first one they take. But I bet you don't find many composition students who want to take more comp classes the same way. Maybe if we put more emphasis on teaching well rather than things like productivity in our discipline, we could engage students in reading more and earlier.

BH: *On that point, would you mind describing your idea—which I believe you piloted last year—of incorporating literature directly into the composition curriculum?*

RS: The goal was to rectify what I think is an unfortunate situation, which is that there is no literature taught in composition courses, and that it has been more or less forbidden—not just here but in general. There is a bias toward keeping literature courses separate from composition. I disagree with that. If we say that people learn how to speak by hearing other people speak, then people learn to write by reading other writers. And not reading student writers or writing exercises, but literature that endures over time and that people have found interesting. Literature that wasn't written as an assignment, but because the writer had something to say, and a clear aesthetic for how they wanted to say it. I think it's important for students to hear that.

BH: *And as an instructor, what was your experience?*

RS: Well, personally I enjoyed it. But more broadly, for adjuncts and a lot of instructors the experience is often that you are trained in

literature but then end up teaching a full course load of composition classes. When you're trained to teach—and you want to teach—literature you can best teach students to write if you love what you're doing, which often doesn't happen with the endless repeated E.B. White and Brent Staples essays. If adjunct faculty were able to teach the things they loved, and convey a sense of devotion to the discipline of literature, that would help everyone involved. I mean, it's not like teaching writing isn't something that I love. I'm interested in comma splices—I think that's interesting, but it's not why I went into this profession. It's down on the list—but it's there. You can talk about that, but it's not what I love, or what any instructor really loves. Give adjuncts some freedom to teach what they want to teach.

Of course, they're also overworked, which is too bad. I think our first year classes are the most important for getting students interested in reading and writing, and if you have overworked lecturers teaching too many students from texts they don't really care about, well, that's a problem. If you really care about retention of students, you really support the people you have teaching first year classes, and I don't think we do that. We overburden them, underpay them, and don't let them teach in their specialties. That's why students only read fifteen minutes a week—they are learning to care about reading only as a productivity issue.

BH: *And you used, I think, Mark Twain's Library of America volumes, is that right?*

RS: Yeah, I—and one other instructor—used the Library of America series of books. Why not have a composition program using it? It's all American writing—good American writing. It has the appearance of a

coherent curriculum, contains a lot of variety, and gives instructors a lot of latitude. It also exposes students to some of the most important writing in our culture.

BH: *And the reception, I gather, wasn't hostile, but neither was it enthusiastic. Do you feel that resistance to incorporating literature into composition classes is a recent priority change?*

RS: I'm not sure it's that new. Composition is sometimes viewed from the perspective of rhetoric, and perhaps those values have held sway. We often get pressure from other disciplines on campus about how we're here to teach students to write, not read literature. I mean, I can remember when it was a concern departmentally—when we had meetings about stopping people from sneaking literature into comp classes—maybe fifteen years ago. We had to police the adjuncts to watch out for literature.

BH: *Yikes. How do you see the role of department literary publications within that light?*

RS: I'm most familiar with *Rendezvous*. The funding was cut a couple of years ago—Sharon Sieber took over and put together two retrospective volumes. I've always liked the mission statement, which reads: "*Rendezvous* is an independent journal dedicated to the encouragement of speculative and creative works both inside and outside traditional disciplines. Its purpose is to bring together on some common human ground varying and conflicting interests and approaches. We encourage the submission of any materials that will generate thoughtful consideration by non-specialists." I think that's a good mission for a journal, in that it doesn't have a consistent identity

due to the varied nature of the essays involved. I mean the only real connecting philosophy is the status of the writers as ISU students and faculty, and the aesthetic quality of the work. It's nice to have such journals. It's nice to have a venue for people on campus to write about their experiences and specialties to a general audience. We've had articles about teaching math, anthropology, mass comm, fine arts, and so on. At the university, we're trained to be specialized, and this is a nice forum for people from different disciplines to write within their fields to the broader campus community.

BH: *Do you have a sense of the role of* BR&S *within the local literary and academic communities?*

RS: I think the change to a student-centered publication has been a good one that I support. I think it gives the publication a more coherent identity than *Rendezvous* has. It's nice to have something local with high standards. I think the previous editors had taken submissions from colleagues and so on, which really is kind of a different thing.

BH: *How do you see* BR&S *developing or expanding over the next ten years?*

RS: I think the publication in place now is a good basis to grow from. Certainly, one thing might be to get more faculty involved in finding students to submit. When we see students who write well, we should encourage them to submit. I mean, as I say this I realize that I never do that. I encourage students to submit for scholarships all the time, and the student-writing contest. I don't see why I couldn't—and all of us couldn't—encourage creative submissions, or even well-executed

composition pieces. Maybe the connection between literature and composition could result in more class-based content. I also like the idea of using *BR&S* in classes as a model of what student writing can look like at the most refined. Certainly pieces within the publication are more interesting than another batch of essays in a textbook about the evils of Walmart or the future of ecocriticism. I also like the idea that the winners of the composition contest could appear in the journal. That seems somehow appropriate.

BH: *Would more interaction with the department help?*

RS: Yeah. It seems like you could give it a try. Some of the undergraduate student contest submissions seem pretty interesting, especially some of the personal experience 101 essays. Even if you got, say this year, the winners to submit or do some editorial revisions to shape the piece into a literary piece. A good essay can ideally be as "literary" as a short story or a poem, I think. Like I said, we're encouraged to view them as distinct and separate, but really, in a publication like *BR&S,* the main expectation of consistency you are likely to have is the high quality of the material, which I think has so far been the case.

BH: In your opinion, what hope is there for the future of student readers?

RS: Well, publications like *BR&S* and *Rendezvous* are good starts. Like I said, incorporating literary texts in a more complete way into composition classes is another thing I think we should pursue. The more good writing students see, and the more they see their instructors embrace it, the more it becomes an unstated backdrop for

the experience of whatever degree they pursue.

BH: *So there is hope?*

RS: Well, there's always hope.

Sam Hansen

Walmart

Write-a-Thon Speed Trial Winner

Twice a year, *Black Rock & Sage* hosts a Write-a-Thon. We reserve a campus computer lab, prepare baked goods in bulk, and invite anyone and everyone in to write. Oddly, the event is both soothing and exciting. During the three hours, participants have produced up to 54,000 words of term papers, grant reports, fan fiction, and paper comments. We break every hour for snacks in the hallway. We award prizes for most words written each hour. Don't sit next to the students who have part-time jobs transcribing medical files. Even their posture is intimidating. This year, we announced we would publish the best creative piece composed from start to finish during the event. So we're pleased to present to you "Walmart" by Sam Hansen.

—Editors

• • •

I don't shop at Walmart because it's cheap,
I don't shop at Walmart because it's the only place to find everything you ever wanted,
I don't shop at Walmart because they provide jobs for the elderly, the interesting, and the scary,
I shop at Walmart because it's a time machine that will take you anywhen you want to go.

And because it's cheap.

3:15 AM. Tuesday. (Technically Wednesday.) Aisle 15.

Between the row of plastic-wrapped pillows and the strategically placed herbal sleep aids containing non-FDA approved something-or-other used by the indigenous peoples of who-gives-a-shit since Jesus was kickin it guaranteed to get you high, I mean, sleepy, or your money back, I see them.
Boxes the size of a chocolate lab's head covered in soft tee shirts. Stop. Blink. Look again. Those aren't tee shirts dude. Those are sets (yeah, apparently there is more than one kind of sheet) of sheets made out of the stuff they make tee shirts with. No way. Sold.

4:17 AM. 3 minutes left on the spaghetti in my pasta boat. My shitty studio apartment.
The tee shirt sheet has replaced the epic battle between Luke and Vader I have slept on since Mommy made it for my 4th birthday. Sorry Luke, it's the closet for you. Screw episodes 1, 2, and 3. Lucas is a tool.
Spaghetti is now consumed, lights are off, space heater is pointed at my feet, and white-noise maker is covering the grunts and sighs of the recently returned soldier and girlfriend next door. Get some homie, you deserve it.
I enter the soft, cool embrace of the stretchy breathable cotton and am immediately transported.

8:37 PM. 1989. Mom leaves for the late shift in 10 minutes.
I'm 4 years old, 40 lbs, and 3 ft tall. I'm bathed in my father's SLC 10k Fun Run shirt. I run around the house, arms spread like Superman.
I want nothing more than to fill this shirt with the whole of me.
Superman can't fly. Superman's not from Krypton. Superman is a doctoral candidate at the University of Utah who teaches Theatre 101 as an adjunct at Salt Lake Community College, while Lois Lane works

the graveyard shift at the grocery store and takes her lunch break at 7:00 AM to wake up three attention-deficit-disorder boys and get them to Millcreek Elementary on time.

9:15 PM. 1989. Lois Lane left 20 minutes ago. Three boys lay in homemade Star Wars sheets on bunk beds in one small room. Superman kissed Lois Lane goodbye and picked up his guitar to sing three rambunctious heroes-in-training to sleep. Papers will be graded when the boys settle down.

2:57 AM. Thursday. (Technically Friday.) Aisle 9.
Between the 15-person crock-pots and the useless miniature fridges sit the George Foreman grills.

1:05 PM. Summer of 1992. Shitty old house sandwiched between the mansions of bankers in an upscale suburb of Salt Lake. Lois Lane calls out the front door, "Grilled cheese!" Three heroes-in-training fight to get the first one.

Contributors' Notes

Eric Archibald began studying the piano at ten years of age with Kathy Chapman and is now a student of Dr. Kori Bond. In high school, he scored high marks in many festivals. He has completed his work for a piano minor and is currently pursuing an engineering degree.

Growing up, **Lyndsey Barnes** would mainly draw with pens and graphite pencils on whatever she could get her hands on. She took a painting class at ISU later in life and fell in love with the art form. From that moment on, painting was the only thing she wanted to do, specifically abstract painting.

Alina Bonci is a clinical psychology graduate student. She is from Vancouver, Canada and takes pictures using a Canon Rebel SLR digital camera. She loves photography and hopes to get the chance to take pictures all over the world.

Emilee Bunker is a voice major who also plays the saxophone, clarinet, and piano. She performs in several ensembles, including the ISU Concert Choir, Chamber Choir, and the ISU Saxophone Quartet. She is currently a junior music education major and is studying voice with Geoffrey Friedley.

Tyler Chadwick is a doctoral student in English. He spends his

time husbanding his wife, Jessica; fathering four little girls; teaching writing foundations online for BYU-Idaho; reading; writing; and researching contemporary American poetry. He's also an avid runner. His poems have appeared in *Metaphor*, *Dialogue*, *Irreantum*, *Salome*, *Black Rock & Sage*, and *The Victorian Violet Press Poetry Journal*.

Bill Chalmers is a part-time graduate student who is currently living in Chile and reportedly writing his dissertation. This is not part of his dissertation.

Mitch Christensen prefers to sit silently wherever there is a chair and let others form him into the person they want him to be. Also, he is a huge Matthew McConaughey fan, and he enjoys television, like a lot. If TV were a person, it would be like Matthew McConaughey.

Adam Clegg is a junior, pursuing a degree in anthropology with a geotechnology minor. This map is his contribution to his family's genealogy, a visual representation of the records his parents and sister have so dutifully collected and compiled. He has worked with ink, graphite, and tattooing. Maps are a new medium for him, and this is one he is particularly proud of.

Joanna Cleveland is originally from Memphis, Tennessee. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky in 2008. She is currently a second year graduate student in the Master of Fine Arts program. Her emphasis is in painting, but she is also experimenting with papermaking and

drawing.

Sharon Collins is a part-time graduate student working on her Master of Arts in English. She works at the Idaho National Laboratory.

Trevor Dorn has been playing the saxophone for eleven years and is a proud participant in the ISU Saxophone Quartet and other ISU bands. He currently studies with Dr. Shandra Helman. After completing his degree, Trevor hopes to become a music librarian.

Tracy Eastman is currently seeking a Bachelor of Fine Arts. In addition to being a full-time student, he works full time as a body piercer and tattoo artist at a local tattoo shop.

Melinda Evans grew up in Maine, Vermont, and Michigan, and she holds an MA in English literature from Andrews University. She is a graduate teaching assistant at ISU with research interests in early British literature, queer theory, and ecofeminism. Her poetry has been published in *Parnassus* and *Spectrum Magazine*.

Keith Foster lives where monsters and giant robots ravage the mutated countryside. In his brain, cowboy spacemen fight evil hordes to save our world. This is probably from too much caffeine and cartoons as a child, but whatever the reason, he is happy with the result. Keith is a comedian, who aspires to writing and/or illustrating comic books.

Karee Garvin is pursuing an English major with an emphasis in creative writing and minors in Russian and linguistics. Karee prefers paper to computers to prohibit the convenient use of the delete button. She enjoys her winter coats and can be seen in a green military coat, orange pea coat, or black-and-white coat with over-sized shoulders.

Erin Gray wishes he was a pinball wizard, and that pinball wizards could run for president based on thumb size. He is a father, a student and a radio deejay. He has written two unpublished novels. He wrote "Record City Killers," a pulpy thirty-two episode radio serial, with a group of friends. He's terrible at making money.

Megan Griggs, student of Dr. Diana Livingston Friedley, has participated in a diversity of stage roles ranging from Shakespeare to a performance as Sally Bowles in *Cabaret*. Griggs also produces original movement as a dancer for ISU's Danson and has also danced in IMOVE.

Brandon Hall, the current prose editor, enjoys the end of the semester.

Steven Hall is a third-year doctoral student of English. When he isn't working as editor of *Black Rock & Sage*, he spends his time reading book after book in a deep, damp cave to prepare for his comprehensive exam.

Sam Hansen is a grad student in theatre at ISU. He dabbles in spoken-word poetry, screenwriting, and the occasional anti-establishment story. He has hopes of pursuing a career in teaching others to express themselves through the written and spoken word. One day, he'll be as awesome as he already thinks he is.

Dustin Hinton grew up along the front range of Colorado. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in drawing from Adams State College in Alamosa, Colorado in 2009. His current work is a series of drawings that combines maps and landscapes encountered while hiking and backpacking in the western United States.

Jared Johnson was introduced to music at fourteen when he performed in *Hello Dolly*. He studies with Dr. Scott Anderson and sings in ISU's elite Chamber Choir. A winner of ISU's Anderson Award, he has starred in several productions, including *Pippin* and *The Threepenny Opera*. In 2009, he was selected for summer music festival study in Italy.

Jeremiah Judy is a student of Dr. Scott Anderson. He has been a regular participant in ISU's elite Chamber Choir and Opera Workshop, and last year played Walt Dreary in *The Threepenny Opera*. After graduating this spring, he plans to open a private voice studio and return to school for certification in music education.

Kim Khan moved to Idaho from the Midwest eight years ago, and it was a major culture shock for her. She is a senior, working on her

Bachelor of Arts in technical writing along with a minor in theatre. She is an observer and a dreamer. Kim likes writing, reading, photography, red wine, absurdist theatre, and eccentric people.

Sarah Kim is a student of Dr. Kori Bond. Her many honors include winning first place at the Idaho MTNA Young Artists Competition and being chosen for the Auer Piano Workshop at Indiana University. She is the pianist for ISU's Concert and Chamber Choirs and keyboardist for the Idaho State Civic Symphony.

Angie Lloyd is a piano student of Dr. Kori Bond and is sought after as a collaborative pianist and teacher. She has accompanied numerous ensembles and musicals and also has completed a voice minor. When she graduates, she plans to open a private studio.

Nikcole (Nikci) King was originally from the redwoods of northern California and then raised in the pines of northern Arizona. In 2006, she moved north to Pocatello to continue her education at Idaho State University in the Bachelor of Fine Arts program.

Nanette Nielson studies with Professor Kathleen Lane. She has been featured in numerous operas, musicals, and choirs. Recent productions at ISU include *The Merry Widow*, *Secret Garden*, *Pippin*, and *The Threepenny Opera*. She has been elected ISU choir president the past two years. Post-graduation plans include auditioning for onstage roles.

Jeff Pearson writes about his dead father, a summer he spent in Philadelphia, his lovely Grandma Cleo, the landscape of southern Utah, ice caves, and sanatoria.

Catherine Reinhardt is a student in the MFA program where she is currently working mostly in printmaking and drawing. She lives in Pocatello with her husband, son, and two retrievers. She loves to be outdoors and draws much inspiration from her fascination with the natural world.

Kierstin Smothermon will graduate in 2011 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a studio emphasis in sculpture and a minor in art history. Ever since childhood, she has been fascinated with the natural world. Along with this fascination came a curiosity and compelling urge to see with her hands. As a sculptor she finds an outlet for these.

Drew Sutherland will begin graduate study this fall and aims for a career as a symphonic performer. His teachers have included Dr. Patrick Brooks, Larry Zalkind and Aric Schneller. He has played in several orchestras, bands, and other ensembles, including the Brothers Sutherland jazz combo.

Mitchell Tilley has been a student of Dr. Shandra Helman and is now completing a student teaching internship. He has served as principal saxophonist for the ISU Wind and Jazz Ensembles and as student director for the ISU Bengal Marching Band. He holds a private woodwind studio of several students.

Robert Tuell has played with several regional groups as well as in many ISU ensembles including Wind Ensemble, Jazz Band, and the Saxophone Quartet. He is currently a student of Dr. Shandra Helman and has also studied with Mr. Monte Grisé.

Jeffrey "Gus" Weaver began violin studies at age nine and played in several youth orchestras throughout high school. He then earned a BA in the Great Books and did social work before beginning his degree in violin performance. His teachers include Igor Markstein, Carolyn Plummer, Carol Sindell, and currently Chung Park.

Colophon

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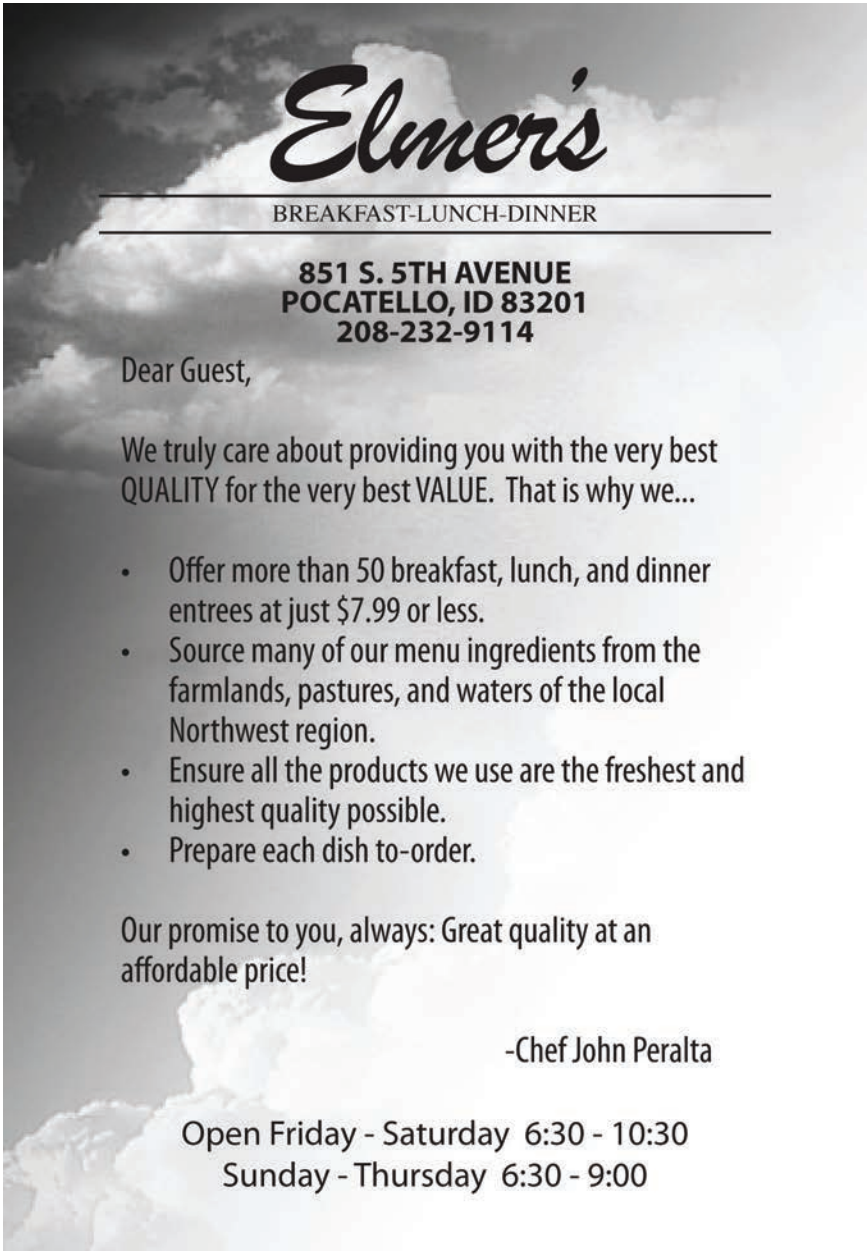
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