

The Matrix



health



pacific lutheran university 2005

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The Matrix is dedicated to the creation of a culture of ACTIVE conscience and consciousness in our communities to replace the current culture of fear and silence. To this end, *The Matrix* provides an outlet that engenders dialogue and fights dehumanization.

Prohibit sharply the
rehearsed response.
-W.H. Auden

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Be careful of reading
health books. You may
die of a misprint.
-Mark Twain

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Dear Readers,

Life may or may not be nasty and brutish—it likely depends which side of the bed you fell off this morning. But both optimists and pessimists can agree: life is short. The end comes too soon, and we spend too many days aimlessly flailing our limbs. And what devours our time? Millions of lists and insecurities and diseased parts that we'd love to cut off, burn, and be done with! We have demons in our hair, ghosts in our closets, and invisible bacteria eating away our souls.

Considering this, we at *The Matrix* believe health is an integral part of social justice. Without taking care of ourselves, how can we begin to consider others? Every emotional rut and mental tripwire only keeps us isolated, passive, and complacent—stuck in our own little box. The demarcation of private and public spheres is a lie; our bodies, our psyches, and our spirits are of essential, irrefutable, political importance.

Please read on, and see what some PLU students think of this inchoate realm of health. These articles explore things like food, assault, chemical dependencies, nature, self-image, language, and of course, nudity. Enjoy!

Love, *The Matrix*

A Whole Lot of Bull

by Ben Perry,
Meat Club member

One would be hard pressed not to smell the sweet aroma of barbeque around PLU on Wednesday nights. This is because a group of students has taken up the art of cooking meat and turned it into a social organization.

Meat Eaters Around Tacoma, more commonly referred to as Meat Club, is a grouping of students that has put a new excitement into the middle of the week with their Wednesday barbeque on Ordal Hall's front lawn.

"I can smell it coming back from baseball practice," said Dan Ruff, a first-year from Ordal.

However, there is more to the Wednesday night ritual than the campus-enveloping scent of seared meat. No birds on the grill, open membership, Shanky the Knife, former vegetarians, and burning of the fat are all part of the barbequing experience.

As written in the club's mission statement, "To promote meat awareness, support local business, build community, and provide people with a healthy diet," the purpose of Meat Club supersedes the consumption of meat. In fact, the club's

mission to support local business has done so well that Parkland Quality Meats, their supplier, gives all PLU students a ten percent discount on their purchases.

The group also contains former vegetarians. When asked to comment on the Vegetarian Alliance, Adam Boyd, a sophomore and former vegetarian, said "Those vegetarians are excitable with their soy beans."

What began as a few students who wanted some meat variety outside the UC, Meat Club has evolved into a fully functional club. Although they are not recognized by ASPLU, the club has a fully functional government.

"We have a constitution, we're just too lazy to get it ratified," said Meat Club President Mike Perez, a junior in Tinglestad Hall.

However, this may change. With an increase of participation in this weekly ritual, officers have increased their drive to establish Meat Club as a recognized organization on campus. A vote of ratification and submission of their constitution to ASPLU could come as early as next week.

For the Love of

by Kate Fontana

I run because I couldn't play soccer.
 I run because I am tired in the mornings.
 I run because my sisters run with me.
 I run because I feel good.
 I run because I don't have time.
 I run because the sun glows today.
 I run because there are girls much skinnier.
 I run because there are girls with more fat.
 I run because I compose music.
 I run because I relish sore muscles.
 I run because I don't fit pants from high school.
 I run because I think too much.
 I run because my mind runs too.
 I run because rain is glorious.
 I run because I explore.
 I run because I get lost.
 I run because I don't have enough to do.
 I run because blackberries abound.
 I run because I am otherwise a dead battery.
 I run because I eat chocolate.
 I run because I don't drive.
 I run because I have thighs.
 I run because I read smutty magazines when no one sees.
 I run because my best friend will always run faster.
 I run because summer nights are soft.
 I run because the forests are always cool and damp.
 I run because I talk with my friends.
 I run because I have no friends.
 I run because I plan ahead.
 I run because I cry a lot
 I run because I am a woman.
 I run because I look good.
 I run because I pray the rosary.
 I run because the view from the top is always better.
 I run because I need to beat The Man.
 I run because The Man told me to.
 I run because I don't sleep well.
 I run because my legs are strong.
 I run because I love the wind.
 I run because I used to not have love handles.
 I run because I have bad knees but worse bones.
 I run because to escape...?
 I run because to find...?
 I run because someone once told me that if you run long enough, some chemical reaction in your brain makes you happy.

Feeding Us Lies

by Amy Post

Think back to elementary school. Think about your health or physical education classes. What do you remember? Basketball? Running the mile? (That was the worst!) Do you remember the food pyramid? Did that colorful chart adorn the walls of your classroom, gym, or school cafeteria? If you went to public school in the United States, you probably had an experience like mine. I remember being taught the food pyramid as if it held the key to my health. Well, guess what. It's a lie! If that makes you as angry as me, keep reading, and I'll tell you how the food pyramid is a whole bunch of bull-honkey.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released the original Food Guide Pyramid in 1992 as a manual to help Americans be healthy. But there's one problem: the pyramid was not created with health solely in mind; the final product was oversimplified, heavily influenced by different food industry lobbies, and based on a racist, White standard. As a result, the food pyramid did not represent the best way for Americans to eat.

In the 1980s, the USDA assembled a group of nutritionists to put together a healthy eating guide for Americans. They completed a first draft of the food pyramid and sent it to the Office of the Secretary at the USDA for approval. But, like most government agencies, the USDA was interested in keeping big businesses happy. So, in order to satisfy the demands of influential agricultural lobbies, the USDA changed many of the original guidelines created by their team of nutritionists.

Some of these lobby groups included National Dairy Council, United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, Soft Drink Association, American Meat Institute, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, and

Wheat Foods Council. In order to protect their businesses, these lobbies succeeded in convincing the USDA to oversimplify the categories, lumping some "good" and "bad" foods together into the same category, and adjusting the recommended number of servings of each category.

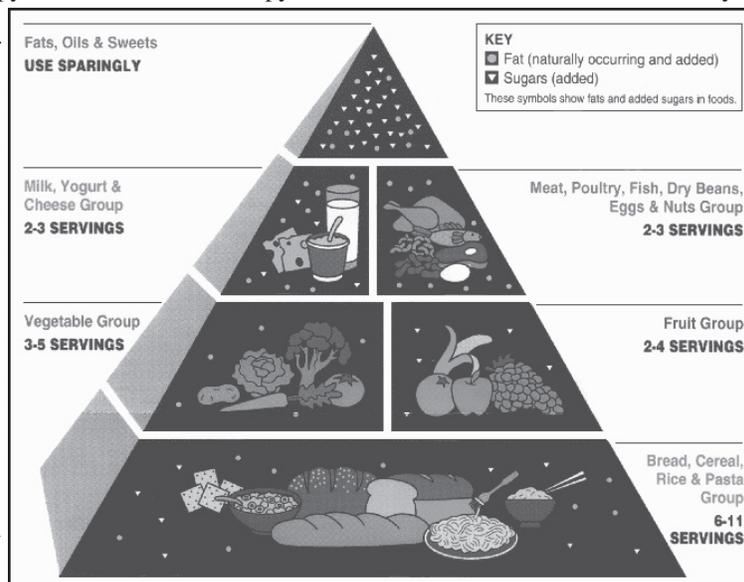
The Food Guide Pyramid released in 1992 lumps all fats together at the top of the pyramid as "bad-for-you" foods, and all carbohydrates are represented as "good-for-you" foods at the bottom of the pyramid. These foods were lumped together to make the pyramid easier to understand and

grain foods. Refined foods often lack a lot of nutrients, and also quickly raise, then drop the blood sugar, which can make you even hungrier. Eating too many of these "bad" carbohydrates can lead to obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, especially if you don't get enough exercise. Conversely, the carbohydrates found in whole-grain foods are generally more nutritious, provide the body with a good, long-lasting source of energy, and might even prevent diabetes. Because there is such a significant difference between "good" and "bad" fats and carbohydrates, which are found in a wide

variety of different oils, meats, and grains, it doesn't make health-sense to lump them into categories as arbitrary as "fats," "meats," and "grains."

According to nutritionist Luise Light in *Conscious Choice*, the quantity of foods we are told to eat has also been influenced by agricultural lobbies. For example, while nutritionists recommended five to nine servings of fresh fruits and vegetables, the USDA changed it to two to three servings (and upped it to five to seven servings a few years after the pyramid's first release, as a result of the National Cancer Institute's influence). And while nutritionists recommended three to four servings of grains per day, the USDA changed it to six to eleven servings.

Some of the most egregious recommendations of the food pyramid are those of the milk category. The pyramid recommends two to three servings of milk, yogurt, or cheese every day. This recommendation is made mostly on the basis of milk's alleged health benefits, as it includes high levels of calcium, vitamins, and minerals. These nutrients reduce hypertension, heart disease, osteoporosis, and cancer. However, there is contradictory scientific evidence



remember, but this lumping does not necessarily reflect what is healthiest. For example, saturated fats, which can be found in dairy products and red meat, are not good for you because they raise your cholesterol. On the other hand, monounsaturated fats, which can be found in vegetable oils (especially olive oil) and nuts, are generally good for you, especially if consumed in moderation.

The same goes for the grains at the base of the pyramid; "bad" carbohydrates found in refined foods, such as white bread, pasta, and white rice, are lumped together with the "good" carbohydrates found in whole-

surrounding calcium and osteoporosis; it hasn't been proven that drinking large amounts of milk can reduce bone fractures (sometimes the result of osteoporosis), and the animal protein found in milk may actually leach calcium from bones. There is also evidence linking a high consumption of milk to prostate and ovarian cancer.

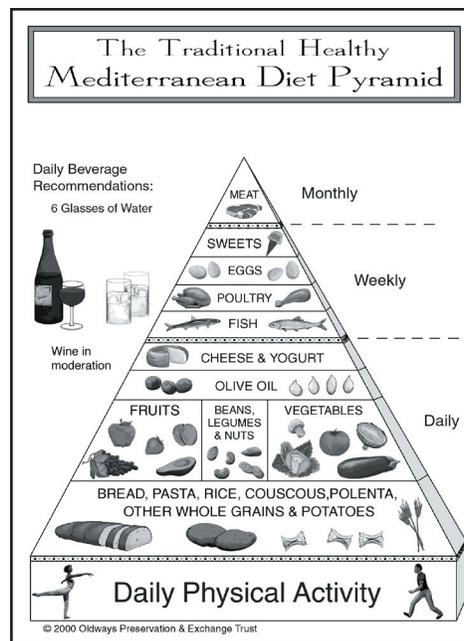
Furthermore, up to 70 percent of all humans are lactose intolerant. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, "90 percent of Asians, 70 percent of Blacks and Native Americans, and 50 percent of Hispanics are lactose-intolerant, compared to only about 15 percent of people of Northern European descent."¹ Yes, the majority of Americans are White, but a large number of Americans are not White. If the majority of non-White Americans are lactose intolerant, then the food pyramid's recommendation of two to three servings every day contradicts what a great number of Americans can eat on a basic level. The food pyramid is racist because it is based on a White standard, where the incidence of lactose-intolerance is very low.

"Who cares about any of this stuff?" you might say to me. "I learned all about the food pyramid in elementary school, but never actually followed any of its guidelines." Well, here it is: all government food policies, which cost billions of dollars every year, are based on the USDA Food Guide Pyramid. These programs include public school lunch programs and food stamps. Seventeen million Americans are on the government food stamp program. So, if the food pyramid promotes the interest of the agriculture industry over the health of the American people, children and poor people pay the price for this discrepancy.

This year the USDA re-released a revised Food Guide Pyramid. The new pyramid is better than the old one; the food proportions are more realistic, exercise is emphasized as vital to a healthy lifestyle, and "good" carbohydrates and fats are emphasized over "bad" ones. (You can find the new pyramid at www.mypyramid.org.) The food guide website is interactive and contains detailed information on nutrition, which is an improvement over the old, oversimplified pyramid. Each food group is represented in the new pyramid by a different colored band, the width of the band representing the proportion of your diet that this food group should fill. After a few minutes at the website, I felt like I had a

good idea of what the government thinks my diet should include. There is detailed information about the best kinds of foods in each category. You can even access a personalized food pyramid based on your age, gender and activity level.

Although an improvement over the old one, the new pyramid still has its problems. Visually, the new pyramid is not immediately easy to understand. The figure walk-



ing up stairs represents a person exercising, which is pretty easy to figure out. But, at first glance, it is not even clear which colored band represents which food group. It takes a computer, the Internet, the ability to read, and some basic computer skills to figure out what the new pyramid stands for. Although it is easy for me, a college-educated young woman, to understand the new pyramid, I'm not so sure someone like my grandmother would be able to figure this thing out (no offense, Grandma). And in addition to issues of accessibility, the new pyramid still seems to be heavily influ-

enced by lobby groups. This can especially be seen in the milk group recommendations, which are virtually unchanged from the original pyramid.

There's a lot wrong with the USDA Food Guide Pyramid, old and new. It seems that there are so many people out there—magazines, the government, your PE 100 text book, CNN, your family—who think they know the best way for you to be healthy. Much of the health information out there is contradictory, so it's hard to know who to believe. There are plenty of alternative food pyramids out there; my favorite that I have found is the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid.² I like this one because it separates the food groups into monthly, weekly and daily foods, which is an interesting alternative to quantified daily servings. But don't take my word for it. The beautiful truth is that you are a unique individual, and no one knows you better than you. So, it's up to you to decide the best way for you to be as healthy as you want to be.

¹ "Calcium and Milk." Harvard School of Public Health. 2005. <<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/calcium.html>>

² "The Mediterranean Diet Pyramid." Oldways. <http://www.oldwayspt.org/pyramids/med/p_med.html>

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A Body Rebuilt

by Kate Fontana

Last month, my 13-year-old sister and I, almost 20, celebrated landmarks in our lives as women: our first periods. You are shocked, so let me explain. Colleen began menstruating for the first time. I began for the first time in a year and a half, during which I babied my body, trying naturally to nurse her into health. Colleen bled for 4 days, I for about 8 hours—but I cheered for my little body and am cheering even now as my abdomen swells and aches dully, in month two of my cycle. And I can't help but feel a little smug.

My story begins like most things—very small, molecularly small, a small tweak in the plan, one letter that didn't show up in the genetic pattern of an oblivious pale-skinned ancestor. That gene drifted down through the Irish and Scandinavians mostly, and then to me and thousands of others who have discovered that the so-called staff of life isn't a universal standard. We have gluten-intolerance at best, celiac disease at worst. The glue-like protein in wheat, barley, oats, and rye causes the villi of our small intestine to shrivel up like bothered sea anemones, drastically cutting down its ability to absorb, and leading to all kinds of other deficiencies.

I don't think I'm being unfair in saying that most modern medicine is rather Cartesian, segmenting the body for systematic microscopic examination. It has done amazing things with such a philosophy, but one always risks missing the bigger picture. I've come to find that the body, much like a family, much like an ecosystem, much like the entire universe, is never understood completely without considering the integration and inseparability of all the parts. We draw lines around things to define and understand—but they are all ultimately lines *we* draw. This is my experience.

I have spent a lot of time in the doctor's office, but have come almost full

circle from problem to solution. Since the summer before eighth grade until my junior year, I menstruated at most five times. With how we demonize that time of the month, most women (and men) might have considered that a blessing. But my mother and doctor were worried—although it is normal to have irregular periods when first starting out, going more than a year without one is often indicative of bigger problems, and predisposes a woman to infertility and osteoporosis.

I began running the gauntlet of modern medicine. I had an ultrasound to make sure my uterus was free of cysts. What a disgustingly frightening word for a 16-year old! I filled many phials of blood, this one to test my thyroid, this one measuring my iron, this one to test the levels of all those gender-defining hormones: testosterone (of which, surprise, everyone has some), progesterone, estrogen. *Are you exercising*

I've come to find that the body...
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too much? Have you lost weight? Be honest—are you anorexic? Then the big guns came out. *Birth control. Something just to jumpstart your system, let it know what it feels like, it should take over in a few months.* I cried walking home from that visit.

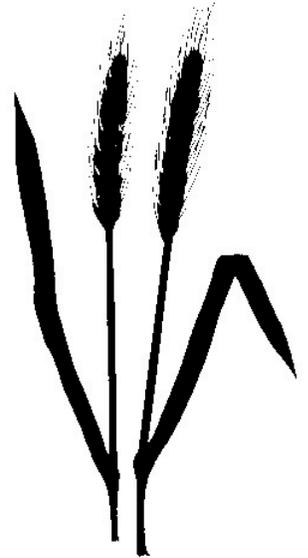
Birth control did what it was supposed to: took a hammer to my body and *made* it work. I had three periods in three months. I gained five pounds, and, "Someone had a bowl of cranky flakes for breakfast," became my little brother's greeting of choice. Then I stopped taking the pills and we all held our breath for 28 days, and then 32, and then 62. Three months later I tried again, and had three perfect periods. And for three more months I waited for

nothing.

I went to the doctor for other things during this time: I broke out in itchy goose-bumps, not hives, but similar, during a volleyball game. I took oatmeal baths for days and mom washed all my sheets and clothes in hypo-allergenic detergent. We finally resorted to the hammer again, and I took steroids, which cleared up my skin in a matter of hours. Another time I was baby-sitting three days before my sisters and I were leaving for a road trip to California. This time it *was* hives; they sprouted first at my waist and bra-line, under my armpits and on my back—patches of red welts that itched to painfulness. I had to call the parents of my kids at the restaurant, go home early to an oatmeal bath, and wait out the night until we could call our doctor for another prescription of oh my lord, strong-as-the-devil, steroids. Mom put our plans to leave

on hold until I had completely cleared up, and I had to swear that I wouldn't eat any nuts, seafood, or foreign anything in case I was allergic to one of these and for Pete's sake, you don't want this to be a road trip to the San Francisco emergency room. When I got back, we visited an allergy specialist and I had my arms and back poked with holes, received two Epipens and the video instructions, a list of the things I'm mildly allergic to (cats, some obscure weed, almonds, green beans, egg whites, air, water, fun, God), and vague warnings about the insufficiency of an allergy panel: *You could be allergic to anything, and you won't really know until it kills you.*

I went to the doctor for insomnia and heart palpitations and my moody



stomach. The last has been by far the least pleasant and the funniest of the symptoms, depending on my optimism at the moment. I can hold my own with my brothers making uncouth smells and noises (but I'm pretty sure everyone can, and we've just been socialized to pretend otherwise). It's unfortunately often accompanied by a terrible stomach ache and diarrhea. One time I had to cancel a three day backpacking trip with my Outdoor Club, for pains that felt like I was giving birth and which turned out to be "just gas." Was that ever fun to explain.

By mid-junior year, I could depend daily on a conversation with my digestive tract, whether it was just growling, a dull weight, or violent pains that caused me to leave school on a number of occasions. I was diagnosed with unhelpfully vague Irritable Bowel Syndrome. Yuck. We finally scheduled a visit to a naturopathic doctor—an ND, equally certified and reputable but with a different approach.

The first visit or two were simply interviews, assessing the situation: *How much sleep do you get? Exercise? What's a typical meal like? Your family health history? Are you happy?* I described all my scattered symptoms. She checked the pH in my mouth, which was low, apparently indicative of essential fatty acid deficiency. My nails had white patches on them—I was lacking zinc. The next few months saw rather fascinating detective work. I tried cutting out dairy, then soy. I took flax seed oil for healthy fats. Then somehow I happen to mention my Irish/Scandinavian heritage and—*Hmm...maybe you're gluten-intolerant...*

I had blood drawn to be tested, and meanwhile cut out all gluten. That meant no pasta, cookies, gumbo, macaroni, homemade honey rolls, and I won't go on because I'm making myself feel bad. Before the test even came back, I knew we were on to something. I just felt better. I had more

energy, and my stomach stopped its daily tirade. And in two weeks, I menstruated.

That was a year and a half ago. I'd like to say I haven't eaten wheat or gluten since then. But although I had been a vegetarian for two years, somehow giving up a food for health was much more difficult than doing it for principle. I'd do really well for three weeks, and then come home to eat half a box of Cheeze-Its after a bad day—not even a worthwhile splurge. I'd sneak Oreos to my room. I'd feel awkward telling

such because they are *essential*, especially for female reproductive health. Hormones and nutrition also influence daily vitality and psychological health. Full nights of sleep were rare, which affected not only my mood but also the natural rhythms of my body.

I felt horrible for a long time. And the little devil in my mind said, *Snap out of it. You think you're suffering? Imagine having this disease in an undeveloped country, where you have no choice about what you eat. At least you know. At least you have food at all.* And so I felt worse.

There is a lot more I could tell you about: about Thanksgiving, about attempts to eat out, about discovering wheat in the most bizarre and disheartening places, about battling food services here at PLU for some basic wheat-free food besides salad. I've learned to be prepared, to bake soy flour carrot cake, to stand up for myself. I've since worked out a preventative plan for

myself, because I never want to feel like I did. I sleep eight hours every night. I treat myself everyday to something sweet and wheat-free, so that I won't crave it when it's around. I let myself have bad days. I pray. I talk to people. I am realizing that I am no good to anyone if I am not healthy myself.

I thought that I was going to be writing about celiac disease, facts and numbers. But as I write, I'm realizing the greater lesson here beyond awareness of this growing minority group. Something about the big picture, about the interconnectedness of one's body and soul; about listening to one's body and being patient with it; about taking care of oneself for everyone's sake; about recognizing my own agency, and not being afraid to ask for help and admit weakness. There are still problems. Won't there always be? But things always tend to make a full circle. Today, my uterus thanks me.



This is Kate. She is sad. She can't eat this food!

a host, and just eat the lasagna to avoid a scene. Previously very health-conscious, I began resorting to sweets to satisfy my craving for something that just tasted good. One can eat only so many rice cakes without going a little crazy.

I have never vocalized this, but I think I probably had some kind of eating disorder. To make up for what I couldn't eat, I'd gorge on things I could, and then feel horrible and punish myself. Strangely, my weight changed little, but I could never admit to anyone how I battled with food, afraid of revealing my hypocrisy: some feminist I turned out to be.

So you see how my condition lacks the simplicity of the gangrenous limb waiting amputation. While my body was trying so hard to digest gluten, there was not enough energy to produce hormones. Other nutrient deficiencies compounded the situation—essential fatty acids are named

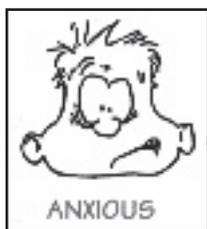
CHEMICALLY INDEPENDENT

by Stefanie Hotra

"Hi, my name is Stefanie."

"Hi Stefanie," says the circle of people I'm sitting with.

"And I am a nursing student." A few chuckles are heard around the circle. "Today, I am feeling..." As I try to decide, I finger the sheet of paper I'm looking at. It has been passed through so many hands that it is frayed on the edges and soft to the touch. On this paper is listed almost any emotion imaginable, along with the



corresponding facial expression. How many do I get to choose? "I'm feeling excited to be here...and a little nervous since this is all so new." Now I have to decide my goal for

the day. "My goal for the day is to enjoy my time here and get some studying done tonight." A few more chuckles arise. I feel lame saying my goal is to study; I never want to be one of those cliché nursing students who spends all her time studying in the library. But let's face it folks, three tests in three days does require some preparation (visions of long hours spent studying at coffee shops come to mind). "And my positive affirmation is that I will get good grades on all my exams."

"Yes, you will," says the group, laughing a bit.

The man next to me starts his spiel for the day with "Hi, my name is D and I'm an addict..."

You're probably wondering how a nursing student fits in with a group of addicts and alcoholics, or maybe you've already guessed. As a part of the junior year of PLU's nursing program, each student does a clinical rotation through mental health. We get a wide range of experience, from in-patient psychiatric units, to crisis units in the emergency department, to chemical dependency units (CDUs).

I wasn't sure what to expect that first day at the chemical dependency unit. The only images in my mind of alcoholics and drug addicts were the ones I'd picked up from TV and movies. I was curious to find out what drug and alcohol treatment is really

like. My experience surprised me.

The chemical dependency unit I went to is under voluntary admission. Some people were there because they wanted to be. Some came because they were persuaded by family or friends. And some underwent treatment to avoid going to jail after getting in trouble with the law. Once they are admitted, people usually stay at the CDU for about 21 days. I spent time on the adult unit and came into contact with a variety of ages, from 20 to 55. The addictions people struggled with spanned a wide range, all the way from marijuana and alcohol to heroin and liquid morphine.

During their stay at the treatment center, the patients engage in a variety of daily activities. Check-in happens in the morning and involves the group I described above. They also attend one lecture daily on a topic like communication or self-esteem, and meet with a counselor on a regular basis. The activity that affected me most was what is called "process group."

A drug/alcohol counselor at the CDU facilitated the process group. There wasn't enough time to hear from every person in the group, but three or four people were singled out and given a chance to share. The patients called this being in "the hot spot."



This phrase couldn't be more true. The counselor that led the group was not a typical counselor. She was confrontational and knew how to push people's buttons. At first I wasn't sure what I thought about her methods, but before long she had the patients owning up to their pasts and being honest about their addictions, including what it would take to overcome them. I was impressed.

It was amazing how she was able to get to the bottom of things, past all the "bullshit" (as she called it). One man went from red-faced angry to tears in the span of a minute as she guided the conversation.



One woman explained that she had lied to her elementary school-aged son and told him that her IV heroin was "medicine" to make her feel better. He is now terrified of hospitals, doctors, and medicine. Another man told of how he became addicted to methamphetamine and spread his addiction to his wife. In less than a year, they stopped caring for their children and were spending all their money to secure more meth. Two of the three children were taken away and relocated by Child Protective Services. Now he faces jail, unless he goes through treatment.

It would have been easy to judge addicts with stories like these, but what stood out to me more than their mistakes was their honesty and openness in telling their stories and sharing their struggles. My classmate and I didn't feel like outsiders at all; it was like we had been a part of the group all along. It took tremendous courage for them to share such personal stuff with people they hardly knew.

At one point the counselor said something that made a lot of sense. One of the patients was talking about how hard it was for her to stay in treatment; her anxiety made her want to run for the door. The counselor then said something along the lines of, "But you know you're doing the right thing because the right thing usually isn't easy."



The statistics for staying clean after getting out of treatment the first time are small—something like 1 out of 12—yet I gained so much respect for the people I got to know, as I watched them learn to own their pasts and take steps in the direction of conquering their addictions. Their honesty and self-disclosure was refreshing because it was so authentic. I think they're onto something at the CDU—that part of living an authentic life means having the courage to own your mistakes, be honest, and make the necessary changes toward what's right, even if it's hard.

Ha Ha. Funny.

by Nathan Bendickson



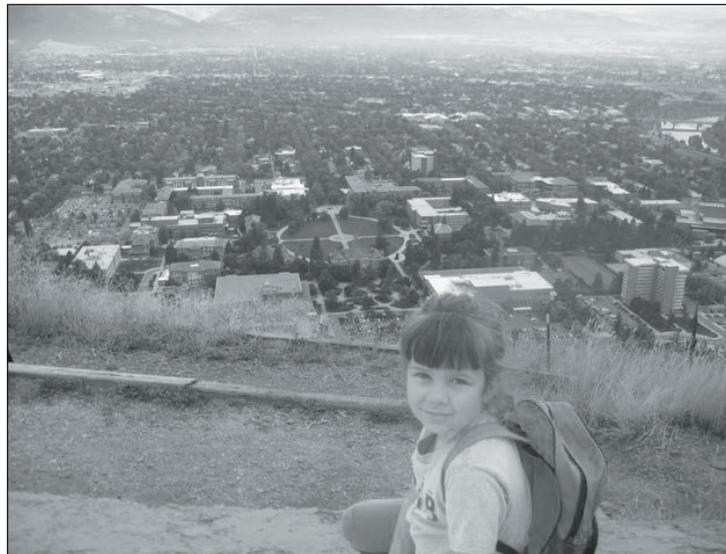
This summer I spent a few afternoons with a four-year-old. Nicole reintroduced me to the joys of Candyland, Tiddly Winks, and sidewalk chalk masterpieces. We scribbled on computer paper, played with Disney princesses, and built a fort between two chairs with a blanket. I won at basketball, but she kicked my butt at soccer.

Nicole is my baby cousin. She's adorable, talkative, and rather exhausting. I think of her as a drama queen in training. At first she shied away from me, peering out from behind her mother's leg, but before long she was bounding up to me—and then ordering me around. Again and again she'd pick a game, do something cute (like throw her hands up in disbelief when she'd missed a basket), and pose the question, "Isn't that funny Nathan, isn't that funny?" Or at least I thought it was a question. At first I'd concede: "Yeah Nicole, that's funny." After an hour I was tired. She sprinkled the question like she would a generous helping of sugar on her cereal. I'd let the question hang in silence, or even counter with, "I don't know Nicole. Is it funny?" I almost asked, "What do you mean by 'funny?'" Instead we ran outside to find her tricycle.

Back home, I consulted my dictionary. The word funny has two definitions (on page 347, which starts with "funeral home"): 1. Causing laughter or amusement. 2. Strangely or suspiciously odd.¹ The way Nicole drawled the word, I couldn't tell which one she meant—"Isn't it humorous, Nathan?" or "Isn't it weird?" Chances are, she hadn't thought about it much. But this linguistic ambiguity worries me. Will Nicole grow up to think amusing things are strange? Do we blur the distinction ourselves?

I may be splitting hairs. Sure, you

might say, we have different ideas for the same word. But we know the difference between ha-ha funny and eyebrow-raised-in-suspicion funny. Then I wonder, why does loud laughter incite dirty looks? This summer I ate lunch with some friends, and someone told a hilarious story. (It ended with her mother saying, "But the bed springs weren't creaking rhythmically, so I wasn't worried.") I laughed and laughed and laughed until it hurt, and then I laughed some more. Then I noticed the other people in the restaurant. We got a few dirty looks, possibly out of disdain, or even jealousy. I couldn't tell. I could imagine strangers sneering at eruptions of, say, drunken, obnoxious laughter. But what about honest, I'm-only-laughing-because-it's-truly-funny laughter? Is there a difference? I worry that real laughter, the kind that roars from the belly, is considered, indeed, strangely or suspiciously odd. It's a social faux pas.



Wow Nicole. You climbed a mountain. That's funny.

Even when I'm not boisterous, people still look at me funny. (Please, spare your theories for a moment.) I'll be sitting in class, following the discussion, and when anything funny happens, I'll laugh. Some people look shocked, like I've just eaten my fingers, or like I'm the other variety

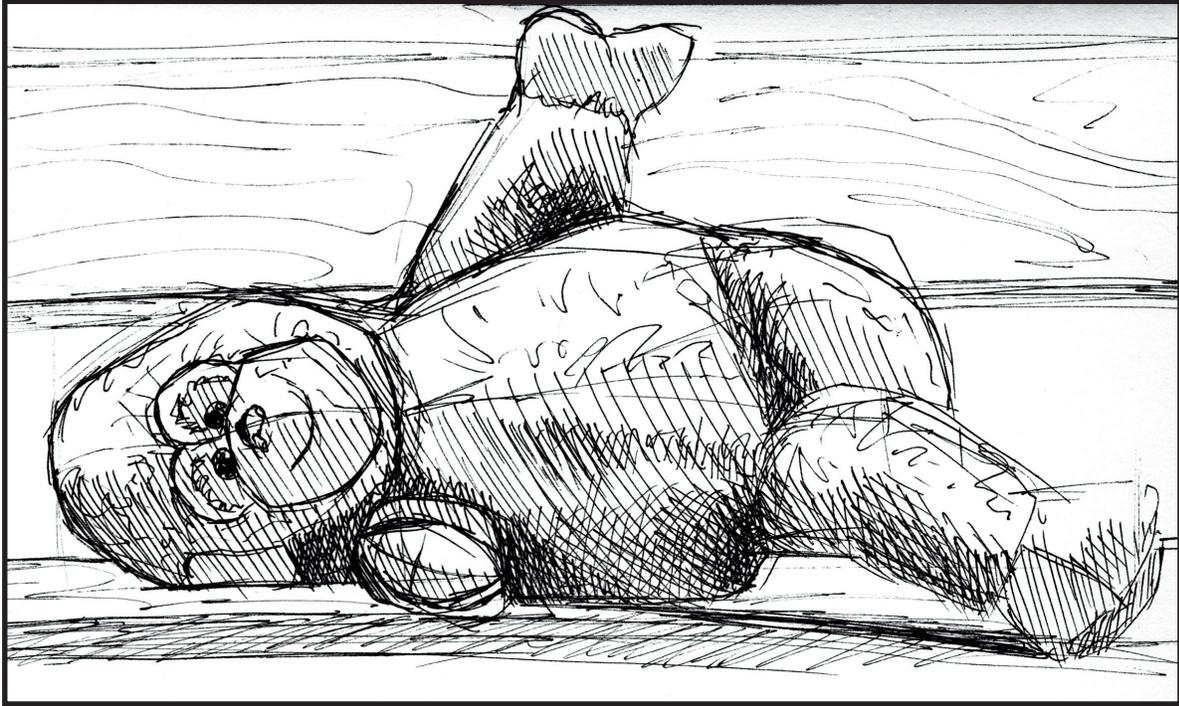
of funny: suspiciously odd. Nicole will be going to school soon, where she'll start balancing the approval of peers and teachers, and if her experience is anything like mine, this "funny" thing will be hard for her. It's good to be funny (definition 1), but it's not good to be funny (definition 2).

Plus, the ambiguities stretch further; our language abounds in gray areas. Nicole will learn (or maybe she's already learned) that "pride is a sin." This gets me. Last Christmas my family went to a coffee shop together, and my mom wanted to pay for my drink. The day before, she'd given me \$20 for lunch. I'm practically an adult. While we argued politely, my older brother stepped in, saying, "I'll take the money; I'm not proud!" Yes, I was proud, but proud of myself, of my ability to subsist independently. That's not wrong, is it? The word, like the word funny, has several definitions, and they get jumbled. If pride (the selfish kind) is a sin, is it any wonder that so many people lack pride (the self-respecting kind)?

I believe people are smart, and can decipher the subtle shades of meaning in these words. But I keep thinking about Nicole, who learns things in a stumbling haphazard way—like all children, new to a world of crazy, complex things. Like anyone, Nicole wants to make others laugh, and she wants to like herself, but our words, our symbols for these traits, are strange and convoluted. And I know too many people who grow up to feel funny—the bad kind—and who lack self-esteem. No one can say, "Ha ha, funny," as a compliment, without some negative connotation creeping in. We laugh with others; we laugh at others. And the difference can be so subtle, no one knows which is which.

¹ The American Heritage Dictionary, 4th ed.

The Comatose Monkey Says:



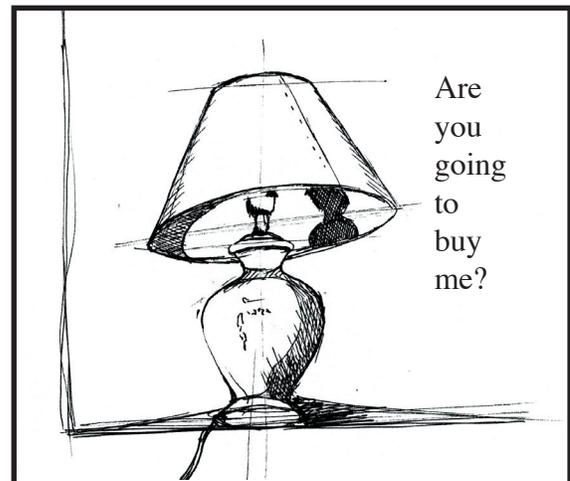
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artwork by Jamie Forslund

THAT WAS IT

by Adam Oswald



I am an ambassador for my valley. It is not enough to say I speak for her or represent her, as if we could be separated or only associated for a brief time. My identity is bound to the rolling skyline of my home; my self flows out from here and is as continuous as any of the streams trickling through my childhood. I find the sound of wind in the tops of fir trees so haunting that it tears out sections of my soul when passing, my spirit and the wind mingling and coursing along the mountaintops, spinning down beargrass slopes to paint on the yielding surfaces of mountain lakes. The wind, playing its instruments of Sub Alpine and Douglas Fir, Lodgepole and Ponderosa Pine, fills in the parts of me that have left to dance, leaving no space empty, so that when I speak others I may bear witness to my valley, and when I breathe they may hear the wind's echo.

I am lounging next to the Clark Fork

River in late spring. The water is not muddy, but moves with an urgency and smooth grace that speaks volumes about the rain earlier this week. I lock

eyes with a black bird mother who is letting me know how close I am to her nest. Her punctuated, monotone *keks* are muffled by a beakfull of insects she has hunted off the riverbank. The swallows bob above the river, accelerating down to the water's surface before checking their dive by another slow climb or a swoop to the left or right. The mind goes blank when following them; they hold the place of thinking. They are not so much animals as they are the higher thoughts of mountains, swirling and connecting with the frenetic virtuosity of any neural synapses. It is fitting that a rough-legged hawk slowly turns above us all, one of the slow ruminations of Eddy Peak. I turn back to my lunch and am grateful to have a job, a legitimate reason for spending my time here.

Then I wince and realize money can never justify my presence anywhere, and that time can only be lived, never spent.

Again I wince at the fact that at the foot of this mountain I felt the need to legitimize my presence.

I am running in autumn; there is coolness in the air that makes it feel more open, like walking into the chill air of a cavern. The sky reminds the valley that we belong to the North, but I run with an endotherm's pride at being able to ward off all cold. The fire in me is fueled by potatoes I hastily buried in the spring. They resurrected with a vengeance, feeding on our compost and the same sunlight that tanned my neck this summer. With the sun's help they pulled pieces out of the air and stuck them underground for my grasping fingers to unearth several weeks later. My mother beautifully sautés the small ones in olive oil and dill, but that was yesterday, and now new tastes blossom in my mouth. Shifting into the middle stage of my run, I exhale in a long soundless whistle, putting some of those potatoes back into the air from whence they came, watching my misty breath shoot out and vanish, waiting to be picked up by the trees around me. I think of those trunks, so solid, and feel my face

push through the air as my potato sugar expends itself, and hope my breath ends up in those beautiful sky pillars.

I am weeding at the tree farm. The work requires us to be on hands and knees, and our paint scrapers pierce and abrade the floodplain soil repeatedly, endlessly, for as long as we have Blue Spruce and Lilac seedlings to defend against prolific weeds. Our faces are pressed to the Earth but we do not see her.

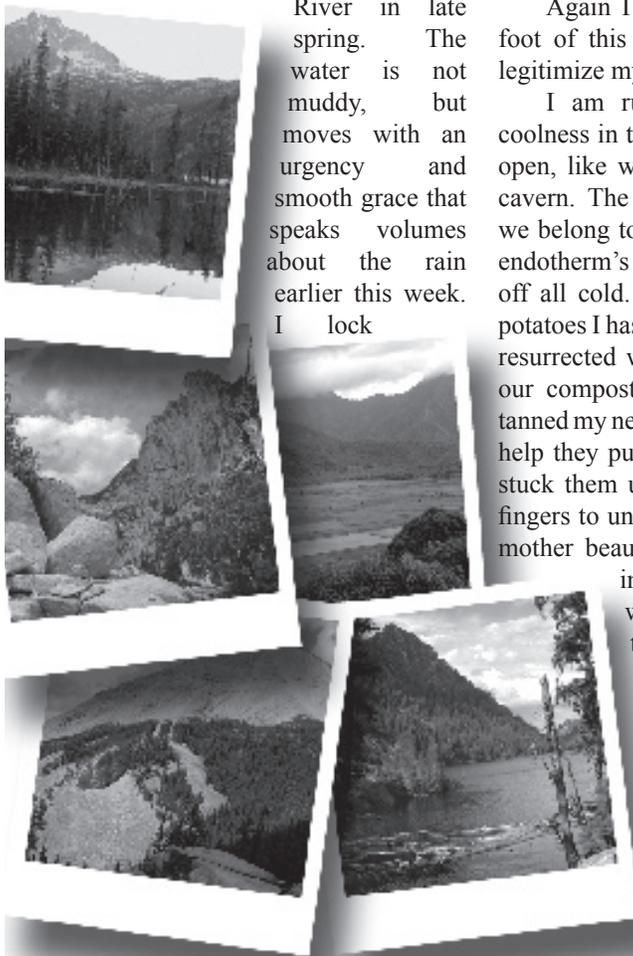
In the process I somehow dislodge a large caterpillar that lands on the sand in front of me, hiding his head in the curl of his body. He is so green that I stop and am reminded of the existence of color. I pick him up. He is comically plump. His tubular body is smooth and yielding when gently squeezed, yet pops back as if under pressure. He feels like a liquid-filled balloon.

I notice a darker, leaf-pulp green stripe down his back that contrasts with the shocking, neon green of the rest of his body. I think it is his gut but then notice a narrower section traveling in a wave toward his head, repeating over and over in a pulse of fluid I can observe from start to finish. It is his heartbeat.

I feel the life in my hands and the soil pushing back against my knees. I hear my own pulse in my ears as I watch his in my hand. And I get it.

The peaks and meadows of this field, the rock that makes its bones, the creatures that animate it, and the way my own hand is a landscape to this caterpillar. The flow of the river behind me through the back of his body which I can see: the movement and change of clouds due to plant breathing, wind blowing and sun shining and the interplay of my own organs and mind is one and the same. The movement of the nascent butterfly across my palm and the rolling of boulders down talus fields as part of an eroding landscape are not isolated spheres of existence but different parts of the same one. My heartbeat, the pulse of the caterpillar, and the flow of the river; my life, and the life of this valley; my existence, and the end of its isolation from the existence of everything "else."

* * *



There is no division between human welfare and the wellbeing of creation. Any comprehensive and honest discussion of human health must recognize that the idea of “human” health embraces all ecosystems of this planet and beyond. We humans cannot benefit at Earth’s expense. Economic growth is a lie, especially when used as a standard of success for the species. We do not make anything, but, by modifying natural things (like burning oil, sawing lumber, plowing soil, etc.) we increase our control over them, changing their shape and function to suit our bodily needs and economic wants. We cannot increase the wealth or health of the world; rather, we concentrate materials and energy into the human camp.

Environmentalism as a whole does not appreciate the continuity between ecology and humans. The idea periodically breaks through but is generally lost in the acceptance of our standard of living, the need for development, separation from nature, and the standard of economic growth. The capitulation to isolation leads to some ridiculous phrases that nearly define specific environmental campaigns. Save the whales, save the pandas, save the rainforest, save the environment! These phrases are bizarre to the point of insanity, and are rooted in our acceptance of the undeniably false split between “Man” and “Nature.” Save the whales from what? For what? Undoubtedly from the most ferocious primate to ever stalk the planet, but then should not the slogan read: “Stop the humans!?”

I don’t want this to be another battle call for

environmentalists, but a commentary on our incredible failure. Western science has known for quite some time about our dependence on natural systems for our survival and welfare. Physically and emotionally we need this planet and the life it contains; we will live with life or die without it. And yet, our destruction has increased, has accelerated. Make no mistake; the more we grow in technology, development, economics and population, the worse the damage becomes. Whenever we speak of increasing our standard of living or maintaining economic growth, we are doing so at the expense of ecological systems that are far more vital to human health than any points on the stock market or profit margins in pharmaceutical companies. Yet we remain trapped in the money mindset, letting the bottom line be...the bottom line. How many college students plan to live poorly, to live *sustainably*? How many environmental studies or biology professors do we know as living examples of how to not participate in such suicidal destruction?

For example, I was a member of the Sustainability Council at PLU for about a year. My fellow members, most of them faculty, were earnest, brilliant, practical, well-informed, motivated, realistic, and admirable people. The experience enlightened me about decision making on campus, thrilled me to see real changes being made, and never once gave me hope that the council could make the campus sustainable. It was comical; we succeeded in every aspect of being a council except the purpose for which we existed. We could not make *ourselves* sustainable. At the end

of the day we drove home (the chair of the committee in an SUV), ate industrial food or at least lived in houses made of harvested trees, and played our proper roles in a giant economic machine that is daily killing off species and will probably add *Homo sapiens* at the bottom of the list. Attempting to make a university (or a city, neighborhood, state or civilization) sustainable is analogous to trying to maintain a fire without consuming fuel. Like most environmentalists, we were hacking at the branches of the tree of evil, not the root. We were branches ourselves, terrified at the thought of the death of that root.

Our social position as PLU students and faculty, or as citizens of the U.S., reveals far more about our environmental selves than anything we say. People in the “Third World” consume less than we do, and therefore do less environmental damage. Indigenous people do less than them. It seems that the more we know about sustainability issues the less we can actually do about them. The poor, illiterate, stateless indigenous peoples of the world, people who have never read an issue of *Nature*, or seen through the jungle canopy, are leading sustainable lives of practical ecological sophistication that industrial people cannot even consider.

This is the crux of the issue, which environmentalism and all civilizations must face if we are ever to stop the catastrophic unraveling of the web of life. World history, but our national history especially, has shown that sustainable cultures, cultures that live integrated with their ecosystems, have no power compared to cultures that bend nature to human uses. They have no power precisely because they choose not to take it. They are not “unfallen.” They do not live in an ideal natural state where individual evil does not exist or they somehow cannot do wrong. There are plenty examples of sustainable cultures choosing to break from ecosystem balance and forge a civilization. What sets indigenous people apart from “civilized” people is the refusal to create and believe in the lie that humans are separate from nature, and have set their material lives accordingly. Our industrial, technological, agricultural lives, on the other hand, are founded upon that lie. The truth is we are not improving the lot of humanity by our economic actions, because those actions

are motivated by desire for power, and in the end, we are only hurting ourselves. The lie was first created about 8-10,000 years ago, when people in a few places stopped hunting and gathering and began to plow the Earth and take over other species for their own benefit. As we take notice of deforestation, loss of almost all grasslands, climate change, pollution, extinctions, etc., we are seeing the reaping of those lies sown so long ago. If you have even wondered what life was like for people in ancient cultures facing ecological catastrophe (like the Anasazi, Maya or Easter

Islanders) stop at the end of this sentence, put down the magazine, close your eyes and take a deep breath.

That was it.

It feels normal to us because it is normal for us, and for all people in all cultures that empower themselves by raping their home of resources. When was the last time you saw anyone crying about the near annihilation of temperate grasslands, of which only 1% remain in the world? When

has there been a national day of mourning for the loss of the Colorado River Delta? If you want to know a destroyer's hands, feel your own. If you want to comprehend a culture that is chewing up the future for current gains in the stock market, you already do. I am awake in the land of the dead; we are half-alive because we do not know the land, we do not know where we are or of what we are a part. We silence half of our own souls, the half that is the world. If we do choose to listen, it is screaming in pain.

Essays like this normally end with an ultimatum: Choose to do the right thing or suffer the consequences. I look at the state of the world, including my own culture, and realize we are suffering already. Now, however, I will present some ultimatums, not to exhort but to reveal how horribly imbedded our destructive relationship has become. We must slow, stop, and then decrease the level of national and world economic activity. We must not drive, or use industrial machinery in agriculture. We must release some farmland back to the wild. We must altogether do away with institutions like the New York Stock Exchange. We must dismantle much of our infrastructure including: many houses, all mansions, roads, bureaucracy, and office buildings. We must couple that dismantling with a lowered standard of (material) living. In other words, in order to reenter life, we must first release our power, for which we have destroyed so much to achieve. Though we certainly can do this in order to stop razing our children's and grandchildren's chances for lives worthy of the name, I don't think we want to. Too many people are ostensibly happy to exist half dead. Too many prefer the media's representation of the world instead of the world itself. In a sea of televisions and iPods we are blind and deaf. How can a people (civilized people) strive to achieve something we do not know exists? Part of me may be leaping Montana peaks on the wind, but such places are islands under siege now, and every moment I waste as a cog in this machine I become better adapted to the position. The most frightening aspect of our choice is that it is real. If we choose to cut ourselves off from the world, to maintain the lie of isolation and keep drinking the poison of power, we may very well succeed.

From the vegetarian camps

by A. Gerow

“Nothing but rain, hard drugs, and vegetarians in Seattle.” Despite my friends’ words of wisdom, I came to school in this strange world of the west coast. Indeed it rains, but I’m still straight-edge. On the other hand, it only took ten months for me to attach the vegetarian label to my list. Originally it was almost silly: a philosophy professor of mine surmised, “Men gathered the meat because women were debilitated by pregnancy.” I was inspired. My quest for gender equality took a step toward a diet of solidarity. I’ve since expanded my reasoning: now I claim, “There is an inextricable link between the violence and cruelty we systematically commit against animals, and the violence we continue to commit against other human beings.”

For others, it comes differently—the environment, health, politics, or otherwise. Here I will briefly survey some of the motivations behind vegetarianism. Keep in mind that all these rationales are linked, if not by foundation then by outcome: the simple choice to not eat meat.

Health. This is a big issue (also the topic of this very publication), and hence carries a lot of weight with a lot of people. Johns Hopkins recently released a report saying that while meat has nutritional value, the embedded hormones are reaching catastrophic levels. The report said these hormones are now permeating generational lines of cattle: i.e. a mother cow who is fed hormones (usually to keep her fat and happy while in reproachable living conditions) is passing them to her offspring in never-before-seen levels. What

is wrong with hormones? Harvard Medical School has linked them to cancer, lowered immune systems, and allergies in the consumer. What is wrong with reproachable living conditions? They have been linked, logically and by formal studies, to mad-cow-disease, E.Coli, and other diseases. Note that such living conditions give rise to the use of another problematic substance: antibiotics.

Antibiotics are used to keep production animals from dying of said living conditions. And, as in humans, prolonged use lowers immunity and provides a breeding

My quest for gender equity took a step toward a diet of solidarity.

ground for tougher bacteria. The closer our antibiotics get to killing 100% of the problematic bacteria, the more problematic the surviving bacteria. The other problem with antibiotics is related to the hormone issue. All these antibiotics the meat factories give the animals are subsequently found in the meat...funny thing right? And thus, the consumers ingest them.

The nutritional value of meat, according to the FDA, can be found elsewhere in beans, legumes, vegetables, and—oh no!—tofu. Back when the diet fads were saying something other than “Atkins!” meat was as unpopular as pasta is now. No meat, fruits,

vegetables, and lots of milk. Some time soon this will come back in vogue with the diet industry, but until then, take our word for it, not eating meat won’t kill you.

Moral. What about those problematic living conditions? Imagine living in a single room for your entire life; a room in which you cannot turn around, where the ceiling and floors are simply bars, and you are constantly being fed drugs to make you hungry. You receive one bath of cold, antibacterial water a week. And, lets not forget, you’re being defecated on, and subsequently defecating on other animals above and below you—now the bars make sense, no? There are lots of stories like this that vegetarians can tell to scare people. Like how cows and chickens alike are strung up alive by the feet and conveyed to a slaughter-pit where their legs are not released, but simply cut off. This saves time and energy on the manufacturing floor.

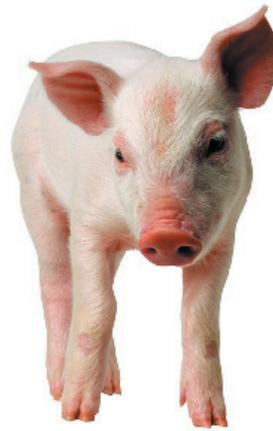
But there are more humane ways to convey the humanity that moral vegetarians espouse. Simple questions sometimes can do the trick. Who are we to create and immediately destroy life for the sake of our own convenience? And yes, meat is only convenience—there are plenty of vegetarians out there not dying of it. Likewise, houses are conveniences of the rich when most of world doesn’t live in a free standing structure. Instead of fear, we can use some fundamental questions to promote some thoughtful inquiry. How much meat would we eat if we weren’t so dramatically separated from its means of production? Would we have the heart to kill so systematically? Would you eat your dog?

Would you eat your child? We're supposed to be thinking humanely here!

On that note, what exactly is the difference between human and animal? First, it was free will, but philosophers like Carol Adams, Peter Singer, and William Stephens have successfully argued against the idea that animals are without free will. Then it was tool-use; but any field researcher of mammals can dispute this

moved, and chemicals don't come and go—they change. So when vegetarians correctly note that it takes as much energy to produce 10lbs of meat as 100lbs of wheat or 175lbs of rice, it needs some explaining. (Note that Japan has recently invented ways to increase the efficiency of rice production, thus furthering the energy gap.) So if no energy is lost, where in the crap did it go!? Well, like any business major will tell you,

Political. A quieter camp of veg-heads, but nonetheless relevant, is those in it for the politics. Leftist libertarians, social democrats, socialists, communists, anarchists, and even some democrats have spoken out against two aspects of the meat industry. One, its enormous ability to shape policy—the food pyramid, with its absurd ration of meat, being the most reluctant example of the industry's clout. Also, the deregulation of growth hormones and antibiotics used in production, and the fight against a popular measure to label meats injected with such substances. If there was nothing wrong with them, why fear the label? If they were good for the meat and the meat consumers, you might think the industry would be all over the chance to exemplify



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pretty quickly. Then language, and a certain Gorilla by the name of Koko learned sign language, and now uses it without the coaxing of her human mentors. She even uses it to communicate with her fellow primates, who in turn are beginning to use the language. Now some scientists want to say that indirect learning is the key to humanity...but experimental psychologists are working quickly to disprove this. In the end, humans do everything, from living and breathing, to believing in a god, to loving and hating each other in accordance with some pretty simple rules of biology. We can talk all day about how we are different from animals, but the fact remains, we are closer to them as a species than anything else in the world.

And of course, the rhetorical question that brings tears to the eyes of pacifists like myself: why kill something we don't have to?

Environment. This is a realm of vegetarianism I was completely out of touch with until I came to the west coast, but it makes some of the simplest sense.

In the world of physics, energy can be described relatively simply: kinetic and potential. And as physicists have proven, energy only gets redirected, matter is only

a bureaucracy's overhead is the bottom line's arch nemesis. And the bigger the operation, the worse the efficiency. So for meat production all this wasted energy is going to feeding the animals, growing the food to feed the animals (which could be feeding people, the same thing the meat will be feeding), and distributing the end product. And of course, paying all the people that operate this machine.

There are more subtle, more specific areas of environmental rationale for vegetarianism. Shrimp farming has become so dense that the chemicals released from so many shrimp kill off the surrounding habitat. The methane produced in one day from Sim-Plot (the second largest producer of beef in the U.S.) is greater than the green-house gas produced by the Exxon Mobile oil refinery in LeMont Illinois. The noise of chicken manufacturing has been cause for property devaluation, and even wildlife suppression. Salmon farming has led to farmed salmon being the number one recommended-against food by the FDA due to its mercury content. Thus, plants and animals living in surrounding areas are drinking water saturated with mercury from the nearby salmon farm. The list goes on, and scientists are only realizing more and more problems with mass production.

their skills in production!

The other side of the political motivation is the riving of consumer and producer. In a strange moment of unity, one communist Karl Marx and one capitalist Adam Smith agree that the consuming body should not be too far separated from the means of production. Smith goes on to prove capitalism will inherently need to be held in check in this regard and Marx goes on to cite that these reforms will never work...and calls for a couple of revolutions to patch things up. To argue against our societal separation from the means of (meat) production is ludicrous. Organic farming, local governance, and community-centered living are all extremely healthy and fun ways to counter the entropic phenomena plaguing the meat industry today. Join now!

As you can see, there are myriad reasons to be a vegetarian. Whether you choose one or not, diversity is stability—the thoughtful words of Darwin. Or if Jesus is your man, love the neighbor as yourself. Or Mohammad when he said that to love the world is to love humanity is to love Allah. All we're saying is that our human morals should be extended to the wonderful animal kingdom.

As I lay against the cold wood floor...

—submitted anonymously

...I felt the pressure of his body on me. The room was dark. It was spinning. Spinning so fast. I felt his breath on my neck. Panting harder. Louder. Soft moaning in my ear. I didn't move. I lay still. Quiet. Spinning. Spinning. I could smell sour liquor on his breath. Tequila. Were we? Was I? My left hand searched for something. Anything to hold on to. I felt my jeans. They were in a pile close to me. I clutched them in my fist. I held on...

"Donny doesn't like black girls." I shouted over the blaring boom box in the corner of the basement.

"What? You're trippin.' I like all girls," he shouted back, winking and smiling mischievously. He concentrated very hard, closing one eye and aiming at the corner pocket. A skinny, short Asian guy about my age sat on an old bar stool in the far corner of the room. Donny gripped a pool stick and stared at the table for a long time, contemplating his next move. He rarely talked, but he kept checking the watch on his left wrist, waiting, expecting something that we weren't. He got up and feverishly rubbed the end of his pool stick with the dusty, blue square chalk. Smack. The ball ricocheted off the side, but did not go in.

"Shit! You're up," said Donny, walking past the skinny Asian guy.

The basement was a cold, gray, concrete room with concrete walls and a concrete floor. Two identical rectangular windows loomed high on the walls, displaying the frosty, cold night sky. There was a single bathroom in the back and a doorway with stairs leading to the main floor of the house. A few plastic lawn chairs and old bar stools were scattered about. The walls hung bare. The pool table was the focal point of the

party, sitting in the center of the room. Above it, a cliché beer chandelier with the word "Budweiser" hung from a single gold chain, casting a subtle, illuminating light on the game.

Tad, the cool twenty-one year old, half white-half Hawaiian guy, who invited me to the party, sat on a dark green, plastic lawn chair on the same side of the room as me, in the corner next to the boom box. I was ecstatic to be in the same room, let alone invited to a party by this guy. We had been exchanging flirtatious glances, quickly smiling and turning away when we caught the other one staring.

Catching my eye he asked, with a smile curling on his lips, "Wanna go upstairs with me?"

I yelled back at him, "Sure!" He laughed, flashing a beautiful smile and heading for the stairs. My cheeks burned red from embarrassment. As I got up and followed him, I looked back to my two best friends, who had been sitting on opposite sides of me. I flashed a hopeful smile and began to gleefully ascend the stairs.

When we reached the small kitchen, I saw an unopened fifth of Tequila on the counter by the sink. We walked over. Tad reached to pick up the bottle. I really wanted to impress him. So desperate to prove myself. To show him how mature I was.

Before his hand reached the bottle, I snatched it and exclaimed, "I got it."

Taken aback by my boldness, Tad stared for a minute, then chuckled and said through that same beautiful smile, "Oooooo! Ok, you got it." I picked up two shot glasses from the other side of the sink, poured the amber liquid, and handed one to Tad.

Giving him my sexiest look, I said, "On the count of three."

One. Two. Three. Simultaneously we downed the liquor. Before the burning warmth reached my stomach, another shot was poured. I took that one with a smile too. Two shots later, Tad and I were laughing, playfully arguing over who had finished theirs first. The door bell rang and we both jumped. I heard the CLACK of a pool stick falling to the ground. First up was Donny, then the quiet Asian guy, then my two best friends. The front door opened and I was surrounded by a parade of strangers. They all knew each other and knew Tad, greeting him with a "What's up, bitch?" All with a bottle in tote. Taking another shot with Tad, I looked at him and felt the burning flow into my stomach. This was going to be a good night.

As I descended into a deeper and deeper drunkenness, I felt my inhibitions trickle away. Apprehension faded. I floated higher and higher. I sat at a long wooden table covered with a lace cloth, chatting with a couple of new people I'd met. I saw Tad standing in the corner of the living room. He flashed me that same beautiful smile and winked. As I stumbled up, I fell over one of the dining room chairs and burst into a hysterical laughter. I was joined by my two, very drunk, best friends. I stumbled into the kitchen for more alcohol. I found something stronger: vodka. I took a shot. I exhaled, feeling the vapors escape through my nose. What happened next is an empty blur. I've searched the deepest part of my unconscious trying to piece together memories of that night, but this part of the story is gone. All I can remember is the smell of tequila, darkness, and spinning.

He exhaled one last time. Very deeply. The smell of the tequila smothered me, making me feel nauseous. When he got up, I struggled to sit up quickly and put the jeans on that I still held tightly in my fist. By the time I finished buttoning my pants, he was already to the door. He opened it, stopped and paused. The soft light of the kitchen outlined his silhouette. Before he left, he turned to me.

"Thanks," he whispered, followed by a wink and a mischievous smile. He walked out. I just stood there. Alone. Too stunned to move. The only thing to comfort me was silence, darkness, and the awareness that my life had just changed.

Creatures

by Nathan Bendickson

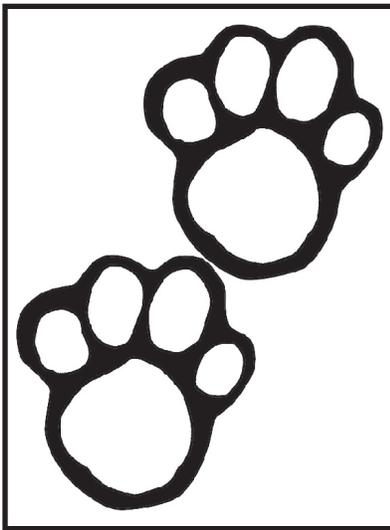
It wasn't a first date because they'd already nuzzled and apologetically fumbled through some dark closets together. But in the light of day, as class was ending, they counted minutes, dividing and dropping them like sand into the cracks of their own sweaty palms. They daydreamed in separate classrooms and recalled those first moments of acquaintance, projecting them against the window panes, atop the cars rushing past the classrooms, trying to impose the smooth, round shapes of memory on the jagged frame of waking, of rulers and buzzers, stiff chairs and unforgiving math equations.

It wasn't a first date, but it was the first something, the first glance at a wobbly statue they'd carved with eyes closed and mouths open. It's like a first scheduled appointment, she thought while racing down the hallways to the front door, to the bike racks just outside. Appointment. Bright flashes of waiting rooms and dentist drills. Her stomach turned. He wasn't by the bike racks, not yet, so she stood against the brick wall and waited and stood, standing as if she'd been standing for years, a nervous lizard, an exhausted question mark. She mentally stretched her conversation skills and tried to push the lizard back down her throat, put him in a cage down there. The sky blustered an impervious gray. Meanwhile he was in the restroom, calming his nerves and washing his hands, leaving them underwater until his doubts peeled off and began to clog the sink. It was a first outing, a first suspicious confederation of after-school secrets. In the mirror he saw a desperate kitty, hiding in the corner of his eye, pawing to be let out. He blinked and shook his head. She's probably waiting, he thought. I should go.

He reached the bike racks and saw her against the wall. There was a mutual recognition, a silent confirmation across space, stretched and frayed like yarn, and

when she didn't move closer to give him a hug, he did; it was a damp sponge, a weak handshake. Well, do you want to go? Sure. Let's go.

She strained to keep up, craning her words, her stories from the day, like a hook to catch him, to cover the empty space of sidewalk between them. They were walking away, but to her it still felt like waiting by the bike racks, as if neither of them had yet arrived, or as if a pane of glass stood between them. Tap, tap, tap, she said in her head. The dentist drills buzzed. From this angle, a little behind, he looked like a wilting statue: rather unsteady, but so certain, so deliberate. He plodded on and gazed at the trees, just now budding, tentative in the afternoon pallor—and then he remembered her. He looked back over his shoulder, and then slowed down. She looked impressive, formidable as any tree, rooted, while her thoughts wafted and waved like branches. Their eyes met; something pawed against his rib cage.



She giggled, and the branches were flippant, careless. He reached to touch her hair, as if to grab a leaf, examine a meandering thought, but he stopped. My car. Oh my god, he thought, what will she think of my car? It's a mess. I should've cleaned up. I should've been more prepared.

He opened the passenger-side door, and the lizard snapped inside her belly (I can open doors myself, thank you kindly!) but she held it back, restrained and locked in place. She smiled plainly and wrapped her jacket tighter as he closed the door. How cute, she thought. He'd fingered letters into the dust on the dash. "P R E N S Y" What does it mean, she wondered. Does he make up words? The door opened. What does he do when no one's looking? He landed in the seat and turned the ignition. She's not speaking, he thought. Does she see the letters? What does she think? The car turned a corner.

What's she holding back? Don't mind the food wrappers on the floor, he said. Sorry. It's okay, she said. Something purred near his lungs.

Are you hungry, he asked. No, not really. Scaly skin rubbed against her belly. Of course I'm hungry, but I won't admit it. Okay, he said. Me neither. He drove to a park by the river. They shivered together on a bench, watching the steely river flow, flattening loose hairs and pieces of fabric that would not sit still, restless thoughts and questions. Should I tell him this? Will she think I'm weak? Yes, school is hard for me. My mind is a sieve. My family? Well, it's hard to talk about. She bumbled through a few arid descriptions, and then he patted her leg for assurance. She stopped speaking. Tell me, he said, how does the air feel to you? The atmosphere is strange today. How would you describe it? She looked at him, then up at the clouds, so distant, and she did her best. The air, she said with a stretch of imagination, well, the atmosphere is like a sugar cookie: sweet and crumbly, hard and soft. She panicked. How stupid, she thought, how silly. Her eyes flitted to his, expecting a frown, but he was smiling a warm, crumbly smile. Wow. That's nice, he said. The kitty purred and purred, while the lizard groaned a satisfying groan.

They left the park and found a crooked trail on a hillside, where they could pad away from the city at steep angles. The wind rose as they did, bending trees limbs and whistling elusive songs. They didn't talk much, didn't touch. The air grew soft and permeable, and the light focused, dimmed, like candles lighting a sanctuary. She felt pricks of warmth on her skin, and thought her breathing sounded monstrously loud. He worried it might rain. But they found a covey, a secret hole in the landscape, where they could hide together like insects. That's where they are now, leaning against rocks, asleep, holding hands. He's afraid to be alone, weak and timid deep down; she's afraid to be herself, to open up that grisly cage for anyone. But a little kitten mews into the little corners of emptiness, and a lizard slides across the stones, walking free, curious about this furry, whiskered thing—all while they sleep.

The United States = Health Care for All?

by Chris Green

The United States has some abominable numbers relating to health care. According to the 2005 CIA World Fact Book, roughly 40 nations have lower infant mortality rates than the United States (6.5 deaths per 1000 infants). Similarly, the average life expectancy in the U.S. went from 20th place in 1993 to 48th in 2005. Large numbers of Americans lack health insurance. Supporters of the status quo often claim that anybody is able to receive health care at public hospitals and emergency rooms. However, this is not the case. In a 1987 National Health Expenditure survey, doctors Steffie Woolhandler and David Himmelstein report that 945,000 people were refused emergency room care; two-thirds of those 945,000 cited lack of insurance or inability to pay as the primary cause for being refused treatment. The National Academy of Sciences estimates that 18,000 people die each year as the result of improper health care. What is being done to remedy this plague in American society?

Looking deeper into health care policy leaves a person feeling pessimistic. The most famous recent health care initiative was the 1993 proposal of Bill and Hillary Clinton; it claimed the ability to procure health care for thousands by redistributing funding (but also limited the treatments covered and length of hospital stays, among others). Political unrest ensued. For instance, author Gore Vidal portrayed the attack on Clinton by Kenneth Starr as corporate-America payback for proposing a government-run health care program, from which they would not profit. However, the five largest health insurance companies at the time supported Clinton's plan. These companies—Aetna, Cigna, Traveler's, Prudential, and Metropolitan Life—met with Clinton administration officials to help draft Clinton's proposal. Under the new plan, a government commission would be formed to oversee the process. This board, like many others, would probably have been dominated by representatives of large corporations—in this case, HMOs. This government board would have designed limited health care packages that private insurers could offer to employers, who would then offer them to their employees. These employees would have no other choice but to accept the miniscule health care benefits,

unless they were willing to pay higher costs or go without.

This health care scheme was not based on providing universal coverage, or even affordable coverage, for the neediest Americans. It was formed under the influence of the largest health insurers, who feared the long-term impact of the spiraling costs incurred by a bureaucracy that denied care in certain cases. However, private health companies and hospitals would still have made profits. Smaller HMOs feared that they would be made irrelevant due to their lack of resources to participate in this new system, and so launched a massive campaign against the plan. This campaign ultimately failed.

Single payer insurance is often said to be “unviable” or “unpopular.” It is, of course, not popular with for-profit health insurance corporations who fund the politicians setting the political agenda. Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, a polling firm that routinely conducts surveys for Republicans, notes, “[A] 1998 survey...found that 51 percent of American's would favor a ‘government-run health care plan that covers everyone in the same way, like the system used in Canada. It would be paid for through taxes and cover all necessary medical costs.’” However, in a 2002 election in Oregon, a proposal for more affordable health care (declared a replica of the Canadian health care system) was defeated 57 percent to 43 percent. Is there a contradiction in what our government's polls show us as opposed to the desires of American citizens?

Opponents of single payer insurance have tried to portray the Canadian system as negatively as possible. Undoubtedly there are problems with the system of our friendly neighbors to the north, but the roots of those problems are easily identifiable: repeated subjection to substantial spending cuts and a high rate of inflation. Between 1990 and 1997, U.S. health care spending rose 27 percent per person, while it rose only seven percent in Canada. And the money spent on bureaucracy? In the U.S. in 1999, 24 percent of health care costs went to HMO administration, as compared to 11 percent in Canada. Americans spend the most on health care in the Western world, but report the least satisfaction with the product.

Regarding the Times I Could Not Find You

by Eric Thompson

You couldn't tell me why you cried,
so I cried too.
And you were speechless,
except with knives which sang your tune.
Your blade made you an artist,
scratching bold and bloody poems
upon your arms.
And while you reveled in the pain,
I bathed in broken glass
and took on all your scars.
And on the brightest of days
I'd always find you in the dark.
Caked in snot.
Broke
and taut.
And love was no reprieve.
You said the drugs made you a stranger
to yourself.
But bear in mind, dear,
that to me
you were never you when dressed in tears.

a day without paxil

by Tifanie Krebs

why am I not allowed to love myself?
I can love everyone else – can't I?
am I simply turning a blind eye
to the overwhelming evidence that maybe,
just maybe,
i can't love at all?

when other people see
what I can't muster to see,
i am helpless
and hopeless
and dying.

My Life as a Recreational Nudist

by Lindsey Webb

When I told a friend from home that there are few things I love more than being naked, she seemed baffled. Why be naked when you can wear cute clothes and be covered up? What if the UPS delivery person comes? What if you (gasp!) have to see yourself in every mirror you pass by?

This summer, I only worked about 16 hours a week, mostly during the evenings. Both of my parents worked during the day, and even my little brother was working more than I. Needless to say, I had a lot of time at my house on my own, which I LOVED. With the exception of the past few years, I had never walked farther in the nude than from the shower to my bedroom. I'm happy to say now that I have, among other things, cooked, checked my email, vacuumed, watched the entire *I Love the 70s, 80s, and 90s* series on VH1, read, done research, checked the status of my PLU student account over the phone—all while very much in my birthday suit. There were, alas, no UPS deliveries, but some very nice Mormons came *this* close to getting an eyeful. As for seeing myself in a mirror when I walked by, I did happen to notice that, as a result of replacing intense daily workouts with 100-page daily reading assignments over the past year, I have lost some muscle and gained a bit of belly pudge. But that was okay; I didn't mind. I found that by minimizing the figurative "distance" between my natural, unclothed body and my vision of it, I felt more comfortable.

This. Is. Me.

We spend so much time covered up (in Western Washington for reasons mostly weather-related)—in jeans that make our butts look better, in bras that support us, or in more "flattering" fabrics, that many of us lose touch with the way our bodies actually look and feel.

My point is not only to encourage loving your body because you're beautiful the way you are, but to propose that we bridge the gap between our perceptions of our naked selves and how they really are. In other words, I want to acknowledge that my body is a part of me, not something I should reject (even though I know I would have Plato turning over in his grave). These days, it seems intentional ignorance is increasing. Most people don't like to know that their tasty Mickey D's burger comes from the tortured lives and subsequent brutal deaths of thousands of cows, or that by buying certain popular brands of clothes they are supporting the use of sweatshops overseas. Likewise, I see this same ignorance in the treatment and perception of our own bodies; we almost categorically deny that the body in its unshaven, unmoisturized, untampered-with form is beautiful or even worthwhile in itself—and we spend billions of dollars a year to ensure that we don't have to see it.

All I'm saying is that I like to experience life in my unclothed body. I like to know that I'm comfortable without being covered up. I like that it is one less thing that I feel is hidden from me, and leaving myself uncovered, exposed, is something that I have control over; it is a reality I am not forcibly denied.

So in the words of Alanis, I recommend walking around naked in your living room. And I recommend going naked in your kitchen, your hallways, and your yard. And I hope that there will be a day when people in the nude aren't arrested for indecent exposure, in your neighborhood, your city, and your world.



TOP TEN NAKED ACTIVITIES

10. RUN
9. EAT FRENCH TOAST
8. PLAY CHESS
7. HULA HOOP
6. DANCE
5. MOW THE LAWN
4. BAKE SWEET, SWEET BROWNIES
3. YOGA
2. GO SWIMMING
1. STRIKE A SUPER-HERO POSE

"YOU'RE SO SKINNY, SO PRETTY"

—submitted anonymously

This is a story about my eating disorder. It isn't something I talk about and it isn't something I advertise. It is something personal, something secret, and something that, more often than not, I have trouble classifying as a problem. Even now as I type this, I don't know if I like these words; they make me sound sick and, most of the time, I don't feel that way.

At first it's easy. You feel full, so you skip a meal. You don't like that your stomach is no longer the tiniest bit concave, so you make excuses. You move more, and become too busy for meals.

People don't notice.
They make excuses.
They rationalize.
Even I do.

I would convince myself that I was just busy. Besides, it didn't take much work. I was naturally skinny. I played sports. I had

no lunch period. I ran. Since I was little, people were always saying to me, "You're so skinny, so pretty." It became something that classified me. But then, I was always skinny, so my physical appearance never changed, and people never said anything except, "You're so skinny, so pretty."

You learn all the tricks fast, and by the time I got to college I was fantastic at it. I could go whole weeks eating the most miniscule amounts of food. I became even busier. I ran. I planned my "meals" carefully, to be eaten in front of people in rotation, so no one would bring up the fact that I wasn't eating.

I'm telling you, if you do it right, no one notices.
Including yourself.

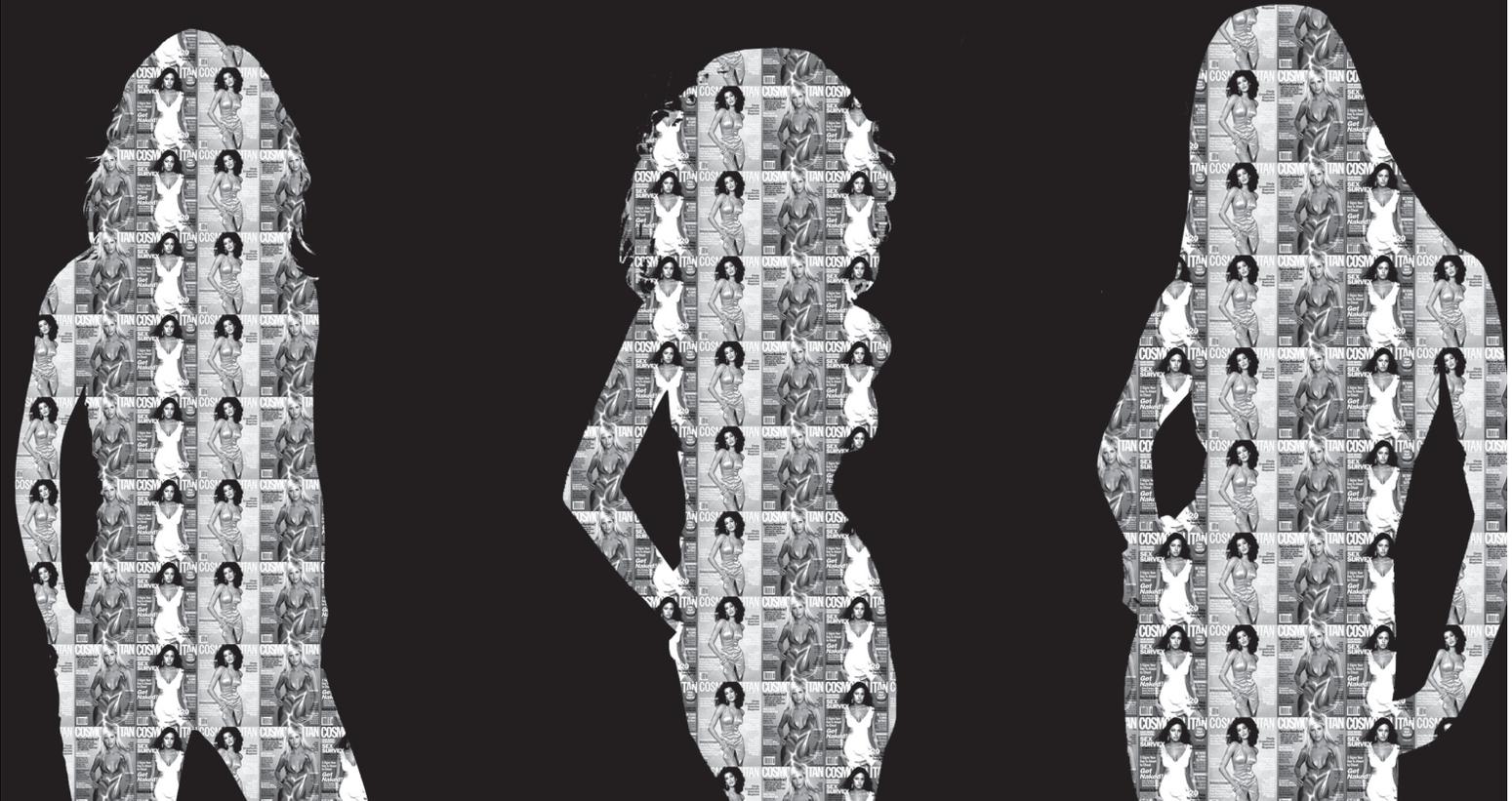
It becomes a part of you and you don't even notice. And still there are the comments—"You're so skinny, so pretty"—justifying you.

No one notices.

Well almost no one.

People would wonder occasionally. A few friends from home said something over Thanksgiving. My brand new boyfriend asked me if sometimes I just didn't eat—not because he had noticed at meals, but because he thought I was too thin. It was the first time I stopped and thought that something might be wrong. I tried running less. I tried to tell myself there wasn't a problem. For a while I even tried eating again.

I gained some weight—maybe ten or fifteen pounds. I think that made me on the lowest end of my weight to height ratio. That was last year and I felt awful. The comments didn't stop—"You're so skinny, so pretty"—but my mentality had changed. All I heard was that I hid my weight well. People only saw me as the skinny girl, which I obviously wasn't. So I've started again. Now I've noticed it for real. I've had



to consciously decide to start not eating again, and it's harder because I have gotten out of the habit. So I've resorted to more drastic tactics. I invent meetings, that include pizza, to get out of going to the UC. I don't take lunches from work. I've even learned to leave wrappers around my dorm room, so that my roommate will assume they are mine. Except now there is something new. When I give in one day and actually eat a candy bar, or two sandwich halves instead of one, I throw up. It was just an idea one day. I knew other people did, and at first I was horrified, but slowly it seemed like my only option. "You're so skinny, so pretty," follows me everywhere, and I can't stand how much I know I don't fit into those labels.

It's funny how little people notice.

Some of you hate me, I am sure. You hate me without even knowing it. I am, according to most people, skinny. So you see me, and you judge me, and you say, "You're so skinny, so pretty," and then you think to yourself, she probably starves herself. You know you do it. I do it. And you're right, even though you probably don't mean those thoughts. You are justifying.

Don't get me wrong—sometimes I hate those skinny girls too, even if I am one

of them. I think people don't understand how distorted one's body image can get. Sometimes I look in the mirror and cry. I know I am thin, but I can't help hating myself. I see my body as un-toned, and not at all pretty; I compare myself endlessly to models and other girls; I look at old pictures of myself and can't believe that back then I thought I was fat. And I hate those girls. And I hate those girls that hate those girls.

I am caught in a strange limbo of hating those skinny models, knowing that I actually aspire to look like them.

So then there come those conversations, the ones girls feel are necessary to make themselves feel better about being, what is really, completely normal.

"Gross, does she ever eat?"

"She's like a skeleton."

"Thate throwing up... I can't understand how girls can be bulimic."

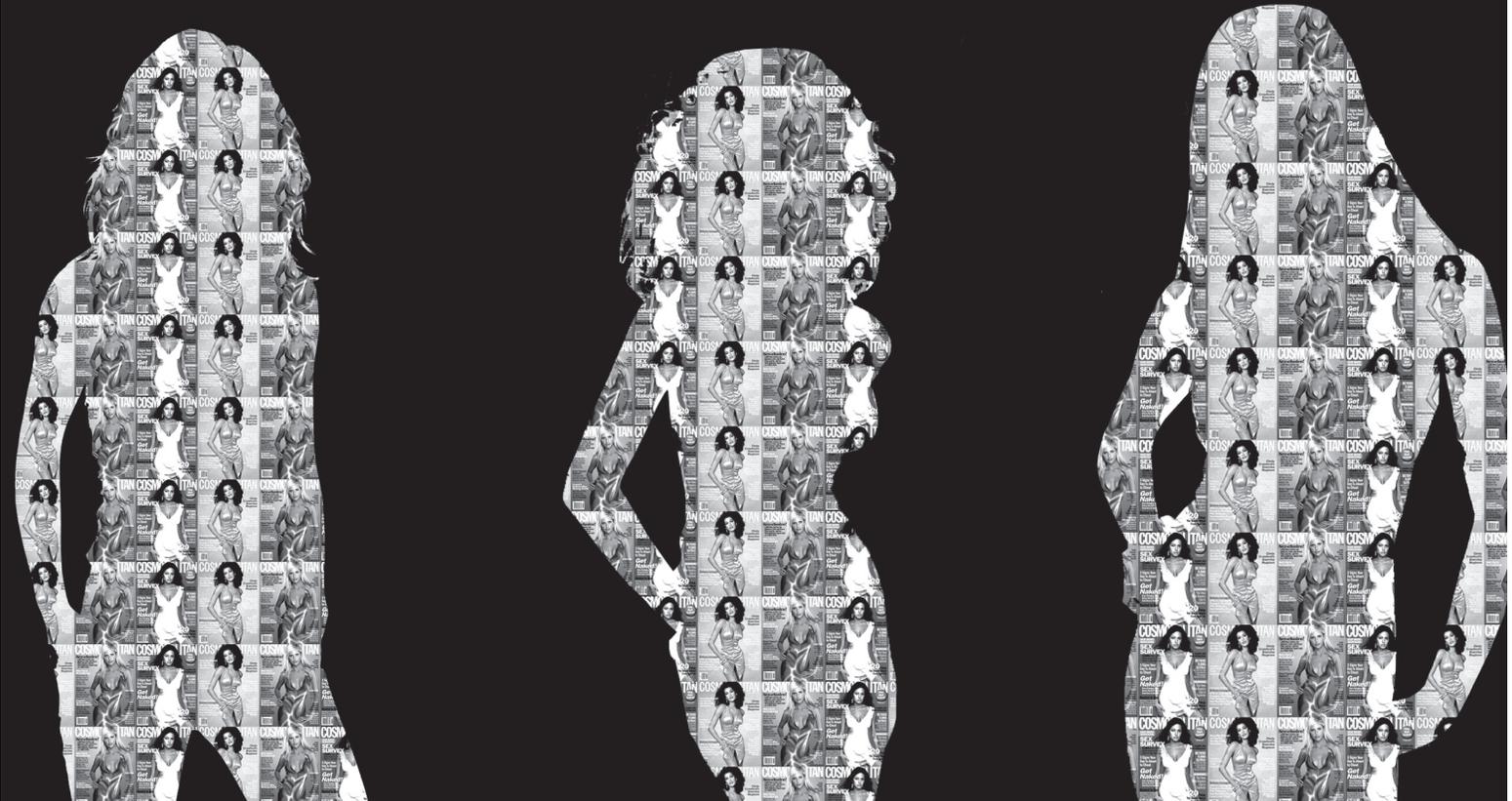
And I smile and nod along. You might wonder why I participate. Why I take part in all the hatred and the culture that started this all for me. Well that's easy: partly feeling superior to everyone because I have a secret, partly to not stand out in the crowd, and partly because I, well, I agree. Who likes to throw up? I certainly don't. It isn't fun, and if you do it after every meal, it becomes tedious, almost a chore, because you don't like to do it, and you know the

health risks, but you can't help it.

Sometimes I try to believe that I'm scared, and I become so frustrated as I try to make it stop. But secretly I like the gnawing feeling in my stomach. I like the dizziness when I stand up. I like the lack of energy and even the shortness of breath that comes from climbing Hinderlie Hill, even though I work out every day. And as long as I like it, I will never be able to stop it.

I didn't plan it like this. It's not like I sat around and plotted ways to make myself feel like shit. I am addicted. I am addicted to people perceiving me a certain way. To hearing those words: "You're so skinny, so pretty." It becomes that tiny vortex in the toilet bowl. You want them to quit saying things about you, because you want, for once, to be categorized by something other than this one facet of your appearance, yet at the same time, without people telling you—over and over again—things get worse. So you run harder and count your ribs in the mirror. And it spins and spins. And as you spin, you can't see that you're headed down the drain.

Besides, you can't even begin to imagine how much you can learn to hate yourself.



ED

Anorexia: An eating disorder characterized by markedly reduced appetite or total aversion to food. Anorexia is a serious psychological disorder. It is a condition that goes well beyond out-of-control dieting. The person with anorexia, most often a girl or young woman, initially begins dieting to lose weight. Overtime, the individual continues the endless cycle of restrictive eating, often to a point close to starvation. This becomes an obsession and is similar to an addiction to a drug. Anorexia can be life-threatening.

—Medical Dictionary Definition

Her name doesn't matter right now.

All that matters is that you know she's beautiful. It's important that you believe me. You don't need to care that she's nearly six feet tall, crowned with golden blonde hair, that her wide blue eyes whisper secrets or that she wears size 11 jeans, extra long. You don't need to know that she likes her coffee black, that she loves the way dew settles on the grass in the morning, that she would learn how to fly if she could, or that someday, she wants to be a great writer. You don't need to know that right now, because that's not what's important.

She's beautiful.

Do you believe me?

She's beautiful.

The mirror lies.

Every day it lies.

Nobody told her what she was supposed to think or feel.

But when she looks at herself she



doesn't see.

Her image dances before her eyes and her body grows wider and wider until it overwhelms, pressing against the edges of the mirror, and then the room itself cannot breathe underneath her size.

And still the mirror.

The mirror screams obscenities. And when she yells right back for it to stop, to leave her alone, to let her love herself the way she should be loved, it screams even louder.

And then she knows what no one else knows.

She is fat and ugly and disgusting and if she only got rid of her butt and her thighs and her stomach, if only her cheekbones were more defined, if she had a little bit larger eyes, and a little bit smaller lips, if she were thinner, if she were thinner, if she were thinner...

She eats carrots. Carrots and ketchup. Her hands have begun to turn orange-yellow from all the carotene. We wonder if they're yellow from the stomach acid.

She holds a diet coke as if it were her lifeline. Diet coke, her drug of choice. Diet, of course.

Please eat, we plead, please.

words and art by
Rebekka Esbjornson

Our voices are silent and empty—useless. The words are discarded, and they dissolve into the plates of untouched food.

You are beautiful, I say, why can't you see you're so beautiful?

Her smile is unreal, plastic like a doll, and she does not remember what I've

said.

They are all against you, the mirror tells her. They are all against you.

One day, I'm introduced to Ed. He slips into one of our late-night conversations and everything changes. She is curled up on the bunkbed, wrapped in a blanket, propped against a couple of pillows, like old times. But then—then He invades her thoughts and the room grows dark.

She doesn't remember when He manifested himself, when she realized He was there, when she realized He wouldn't stop talking to her, when she decided she knew the truth. But when she tells me, I am afraid.

He is always with me, she says.

Always.

Ed is short, really. A nickname.

Ed for Eating Disorder.

She knows. I know.

Ed is stalking her and I cannot call the authorities to make him stop. He is stalking her and He won't let her go. There is nothing I can do. I can't yell at him or glare at him or tell him what an asshole He's become. I can't because He wouldn't be able to hear me. If He could, He would laugh.

I am afraid.

I hate him. I hate him for doing this to her.

Him, him, it, this. This is not right. It shouldn't be allowed.

Oh god, this is not right.

Please go away, I want to tell Ed. Please stop, please stop. This is so unfair. Please give me back my friend.

Please give her back.

Please.

I hug her and I feel her start to shatter underneath my touch. She cannot see herself, so she would not understand why I hold back my gasp when I can feel her ribs through her back. She cannot see her collarbones—the way they stick out too far, oddly angular underneath her papery skin. She cannot see her eyes, how they have lost their brightness, how they stare blankly, frighteningly empty, ringed in pale violet circles. And she cannot see her hair, limp and lackluster and wispy, framing the wasteland of her face. She is reminiscent of a Holocaust victim and I want to cry.

But instead I smile, tell her that I love her, and hope she believes me.

I have since lost touch with her.

Her mother used to write occasionally. She is doing much better, she said. After two years in and out of treatment, she is doing much better.

I want to believe it's true. I want to believe she's remembered how to live.

* * *

I cannot justify this to you. I cannot explain why one girl would decide she can love herself and another could decide to destroy herself. I cannot tell you, because I've been there, wavering on the borderline, leaning in, but not quite falling.

A few summers after I had last seen my friend, I found myself not eating, or at least barely eating. I would only eat a yogurt, an apple, and a cheesestick a day. It's complicated when I try to understand exactly why...

Mostly, I think, when it really came down to it, I liked the way I looked.

I was thinner than I had ever been before. Guys seemed to

notice me more, seemed to find me more attractive, and I began to feel as if that attractiveness was directly linked to my weight. But then again, even while I complied with some lie of who I was, I was angry. I was angry that some sort of idea of beauty was dictating my idea of self, my friend's idea of self, any woman or man's idea of self, when we were all so beautiful. In the same moment I was starving myself, I would tell the girls next to me how beautiful they were, how they should love themselves, how they should never, ever, ever, ever let anyone tell them differently. I lived a paradox.

Maybe my anger was what brought me through in the end. I was one of the fortunate ones. My self-induced starvation lasted only a summer. Somehow I never developed any concrete pattern, I began eating again, and I have not relapsed since.

Eating disorders are not something people like to talk about. They are not neat and tidy; they do not fit into any categorical boxes that promote easy discussion. We do not talk about them, but we should.

We are surrounded by media that constantly barrage us with images of what we're "supposed" to look like. We have fashion magazines lining any isle of any generic American supermarket with airbrushed models on the covers, only shadows of what real women and men actually look like. And people comply with these images, and it's frustrating. (I was especially infuriated when some random guy from some South Dakotan university facebooked me the other day, not so much because he facebooked me in the first place, but for what I found on his profile. What pissed me off was that someone, somewhere actually had the audacity to create a Facebook group online that was called "Freshman Girls: Get Them While They're Still Skinny.")

Needless to say, he was

immediately rejected from my friends list.)

When will we all learn to love our bodies as they are? When will we learn to love *other* people's bodies for what they are? We need to realize we are all beautiful, regardless of race, color, sexual orientation, or the size and shapes of our bodies. We need to let go of stereotypes, classifications, and warped perceptions, lifting the cover of lies. We don't need to wait for it to happen. The time is now. Take initiative and start today.

So for that, I'll leave you with this, and I want you to believe me.

You're beautiful.

Really.

You're beautiful.



