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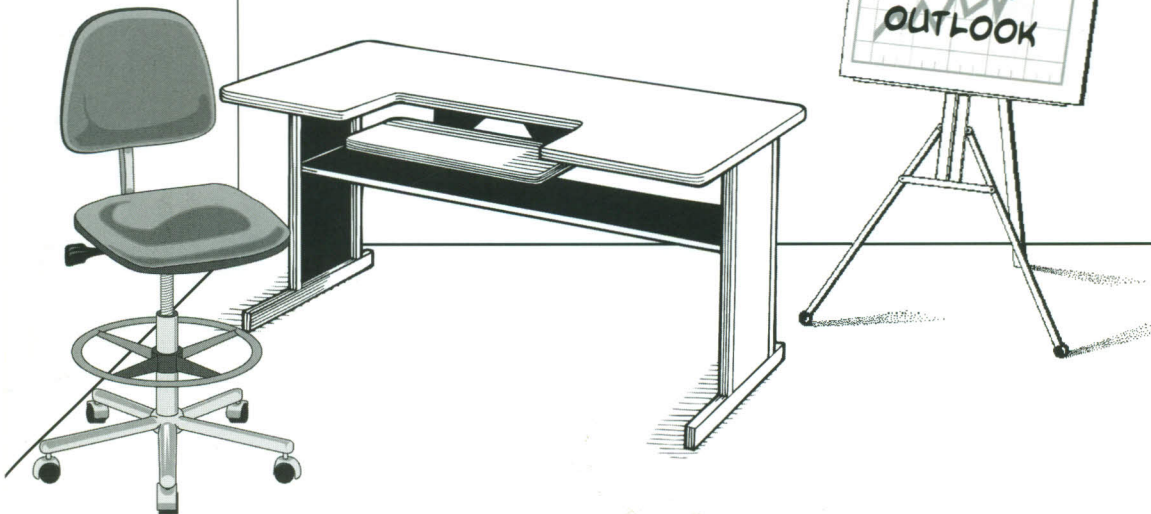


**DAILEY
DICK
GLOCK
HARR
LEWIS
NEUHARTH
WEISGERBER**

FIGMENTS OF IMAGINATION



**AN 80-PAGE SPECTACULAR MONSTROSITY
FILLED WITH STUDENT ART, PHOTOS, AND
TALES TO ASTONISH! AND ALL FOR THE
GREAT PRICE OF FREE!**



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FIGMENTS OF IMAGINATION 2005

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LE GENERICALLY MAGNIFICENT "OFFICE COMIC"

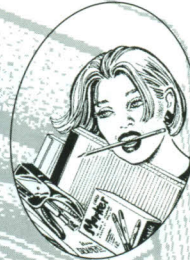
STARRING...



CHUCK



BOSS LUANN



ALEECIAH



SUSAN



PAM AND WACKY LARRY



LEON



LISA



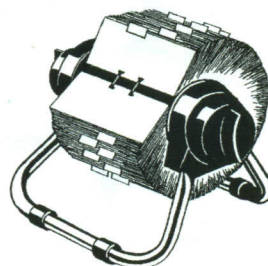
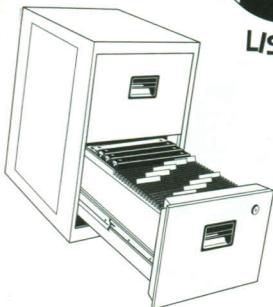
BLAINE



BONITA



CHET



SOMEWHERE, IN
SOME CITY, IN
SOME OFFICE,
SOMETHING IS
HAPPENING. WHAT
FOLLOWS MAY OR
MAY NOT BE IT.



I WANT ANSWERS.
EXPLANATIONS.
MY GOD, PEOPLE,
I'LL EVEN TAKE
EXCUSES
AT THIS
POINT!



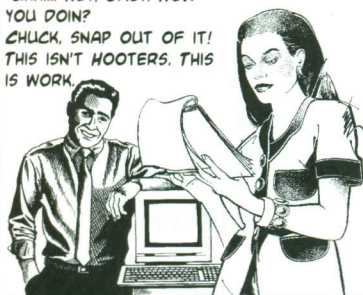
WHY HASN'T
YOUR TEAM
MADE ANY
PRUGRESS?

RIIIING! HOWDY,
THANKS FOR
CALLING PRIEST +
SONS MARKETING.
MY NAME IS
CHET- HOW MAY
I ASSIST YOU?



...PLEASE HOLD.

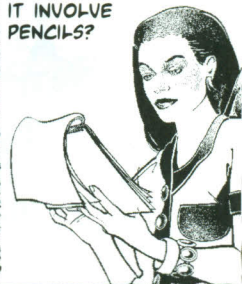
CHUCK, WHAT ABOUT YOU?
-UHH.... HEY, BABY. HOW
YOU DOIN?
CHUCK, SNAP OUT OF IT!
THIS ISN'T HOOTERS. THIS
IS WORK.



WE HAVE AN IDEA!!!



YES, PAM AND WACKY
LARRY. DOES
IT INVOLVE
PENCILS?



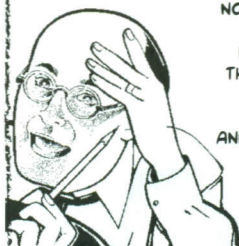
HOW DID YOU KNOW?



PAM- I'VE FREA-
KIN' TOLD YOU A
THOUSAND TIMES- NO
MORE PENCILS!
THAT'S WHY
LARRY'S
HOLDING
HIS BRAINS
IN WITH HIS
PENGUIN HAND-
PENCILS! THAT,
AND INADEQUATE
HEALTH COVERAGE.



AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!!!



NO MORE PENCILS,
PLEASE!!!
I ALREADY NEED
THERAPY THE WAY
IT IS, FOR MY
MID-LIFE CRISIS
AND ANXIETY OVER
MY RECEDING
HAIRLINE...

SUDDENLY...



WOOOOOO-HOOOO!
JEEPERS, LOOK
AT ALL THE
FIGMENTS
ENTRIES
WE JUST
GOT!

WOOOOOO-HOOOOO!!!!



WOULD SOMEBODY
GET DISGRUNTLED
AND TAKE
CARE OF
THOSE
TWO?



THE BEGINNING

BY SUSANNA MAGSTADT

ANNA SAW HER FROM ACROSS THE CROWDED SMOKY CLUB. Even in the dim light and the billowing smoke from the other patron's cigarettes, Anna could see the thin white lines nearly encircling her bicep. Anna's hand instinctively ran up her own arm to feel for the raised scars that she had carved into her skin from the time she was fourteen. "We have that in common then," she thought.

The woman was leaning against the bar, one hand wrapped around a bottle of beer, a cigarette balanced between two fingers of her other. Her dark chestnut hair was cropped short and slicked back out of her face. She was wearing a white tank top and faded blue jeans that clung to her ample frame. Her belt was black, probably leather, with silvery metal studs fixed to it at even intervals. She wore black boots, the thick soles bearing just a bit of height to the heel, the chains encircling them making her think of motorcycles and tattoos. This was no mere woman. This was the kind of female that could run heavy machinery, fix a car, and break a man's nose, all in one day. One may say she was stereotypical, but there was really nothing stereotypical about her. She was different somehow; maybe it was the way her eyes smiled, the way she moved, the soft skin of her face, that made one think of someone regal. She was someone who listened to Chopin while she tinkered with a transmission in the garage.

Anna watched her intently. Her skin showed she had lived a less than ideal life, the scattering of small pock-marks told of taunts in the hallway during her teenage years.

Her slightly heavy frame made her seem more woman than most of the other women in the bar, and that soft sensual form was contrasted by the clothing she wore. The curve of her hip, the bend of her knees all proclaimed a feminine shape that she seemed to be trying in vain to overcome.

The steady "thump, thump, thump" of the music from the band in the back of the place seemed to match Anna's quickening heartbeat. Sweat from the cold glass of beer in her hand ran down her arm and dripped off her elbow, causing her to shiver. The thick air of the bar seemed to encapsulate her, surrounding her with blue-grey clouds of smoke. She could feel the alcohol beginning to take its effect on her, making her feel safe, warm.

Anna's hand went to her pack of cigarettes on the table in front of her. She pulled one out without taking her eyes from the woman at the bar. She struck a match, her eyes watering from the sting of the sulfur rising on the heat. She lit her cigarette, drawing the smoke deep into her lungs. As she released her breath, the woman turned as if she knew Anna had been watching her and smiled directly at her.

Anna's eyes flew open and she looked away, trying in vain to look anywhere other than at the woman's deep brown-gold eyes. Anna looked down to tap her cigarette into the ashtray, and looked up again. The woman's half-full bottle sat on the bar, her cigarette still smoldering in the ashtray next to it, but she was gone. Anna sighed with disappointment. She began to scan the area, looking to see

where the woman had gone.

"ANNA!" a voice called out behind her. She turned to see who had recognized her here, of all places. She was careful when she chose this bar, because she was certain none of her friends even really knew about this place. "Anna! Fuck! What the hell are you doing here?" said a small red-headed chick, smiling widely.

"Paięe? Uh, hi! What are you doing here?" Anna's heart beat faster; she was not expecting to see anyone she knew here. "I didn't know you hung out at the Lotus."

"Not usually, but my sister is playing in the next band, and I promised I'd come and see her. What are you doing here?"

Anna tried hard not to roll her eyes. The question Paięe was asking was not the one she voiced. Anna was at a loss for words. She was obviously not here to see the bands, or she wouldn't be in this section of the club, where there was a more relaxed atmosphere. There were some tables scattered around with couples sitting close, but more with single people, like Anna, watching. How could she tell Paięe, who had the biggest mouth in town, what she was really doing at this bar? "Ah, well, I was supposed to meet my cousin, Eric, here. He wanted to introduce me to his new boyfriend." The lie slipped Anna's tongue like warm oil. "He's, you know, gay, and since I'm the only one in the family who knows, he wanted me to meet him." Anna felt sure Paięe would see right through the lie.

"Ah, I understand." Paięe leaned in close. "It's good you support him. When my sister's friend came out, holy shit, what a mess. But as long as they don't bother me, I'm cool with that."

Anna's stomach tightened. "Yeah," she said through clenched teeth. "I know what you mean." Anna hated this lying. She wanted to shake Paięe and ask her what the hell she meant with that. She wanted to slap her and make her look around and see that so many more people were gay or bisexual than she thought. So many people. All wanting to be accepted for who they are, who they love. And people like this only made it harder. Anna swallowed her anger, trying to keep herself under control. Only her fist clenched hard under the table gave her away.

"So how are you and Derek doing? Are you guys still thinking of moving in together?"

Anna crushed out her cigarette with force, trying to smash it into nothing. "Uh, no. Derek decided that Shelly was more his type. You know what? Fuck him anyway." Anna did not want to be reminded of Derek. Not now, not tonight. But the thought of him came swooping in, like a moth fluttering around a porch light on a warm summer evening. "God," she thought. "Of course she'd have to bring him up. Asshole. I don't need him." Anna looked around, hoping to see the woman who was at the bar again to bring her back from the intense anger she was feeling. She sucked in her breath when she caught a glimpse of her near the black-jack table, leaning over a blond woman. She quickly looked back to Paięe. Paięe was looking to the back of the bar, where the bands played.

"Oh, Anna, I'm sorry. Do you want to hang out with us? I don't want you sitting here all alone!"

"Uh, no, that's okay Paięe. I'll just hang here for a little while to see if Eric shows up. I have to be up early tomorrow anyway, so I'm going to take off soon."

Anna's lies were coming easier now. She didn't feel as bad about lying to Paige. She just wanted to be left alone.

"Alright, but if you want to hang out later, come find us. I think the other band is about to go on, so I better jet. Call me later, ok? We can talk more then."

"Yeah, I'll talk to you later." Anna was relieved. She didn't want to have to make any more meaningless small talk with Paige. She sure as hell didn't want Paige prying into her business with Derek. All she wanted to do was be here, watching. And that didn't include Paige at all.

Anna watched as Paige walked away, her hips swinging. She looked back towards the card table to see if the woman was still there. The blond was there with a few guys around her. The woman was gone again. Anna sighed. Tonight was not her night. First she loses track of the woman she was watching, then Paige shows up. She grabbed her cigarettes and threw them into her purse. This was probably a mistake, anyway. She didn't really know what she would do if the woman spoke to her. What was she going to say; "Hey, I'm Anna, my boyfriend dumped me and I thought that since I find some women really attractive, maybe we could go and fool around." She didn't think that would work out too well.

"Hey, I'm Kat," said someone behind Anna. Anna swung around to see who was there. It was Her. She was standing with her feet slightly apart, one thumb in her jeans pocket, the other hand wrapped around a bottle of beer. "I saw you looking at me earlier, and I wanted to come over and introduce myself." The words were said in a deep, almost masculine voice, and Anna could feel them in her chest. She looked at Kat, the first time she was able to see her this closely. The silver scars on her bicep had matching marks on her forearm, lighter, but still there. There was a tattoo peeking out from the top of her shirt, making Anna want to hook her finger into the fabric and pull it down to see what was inked there. Kat's intense gaze was on her, and she could feel a wave of warmth wash over her.

"I'm Anna," she said, breathlessly. "So, do you come here often?" Before the words even escaped her lips, Anna knew how lame they were. Of course she came here often. Anna had seen her here before, and Kat knew it. Anna felt the blush creep into her cheeks. "Christ," she thought, "what should I do next? Ask her for her sign?"

Kat raised one eyebrow and a slow, easy smile curved her lips. Her eyes sparkled in the dim light. "Yeah. I've seen you here before. It took a while for me to decide to come over and talk to you. You never come in with anyone, so I didn't know what to think. But when I saw you looking at me tonight... I thought I should just come over and say hi."

Anna had waited for this moment. She wanted to throw herself into this woman's arms and let her take her somewhere, anywhere. Her tongue seemed cemented to the roof of her mouth as she tried to think of a way to explain herself in a way that Kat could understand. "I'm Anna." The words came out in a near whisper, full of emotion. "I see you here all the time and I want to talk to you but you...." Anna's words trailed off. She didn't know what to say to this woman. There was so much Anna wanted to tell her, to ask her. Anna wasn't even sure that she knew what she wanted, but maybe Kat could help her. Her mind buzzed like an angry hive of bees.

"Hey, that's ok. Anna, huh?" Kat leaned closer. "I know why you came here."

Anna's eyes glazed over and her breath came quickly. "I just... I wanted to, you know, meet new people and I, you know..."

"Shhhh. Fuck it," Kat said putting her hand over Anna's mouth. "I know. Don't worry about it. There are a lot of people who come here to figure things out, but I think you are different. I think you know what you want. So, what do you say? You want to get the hell out of here?"

Anna's mind spun. Her thoughts flung out in two entirely different directions at once. She could say no and go home to her ordinary life and keep pretending and never know what it was like... or... "Yeah," she whispered. "Yeah."

DANCE OF THE SHADOWS

BY LAURA DAILEY

As I sat and stared
The shadows jumped and danced in song
With the candle's glare
Small and strong
The dark angels seemed to jump in fright
At the sight of the dark hour of that long cold night
Maybe it was just silent dreams
Of sweet whispering meadows
But as it seems
It was the dance of the shadows



HANDS OF GRACE

BY JENNA HEINLE

This was a class assignment in Drawing I.
We were supposed to include three hands, and one of them was to be our own.
I knew I wanted to draw my hand while I was drawing (this was the hardest part).
I also wanted to experiment drawing wood, since I never had before...
everything started to flow from there.



STEEL TUNNEL

BY CATHERINE KLEIN

This photo is of the Liberty Memorial Bridge.
It was taken by standing in the lane of oncoming traffic, facing Mandan.
The bridge seems like a tunnel that goes on forever.

MY LAST RIDE

BY KRISTAL GRINOLDS

IDID NOT WANT TO BE THERE. Anywhere but there. The smell of the flowers, which once comforted me as they reminded me of the summers on my grandparents' farm and the many flowers my grandmother tended, now sickened me. The smell of the flowers flooded my nose and made me want to purge. I dreaded having to take them all home, trying to nurture them the best I could, only to watch them slowly die. Anything that is living cannot exist forever, no matter how badly we want it to. I knew those flowers would soon perish and once again become one with the earth from which they grew.

The sound in the church, which was once filled with the pleasant chattering of avid churchgoers, was now replaced with an eerie silence. I could hear people softly cough to clear their throats, people here and there blowing their noses, and every once in a while a whisper of people talking to their neighbors so silently as if they did not want to get caught. I did not want to turn around and recognize any of the faces the sounds could be coming from. I did not want to turn around and see a sympathetic stare gazed on me from someone I knew. So I remained facing forward, hoping to get this whole day over with.

The pastor came to the front of the church and the organist began her slow, sad song. The congregation rose to gaze upon the coffin as it was carried to the front of the church by several pallbearers. The coffin my grandpa chose was amazingly beautiful. It was an iridescent bronze with a field of wheat embroidered on the inside. He chose to spend the extra money on this airtight model. It gave him comfort knowing that once his son was buried beneath the ground, nothing could get to him and corrupt his corpse. When my grandpa first mentioned the idea of getting an airtight coffin, I quickly agreed, not wanting my father to be disturbed. But today, watching the coffin make its slow descent down the long aisle of the church, I could only think of the verse the pastor always used at Lent: From dust we were made, and to dust we shall return. Would this coffin prevent my father from becoming one with the earth once again?

The coffin eventually made its way to the front of the church; the organist ceased her song, and the pastor took his place at the front of the congregation. He began to speak of my dad as a loyal citizen, who was loved by all and would be missed by everyone. Those words angered me. His speech was so vague; he could have been describing any one of us sitting there in that church. Of course my dad was a loyal citizen and would be greatly missed by all of us, but those were not the final words I wanted to remember my father by. If I were to give the speech, I would talk about the pride my dad took in his classic muscle car and the many times I rode in his car with him. Almost everyone would be able to relate to the memories in my dad's car. He loved to show off his car to anyone who was up for a thrill. My anger soon turned to sympathy when I realized neither I nor anyone else volunteered to speak at the funeral, and it was up to the pastor to reflect upon my father's short time on earth.

The pastor then took a seat and I knew what was about to happen next. They

were going to play the song my sisters and I chose for my dad. Up until that point I had not shown any emotion, but I knew when the music started to play, I would no longer be able to hold my tears back. My heart started to pound, and my body went into a fight or flight mode. I could feel the adrenaline rushing through my body, and I could feel my face turning red. I turned to my mom, and I pleaded with her to let me go, just until the song was over. She wouldn't let me. She said I needed to stay and listen to the song. I wanted to escape. I wanted to crawl under all the pews until I made my way to the back of the church and run away. In a half attempt to do so, when the music started to play, I fell onto my grandma's lap, sobbing.

After the funeral, I got into the car and revved its engine, trying to imitate my dad, and I smiled knowing I had pleased him. I took my place in line behind the hearse and everyone soon followed. We then made the slow drive to the cemetery to bid our last good-byes and to lay my father in his final resting place.

As we reached the cemetery, my family and I took our place under the blue tent, the same blue tent I had seen set up at many burials. I knew that tent occupied the friends and family closest to the deceased, but I never had to step foot underneath it before. I hated standing under there, with my family, as everyone looked upon us sympathetically while the pastor gave his final sermon.

Once the pastor had finished speaking, my sisters went forward to place their roses on my father's grave. It was as if it had been rehearsed. Then everyone's stare was on me as if I were an actress in a play who had forgotten her line. My sister nudged me to go forward and do the same as they had done, but I remained planted in my spot. I did not want to place my rose on my father's grave to satisfy everyone. If my father could be anywhere in this world right now, it would not be there in that coffin.

"Hey Dad!"

The windows of my dad's car were rolled down and my voice carried into it, and even over his loud music, he heard me. He slammed on his brakes, threw the car in reverse and squealed his tires, filling the air with smoke. This satisfied me and everyone could see what a cool dad I had.

"Get in, I'll show you how to handle this thing."

I took my place in the passenger seat of my father's 1970 El Camino SS. He had just washed and waxed it, and the black cherry color had never shined so brightly. The aroma of leather, which occupied the interior of the car, surrounded me. My heart was throbbing as the tires squealed as we sped off. My dad handled that car with such ease, and I longed to do the same.

He turned onto the open highway and pushed the gas pedal down to the floor. The gauge on the speedometer quickly rose. I was terrified yet excited as we raced down the open highway. I looked over to see how fast my dad was going and the speedometer read ninety. My dad saw me glance over and turned to me and said, "We're actually going about a hundred and thirty. Do you want to know what it feels like to lock up the brakes?"

I was terribly frightened, yet I was up for a thrill. As my father locked up the brakes, I thought he was going to kill us both. He stopped the car and got out to let

me drive back into town. While making my way back into town I never felt so free, driving such a powerful car, with my dad in the passenger seat beside me.

My dad was not in that coffin. He was racing down an old country road in his car. The car we both loved. As the people started to clear out of the cemetery, I made my way back to the car and placed my rose inside.

I then took my last ride with my dad.

ALLURING NIGHT

BY EMILY ENTZEL

Tonight, I lie on my back and face the infinite night sky,
I admire the inconstant celestial patterns and the quiet elegance of imperfect
stars, they are scattered in disarray

Cold beams of blinding lights and burning vapors, enchanting allies of an
incandescent moon, these entities overshadow the trivial burdens of life,
common worries seem pointless in opposition to the grand scale of the universe

The night sky towers down on me like a fearless tyrant, encasing darkness inspires
a drifting train of thought, as I am surrounded with the haunting beauty of the
unknown, darkness my quest and former daylight's last request

Traces of seasons past remain a memory, summer now the dominant, the night sky
merely hints at the great mysteries of existence and it forever holds the secrecy of
heaven, my view seems deprived

Earthbound, I am enamored; gazing up feels like waking a dream, disorienting
and surreal the ever-present night always hovering above loyalty, while sleep
graces my eyelids

TUNNEL VISION

BY JOSH ALESON



The day. Somewhere in the Big Sur along the Pacific coastline of California, my parents and I dawned ponchos and puddle jumped toward a fantastic view of the ocean. I found my best shots on the way there. This picture I am standing almost five feet in the tunnel trying to figure how much of the water trail's reflection would give off light.

Apparently, enough.



LEAVING REALITY

BY JENNA HEINLE

I've done paintings before incorporating a keyhole,
and I knew I wanted to make this the focal point in this painting.
I also like to paint hidden figures in my paintings — especially in trees.

I DON'T WANT
TO HEAR IT.
BECAUSE
THEN I WOULD
HAVE TO DO
SOMETHING.
AND THIS AN-
NUAL REPORT
IS JUST TOO
RIVETING. JUST
FREAKIN'
BRAINSTORM
AN IDEA
BEFORE I GET
BACK!!!



(WHISPERS) WHAT
DO YOU BET SHE
HAD A COMIC
BOOK HIDDEN IN
THERE?



MMM... MAGIC PLANE
TRANSCENDERS. I MEAN...
MMM... CHOCOLATE.



BONITA- YOU'RE WORTHLESS!
ALL YOU DO IS EAT YOUR
MIND-ALTERING CANDY ALL
DAY. YOU COULD AT LEAST
PRETEND TO BE
READING A
NEWSPAPER
LIKE ME.



OKAY, TEAM-
LET'S GET
FOCUSED!
THERE'S NO
"WE" IN "TEAM"-
I MEAN, NO "I" IN
"US"... SIGH.
I NEED
KANAX.



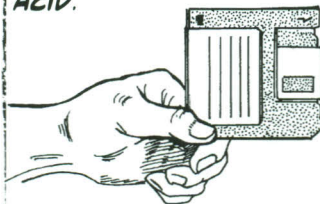
I JUST RAN
OUT. WOE IS I.



BUT WE HAVE
TO TAKE
SOMETHING.
DON'T WE?
DON'T
WE???



HERE, TAKE THIS. IT LOOKS
LIKE A REGULAR 3.5
FLOPPY DISK, BUT IT'S
REALLY A GIANT TAB OF
ACID.



WHEEEEEEEEEEE!!!
ACID!!!



AND SO, THE HORRIBLE TEAM AT
PRIEST + SONS MARKETING IR-
RESPONSIBLY ALTERED THEIR STATE
OF CONSCIOUSNESS. BAD, BAD,
TEAM. BUT YOU SEE, THEY WERE
DESPERATE FOR IDEAS, AND DES-
PERATE TIMES CALL FOR DESPER-
ATE MEASURES- ESCAPISM! THEY
WERE PAST DEADLINE!!!
DUNH! DUNH! DUNH!

LATER ON...

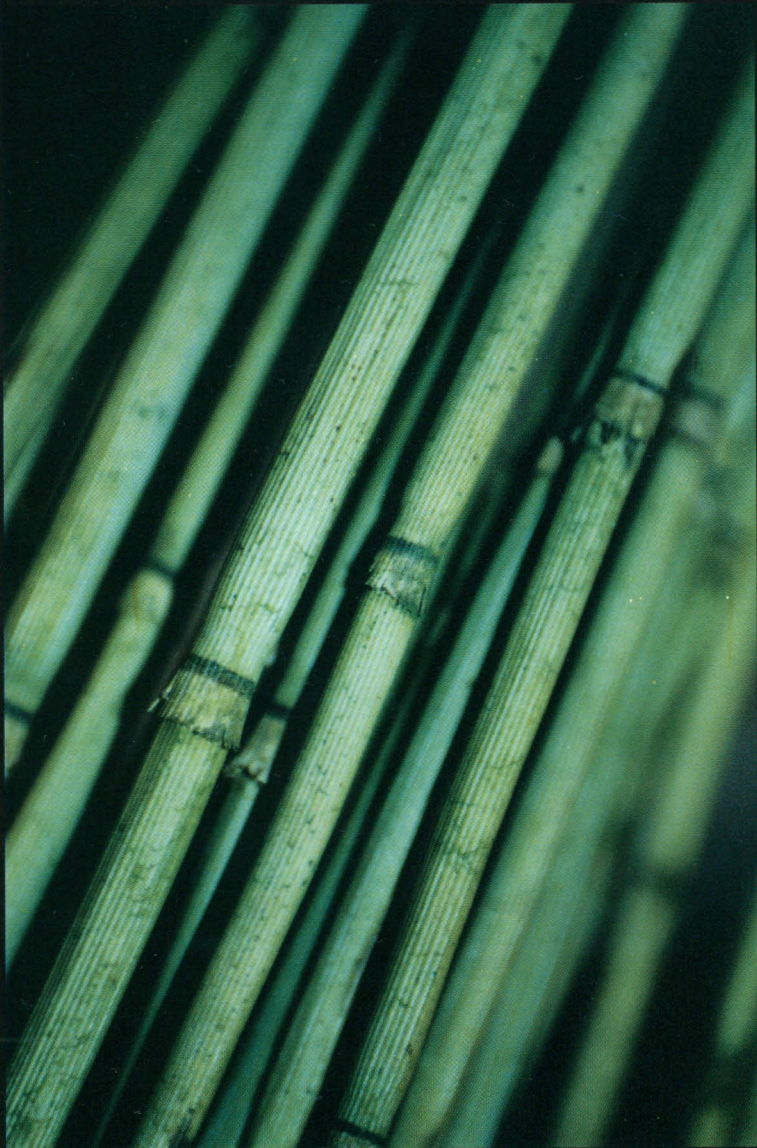


HEY GUYS! I'M
BACK FROM
STAPLES. THEY
RAN OUT OF
BAGS- ISN'T
THAT
WEIRD?
AND YES, I'M
HAVING A
HARD TIME
TALKING WITH
THIS PENCIL IN MY
MOUTH! COULD
SOMEONE GIVE
ME A HAND???

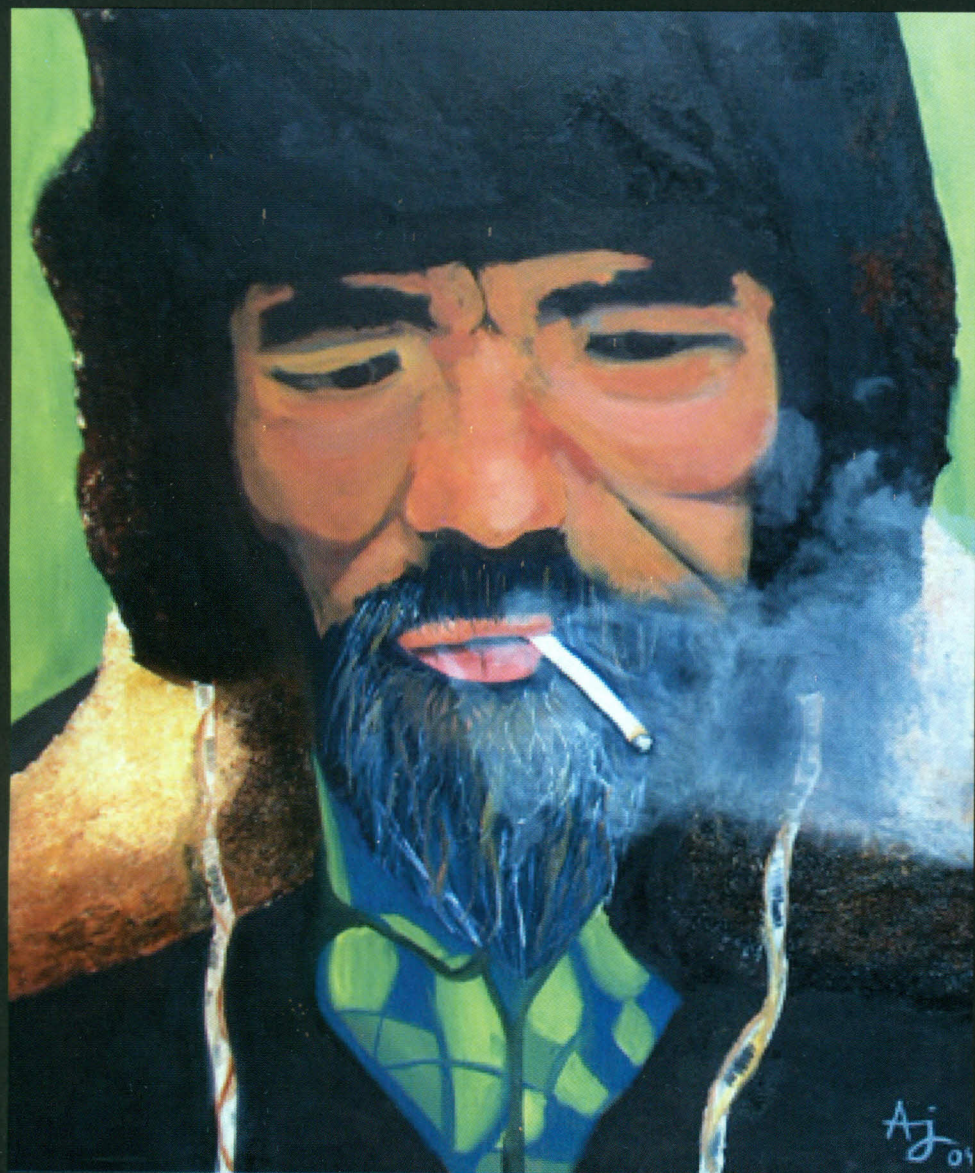


SNAKEGRASS

BY JENNIFER WEISGERBER



This was one of the first photos I took with my new macro lens. I'm a big fan of texture, and being able to photograph it so closely was exciting.



DIRTY STINKY OLD MAN

BY ANNA JOHNSON

The inspiration for this artwork was a picture
in *National Geographic* of an old Alaskan fisherman after a long hard day.

WEIRDO

BY KIRSTEN BABIUK

WEIRDO," THE WAITRESS SAID TO HERSELF as her most peculiar customer of the day exited the little coffee shop on Main, leaving no tip. He had obviously been in a hurry to leave, as if he'd spotted someone he knew. Having seen the guy around town now and then, always alone and often picking garbage, however, Betty decided he had more likely spotted the remains of a cigarette beside the curb or a piece of still-chewy gum stuck to a wall somewhere. Somehow, in his hurry, the nameless man had managed to quickly count exact change for his coffee, a feat which both surprised and impressed the waitress. She shook her head, dropped the change into her apron pocket, and began to remove the man's mess of torn paper napkins off the flecked yellow tabletop, turning her back as the man ran up the street.

In 1980, Ron's dad, Bill, had introduced the boy to steer wrestling and bull riding. Of course, at his age, Ron was stuck riding sheep and goats, but he took it seriously, all the same. He was close to both his parents, but especially his father. He had taught him how to fish when he could barely walk, had taught him all the manly things that men should do. Bill's life had been complete the day his first and only son was born.

That year, the annual family vacation took them to South Dakota to explore the history of the Wild West. Bill had always been fascinated by the cowboy ways, and Ron, who took after his father in this respect, begged for this trip. They watched rodeos along the way and finished their trip off with a quick drive to The Black Hills in South Dakota. The family had never been happier, it seemed, but their trip ended much too quickly. Bill had a rodeo to compete in back home: a small affair at the state fairgrounds, but one that excited him nonetheless. His son was also competing that year, for the first time ever, and the proud father could not miss that.

In his first event of the competition, Bill rode a bull named Tornado, a brindle colored animal with long horns and furious eyes. He rode for his full eight seconds and dismounted to the applause of a violently excited crowd. But as he stood up from his place in the dust, he felt pain suddenly rush through his body and warmth trickle down his legs as they fell numb. The bull had pierced his gut and shaken its head a few times before dropping him to pursue pale-faced, wild-haired new interests. The EMS was called in, but he died before they even arrived, his son and wife looking on in horror. Molly stood motionless, just staring at the red dust in center ring, as her beloved's body was carried away. The child bawled in the background, suddenly alone for the first time.

A year later, Ron was titled the Lil' Cowboys Champion in the sheep riding competition. The boy beamed the day he won that trophy, carried it around all day. No one was there to congratulate him, but he pretended; he pretended that his mother was conscious, that his father was off telling all his friends about his brave son, and that he had some friends by his side to congratulate him. But even

back in 1981, Ron was thought a little odd by most, and was not well-liked. And since his mother was generally inebriated since Bill's death, the young boy spent summer days riding his pony around the now run-down farmyard and brushing her to an unfitting shine.

Peppy Sue was Ron's only friend. At only ten hands high, she was small enough that he could jump on her back with no saddle, and he had fashioned a tiny, orange bridle out of baling twine. Ron had bought her from the old woman down the road for \$100.00 in allowance, which he had been saving before his father's death. He fed her off the grassy yard and, once in awhile, would take a bit of the welfare cash from his mom's wallet to buy Peppy Sue a cupful of grain or a bail of good hay.

Ron always told his pretend people that she was a "purebred Arabian: fast as the wind and the pertiest around." In reality, her short, stubby legs suggested some Shetland, her cute face and thick, cresty neck hinted at some Welsh blood, and her excessively muscular hindquarters were clearly the mark of Quarterhorse heritage. Whatever she was, Ron loved her. And Peppy Sue loved him right back. When he tumbled off, she stopped abruptly; when he accidentally poked her in the eye with a grooming brush, she'd just blink and let him go on. She would prance up to the boy when he got home as if she thought she really was his prize winning Arabian, and she'd follow him around the yard until he went in at night. Ron swore he'd learn to calf rope and she'd be his mount. They'd win "millions" of titles and everyone would want a horse just like Peppy Sue, he said.

Before he even turned eleven, though, as was bound to happen sometime, Ron's mother sobered up a bit, and spotted a mottled yellow horse in her back yard that she assumed must be worth something. She hadn't any clue where the animal had come from, and even pondered briefly whether it was hers. Finally, unable to recall having ever even wanted to ride a horse, she decided it may-as-well be sold. She stumbled all the way to the phone and called up the auction house, who paid her three hundred dollars by the end of that day for the little mare.

Ron arrived home from the grain store that evening, a cupful of oats in hand. He saw no pony at first, and although he thought it odd, didn't worry too much. The boy walked further into the yard, starting to worry as he got closer and closer with still no horse in sight. He could hear his mom's music blasting from the house and yelled at the oblivious woman to "shut that shit off." His heart pounded and paused for a moment as he stepped out behind the house and still saw no pony. Panic struck. Where had she gone? He ran the fence; the task took him an exhausting half-hour, but Ron never slowed.

By the time he found himself back at the house, he had broken down. His horse was gone with no indication of logic. He sat down and cried. Tears ran down his face, while his mother continued her lonely party inside. As he entered the house, Ron found his mother, passed out amid pools of vomit and more empty bottles than he'd ever seen her with. He was a smart kid. He knew then where his pony, his best friend, had gone.

The ten-year-old boy walked out the door and into the world. He begged for money and people gave, and when fall temperatures gradually began to overtake

the warm weather, he hitchhiked south as far as he could before winter's fury blew in.

Nearly twenty years later, at age twenty-nine, the boy found himself in Walla Walla, Washington. He had developed a severe addiction to whatever preparations he could get his hands on, as a means of escaping, if just for a little while, a reality in which he felt unwelcome, and usually found whatever meager finances he needed in passersby. Ron came to know his street life and felt there was no reason to change it. He was too old, he said, for better things.

The day Tammy met Ron, he was sitting on the ground outside a local sub shop looking rather perplexed, his brow furrowed and his brain groaning.

"How you doin'?" he asked the girl in the same way a cheesy sitcom character might hit on girls at the bar. She glanced, but walked on by, uninterested. On the way out, however, Ron stopped her again, this time asking for help.

"With what?" Tammy inquired, keeping a safe distance from the stranger, who was obviously a fighter as she judged by his grotesquely black left eye.

"I need a job, but I can't spell so good and I can't get my application filled all out."

Tammy felt herself soften and stepped a little closer, relaxing.

"That I can help you with," she said with a soft smile, taking the sheet of paper from the man and looking it over quickly. "Okay, well first you just have to give your name."

He answered her as if he had forgotten it was not the girl who asked, but rather the application. "Ron, Ron Healey."

"Okay, well write it down." She slid the paper across the warm pavement and pointed to the line.

"Uh-huh. 'Kay." He looked again totally puzzled, this time also embarrassed, as he tried to act as if he knew exactly what to do.

"Do you know how to spell your name, Ron?"

The man looked down at the ground and shook his head. "Not so good, I'm sorry. I didn't never really go to school or nothin'. Well, since a long time ago, anyway. Don't remember them days so good though." He laughed, again with a hint of embarrassment.

"It's alright," Tammy told him, "I can help you. But you write; you may as well learn," she said, refusing his attempt to hand her the pen. "Okay. Your first name: R - O - N."

He thought long and hard before inking in each letter, but eventually identified himself on the Pizza Hut application as Ron Healy: ex-dishwasher and self-taught mechanic, whose last address was "no address" in Billings, Montana, and who was seeking "any" job available.

"So you're from Montana?"

"Yep, I am; grew up there. Well, partly there, but really more like everywhere. But I got an idea I needed a chance again and wandered off and ended up here."

"How long since you moved?"

"Ummm... two days I think. It's real' pretty here."

"Yes, it is..." Tammy looked at him again, curiously. "How'd you get that black eye, Ron?" she asked.

Ron gazed at the ground again as Tammy pictured the fight scene, maybe over drugs, maybe over a drunken prostitute, in her head.

"Some asshole in College Place. I went to his store, asked for the time. Chased me out with a broom and hit me in the face. I shoulda known. Those religious folks are all the same."

"That's terrible," she responded, "Did you call the police?"

"No, he said he'd call them and they'd pick up a 'weirdo' like me before they'd take him in. He was right, too."

"But Ron, that's awful..."

"It's okay, I'm used to it," he finished in the same, nonchalant way someone might say he or she is used to the bitter cold of an eastern Montana winter.

"It's not okay. It's really awful."

A moment of silence and continued work on the application followed, before Tammy's eyes happened upon her watch and she realized she was officially very late for work. "Oh, shit, I'm sorry, but I really have to run! I'm late for work! I'll see you around though, I guess! Take care of yourself, Ron." She smiled, adding, "And I'm Tammy, by the way," and offering her hand, which Ron shook, although his choice would have been a close and lingering hug. He watched her go, forgetting for a moment all his troubles.

Mr. Healy bounced around town for awhile. He found some people to party and made money begging while he looked for a job to no avail. A God-faring town like Walla Walla was great for drifters, although, in usual form, no business would hire one.

One sunny afternoon, after Tammy had just spent the day shopping downtown and was on the way back to her car, a few bags in tow, she heard her name through the hot June air. Glancing around, she quickly spotted Ron running toward her from the diner up one block and across the street. She greeted him and agreed to go for coffee, but not at the nearest diner because her cohort feared the waitress would think he was crazy.

They walked and he talked and eventually, the two ended up at a café a little ways north of his first stop. Ron remembered he had no money left and threw his hands into his pockets with childlike desperation. Tammy saw the look of horror on his face as he suggested, "Actually, wh - why - why don't we just not have coffee. We'll just walk around or somethin'."

"It's okay, Ron. I'll buy you a cup."

He gave her an impromptu and rather uncomfortable hug and thanked her enthusiastically.

"You smell good," followed his thanks.

"Ron, thanks. But remember, we're just friends, okay? Sorry, I'm taken." She flashed a shiny ring and beamed.

"Oh, sorry. Sorry, Tammy. But you do smell good."

"It's okay, just keep it in mind. And it's just my shampoo," she said, offering him a smile and a little wiggle. Ron smiled back.

After coffee, the duo said their goodbyes and both went "home" with their

own thoughts. Tammy was saddened by her inability to make Ron's day better, and she promised herself that she would be perhaps his first friend.

Meanwhile, Ron wondered if life was really worth continuing. He thought about how he would be alone forever, on the streets and in misery. He returned to his home in an alley behind the Rose Street Safeway, lit a cigarette butt, and reached into his pocket to pull out the small packet of acid he had bought the week before. Ron placed the first square onto his tongue, let it dissolve a little, and swallowed, closing his eyes. He took then, another, and then the last.

A golden horse suddenly danced before Ron's eyes, in and out of reality, taunting him to follow her. His mother stood just out of reach, smiling at him as she had before his father's death; and suddenly, the world became that old farmyard, held together by love and baling twine, and his father stepped onto the porch of the tidy little house. The boy again saw a place where he belonged, where everything was as it should be. He stood up, patted the horse that wasn't there, waved at his father, and smiled at his ghostly mother. He walked across the street to a big blue apartment building with a small blue fire ladder on its side. As he approached, a paint chip fell toward him, indecisive in the wind, and landed on his shoulder. Ron didn't notice.

He mounted the first step and continued up to the third and highest floor. To him, then, it was the ladder to the old hayloft he climbed, the red paint still fresh enough that its scent tickled his nose. He stepped onto the tattered shelf and looked over a shaky railing. Below stood his beloved pony, his loving mother, his father, full of life, and his home. Without a moment's hesitation, Ron, thrust his body over the side, with wide eyes open, toward the deep-grassed meadow beside the barn. He fell quickly, landing hard upon the cement.

The police responded to a call by a tenant of the big blue house the next day. There, they found the body of an unidentified man, pale, stiff, and cold. Tammy heard about the death on the news and had gone quickly to the police station to give him an identity: simply, Ron Healey. Police searches showed that he had been born the son of William and Molly Healey, in Glasgow, Montana. His last recorded residence was a small town northwest of his birthplace, where his mother still lived. Ron was two days short of his thirtieth birthday when he died.

Tammy sat at home the following evening, looking over photocopies of the official report. She looked through an old photo into Ron's troubled eyes, and suddenly understood. She knew that in death, he had found his dreams, his peace, and his life. "Happy Birthday," she said.

AFTER THE RAIN

BY KRISTI RASMUSSEN



Inspiration for this photo came from seeing this flower right after it stopped raining, and the sun came out. The play of light and water droplets on the flower was beautiful.

CALM IN THE STORM

BY ANDREW LARRIVEE

I'VE SPENT MOST OF MY LIFE WAITING FOR THAT SPARK - the flash of brilliance that comes when you least expect it - where all you can do is accept and embrace the power it holds over you. As a precocious child nurtured by literature, music, and the arts, I always dreamed of something more. I had been told college would be the gateway to what I wanted in life, so I proceeded to make sure that I got as far away as I could from everything that seemed to be holding me back.

When I was offered an academic scholarship to the University of Arizona last year, I felt like all my hard work was finally being rewarded. Independence and self-discovery had been my two biggest goals since I was a little boy, but now that they were approaching I was beginning to have some second thoughts. I never told anyone those doubts though, and when the time came for me to be on my own in a strange new land, it was overwhelming to say the least. I almost ran away before school had even started. Crushed by my own ambition at a time when I had no one else to turn to, I became a thin, dilapidated version of my former self.

I was able to resist the temptation to escape, but those repressed emotions that had come crumbling down were still very much present. I gradually became more and more distant from the student body surrounding me. My only satisfaction came in the late night walks and bike rides that, for a short time, separated me from everyone else.

I needed a reason to stay in Tucson. I needed a reason to feel alive. I needed something that could make me appreciate the miracle and gift of nature. My wish came true one Saturday afternoon in September, when everyone except me had gathered for the big football game.

I had originally reserved the day for practicing my trombone and finding a place to volunteer, but I put my second errand on hold when I heard the bellowing ache of thunder and the pitter-patter of rain seep through the music complex. As I went to unchain my bike, I discovered that it wasn't raining, it was pouring with wild abandon and relentless fury. I could not miss this opportunity. I decided that I would not stop biking until the storm let up.

With the dynamic sounds of Miles Davis and J.J. Johnson still fresh in my mind, I zoomed past the tall palm trees and irrigated lawns of the vast campus I was already taking for granted. I laughed with maniacal delight as I passed by all the people running for shelter. The storm just kept getting worse and worse. Rain seemed to be pelting me from all directions, but it couldn't have been more exhilarating. There was no rhyme or reason to where I was going; I just turned whenever I was compelled to do so, letting my primal instincts guide me. The storm quickly ballooned to monstrous proportions. Most normal, sane human beings would have stopped right there and gone home. I, however, was not a sane person at the time. The storm was relentless and unyielding, but so was I. It was like some great naturalistic short story by Crane or Hemingway where the character is pitted against the elements of nature in a fight to the death. I really could have been seriously injured at any point. I could have been struck by the danger-

lightning, been hit by a car with the poor visibility of myself and others, or have lost my grip on the water-filled roads causing me to head straight into traffic, but I came out untouched. At that moment in time, nothing could go wrong.

I had never felt so alive. I began to see things in a completely different light. Everything was suddenly significant as I found myself fascinated with even the smallest of miracles. I looked around at the scenery and noticed how perfectly the architecture and the desert complimented each other. I noticed how beautifully random the vegetation sprouted in some places and marveled at the sheer size of the mountains surrounding me. I focused on the flow of the water; how currents were formed in some areas; how the slightest change in topography and elevation yielded completely different results. I developed an intense appreciation for how complicated and all encompassing the world really is. I had spent the majority of my life looking for answers and getting nothing but more questions in return, but I realized then that these questions were what made life so incredible. I became content in the fact that I knew nothing that day. Even as complete chaos surrounded me, I felt at peace.

I was in the worst of the storm while I was thinking these thoughts. There were times that I was completely hydroplaning and I had no control over my bike. There were also times when a car would pass by and spray water over me so that I wasn't able to see where I was going for at least five seconds. It was one of these times where I lost control, hit the curb, and wiped out in the grass. I couldn't help but laugh. I later found out that I had completely screwed up the alignment of my wheels, but I didn't care then. I started singing songs as loud as I could, my voice drowned out by the everlasting roar of the small typhoon.

After about an hour I decided it was time to head back. Fortunately, I had zigzagged enough that I wasn't that far away from home. On my way back, I came across a guy whose car was stuck in almost waist-level water. My initial reaction was to keep going, but I decided to see what I could do to help. We pushed the car into the nearest driveway, and along the way other people came out to help. I know he would have been fine without me, but there was something about that unification of strangers that was really rewarding. For once I had done something where I knew I would get nothing in return.

The storm had dramatically backed off since my part in the rescue operation, and now I was beginning to slow down too. It was still raining, but there was a genuine peacefulness in the air now. I no longer regarded my experience as a fight against nature. Somewhere during my little escapade, I had become one with nature. I thought it was just a cliché before, but it was as if our heartbeat and breathing were now one in the same. When it picked up the pace, I picked up the pace as well. When it backed off, something made me subconsciously back off with it. I never thought that the feeling was possible.

I'm still hesitant to throw around words like "epiphany" or "spiritual revelation," but I do know that something inside me changed forever that day. It wasn't spiritual; it was something bigger, something harder to define. It made me realize how vast the universe is. I came home drenched from head to toe afterwards to see that everything was as it was before. I laughed at my stupidity when I saw that the CD player I had been carrying in my backpack was ruined. My older room-

mate could only marvel at my apparent insanity as I tried to recreate the scene for him. I took a shower to try and see if I could make some sense of what had just happened, but it was a vain attempt. I'll never be able to fully comprehend and articulate the change that came over me on that unassuming day. It will forever be ingrained in my consciousness, but it will never be completely understood.

The revelation, as they always are, was only temporary. I realized about a month later that I couldn't keep exposing myself to an environment this draining and hazardous to my mental health. I'm still not sure what made my first college experience start off so horribly, but part of it might have been the disappointment of entering a place still very much like my own. This time, it was much bigger and much more threatening. When I couldn't find anyone to relate to, I withdrew into a world of books, music, and dreams. I was so focused on the future that I forgot to enjoy the present. My bike rides were the only thing that kept me sane. I now look back on that journey through the pouring rain as proof that I don't need dazzling credentials or high-profile instructors in order to become creatively inspired or enlightened. All I need to do is sustain the thirst for knowledge and creativity that I already possess. All I need to do is look to nature whenever I am frustrated. If I do those things, everything else should fall into place.

Even after everything that happened, I still wouldn't change anything about my stay in Tucson. That Saturday afternoon was just one of many moments there that made me become more aware of what kind of person I was and what my limitations were. I learned that I couldn't keep putting pressure on myself to be the best in everything that I did. I learned to appreciate the world around me, and not remove myself from it whenever things didn't go my way. I found out what the world outside was like - and it wasn't always pretty. Despite that though, my experiences there gave me hope that I would someday be able to find my voice. I took a chance with my challenge against the elements, and I came out forever changed by the experience. I lived most of my life settling with what was comfortable and familiar, but by exploring the unknown, I discovered that the spark I craved would never be found unless some degree of risk was taken.

CHANGING SEASONS

BY KRISTAL GRINOLDS

Leaves

falling

falling

falling swirling

gnitziwt

gnitziwt

Land

On top

leaves on top

Baby's head

Sweet

Child

Laughter's

Fill

Air

Winds

Blowing

Leaves

Darting

To and Fro

Blue

Eyes

Of innocence

Happiness

Showing

Love

For you

Baby Boy

Precious

And new

Life

Ever-changing

Seasons breathe

New life

Through

You

INNOCENCE

BY KRISTAL GRINOLDS



This photo was taken when we were raking leaves in the yard.
My son, Braedon, crawled on top of a big pile of leaves and threw them into the air,
laughing with pure joy and innocence.

THEM BASSES

BY DAN BAUER



I play this brand new King Tuba in the Wind Ensemble at Bismarck State College.

It's the same instrument that I played at Bismarck High School, where we played a piece entitled *Them Basses* by Getty H. Huffine.

I was one of a group of eight tubists who performed this arrangement with the accompaniment of four full Wind Ensembles.



HANGING ON

BY KRISTI RASMUSSEN

Inspiration for this painting came from a tree that I saw.
The ground below the tree was eroded away,
yet the tree was still hanging on.
I related to the tree because, at times,
I feel I have fallen, but I have managed to hang on.

VERTIGO'S PIER

BY JOSH ALESON



The complete lack of sky even in the water's reflection,
as well as, the glass reflection of the dock and boat. I really like green.

THE RIVER

BY PAT VANNETT

THE RUSTLE OF LEAVES DRIED FROM HEAVY FROST, the churning rush of the swift current comforted Sarah as she sat on the park bench near the walking path along the Missouri River. The beautiful middle-aged woman sat motionless, unaware of the traffic nearby. She was drawn to the water like a woman drawn into her lover's arms. She longed for the peace it promised her if she would only enter its cleansing grace.

Sarah Hunter pried open her weary eyes, bloodshot and stuck with the yellow matter that collects in the corners from sleep. Exhaustion showed in the lines around her eyes and in the puffiness of her cheeks. She often worked late into the night. Last night had been particularly long. She had become quite busy at her Medical Transcription job. Working from her home office, she had developed the habit of working during the night in order to keep her afternoons and evenings free for family activities. With the start of the school year, she was becoming more involved with volunteer work at her daughter Erin's high school.

Rolling over, the bedroom clock admonished her with its neon red numbers. Nine-thirty a.m. She vaguely remembered hearing the rush of footsteps upon the stairs and the bang of the front door - Erin, her sixteen year old, leaving for school. Or was that yesterday? Is today Saturday? Feeling disoriented, Sarah located the remote control on the nightstand at her bedside and turned on the television sitting on the dresser across the room. Let's see, the news channel should tell me something. "Oh, my God!" The words sprang from her lips. What are they saying? What?

"For those just joining us, there has been a terrible tragedy. A plane has struck the Pentagon," The broadcaster announced.

Mesmerized, Sarah's eyes blurred. Tears rolled down her cheeks. The tragedy pierced her like a knife ripping through her stomach and sides. The phone's harsh ringing broke into her shocked, horrified mind.

"Are you watching the news?" Her husband Bill was calling from his accounting office.

"I just turned it on. What is it?"

"They're saying it might be terrorists."

"What? Are they sure?" Terror filled Sarah's voice.

"I think they're pretty sure. They probably wouldn't even suggest it otherwise." Bill was the logical half of this couple.

"I better call Daniel." Their son was attending Colorado State University and of her three children, she knew he would need to hear her voice today. They had a special bond, as mother and son. He had always been emotionally attached to her. As a child, he needed her to rock him before sleep would come and would often awaken after she had placed him in his bed and pitter-patter down the hall to where she and Bill lay to climb in between them. That, too, had been a time of disagreement for the couple. Bill thought she babied Daniel. And maybe she did, just a little. But her son always seemed to need her close to him, and she couldn't

bear to hear his cries.

"What for?" Her husband admonished her. "You can't do anything, anyway."

"I know that, but it always helps to talk to family during tragedies."

"Whatever." His typical dismissal of her.

Throughout the day, Sarah was vigilant to the news. The drama kept escalating as more events played out. It was like watching one of the action movies that had become so popular of late. Sarah was reminded of the movie she had recently watched with her daughter Erin where the renegade asteroid was ready to destroy the earth in twelve hours. She kept waiting for the hero to come up with some miraculous way to save this horrible day.

Sarah fielded calls from all three of her children that afternoon. Even Jane, her very independent twenty-five-year old, called to hear her mother's voice. Jane had always been a distant child. The oldest, she took on more responsibility for her younger siblings than was necessary. Sarah often wondered if Jane resented that role or if she was just more observant of her parents' animosity toward each other, causing her to be more distant and judgmental. Today, Sarah listened to her children's fears, comforting them in their need to feel grounded. Barely peeling herself from the mayhem displayed on every major television station even to eat or use the bathroom, Sarah became weak with despair.

The day following 9-11, Sarah awoke to an empty house. The family dog, Jasper, was pacing near the front door, his signal of needing to be let out into their spacious, fenced back yard. Annoyed at the interruption of her sleep - Sarah's only escape from the trauma of the past twenty-four hours - she climbed from her bed and made her way down the stairs to let the dog out. As she opened the sliding glass door to the backyard, Sarah breathed in the crisp morning air mixed with a hint of the musky aroma rising from decaying foliage. Drawn to it, and with a pretense of getting much needed exercise, she went back to her bedroom. Sarah changed into the insulated sweatpants and sweatshirt she wore to Erin's soccer games, walking shoes, mittens and a hat. Going through her pristine kitchen to the garage door, she grabbed the collie's leash and headed out for a walk.

As she entered the back yard, Jasper immediately recognized his worn, brown, leather leash. He ran to her and jumped up excitedly, wagging his tale. His long, golden brown hair had become wet from the dewy grass. It felt much like a wet rag rug bringing warm memories of Sarah's childhood. A smile formed on her face as she recalled the fight she had put up when Erin begged for a dog knowing that ultimately the responsibility for its care would fall to her since she worked from home most days. Sarah and Erin had found this young Collie at the Humane Society. He had been a quiet, cowering animal. With the family's loving attention, Jasper had become a happy, playful family pet and Sarah's daily companion.

Going to the street and turning left, Sarah quickly made her way to the nearby walking path. Her warm breath created a vapor as it mixed with the cool morning air. Jasper, always excited with their daily walking ritual, stopped frequently to sniff and raise his leg to pee. The street traffic was heavier here. As she approached the underpass, the rumble of tires echoed overhead. The rushing sound of a gaggle of geese rising from the river was a distant backdrop to the churning of Sarah's thoughts.

As the companions neared the walking path along the river, Sarah felt the calm and gentle tug of the current. Increasing her pace, her urge to be nearer that mighty water grew. The woman's stature became more upright. Her head rose higher, her chest lifted, her back straightened, her confidence rose as she neared her special place. Jasper sensed the change in his master. His ears perked up and he no longer strayed from the path.

Sarah stopped, knowing instantly when she arrived at the bench she had been searching. Sitting, holding Jasper's worn, leather leash loosely in her hand, she studied the river intently. She felt a kinship with the gray, churning water. Here she felt accepted. The river talked to her - not in the harsh words she heard everyday: "That's stupid. What are you doing that for?" This mantra came from her husband. "What are you doing that for? That's stupid." Her daughter Jane had learned well from her father - but with the cooing of a lover: "Come to me. I will wash the sadness from your heart." The river accepted Sarah with all her faults, with all her despair. Yesterday's events had propelled her to this place of peace. She felt a kinship with those who had passed. They had not chosen the sudden passing into another world. They had not been able to talk with their loved ones before they died. The cleansing waters called to her aching heart with promises of unconditional love and peace.

Jasper tugged at the leash. He wanted to explore the earthen path leading to the river's edge. They had come to this place before and Jasper loved to drink from the river. A ragged flock of mergansers floated by, some diving, others looking alert. The faces of her children Jane, Daniel and Erin passed before her eyes. She loved them dearly and had given them a firm foundation to their lives.

It was in this moment that Sarah realized the despair she felt in her relationship with Bill. He truly did not love her anymore, maybe he never had. And she no longer loved him. Not so much him as what he and their life had become. They could no longer have a conversation without hurtful things being exchanged. They had not shared the same bed for several years. Bill chose to seek others for this comfort that she was no longer able to give him.

How had they come to this point? It was so surprising to her. She had devoted her life to her family. She gave up working at regular jobs where she could benefit from daily personal contact and personal growth. She mothered and nurtured all her children in the way they needed. Her children were at the front of her thoughts now. Jane always seemed to have a bone to pick with her; she had a special relationship with her father, Bill. Daniel would always be the free spirit. Erin was the over-achiever of the family; she would make a wonderful teacher one day. Sarah and Bill had been separated about ten years earlier, and she had allowed him to return. She did have to admit that he had tried, for a while, anyway, to love her again. But, she just wasn't any fun anymore. She snickered. Fun to him was getting drunk and drooling, hanging on all the women in the bar, including her. She hated that. It was the worst insult to her and to their marriage, and she knew in her heart that their life together was over.

Sarah rose from the bench. The dog's smooth, leather leash slipped from her hand. She placed one step in front of the other yearning to be covered in the welcoming peace of the Missouri.



"... AND HE KNEW HE WAS GUILTY"

BY KRISTI RASMUSSEN

Inspiration for this painting comes from reading *Montana 1948*,
and how I thought Marie would feel as a result of what she went through.



MARIE

BY DEB EMERSON

The artwork on these five pages relates to the book
Montana 1948 by Larry Watson, the Bismarck State College 2004 Campus Read.



LEN
BY JENI BAILEY



FRANK
BY NICOLE RESSLER



OLLIE YOUNG BEAR

BY ANNA JOHNSON

When my father was my age, he lived in an all-white town,
and the kids at school used to tease him and his sisters.

The other kids would call them "apples" —
white on the inside and red on the outside.

So, since Ollie Young Bear,
from the book *Montana 1948*, wanted to be white,
I decided to make his head look like an apple with a slice taken out.



SHADOW'S TREE

BY ALEXIS MONROE

My dog was my best friend for the first thirteen years of my life;
she is buried in a section where we used to play.
Memories of her are very comforting.
but she is gone from sight – just like the leaves on the tree

OKAY, GUYS- FOR
SERIOUS NOW.
WHEN! DID YOU
KNOW YOU'RE ALL
THE DEVIL???

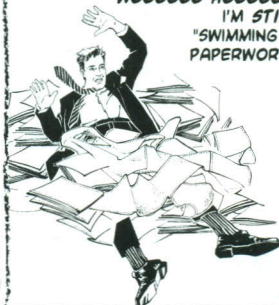
**ALL OF
YOU!!!!**



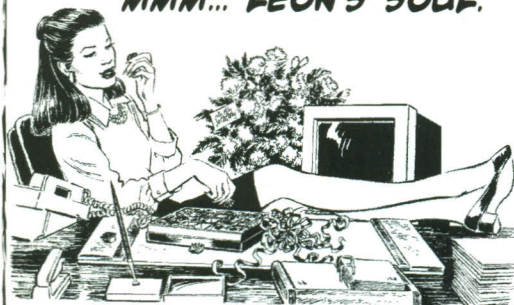
**WE WANT YOUR
SOUL, LEON!!!**



WOOOOOOO-HOOOOOO!!!
I'M STILL
"SWIMMING IN
PAPERWORK!"



MMM... LEON'S SOUL.



HOLDING THIS PHONE FEELS LIKE
MY CONSCIOUSNESS TASTES,
SPIRALING OUT OF TIME... AT LEAST
THE BANANAS AREN'T RIPE YET.
THEN WE'D NEED TO GET THE
PRESIDENT INVOLVED.

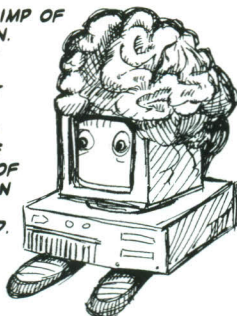
SUDDENLY...

WHOOOSH!



HEY, LITTLE GUY.
WHO ARE YOU?
DO YOU COME
IN PEACE?
WHY ARE
YOUR BRAINS
EXPOSED?

I AM YOUR IMP OF
INSPIRATION.
A MUSE. IF
YOU WILL.
I WAS SENT
FROM THE
FUTURE TO
MAKE SURE
FIGMENTS OF
IMAGINATION
GETS COMPLETED.



WHAT'S THE POINT? OF LIFE? OF
THIS YEAR'S FIGMENTS?
OF HAVING A DESK
WITH A KEYBOARD
BUT NO
COMPUTER?

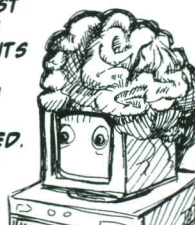


HEY, COULD
SOMEONE GIVE
ME A FREAKIN'
HAND WITH
THIS CRAP?
I'M SICK OF BEING
THE
OFFICE
SUPPLY
SLAVE.
AND I
BETTER GET
SOME HELP, OR
I WILL STAPLE
EVERYONE'S EYES
SHUT!!!



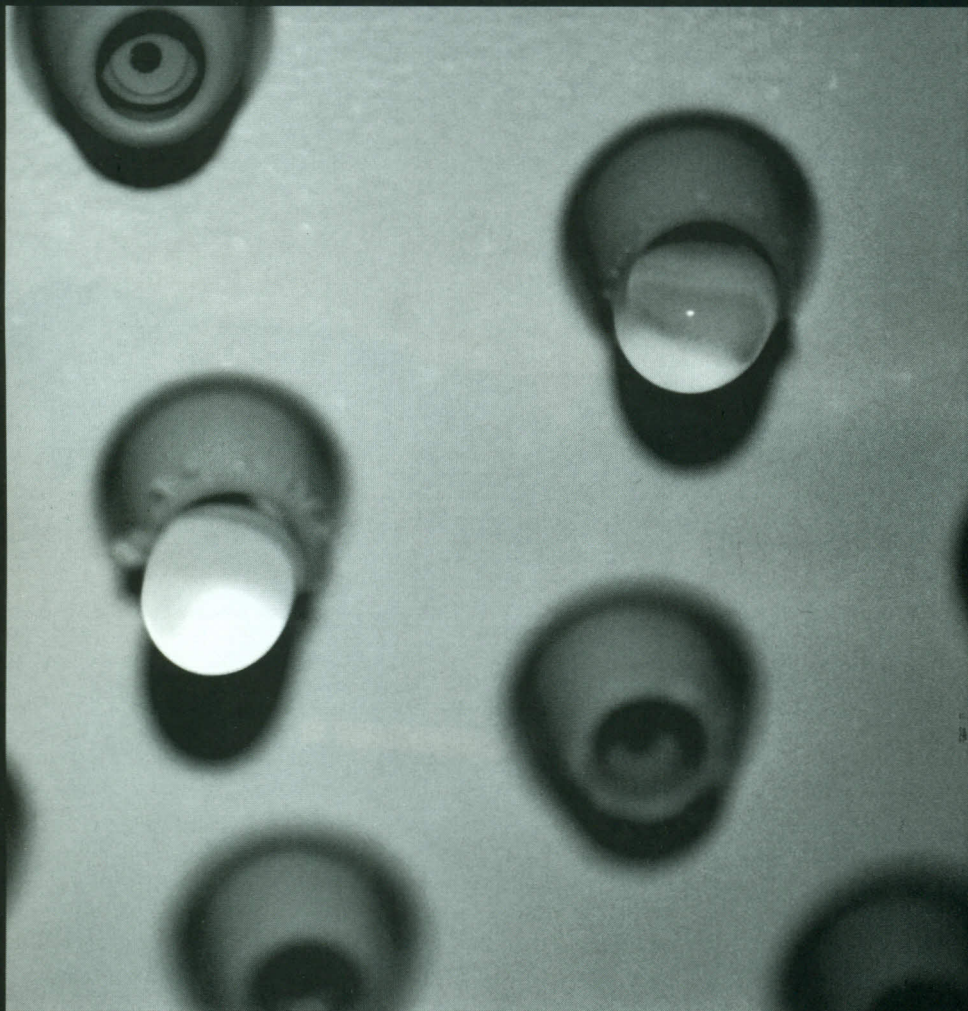
HELLO? COMPUTER
DUDE? I THINK THE
LINE IS BREAKING UP...
TELL ME, OH MIGHTY
MULTI-DIMENSIONAL
CREATURE, WHY IS
IT SO IMPORTANT
THAT FIGMENTS OF
IMAGINATION BE
COMPLETED?

IF I TOLD YOU, I WOULD
HAVE TO TERMINATE
YOU. IN BRIEF, THE
UNIVERSE WILL CEASE
TO EXIST
IF THIS
FIGMENTS
PUBLI-
CATION
ISN'T
FINISHED.



ALMOST

BY JENNIFER WEISGERBER



This shot took a bit of waiting. I stood in my shower trying to avoid the water drops as they fell. I like the tension the photo exudes. It almost feels like if you look at it long enough, those drops will fall. I was also drawn to the geometric shapes of my showerhead.

FOREVER FRIENDS

BY MAHALIA MEES



Living in California with my best friends was so far one of the best times in my life —
after all, they're not just my friends — they'll always be my sisters.

BURIED IN THE SNOW

BY CONRAD BAUER

IT WAS SNOWING BEAUTIFUL SNOW. The soft flakes blanketed our vision for as far as we could see, a massive twenty feet. It wasn't cold; rather, I think the thick snow was keeping all the warmth in. My cousin, his friend, and I were hiking down through the rugged hills and tall pine trees.

Harv, my cousin, was kind of an idiot that liked to drink. He can sure hold his own in a bar fight, though. Through his two years of legal drinking he learned his size and bulk allowed him to be slightly less drunk and slightly more intelligent than most of the other big, dumb, drunken opponents he faced. Note, slightly more intelligent. Harv's parents owned a cabin somewhere in the outskirts of the Rockies. I needed a break from life, so I agreed to go with him.

The cabin had heat, books, and crappy television with basic cable. I was more interested in the heat and books. Strange how two such commodities could make a person feel so content. However, Harv was not content with the simplicity of the cabin. He wanted every channel he could get on the television. Every brain cell-killing channel he watched everyday every week at home, he wanted here. "The only thing better than watching T.V. and getting drunk at home is watching T.V. and getting drunk somewhere else!" was his number one reason for the trip to the cabin.

Harv had invited his friend along. Everyone called him Chub. I never did learn his real name. Chub was the reason Harv got in so many bar fights. A fat, chubby, short welt of a figure. Chub was the same age but weaker, cockier, and more annoying than Harv. I didn't think very highly of him. I flat out told him that just before we squeezed out the small door of the cabin.

He was also the reason we left our nice, warm abode. Chub was the proud purchaser of a cable descrambler. This descrambler could theoretically grant Harv's wish of all the television channels he wanted. The combined brainpower of my two companions, still negative, surprisingly managed to dig out old blue prints and maps of the cabin. Because of the weather that sometimes visited these white hills, all the wiring was buried. They found a cable and electric box about a half-mile downhill where our cabin was. It was the underground wire hub for several cabins in the ten-mile radius of its domain.

"Ay, Frail!" Harv's voice rang out cutting through the silence I was too busy noticing to answer him. He tried louder.

"Frail!" Frail was my nickname. Franz was my real name. Didn't like Franz too much. Was called Frail because I was tiny and thin. Note, not sickly. I liked the name Frail, so I kept it.

"Frail?" He looked back, wondering if I had disappeared in the heavy snow we were walking in.

"Don't be so loud..." I managed to whisper while adjusting the oversized coat I was wearing to make it more comfortable.

"What're ya gonna do when we get back to the cabin?"

"Read."

Harv answered in a way that he understood and nullified the conversation at the same time. "Ya."

Another few minutes passed with silence. We had been walking for about twenty minutes. The cable box was probably yards from where we were. However, Chub was breathing hard and looked as if he was about to pop.

"Ugh, guys! Can we stop for like, a second?" He sputtered, out of breath.

"Chub, we can't be that far from the box. You can rest there," I remarked.

Chub had leaned against one of the many pine trees that were scattered around the area. Harv had stopped, turned around, and looked at me with puppy-dog eyes. I gave in.

"... I... I suppose we could stop for awhile." I stopped and plopped down in the snow where I was. I didn't bother moving underneath the tree to protect myself from the endless flakes. Harv walked over and sat next to Chub.

"Think we'll be able to watch porn when we put this thing in?" Chub put great emphasis on the word porn, holding the descrambler in his hand.

"Yeah, that'd be great!" Harv answered, of course.

I sat there in the snow. It was the first time I noticed it. We were all wearing the same color coats. The same drab green tainted all our garments. I secretly wondered if I was the only one who hadn't noticed the matching colors of our coats yet.

Between the conversation of idiocy and the snow being piled on top of me, I eventually drifted to sleep. It was a short bout of sleep. I dreamt I was somewhere and it was snowing. The only difference between my dream and reality was that my dream was completely silent. There was no one around. Silence saturated the air in my dream world.

"Frail!" The ironic end to my dream came abruptly. Harv's friendly steel-toed boot accompanied his yell with a kick to my kidneys. Had it been anyone else in our troupe that kicked me, I would have made sure they paid for it.

"All right, I'm up." I quickly climbed to my feet fearing another wake up call.

"Quit wasting our time, Frail!" Chub glared at me. I didn't say a word. I didn't even meet his eyes. I simply ran to Harv who was already trudging away. Chub met us shortly after. Out of breath.

We finally arrived at our slightly exciting destination practically seconds after our rest. The cold off-manila colored box barely stuck out from its white abyss. We cleared away the snow and stood there. We glanced at one another, wondering what the next step was. Eventually our attention and eyes rested on the object in front of us. During our rest the fog in the distance turned to gray from its previously joyful white.

"So how do we open it?" Chub asked. Before anyone could answer, Harv rushed forward and bashed the box several times with the hammer he had brought along. He peeled away the covering to reveal the metal creature's guts. One of the wires inside was sizzling, damaged by Harv's assault and reacting to the wet snow that now fell on its unprotected form. Chub seemed alarmed but did not show it in his voice.

"Uh, oh, hope that wasn't ours."

"No, it wasn't. That one's labeled 143A, electrical. Ours is 138," I reassured

him, remembering the numbers on the side of the cabin and on the blue prints. Someone out here is going to be wondering what happened to their electricity.

"Well, we didn't come all this way for nothing. Frail, put the box in."

"What?" This was Chub and Harv's brainchild! I didn't want anything to do with this. I almost yelled at Chub for even suggesting such an idea, but then Harv spoke.

"Yeah, just do it, Frail. You're smarter than both of us, and we'd probably screw up."

Instead of denying their request I, for some reason, agreed. I also noticed on the ground by Harv blood from his hand. He was trying to hide his wound, and the snow was quickly covering the blood on the ground. He must have gotten it when tearing the metal covering open. No blood seemed to have gone onto the metal cable box, though. Chub hadn't noticed.

"All right, fine." The box stood inches away from me. I peered into the gaping tear, courtesy of Harv's massive strength, and prospected my plan of action. A hammer, a wire cutter, and the descrambler were all that Harv and Chub had brought along. Chub had mentioned something at the cabin about the person who sold him the descrambler. I supposedly was to cut the cable that was ours and twist the end wires into the two protruding sides of the descrambler.

I took off my mittens and put them in my coat pocket. I hadn't noticed it, really, but when my bare skin came in contact with the air I did. It had gotten colder. A slight breeze helped the already quick numbing of my hands.

Leaning forward with the wire cutter, I clipped the wire that was ours and shaved the covering of both ends. Taking the descrambler in my other hand, I advanced on my target. Harv watched with a sense of stupidity in his face. Chub watched with a smirk on his face. Neither of them noticed the small cut I made in the electrical cord.

Between the wetness of the melted snow on my hands and the dryness in the air, I flew about twenty feet back after coming in contact with the electrical. I didn't think it'd be that bad, but it still accomplished my task. It hurt for a split second and singed my fingers. My two companions scurried quickly away with a look of fear and surprise on their faces. I never thought Chub could move that fast.

It was still snowing beautifully. I managed to get my mittens back on. And I lay there in the snow. Warmth again returned to my fingers and body, insulated by the snow and my lack of movement. Finally. It was quiet. I twisted my neck in several directions seeing if those two idiots were still around. Nope. The television cable was cut. There will be no more idiot box to loathe when I get back to the cabin. I enjoyed the next fifteen, maybe twenty, minutes of my life in complete silence, buried in the snow.



SUNSET

BY SUZIE MCSHANE

Inspired by North Dakota sunsets —
I use the glazes as a palate for this scenery.
It was an interesting effect.



MAYA
BY DONNA KING

LEFT

BY LAURIE SEEBERG



I was out driving with one of my friends, and we found an abandoned playground.
In the middle of the playground were these huge cement tunnels
that had spider webs, dirt, and weeds in them. They were completely forgotten and left.

CALM WATERS

BY JENNIFER WEISGERBER

THE AIRBRUSHED CHEVY VAN LUMBERED DOWN THE HIGHWAY, a blur of delicate smoky landscapes against the grey paved road. Emily lay in the back of the van, caressed by the heat of full-blown summer as it noisily blew in from the two open windows. The warm wind felt comforting, even though her skin was starting to stick to the velvet upholstery that lined the built-in bed.

She yawned and stretched; she preferred to sleep on these long road trips. The heat made it almost impossible not to. Sitting up, she noticed that her muscles were stiff. Even though she was only twelve, the space was too small to share comfortably with her fifteen-year old sister. She turned around to look out the tinted porthole situated on either side of the bed. The window was bubble-shaped, and she could see parts of her own reflection as she stared at other families passing by in normal cars like station wagons and minivans, wondering where they were headed.

She leaned over, her elbow digging into her sister's side, and yelled toward the front of the van.

"Mom, where are we?" She paused, trying to distinguish sounds of the choppy wind from what might be her mother's voice.

"Get off me, Emily," her sister said, twisting away. "You're hurting me."

"Oh, just hold on, Kate," she said impatiently. "I'm trying to figure out if we're almost there, and you're in my way. It's not my fault you got the better spot. I woke up late this morning."

There was still no reply from the front of the van.

"Mom. MOM. Hey, Mom!" she tried again.

"What is it?" Her mother turned in the bucket passenger seat to face Emily. The wind blew her curly dark hair up into a floating crown around her kind face. Her stepfather sat behind the lambskin-covered steering wheel, smoking a cigarette. His eyes never left the road.

Finally, an answer. Feet could seem like miles in a big car.

"Where are we? Are we almost there yet?" Emily asked.

"Emmy, I don't know," her mother replied. "Wait, there's a sign coming up. We're just passing Mobile. We're getting close, honey."

This was good news, she thought, as she moved away from her sister, applying a little extra pressure on Kate's side as she went. The older she got, the longer the trips seemed to be. She still looked forward to the change of scenery, from the magnolia trees and dirty streets of New Orleans to the tall pine trees and white sand of Navarre, Florida. Vacations were almost cleansing - the change of people, of attitudes, of air.

As the van rolled further east along Interstate 10, the breeze roaring through her hair began to smell more like salt. She lay back down and closed her eyes, imagining her favorite place - the beach. She loved the twisting, white-hot sand dunes protected by yards upon yards of sea oats and giant cutgrass that led to sparkling open water. One of her favorite things to do was walk along the shore

while foamy waves washed over her feet, being careful not to step on the sharp shells embedded in the sand. The waves were so playful and powerful; she could jump over them, evadingly; she could run into them, embracing the water with her eyes tightly closed to keep the sting out. She still remembered the summer when hundreds of jellyfish were stranded during a high tide. Unable to get back to the ocean, they suffocated on the dry hot sand, their translucent bodies drying to gummy sacs of clear liquid that spilled out when punctured with a piece of driftwood.

But the beach would have to wait. They weren't even in Florida yet. She sighed. Patience was never a virtue Emily possessed; neither was punctuality. At her grandparents' house one summer, she overheard her grandfather say, "That girl's going to be late to her own funeral." He meant it in a joking manner, but her cheeks burned as she heard the rest of her family laugh. Years later, as she lay in the van, staring at the shaft-carpeted mess of blue and green ceiling, this memory flooded her mind. She felt her cheeks getting hot and turned to face the wall to try to be alone.

She soon fell asleep, and the miles went by at a steady pace. As the van slowed down, taking its last exit of the day, Emily awoke from her turbulent slumber. She sat up to look through the windshield and began to recognize intersections, gas stations and grocery stores. The sight of red scoria roads was comforting. Her sleepiness soon wore off as the excitement of being somewhere new spread across her body.

Emily took comfort in the fact that it was only a short distance on the highway before she could get out of the van. The highway ran parallel to the ocean, teasing travelers with glimpses of translucent green-blue waves forever rolling in to shore, the sun's reflection glinting like diamonds. Impatience washed over Emily like the sometimes strong waves at the beach knocked her off her feet; all she could do was watch the sand dunes.

The van, chugging tiredly along after a long day on the road, rolled down a scoria street lined with pine trees and dry-looking wild grasses. It slowed and pulled into a driveway that led to a small trailer near the back of a lot. *Our vacation home isn't much*, she thought every time she saw the dilapidated one-bedroom with an addition in the back, *but it's ours*. And she guessed that counted for something.

Emily nudged her sister, who was still reading. Kate was always reading, and occasionally it annoyed Emily. Especially when she wanted to get out of the van after a long road trip and Kate was in her way. And especially when the beach was calling her name.

"Kate, come on. We're here. Move so we can get out."

"Just a second. I want to get my stuff together so I don't leave any books in the car."

"We can get it later. Come on," Emily said with frustration. "The sooner we get out, the sooner we can get to the beach."

After some more hustling, her sister finally got moving, and Emily scooted out of the sliding door, her legs weak at first from lack of use. She gathered up her bag of clothes and swimming suits, Walkman and flip-flops, and rushed to the

door behind her mother and stepfather.

Her stepfather's rough hands jangled the deadbolt off the lock, and the small trailer door opened. The musty smell of old bug spray hung in the air. Every time they left town, her stepfather, a temporary soldier, launched an insect fogger to keep pests out during the months they were away.

Emily always thought this trailer was made for small people, for people her height and size. The kitchen cupboards were small, the counters low, and the sinks miniature. Her stepfather had to stoop to pass under the doorframes, but it was just perfect for her mother, sister, and her. After pausing to look around - sometimes things seemed to change since she had been there the last time, to play tricks on her memory - she ran to the bedroom she shared with her sister and quickly changed into her swimsuit.

"Well, somebody's ready for the beach," her mother said, looking at the pudgy blonde girl who flip-flopped into the kitchen, beach towel in hand.

"Are we going soon?" Emily asked.

"Soon. Let me pack the cooler first. Go outside with Kate until we're ready to go."

Emily stepped out the metal front door onto the small cement porch that framed the front of the trailer and saw Kate reading on one of the plastic patio chairs.

"Will you swim with me when we get to the beach?" she asked. No immediate response. Emily sighed.

"Hey, Kate."

"Yeah?" Her sister looked up, folding the corner of the page she was on.

"Will you swim with me? At the beach?"

"Probably, yeah." Kate went back to reading.

Emily turned from her sister and walked around the lot, staring down at the fallen pine needles that padded the space between her feet and the ground. *Most people didn't know that northern Florida has no palm trees*, she thought. When they first came here, she was disappointed with seeing only pine trees herself. Emily smiled at the memory of her first introduction to Florida as she walked down the driveway, where, more and more, the dry, dusty red scoria started peeking out through the brown pine needles. She crossed the road, kicking chunks of red clay, and stopped at the mailbox. The rusty hinges squeaked as she checked for mail. Just a few catalogs; she left them there.

The trip back to the trailer was a little more exciting; she quickened her step as she saw her mother loading the cooler back in the van. She ran to bother her sister again, but Kate was already in the van, maybe to secure the better spot for the second time that day.

"Yes, we're finally going!" Emily said, mostly to herself.

She boarded the van, crawling to the way back, not minding the cramped space this time. Her stepfather, deeply, unhealthily tanned and now just wearing cut-offs, climbed into the bucket seat behind the steering wheel. Her mother's eyes were adorned with exaggerated tortoiseshell sunglasses with rhinestone embellishments; a mesh cover-up clung to her swimming suit. Emily thought the swimwear was ironic; neither her mother nor stepfather ever seemed to go into the

ocean. To them, hot days at the beach were just for sunbathing, and the ocean was there to wash off the heat every few hours.

The van once again roared to life and they headed to the beach. The few miles of highway seemed even longer the second time around, especially since her parents always tried to go out a little bit farther along the coast than most people did in an attempt to find some privacy. They, after all, weren't tourists.

Emily looked out the bubble windows again; there, on the right, was that weird igloo-shaped house on stilts she always looked for.

"Hey, Mom, there's that house. Why did they build their house like that?" she asked.

Her mother turned around in her seat, smiling with patient frustration because Emily asked the same question every time that particular house appeared.

"Because of the hurricane season, dear. The tides have come across the highway before, they were so high."

"Oh," Emily said, switching to the other window to look at the dunes again. *We have to be close*, she thought. It wasn't long before the van slowed and pulled to the side of the highway, waiting for a line of cars to pass. When there was a break, her stepfather pulled a wide u-turn and parked alongside the highway, in the sandy dirt.

As soon as the sliding door opened, Emily pushed past her sister and grabbed a handful of towels so she wouldn't hear complaints from Kate about not helping. Her parents always brought extra towels to wipe sand from all eight of their feet before reentering the van. Beach sand was incorrigible: the stubborn white granules, if allowed, would stick to human skin for weeks, creating painful friction between heels and the backs of shoes, even attaching to the scalp. Emily's arms were full as she trudged up the massive sand dunes.

The cumulative effect of previous visitors showed in the small foot trails that wove through the masses of wavering native grasses. It was illegal to remove sea oats from the dunes. Emily understood the importance of ecology and kept her desires to touch the tall ribbon-like plants to herself. Kicking off her flip-flops, she bent down and hooked a free finger around the straps and hurried as fast as she could along the path, slowing down only to avoid the creeping cocklebur weeds that threatened the tender soles of her feet.

She paused as the ocean came into view; closing her eyes and breathing deeply, taking in the warm salty wind. Emily smiled as the sun warmed her face. Before her lay a huge stretch of milky whiteness all the way to the water; she ran toward it, throwing the towels on dry ground. It was mid-afternoon, and the sand had been absorbing heat all day. The immediate burning on the soles of her feet caused Emily to step faster and faster, wanting only to put out the fire on her skin in the cool ocean water.

As she stood on the firm damp ground, the weight of her feet making slight indentations in the sand, she shaded her eyes with one hand as she searched the endless horizon. All she could see was waves. She felt like a small speck of sand compared to that huge body of water, that infinite ocean. Though only twelve, she knew what humility felt like; it struck her whenever she confronted nature like this.

She turned around to see what everyone else was doing. Her parents were lying on old beach towels soaking up the heat, glowing like oiled-up sun zombies. Kate was sitting in a fort of beach towels and sticks, constructed to shade her reading. It was up to Emily to have fun.

"I'm going swimming!" she called to them, an invitation of sorts.

"Okay, dear," her mother said absentmindedly.

The best way to run into the ocean was at full speed. Emily took a deep breath and ran, the waves slowing her down the deeper she went. The powerful waves that met Emily's thighs caused a great splash; cold seawater hit her face, causing her eyes to shut reflexively and her face to scrunch into a happy grimace. Emily knew the water wasn't going to get any warmer, so she decided to plunge in head-first.

Still running, she took a deep breath and closed her eyes tightly. She half-jumped, half-dove into the crest of an oncoming wave. She noticed the absence of the roaring waves, replaced by a closer, more intense whoosh as if all the water in the ocean were now in her head and she was hearing it splash around. The cold, salty water now surrounded her, prickling her scalp and unleashing the boundaries of gravity as her blonde curls swirled upward. She outstretched her arms, muscular from years of consistent swimming, and kicked her feet, propelling her body further toward the sandy bottom.

Even though she would regret the sting, Emily opened her eyes for a quick second - she never could resist the urge. Mounds of fluffy seaweed migrated across the ocean floor through the blurry lens of the water. The sun pierced the water's surface and diffused into wide bands of brightness, highlighting the dust and specks of miniscule water organisms that hovered weightlessly all around her.

She closed her eyes and prepared to resurface. Her slippery feet went searching for the ground. After a few moments of treading, she felt the soft, cool sand of the sea floor fill the spaces between her toes. Her knees bent and she pushed herself out of the water. As her hair broke through the reflective surface, soon to be bound again by the earth's gravity, Emily gasped for breath, her lungs aching for oxygen.

She was alive.

Emily kept her eyes closed, not wanting to rub to get the salt off and end up irritating them anyway. She drew a deep breath and turned onto her back, attempting to float. She was never a successful floater. Her lungs worked just fine and kept her torso pulled to the water's surface, but her legs sunk like fleshy anchors and sabotaged the whole attempt. Whenever this happened, Emily thought of her grandmother, who, on the rare occasion she was willing to go swimming, merely sat at the edge of hotel pools, dangling her feet in the water. *I'll sink like a rock*, she used to say. Maybe floating was a genetic trait that she just hadn't inherited.

As the girl drifted on her back, water flowed in little waves against her face, streaming in and out of her ears. Cawing seagulls and planes flying overhead trailing messages like "Eat at Hank's" alternated with the echoey sound of sloshing water.

The throbbing sun felt so warm on Emily's face and stomach that she soon relaxed to sleepiness and her mind concentrated on the sounds around her. She

felt peaceful.

Minutes passed, then Emily felt a heavy drop of water land on her cheek, startling her. Emily snapped to sit up, causing her shoulders and head to bob down underwater. Cool, refreshing water on hot, sun-touched skin conflicted with the sensation of burning salt in peaceful dark eyes. Emily gasped and some water invaded her mouth, throat and then lungs. She coughed, spitting up the briny liquid. She regained her footing on the firm sand, and then stood.

She was facing the ocean, where waves starting from unseen places kept rolling in. *Things don't look too peaceful now*, Emily thought. Her eyes followed the water back to the horizon line, which had transformed from a sunny, blue expanse of sky to a bleak, grey stretch of clouds. Emily sighed. The weather in northwest Florida was known to be turbulent, with a thunderstorm usually passing through daily. The storms were quick but fierce, but when they passed, Emily and Kate would wander to the front porch of the little vacation trailer, breathing in the moisture-soaked air and smelling the clean, cooled pines.

Her eyes continued to scan the clouds - they were of all different shapes and shades and distances from her, so fascinating - when she caught sight of something suspicious. Three tall, grey cylindrical-shaped funnels seemed to sprout from the water about a mile out. Emily frowned. She had never seen clouds like that before at the beach. She tried to remember back to science class and the different types of clouds she learned about.

Cumulus. Stratus. Cirrus. Nimbus.

Whatever category these clouds fit into, Emily felt uneasy looking at them. They seemed to be getting bigger. She felt the tap-tap-tap of three raindrops hitting her shoulder. Those were cold, much like the ocean was starting to feel. *I need to get to shore*, Emily thought as she looked up. She felt a shiver starting in her teeth as she watched the grey clouds dancing overhead.

A feeling of doubt spread over Emily and she felt lost. She chided herself for that childish emotion, thinking, *There's no way I drifted that far out. They're probably right behind me. My sense of direction got messed up because I was floating - that always happens.*

Emily's arms interrupted the water's steady rhythm as they flung her around to face the shore. No one was there. She looked up shore; her pulse was beating faster. Emily, squinting, could make out three motionless dots on the shore. *See, there they are.*

But they were pretty small dots.

The sky was darkening and the wind picked up, chilling Emily's golden arms to what she and her sister called "chicken skin." *Help*, Emily yelled in her mind, knowing her loudest screams wouldn't be much of an opponent against the whistling wind combined with the roar of the angered waves. She shifted her glance back to the suspect funnel-clouds and realized that they weren't just getting bigger, they were getting closer.

I need to get to shore, Emily said to herself, as if repetition would coax her soft muscles into action. Her feet flexed and she pushed off from the ground, eager to get back to the beach. Visions of being swept into the undercurrent flooded Emily's mind, reinforced by a loud burst of vibrating thunder and heavy rain. It

felt suffocating, not like the summer rain she remembered at her grandparents' house, which tickled her face as she turned it toward the sky.

She looked back to shore, now dim in the absence of sunlight, her eyes frantically finding the three dots again. They were still there, Emily saw, but now they were moving, gathering up blankets and towels and deconstructing forts, getting drenched in the process. One figure ran to the water's edge and stopped. *Mom*, she thought.

Emily's body was tired from all the swimming and anxiety, but she commanded it to find strength and started swimming a diagonal line toward the shore. She figured she could cover a greater distance if she used the momentum of the waves to help her along. The wind seemed to come from all directions, confusing the waves. As she struggled to shore, Emily had trouble keeping her head above water.

Finally. Her knees hit rough sand.

Emily sobbed as she clumsily crawled to her feet. The pouring raindrops, falling like missiles, punctured the smooth surface of the shore, destroying the peacefulness of the waves, even though the waves themselves created disruption.

"Mom! Mom!" she yelled through her tears, now burning in her eyes much like the saltwater did. Emily's feet left mangled footprints in the wet, thick sand as she charged back to her family's spot on the beach.

All that remained was Emily's colorfully patterned towel, draped over the sand, soaking up the rain.

"Emily! Where were you?" her mother cried, near tears but still keeping her composure. "We need to go! There're funnel clouds out there!"

"I know! I'm sorry!" Emily yelled out. "I drifted out too far!" She grabbed her sopping towel and flip-flops and ran behind her sister Kate, following her to the trail that led back to the van. The water funnels continued to advance on the shoreline. White plastic bags emblazoned with a Winn-Dixie logo, bags that recently held sandwiches and treats, soared into the air, swirling along the paths of the wind.

Emily ran back along the path, not caring if the cocklebur weeds mauled her bare feet this time. The ferocious wind spat granules of sand against the back of her legs, further encouraging the fast trip back to the van. The sea oats were arching their spines, trying to be flexible lest the wind snap them in two, the grey skies above void of seagulls. Rain continued to fall loudly, a patient warning of the funnel clouds' upcoming onslaught.

By the time Emily caught up to her sister, Kate was already in the van; it may have been one of the few times in her life Emily wouldn't see her sister's face in a book. Kate threw an expectant gaze in Emily's direction: everyone else was situated in the van, which now appeared as a safe haven, ready to go. They were just waiting for Emily, the youngest child, the baby.

Her eyes got to the van before they finished assessing the path that lay before her. Her foot caught on a puffy hump of sand, throwing off her step. Her other foot overcompensated and Emily found herself on the damp ground, one knee tangled in a mess of cockleburs. Red blood stained the white sand. Time stopped as the wind continued to blow harsh whispers through Emily's hair and into her ears.

Emily regained her footing and hurried to the open sliding van door, leaving her beach towel stranded on the sand dune. She jumped inside and grabbed the angled door handle, her muscles straining against the wind to pull it closed.

The air was silent except for Emily's heavy breathing and the faint shhhhhh of wind streamlining the vehicle's contours.

The van roared to life. All of Emily's emotions exploded in violent crying.

"Mom," she sobbed. "I thought I was going to die."

"I was worried, honey," her mother said. "We couldn't find you. What would we have done?"

"Is it a tornado?"

"If it hits land, it will be," her mother said. "There's three of them, so there's a pretty good chance."

The van, old for its years yet still powerful, fled the beach, the white median lines passing by at a blur next to the worn tires. Rain pounded on the van, making metallic noises that calmed Emily.

It feels like when it rains on the interstate, she thought.

Completely normal.

Emily looked out the porthole window one last time to see how closely the funnel clouds were following them. The chucking speed of the van, reluctant but steady, was enough to outrun the funnel clouds as they made their way onshore, twisting with a newfound energy.

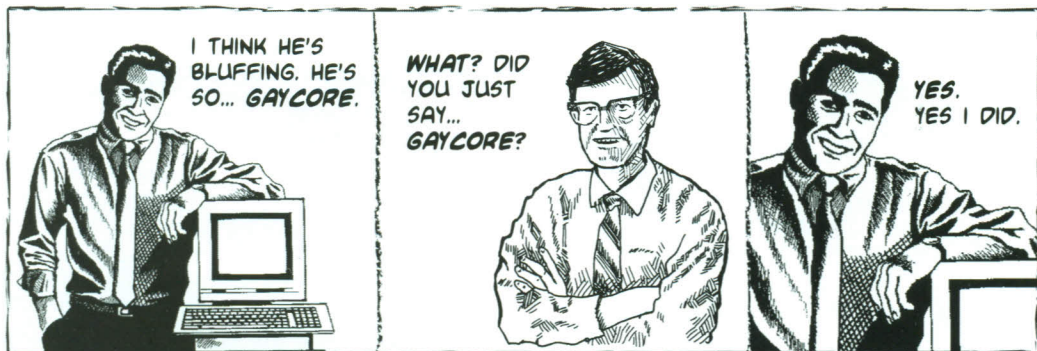
As the seconds passed, so did the distance between the van and the storm. The smoothly paved highway was all that separated still from wind, calm from storm, life from death. Emily lay in the back of the ancient van, now her mechanical savior, and stretched out on the velvety bedding that once was hot and sticky. Now it was damp and cold. Her body relaxed as if it knew it was finally safe.

Snuzzling up to her sister, Emily slept.

She dreamt of crashing blue waves, of orchestraic sunsets illuminated with reds, yellows and oranges, and of body-warming sunshine that tingled her toes.

She dreamt of the beach she remembered as a little girl.

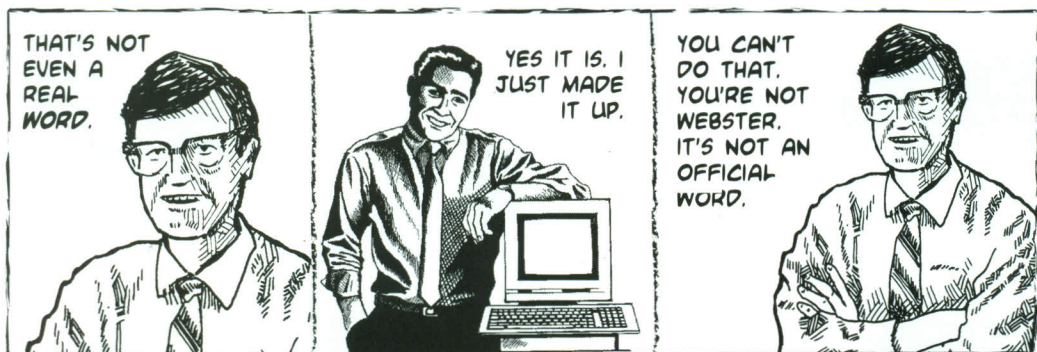
She dreamt of calm waters.



I THINK HE'S
BLUFFING. HE'S
SO... **GAYCORE**.

WHAT? DID
YOU JUST
SAY...
GAYCORE?

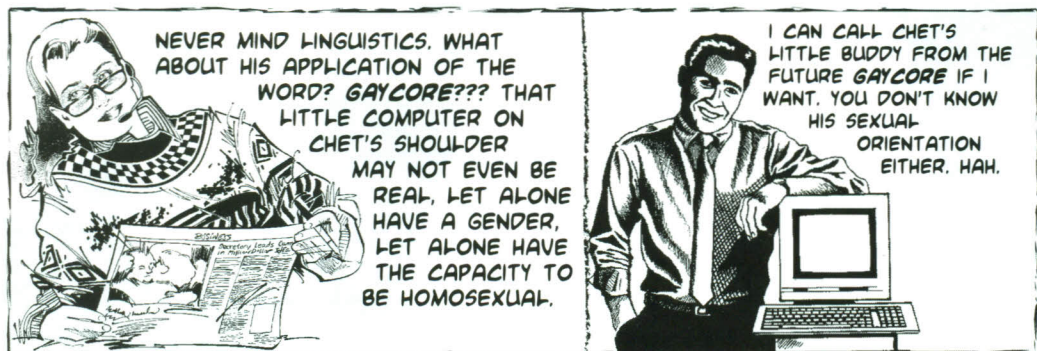
YES.
YES I DID.



THAT'S NOT
EVEN A
REAL
WORD.

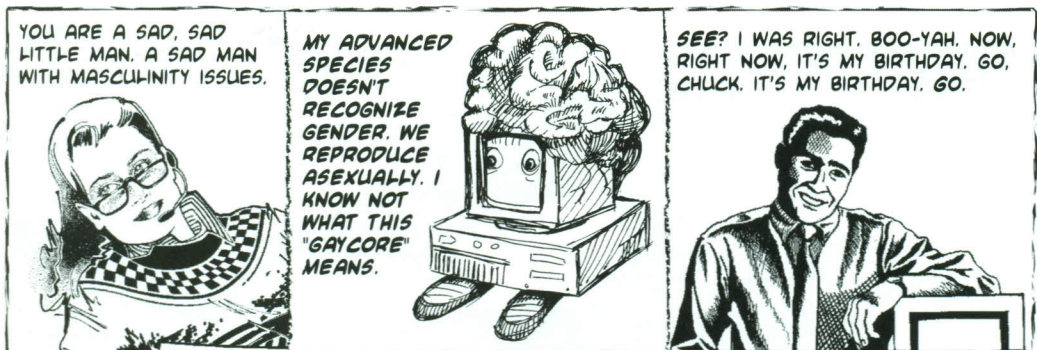
YES IT IS. I
JUST MADE
IT UP.

YOU CAN'T
DO THAT.
YOU'RE NOT
WEBSTER.
IT'S NOT AN
OFFICIAL
WORD.



NEVER MIND LINGUISTICS. WHAT
ABOUT HIS APPLICATION OF THE
WORD? **GAYCORE???** THAT
LITTLE COMPUTER ON
CHET'S SHOULDER
MAY NOT EVEN BE
REAL, LET ALONE
HAVE A GENDER,
LET ALONE HAVE
THE CAPACITY TO
BE HOMOSEXUAL.

I CAN CALL CHET'S
LITTLE BUDDY FROM THE
FUTURE **GAYCORE** IF I
WANT. YOU DON'T KNOW
HIS SEXUAL
ORIENTATION
EITHER. HAH.



YOU ARE A SAD, SAD
LITTLE MAN. A SAD MAN
WITH MASCULINITY ISSUES.

MY ADVANCED
SPECIES
DOESN'T
RECOGNIZE
GENDER. WE
REPRODUCE
ASEXUALLY. I
KNOW NOT
WHAT THIS
"**GAYCORE**"
MEANS.

SEE? I WAS RIGHT. BOO-YAH. NOW,
RIGHT NOW, IT'S MY BIRTHDAY. GO,
CHUCK. IT'S MY BIRTHDAY. GO.



PLAYTIME

BY STEVEN PROCHNOW

I wanted to incorporate a cute but unsettling feeling in the art, and this was the idea that came to mind.

I always liked things that stood out as different, so I wanted to paint something that would catch people's interest but also have a childhood cuteness to them.

EVERYTHING

BY REBECCA SCHMALTZ

Blood
Death
Darkness
Earth
Heaven
Hell
Rebirth
 Screaming
 Crying
 Agony
Nothing left but yourself
No air
No light
Body frozen to the core
 Penetrating deep within
The pain of every life
The scolding
 The mocking
The hatred within
Every eye
 Every hand
Staring
 Looking
LAUGHING
Holding our your hand
Reaching for someone, something to grasp
Wanting
 Waiting for
Blood
Death
Darkness
Earth
Heaven
Hell
Rebirth
 Screaming
 Crying
 Agony
And nothing left but yourself!

BEAK DEEP

BY JOSH ALESON



A beautiful morning in San Francisco Park, complete with Roman Pillars and a great dome structure – if singling out birds by hearing them was attempted, your head would spin. The number of types and sounds was inspiration enough.

THE MIGHTY GECKO

BY KRISTI RASMUSSEN



Inspiration for this photo came from seeing this gecko — all three inches of him.
— such a mighty pose for something so small —



THE PEACOCK LADY

BY MIRANDA POLLERT

I saw a watercolor or something similar,
and I chose it as a base for my first painting in high school art class.
I changed the girl to look more like my best friend at the time and I also changed the background.

HIDDEN FACES

BY JONI PAYLOR

Hidden faces
In public places
Waiting to be found
Hungry, tired
Sleeping on the ground
We hear all the lies
But never the cries
Of hidden faces
In public places
Waiting to be found

DEMONS

BY RYAN DEWALD

Skeletons in the closet
Demons of the soul
Feelings held back
Moments stole
Deep inside the soul is bruised
Deep inside the pain is real
What I've done
People I've hurt
Skeletons have ears
Demons never forget



UNTITLED

BY ANDREA FICEK

Inspiration:
Life.

THE ROLLER COASTER

BY SHERRI ERHARDT

I saw the roller coaster
and felt the thrill.
How amazing I thought
to ride that hill.
"Do I dare?" I asked myself,
as butterflies fluttered deep inside.
But how adventurous it would be
to take this one ride.
Throwing caution to the wind,
I took the dare.
If I had anything to lose,
I didn't care.
The danger excited me.
My heart was pounding with each beat.
Every nerve in my body tingled
as I jumped into the seat.
I was alone on this ride.
It was a little scary as I fastened my belt.
For these powerful emotions
were more than I had ever felt.
I wanted the moment to last forever.
I wished for time to stop.
I didn't want to go back down
as the roller coaster reached the top.
What a powerful machine it was
as it quickly picked up speed.
Over the hill I soared.
It was such a glorious need!
With every twist and turn,
I knew it would soon end.
Sadness and emptiness filled me
as the roller coaster turned the last bend.
I didn't want to get off.
Reality was waiting for me by the gate.
What does this ride represent?
The devil in disguise or fate?
This one ride was free.
But one day, I will have to pay.
Everything in life comes with a price
on our judgment day.



MINOT 12-PACK

BY JENNIFER WEISGERBER

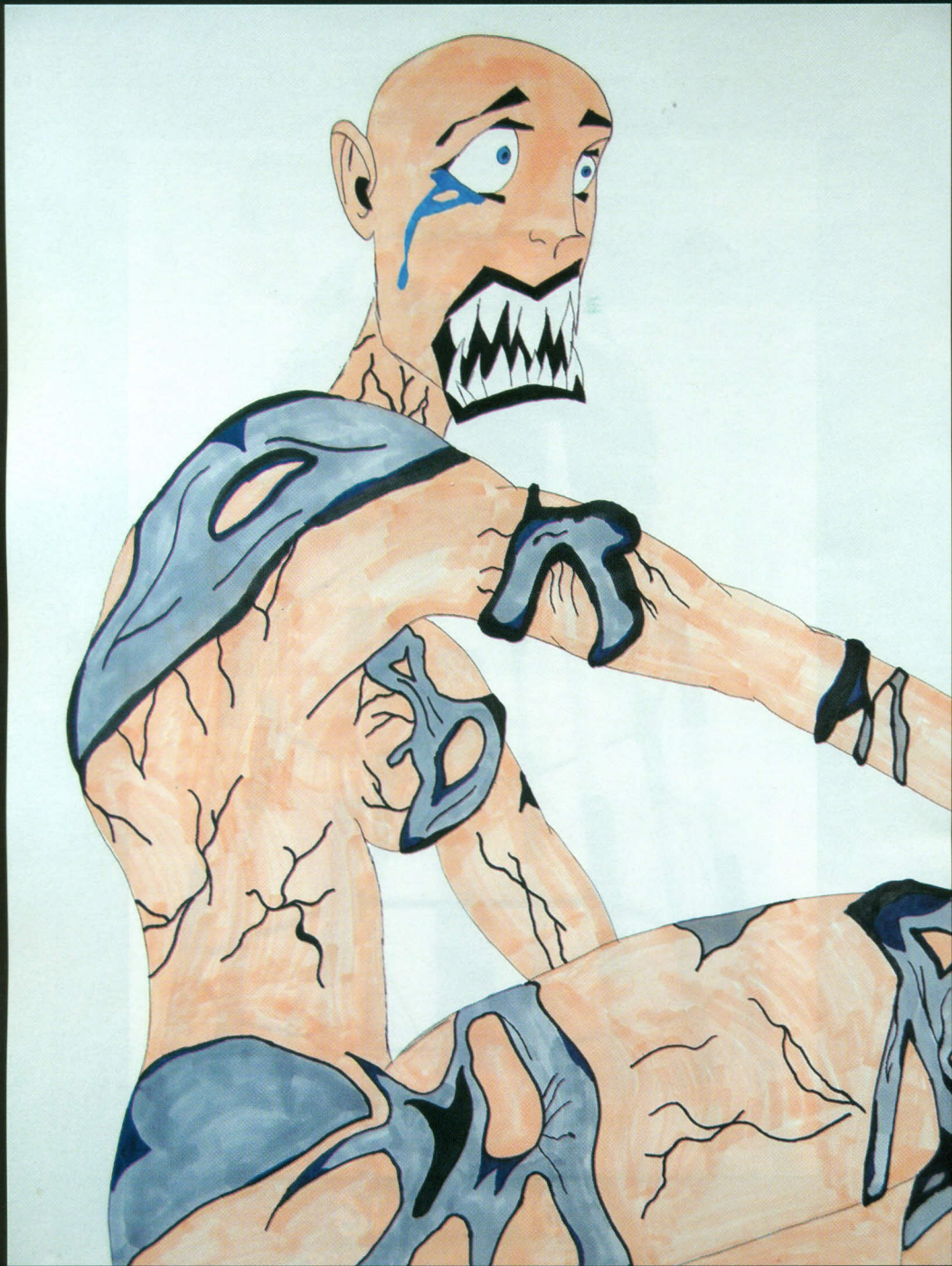
I was in Minot for the Arts and Humanities Summit. My advisor and I were driving around after lunch — she graciously stopped to let me shoot some of the great historic buildings.



TOWERING

BY JENNIFER WEISGERBER

On a very cold school-related trip to Minot, my advisor and I drove through a furniture graveyard to reach this candy-cane looking water tower. I used a wide-angle lens to get the perspective I felt from the ground. I don't know if I've ever been so close to a water tower before; all I could do was stare up and wonder if it was possible for me to imagine how much water it contained.



THE VIRUS

BY COLE WEISZ

My friend was talking about STDs,
and I drew this because I thought about how a person with an STD might feel.

A RIGHT TO PRIVACY

BY DUSTIN ALLEN

MORGAN WAS ALONE. She sat there, having moved from southern California to attend an affordable school she had only a few acquaintances, but they were not with her, so she relied on herself to get through each class and get back to her apartment. Morgan loved the drive in the winter.

If they only knew, she thought. She had many reasons for being in North Dakota, but none of them would be discovered by anyone who was currently in the room with her. Her motives would remain her own until it was time to let someone in because no one seemed to want to know more. The faceless many that cluttered the area near her desk never seemed interested in what she was doing or thinking, wondering, instead, they only cared about what they would be doing later on that night or who they would be drinking with as they set out to party later that night or weekend.

That was in not her thoughts, though. There were plenty of other students that sat around her. The class was full of those who interest her, either romantically or otherwise. Men were so predictable and she knew exactly what they saw in her.

They saw the long brown hair, curled and stylish, like spirals that dance from the top of her head into a mosaic of perfection. Men saw the dark brown eyes that seem to be able to make anyone who peered into them disappear completely. They saw the light complexion that was not perfection, but was soft and alluring. Men usually were intent on coming closer to her and there were very few she was interested in giving that privilege.

After class, she exited just like anyone else. The room emptied and she walked amongst them leaving the building without speaking a word. When she had spoken, the words seemed to disappear into the hollow conversation others liked to pursue. No one seemed to be able to comprehend all the hidden messages and hints that she left for them in her sentences. If someone would only take the time to truly listen to what she had been saying throughout the entire conversation, understanding about what she'd said and what she'd meant would clearly be seen as two separate things.

Reaching her car, she looked around again, and gave herself a smile. No one seemed to care. The masses kept to themselves, giggling at the jokes that had been told and faking interest in others' lives. Some of the faceless many were trying to procure a date for the future, some were interested only in reaching their vehicle to get warm again. Most of their numbers, however, walked alone until they disappeared into their own vehicles and drove away to jobs, family or homework.

Morgan slid the key to her car into the lock and opened the door. Once she climbed in, she adjusted her seatbelt and made sure the car started without issue.

Driving home had always been such a bore where she used to live. Fully concentrating on the hurried traffic and maintaining a minimum speed didn't allow Morgan to enjoy the traveling time. Moving to North Dakota had livened up the drive. When the weather was bad, it made the journey home all the more exciting. In California, at least the part that she used to live, snow was not a common sight.

Her car made its way through the streets until it finally arrived at her home in the city. She took a moment to simply scan the building up and down before she climbed from her vehicle and secured the door. Her desire to remain closed to those she did not want in was the most important part of why she was here. North Dakotans kept to themselves when they didn't feel welcome.

Her apartment was on the northeast side of town, near the busiest highway heading out of the city. The school, however, was located on the far west of the city. It wasn't the most convenient place to live but gave her time to think about where she was going. Thinking while driving was something she enjoyed as much as the scenery. Californians rarely take the time to look around as life rushes along.

She lived on the top floor of the three-floor apartment building. Her building was only one of four that made up an entire complex. Morçan's door was three quarters of the way down the hall from the lone stairway that connected each of the floors to each other. There were precisely twelve stairs on every small set; each set either ending at a landing or the next available floor. Morçan knew the exact number as she enjoyed counting them as she scaled her way up them daily.

There were several families that called the first floor home. Morçan knew of at least two of the families, as they seemed to constantly be on the move. The children were just old enough to be ferried to and fro, from soccer practice to singing lessons. Each of the two children in the two families seemed to either be actively involved in some sort of extra curricular activity or sleeping. Rarely was there a moment of rest, it appeared. In a funny way, she felt sorry for them. They never had the time to simply sit and relax.

On the wall of each of landing rested a fire extinguisher. Several months prior, the glass cases on them had been cracked by juvenile delinquents and Morçan could only shake her head. Destruction without a purpose was totally pointless.

The second floor is one that she was glad she did not reside on. There were other college students, some she had seen before that lived on the second floor. These, however, were the party animals, where a beer in their hands outside of the campus was not an uncommon sight. Morçan often wondered how someone could go through life doing nothing but partying. The purpose of college for them seemed to be a social experiment rather than trying to learn something.

Finally, after a long and arduous trek up four flights of twelve stairs each, Morçan reached her floor and stared down the hallway. Other than herself, she knew that each of the apartments was being rented but had never seen any of the renters outside of their homes. Someone else might have considered it odd that she hadn't met any of her neighbors, but Morçan saw this as an omen. She insisted on having as much privacy as possible, and having no knowledge of her neighbors fell into the "good" category. Friendly neighbors tended to ask too many questions and always felt they were entitled to the answers. Their questions were something that Morçan did not want to answer.

Morçan made her way down the hall to her apartment with eager anticipation. The sight of her door always brought a rush of joy to her heart, as it was the one place in the entire world she could truly feel at home.

She withdrew the key from her pocket. As she visually searched the keys on the key ring, it took her only a moment to find the right key, one among many, on

her key chain. The lock above the knob was perfectly placed so she could open it with one hand while turning the key with the other.

She grabbed the cool brass knob with her left hand. Her hand was slightly clammy and the sweat that had come in contact with the doorknob brought out the familiar and welcome brass aroma, the scent of slightly cooled metal filled Morçan's senses with complete delight.

With the grooves pointed towards the ceiling, the key began its trek into the lock with the recognizable "pah-rud-rud-rud-rud-rump." As each piece of the lock was lifted out of place by the upward turned ridges and crests of the tiny brass key, the noise was unusually loud and actually caused an echo in the empty hallway. Faintly, she heard the television noises coming from the apartment next to hers. The television set was loud enough to be heard, but what was being said was still obscured by the door.

Giving the key an additional thrust to ensure that it was securely embedded within the lock, Morçan twisted her right wrist and began to turn the key clockwise to allow it to release the bolt holding the door in its place. The key's journey would be a long one as she slowly went from angle to angle turning it the required three hundred and sixty degrees to the halfway position.

Each position was its own. One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock... The motion was smooth and brought a sense of great anticipation as it continued around its path. Morçan was forced to readjust her grip, as her wrist was not able to swivel the key around the whole way. Six o'clock, seven o'clock, eight o'clock... The brass aroma was now at full strength from her firm grip. Ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, and, finally, twelve o'clock as the key was returned to the place it started.

But the door was not open. Returning the key to its original position was only half of the motion required to unseal the delight hidden within. This lock required a return from the journey by going counter clockwise to complete its task.

Morçan then began again. Nine o'clock, eight o'clock, seven o'clock, six o'clock... Again, Morçan was forced to readjust her grip at this point to prevent her wrist from being turned to an uncomfortable angle. Were it not for the required change in grip, Morçan would have been happier to simply keep her fingers tightly affixed to the key for the entire trip.

Preparing for the final click of the mighty bolt holding the contents of the apartment in and trespassers out, Morçan's left hand began to rotate. The key was still moving, but she could never wait for it to finish. Three o'clock, two o'clock, one o'clock, twelve o'clock... click!

As if time had been standing still, it now returned to full speed. Morçan withdrew the key from the lock as she simultaneously twisted the knob to allow her into the apartment. She slid the ring of keys back into her jacket pocket.

Looking around as she backed in, Morçan saw no one in the hall that could catch a glimpse into her world. What lay behind that door was totally her world and it was something that she protected with every fiber of her being.

There had been some who had tried to learn more in the past, but they were now simply part of her collection. She smiled as she turned, there they were. Each piece of her collection was well loved and she knew every groove and imperfection better than her own face. Her collection of skulls.



CANOPY

BY ALEXIS MONROE

Inspiration for this painting comes from
the view of a tree at night while camping
and a story from "Confluence".

FIGMENTS OF IMAGINATION #1* @ PAGE 74



PLAYING DRESS-UP

BY STEVEN PROCHNOW

I enjoy drawing things that are abnormal but interesting.

I saw some dolls called *The Living Dead* series and thought I could do a few paintings based on them and what childhood might be like if they were real.

I chose to use teddy bears or rabbits to convey the cute innocence of youth. The devilish children were meant to convey the opposite spectrum of youth and how children can also be quite mischievous.

MORNING'S CHANDELLE

BY JOSH ALESON



Light, lines, shadows, and frost.

Old cars and an outhouse privy-type shack always make for nostalgic scenes.

The light illuminating the frost and the jet lines were the first things I saw as I turned the corner at my grandmother's farm, nine miles from McClusky.

CHUCK, TAKE
YOUR 1980S
MACINTOSH
ELBOW REST
AND GO HOME.
YOU ARE...
BANISHED
FROM THIS
PARA-
DOXICAL
HADES!!!
FOREVER!



ZAP

KABOOM

AAAGH!



WAS THAT "GAYCORE?"



GREAT, IT HAS A SENSE
OF HUMOR. WE'RE ALL
GOING TO DIE.



THE WALLS ARE MELTING!!!



I'M BACK!!!

WHAT
IS YOUR
THEME,
YOU
PUPPETS?



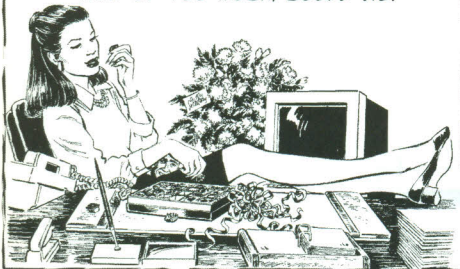
Phloom

WELL, GLAD TO BE OF
ASSISTANCE, DUDE. THANKS
FOR CALLING PIZZA... I
MEAN, PRIEST + SONS.

WELL, LUANN, UM...
WELL, IT'S
BEEN A LONG
AFTERNOON.
WE, UHH... WE
WERE
THINKING...
UM...



MMM... CHU... I MEAN, HEY, HOW ABOUT A
COMIC BOOK THEME? WE COULDN'T SCREW
THAT UP TOO MUCH, COULD WE?



A COMIC THEME?!

SHIVER ME TIMBERS!!!
THE SPACE PIRATES WILL LOVE
THE IDEA!!!!!!!



-HEY, WHAT HAPPENED TO
CHUCK'S HEAD?

WELL, LUANN, WHY DON'T
YOU ASK BONITA?-



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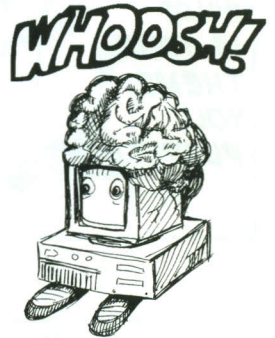
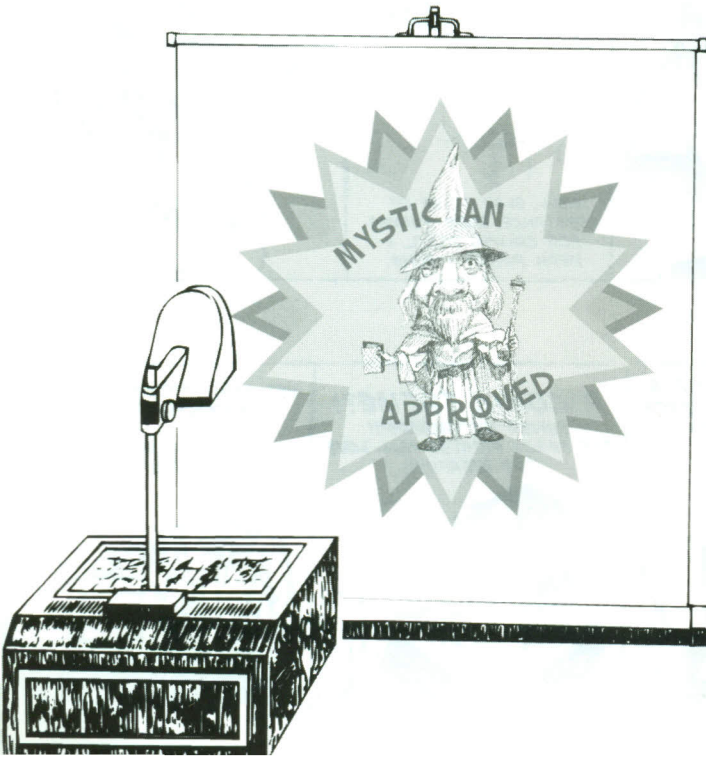


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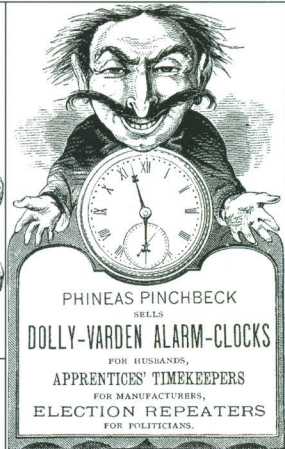
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**PARLEZVOUS,
LADIES' SHOEMAKER**
PINCHEM STREET,
KIDVILLE.



**JAPANESE
COMPLEXION POWDER**
PRODUCING
Beauty—Grins upon the most Snarling
Cousinages.

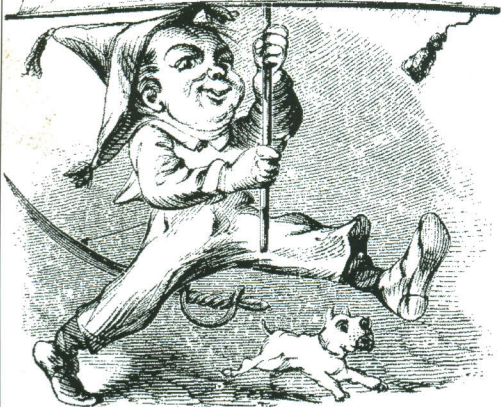


**PINEAS PINCHBECK
SELLS
DOLLY-VARDEN ALARM-CLOCKS**
FOR HUSBANDS,
APPRENTICES' TIMEKEEPERS
FOR MANUFACTURERS,
ELECTION REPEATERS
FOR POLITICIANS.

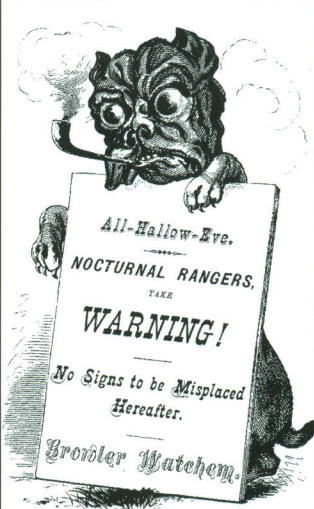
*Our Banner bravely flaunts the
Trade Winds.*

**CHUBBYCREEK'S
TOYS**

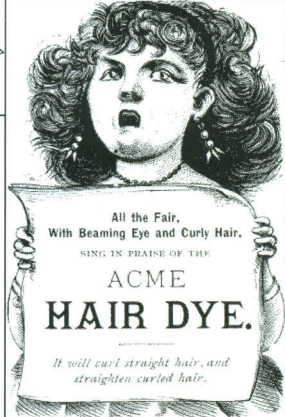
FOR THE
*Diversion of the Old and Young, Rich
and Poor, Wise and Otherwise.*



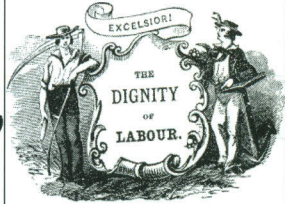

BY CARRIER-PIGEON—DIRECT.
**IMPORTANT
FROM LANDS ALOFT.**
Particulars Hereafter.



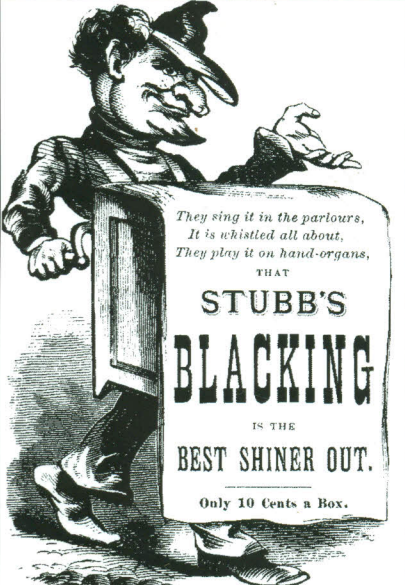
All-Hallow-Eve.
NOCTURNAL RANGERS,
TAKE
WARNING!
*No Signs to be Misplaced
Hereafter.*
Brodler Watchem.



All the Fair,
With Beaming Eye and Curly Hair,
SING IN PRAISE OF THE
**ACME
HAIR DYE.**
*It will curl straight hair, and
straighten curled hair.*



EXCELSIOR!
THE
DIGNITY
OF
LABOUR.



*They sing it in the parlours,
It is whistled all about,
They play it on hand-organs,
THAT*

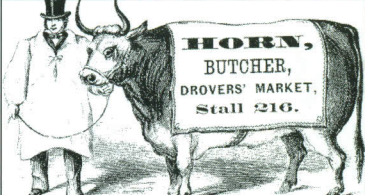
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IS THE
BEST SHINER OUT.

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AMBROSIAL
TEAS,
AND THE GREAT
EDIBLE BIRDNESTS.**
No. 80.



**HORN,
BUTCHER,
DROVERS' MARKET,
Stall 216.**



**SUNBEAM,
PHOTOGRAPHER,**
123 Skyhigh Building,
HELIOTROPOLIS.

Likenesses twice as natural
as Life.