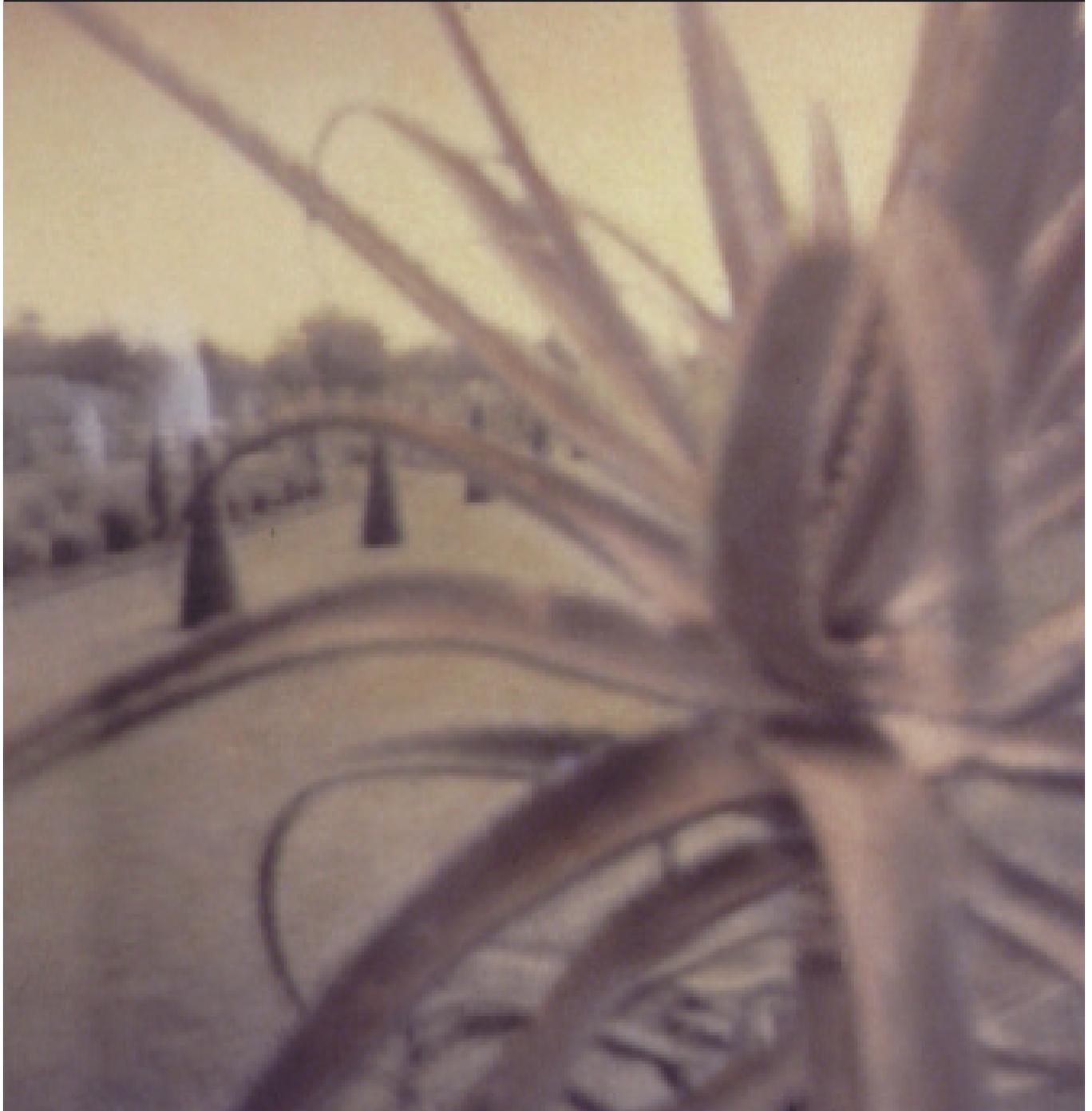


The Blotter

Magazine
www.blotterrag.com

A Blot of Mustard, A Crumb of Cheese

Free in Asheville, Athens, Atlanta, Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Charlottesville, Durham, Hillsborough,
December 2005
New York City, and Raleigh



M

erry Christmas, y'all. This month, Johnny Pence gets heretical in the parking lot of the Little Star Health Spa. Michael Owen walks without fear across the Interstate offramp. Ghost-eye view artwork from Allison Overton. Poems by J. Marvin Brown and Kelly Skinner. And you know we got the Dream Journal and mckenzie's "Sinister Bedfellows" too.

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*This magazine may contain typos or
bad words*

Items Worth Mentioning
from the desk of Johnny Pence**Droppin' tha J-Bomb**

A warning: This issue has some Jesus content. It might offend some people for one reason and offend other people for the exact opposite reason. Once again in this issue, as I've had to do in the past, I'll apologize. But once again, I'm not sorry.

There are plenty of people who will see some of this stuff as blasphemous, for one thing. Well, that's their karma. I'm not trying to please any fundamentalists anyhow.

On the other hand, I was brought up celebrating *Christmas*, not some watered-down Old Navy ad designed to sell a bunch of crap to the widest demographic possible. I think it's disingenuous to go around saying "Happy Holidays" when what you really mean is "Merry Christmas, but I don't want to offend you." I think it's baloney to say "Happy Holidays" when what you really mean is "Happy Hannukah," or "Happy Kwanzaa," or "Happy Solstice." Celebrate what you celebrate and be proud of it.

But then again, if anybody cares, I also think it's lame for offices and schools to ram a bunch of Christmas down everybody's throats without thinking that someone might be Jewish or Buddhist or Dogon or Atheist. I've celebrated Kwanzaa and Solstice and Hanukkah and Christmas before, and in my experience, everybody likes to cook something yummy. Sometimes folks like to have a little nip o' some spirituous liquors. I think it's all a grand idea.

Exceptional Vehicle!

I saw this truck parked out in front of my house. Note the full foot of detritus on the dash. Note the dangling ladder. Look at all those bungees! The hose! Oh man! I don't know who this belongs to. Hope he/she doesn't sue. Send pictures of *your* exceptional vehicle.



—ediot@blotterrag.com

Least of My Brethren

by Johnny Pence

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

[Luke 8:8, Gospel of Mary (Nag Hammadi) 4:24, 32]

This time of year, everybody's heart gets a little raw. Even if you spent the whole year doin' nothing but good and having a dandy time, you still got to spend at least a half hour cryin' to yourself at Christmastime. Me, I get a choked up about hungry kids or soldiers away from home. Sometimes even the Island of Misfit Toys does it or that Willie Nelson song about "pretty pencils to write 'I love you—'" oh, good Lord. I cain't even think about that one.

And I like to think I lead a decent, Christian life, so if Christmastime is that hard for me, you can just imagine how hard it is for a genuine, miserable bastard like Leroy.

Here he comes now. He was in the Private Shower room of the Little Star Health Spa (and "All-Girl Staff" is in red neon below the blue star on the sign, with "Truckers Welcome" below that so you can see it from the interstate) with Handy Mandy, and she's a-chasin' him out, throwin' hot massage rocks, bars of soap, a full ashtray, whatever she can get her hands on. The other girls hear the commotion and join in with the throwin'.

"Mary, stop this sumbitch!"

Mandy says to the new receptionist.

"Hit 'im with a stapler!" Says Amber.

"Shoot 'im!" Says Britney.

Leroy's taken a few lumps, and that ashtray hit him right in the head and broke. And you know how much it bleeds when you get cut on the head.

"Girls?" Mary says, writin' something in the dust and dirt on the reception counter, "What's goin' on?" She just started the job today, so I reckon she don't want to do nothin' rash. Strange though, startin' a job as a receptionist at a warehouse on Christmas eve.

Mandy says, all huffin' and puffin', "Well, we did the shower like he paid for, but I could tell all along he won't goin' no further with that soft little pickle between his legs. But he left a tip and I *tried* to give him a special, but time dragged on and the hour was up and my carpal tunnel was killin' me—so I quit. He wanted his money back. I said hell no. Then he pushed me and tried to take it. I kicked him in that soft little pickle and, well, here we are.... I'm a kill you, you sumbitch!"

"Shoot 'im!" Says Britney.

Mary keeps a-doodlin with her finger in the dust [John

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Rumer's Romper Room, Good Sports

Okay, so I had this dream that I was hanging out at Bruce Willis or Demi Moore's house with their daughter Rumer (apparently, in the dream at least, she was very cool for a teenager and we hung out a lot when I was over there; we got along well).

We were in this really big, bright, room. There was a stack of toys and other stuff in one corner—I particularly noticed four basketballs still in their store wrapping. I was teasing Rumer, and I said "Ooh, you're a bad little rich girl, letting all those new toys sit there while kids are starving." She laughed. I said, "Hey, let's get your dad to fly us to Africa in his plane and we can drop them off with the kids." She laughed. I said, "No, seriously, why not? Do you think he'll do it?" She said, "I don't think he would be into it."

—T.S., Durham

I dreamed that someone had started a tradition in which, whenever you see football goalposts, you're supposed to climb up on the crossbar and yell down at the field "You win some, you lose some!" This was done for good luck. It started after a football game, and the first guy to do it was somehow displaying excellent sportsmanship by the act. It turns out that a large percentage of the world's football fields were lined up together, all around the world. So when the first guy did it, everybody saw him and passed it on from one field to another. In this way, it spread very quickly.

—T.T., Athens

Please send excerpts from your dream journals to Jenny at mermaid@blotterrag.com. If nothing else, we love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

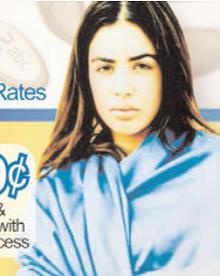
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8:8] and says, “Oh, like y’all his *own family* at Christ- ain’t never done nothin’ wrong. mastime. Or anytime. And Go on and break his head open really, I cain’t say I blame him. if any one of you girls gave a His wife and kids don’t care feller his money’s-worth today nothin’ for him, and they only without takin’ shortcuts or want him to buy them things. givin’ him a forty-dollar special When the boys were littler, he when he paid sixty.” Mighty used to hug them and play ball strong words from the new girl, with them when he was home, and one who don’t work with but they don’t want nothin’ to the customers either, but some- do with him now, so why come how don’t nobody argue. home? And that works out fine

The girls kinda shake their because they want him to work fists and grab their coochies more miles so he can buy them and make faces at Leroy, who’s a Xbox 360 and a new Honda just bawlin’ his eyes out, doin’ 250 and some true bling so up his pants, puttin’ his hat on they can represent like playas. I top of his bleedin’ head. Ain’t don’t think Leroy knows what no pride in bein’ beat up by a none of that means.

bunch of whores.

I don’t have nothin’ nice to say about that wife of his, nei- ther. She takes his money and proud of in this life. He is a spends it on the junk those good trucker. He’s usually on boys whine for. And on junk time, that much he does have. food too, rots them boys’ teeth He’s been drivin’ for Simon’s and guts out—you think I’m Fair Seas transport for fifteen kiddin’? The older one’s proba- years, ever since he dropped bly goin’ to need to get his gall out of high school, and he ain’t bladder out from never once never late if he can help it. Of eatin’ a collard green or a pole course, a big part of that is that bean in his life. And she screws he don’t sleep. And a big part around with anybody who’ll of *that* is that he likes the crys- tal. That crystal also has Leroy nothin’ when he’s in her something to do with his soft bed. She does want him to do little pickle. for her though. She wants some

But drivin’ through these stuff to pretty up the trailer: a mountains with a head full of plasma teevee, a new orange ice can get mighty hard. It gets velour livin’ room set, and a to where he’d rather be on the big, shiny rooster sculpture road—in the snow, in the dark, that she saw at the Mountain on a 20 percent grade, with a Gallery in the mall in Johnson load of steel beams, with a hun- City.

Leroy’s back in the cab of a swervin’ minivan full of yup- pies and their kids in his blind the truck, with “Simon’s Fair spot on the other—than with Seas Transport” lit up in the

gaudy neon for all to see. Mr. Simon wouldn't want to see it, or for anybody to tell him about it, but to hell with Simon, Leroy figures. To hell with that wife and those kids. To hell himself. He opens the glove box and pulls out the old .45.

See, anywhere Leroy drives, it starts and ends in the mountains. You know they put them runaway truck ramps on the side of the road for a reason, and Leroy's had to use one once, brakes just quit on him. He hit it at about 90 after tryin' and tryin' to keep that truck on the road. He keeps his daddy's .45 in the truck now because he'll never go through that again. That'll be one time he don't show up on time. Well, maybe tonight he won't show up on time neither.

Now folks, if you know what a gun barrel tastes like and you're still here to read this story, you know Leroy's in a bad way right now. He needs a little help, and prayin' won't hurt none.

Well, here comes Mary.

Mary's got some help in her for Leroy, and some to spare. She sees Leroy and the gun, but he don't see her. She ain't scared of nothin'. She walks right up and taps on the window. She's got two twenties held up; Leroy was a-fightin' over a forty-dollar tip before. "Hey sugar, this one's on me. Merry Christmas," she says through the glass.

Leroy takes the gun out of his mouth and holds it up to his temple. "Cain't you see I'm busy?"

Mary opens the door, climbs in over his lap, across the pistol, across the shifters, and plops down in the passenger's seat. She's sittin' on a big bag of beef jerky, and pulls it out from under her butt. She takes a piece of the meat [Luke 7:36] and starts to chewin', lookin' Leroy in the eye, not blinkin'. She puts the money up on the dashboard. She can't be twenty years old yet, and just as pretty as a picture. At least half Cherokee, but then, who ain't around here? Strange how don't nobody know her at

the Little Star though. She said she was from around here.

"Dammit," Leroy says, "I cain't even ... I should have just pulled the trigger."

Mary just chews.

Leroy's cryin' hard now, blubberin' tears and snot all over himself. He wipes his nose on a napkin from down on the floorboards and takes his hat off. He ain't bleedin' hard no more. He grabs Mary's pretty little foot and takes off the shoe. He's rubbin' her foot now, not like in a perverted way, but in a nervous way. Like he don't know nothin' better to do.

"I'm so sorry." He kisses her foot and his tears are drippin' down on her. "I'm so sorry."

"It ain't me you should be apologizin' to," Mary says, "but you know what? I forgive you anyhow."

Leroy looks her in the eye, maybe for the first time. Maybe the first time he done looked anybody in the eye for a long time. "Thank you," he felt like he had more to say, but

Sinister Bedfellows by mckenzee



Happy Birthday, Son.



Thanks Mom,



Happy Hannukah to you.



SINISTER BEDFELLOWS



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wouldn't no more come out. "Let me tell you something Leroy," Mary says, calm and collected as you please, just takin' that gun away from him and lettin' the hammer down easy, droppin' out the clip and takin' the round out of the chamber, "Today was my first day workin' here. I tell you what, I sure ain't here for anybody *but* you! Triflin' women in there. Men too. But I see it now, clear as day. You need my help and that's what this is all about. I can see that, clear as day," she said again.

"You and me is here together tonight for a reason," she says, lettin' him rub her feet and gettin' comfortable about it.

"First of all, I can tell you need love, Leroy. That's what brought you here, but don't

nobody pay for love. You give it and it comes back. But you cain't give nothin' you don't have. No sir, you cain't give nothin' you don't have."

Mary hit the nail on the head for Leroy, but she don't know him a bit. But for him, hearin' it is just as matter-of-fact as her tellin' him his eyes was brown. "What's your name, darlin'—uh, ma'am?" he asks, huggin' up on her foot and really diggin' in with his knuckles.

"Oooh, that's it, boy! You can call me Mary, and that's good enough for now. I am what I am. But listen now if you got ears to hear me," Mary ain't never met a stranger, I reckon. "You think you cain't love yourself or that family of yours because don't nobody love you. You got to give

it, Leroy. You cain't give it if you choke it off worryin'. That's why you ain't got none to give. You choke it off with guilt and despair. Do that thing where you pull the toes down again. Yeah. That's it. You know despair is the sin cain't be forgive? Good thing you didn't pull that trigger." She starts on another piece of jerky. "You got to believe you can still be saved, no matter how awful you think you are.

"You feel like you're a-wallerin' in sin, cain't nobody help you. Well, you are, but you don't have to be. You look around and worry about buyin' things and tryin' to live up to somethin, not out of love but because you feel like you have to. And somewhere in the back of your mind, somethin's naggin' you about the 'reason for the season' and it makes you feel worse because you got all that misery twisted up in your heart and you don't feel like you can do no good even if you wanted," and she kicks off her other shoe and give him her other foot. He offers her a Marlboro and she lights it, relaxin' like only a Marlboro red can do you. She's talking some crazy shi— uh, *stuff*, but she don't look crazy. She looks like she knows what she's doin'. Leroy just rubs and listens, cryin'.

"But they ain't no such thing as sin, Leroy [Mary (Nag Hammadi) 4:26]. You *make* sin yourself when you do sinful things," she says, turnin' up the heat in the cab just a little, "Everything in this world is tied up together, and ain't none of it perfect. Only perfect thing that

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ever was, was the Good Lord, so don't beat yourself up if you ain't perfect. You ain't the Good Lord are you?" She laughs and flicks an ash, but then somethin' changes. She says, real serious and crazy-lookin': "You ain't, *right?*"

"No," Leroy answers, a little scared.

"You done showed me love tonight, Leroy. You was gentle back when I was gentle to you. You wanted to use that gun and you didn't. Bless your heart for that, Leroy. That was brave.

"Now, I'm not goin' back in the Little Star tonight. I quit. I told them before I left that I forgive them, but they got to know they ain't doin' right. They needed somebody to work the desk, but didn't nobody share a kind word or offer me a cigarette or nothin'. You let me into your truck and let me save your life. Here you are rubbin' my feet after both of us had an awful day of work. You're full of sin, but you got love in you too [Luke 7:47]. I can *forgive* you. I can give you that as a Christmas present."

Leroy drops his head and it really comes out now, big ol' sobs shakin' the whole cab. He's cryin' like he don't care who hears it, cryin' so hard he gets the hiccups.

"Thank you, Lord," Leroy says after he gets it all out.

"Go in peace, Leroy," Mary says, but he don't go right away. They sit there together eatin' that beef jerky for a while longer.

Homeless, Stranded, Need Help

by Michael B. Owen

Even if you do not see them, they are there. Every day they are standing at the stoplight at the interstate ramp of I-40 at 15-501. They are holding signs that say, "Homeless, Stranded, Need Help." You might occasionally glance at them but you are careful to avoid eye contact.

You wonder if they are really stranded and homeless. You wonder how much money they make. You wonder if they would accept an ordinary day job if someone offered it. You wonder what type of condition,

or character flaw allows these men to degrade themselves by begging for change at freeway stops. You occasionally take quick glances at their faces and see vacant, distant, pathetic expressions. You begin to notice the same expression on the faces of many other highway beggars in the area. You wonder what their lives are really like.

Maybe you do not wonder about any of this at all, but many of us do. I did. I became very curious about two men

cont'd., p. 10

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who I had noticed standing homeless men sitting on crates every day at the 15-501 Exit off of I-40. One morning a few months ago (for reasons that I still do not understand) I pulled off the ramp and onto a service road. I walked through the underbrush, over a fence, across the ramp and approached one of the highway beggars. As I approached the homeless man, I mentally rehearsed a few openers to explain my interest.

I slowly walked close enough to shake hands and introduce myself. I said, "I have noticed you guys out here for a long time. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?"

The homeless man said, "What kind of questions?"

"I don't really know, yet," I said. "I have this idea about making a videotape that describes what you guys are doing out here. I think a lot of people would be interested."

"I don't know about a videotape, but we'll be happy to talk to you. I'm Charles." He looked over into a stand of trees about 30 feet from the ramp. There were two other

homeless men sitting on crates in what I later learned was their "break area." Charles pointed at me and yelled over the traffic noise to one of the other homeless men, "Talk to him!" He smiled at me and said, "His name is Bulldog. I can't talk to you right now. You can go talk to Bulldog if you want to."

Bulldog looked like a guy who had earned his nickname. He was a short, sturdy, tattooed guy with long hair. He was sitting with another man who appeared to have some type of skin disorder. I walked over and sat down in the break area and started chatting with Bulldog. He told me that he was a former Navy Seal. He said that he had been on the highway ever since both of his parents died many years ago. He said that he and Charles worked together and that they had been standing at this same ramp for almost two years. I must have looked surprised that they had been at the same spot for so long. Bulldog explained, "We're all out here waitin' for something. Charles over there is waitin' to get his

driver's license back. Ralph here is waitin' for his disability claim to go through. Everybody out here is waitin' for something." I asked, "What are you waiting for, Bulldog?" Bulldog looked up to the sky, raised his hands into the air and said, "I'm waitin' to be taken up by Jesus."

Eventually Charles joined us in the break area. I quickly observed that he was a respected leader among the group. He told me that he previously worked for thirteen years for an electric company in the area. He had been married and had several children. His life had taken a sour turn a few years ago when he lost his driver's license. He was a little vague about how this happened, but he said the loss of his driver's license started a chain reaction of negative events that left him with no way to earn money. I brought up the idea of making a videotape to tell some of these stories. Bulldog made it very clear that he was not interested. Charles said, "We don't know you well enough for something

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like that. But you can come out here anytime to talk with us if you want." His invitation led to a series of visits over the next several months. During these visits I learned a great deal about their lives. I also grew to like these guys.

The first few conversations focused primarily on the mechanics of their work as panhandlers. Charles and Bulldog told me that they "own" the ramp at I-40 and 15-501. They sometimes share their ramp with a few other local people, and they are happy to share "shifts" with drifters who are just passing through. I asked Bulldog if other panhandlers ever challenged their ownership of the ramp. He looked over into the trees at a long metal pole and said he was not worried about that. He said it was "sort of a code of the West" that panhandlers respected each others' property rights.

Charles and Bulldog start early enough each morning to catch the rush hour traffic. They take a long break about ten o'clock. They return in the afternoon around three and

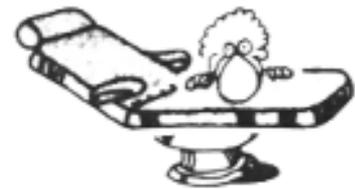
work through evening rush hour. They work in thirty minute shifts. One of them stands on the ramp with a sign while the other sits on a crate in the break area. They are a team, and they work together well. They pool their revenue and share expenses. They say they each can make about ten to twelve dollars a day, but I suspect that they may make a little more than that. Charles has studied the giving patterns of people passing by and can predict which days will be better than average. For example, he said, "Fridays before holiday weekends are always our best days."

Charles and Bulldog live together in a campsite in the woods near the Interstate. They do not reveal the location of the campsite but they appear to be very proud of it. They each have a tent, sleeping bag and a propane tank. They live in this campsite year round, regardless of the temperature. They store water in containers and take "half a bath" at the campsite each morning. The other "half

a bath" they take in the restroom at Wal-Mart. They take pride and satisfaction in their ability to live independently in the woods. They correctly pointed out that, "Not everybody can do it."

Eventually, I learned that Charles and Bulldog have "regulars" who frequently give them food. Bulldog told me that he once returned to the break area after being away for a while, and someone had left food on top of one of the crates. On one occasion while we were talking, they were eating freshly baked bread given to them that morning by a truck driver from a bakery. In fact, they seemed to have plenty of food. "What we really need," Bulldog said, "is

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propane fuel and bug repellent to get rid of the ticks.”

Charles and Bulldog told me that each panhandler in Durham must buy a permit for twenty dollars from the city or be subject to a fine. This permit includes a photo ID that the panhandler must wear when working. This requirement became relevant one afternoon when I was at the Interstate ramp during a visit from the Durham police. A young policeman parked his patrol car and approached the break area where I was sitting with four panhandlers. Everyone but me quickly stood up and displayed his ID card. When the cop asked to see my permit, Charles said, “This guy is some kind of social worker. He’s okay.” The friendly cop accepted the harmless but untrue explanation and left.

I think the police actually like the panhandlers at the 15-501 ramp, and I can understand

why. On another day while I was visiting the ramp, a car at the intersection.”

the intersection started to smoke from under the hood. A young woman driving the car panicked and immediately called 911 on her cell phone. Charles approached the car and asked if he could help. The distraught woman said that she thought her car was on fire. Charles asked for permission to look under the hood where he saw a small leak in one hose. He reassured the woman that her car was fine. He called Bulldog over to help push the car out of the road and onto the curb. Within minutes a police car and a fire truck were at the scene. Charles took charge. He explained the circumstance to the patrolman and told him, “Everything is under control.” The police and fire department quickly moved on to other matters. When the woman’s husband arrived, Charles continued to manage the situation in a way that minimized the young woman’s embarrassment for overreacting. Later Charles told me that he and Bulldog often manage

situations like that at “their intersection.”

Charles, Bulldog, and the other panhandlers I met are not ashamed about begging for money. Their acceptance of begging challenges the stereotypes about work and self-sufficiency that most men in our culture are stuck with, whether we like it or not. I think Charles and Bulldog have created some sophisticated rationalizations that make them more comfortable with begging. For example, Charles says, “At least we are not stealing money. We would rather accept what people give us than steal it.” Another rationalization is supported by the permit that they wear. They say, “If there was something wrong with panhandling why would the city sell us a permit to do it?” One of their friends said, “I am not proud of standing out here with a sign but I am proud of being able to live on my own in the woods.”

After two years at the same Interstate ramp, Charles and Bulldog have established some

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very strong relationships beyond the community of fellow panhandlers. The strongest of these relationships is with a group of Divinity School students from Duke University. This handful of students has created the 15-501 Ministry that exists to serve the handful of panhandlers near the 15-501 intersection. Every Sunday afternoon the students set up a small tent at the end of a service road and conduct a Christian church service for the panhandlers. The students return every Monday afternoon and serve a free meal. The students have a very strong friendship with Charles and Bulldog that appears to be based on mutual trust and respect. One of the students is helping Charles get his driver's license back.

Charles and Bulldog do not have a house, but I do not think they are homeless. They have a comfortable campsite and people who give them enough money and supplies to eat reasonably well. They even have a sense of independence

that comes with being free spirits who are able to make a home in the woods. In some ways they have more than a house. They have created a genuine community.

I do think that they are stranded and need help. Charles expressed it best when he said, "If somebody drove by in a car and gave me a thousand dollars it wouldn't make any difference. I could get an apartment and pay the deposits and two months' rent. After that I would be right back out here, but I would have lost this ramp and lost my campsite." I think he is stranded on the Interstate ramp because he cannot take the risk to leave and let go of what little he already has.

Their situation seems similar to many of us who drive by on their ramp. We own cars and live in houses, but many of us are still stranded in one situation or another. Some of us are stranded in painful relationships. Some of us are stranded in dead end jobs or in mindless routines. Some of us are stranded on Interstate

ramps. Maybe the common thread is our inability to take our own version of risk that threatens what little we have.

Sparky, another member of the 15-501 panhandling community, told me he has been standing on I-40 with a sign since 1991. I asked, "How long are you going to do this?" He said, "Only three more years. Then I'm going to retire." He sounded just like countless other people who tread water while waiting for retirement. Maybe we avoid eye contact with the panhandlers because we do not want to face what we have in common.

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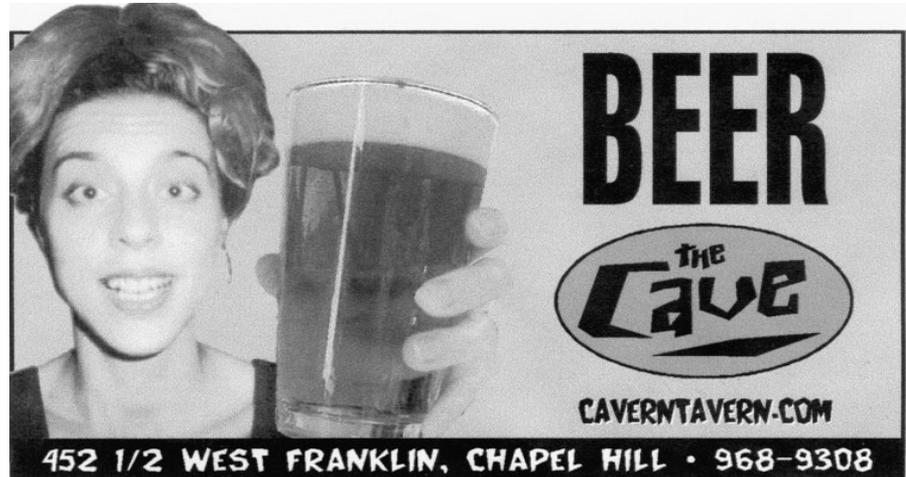
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A House for People by Kelly Skinner

The woman with the floral print
dress talks softly
And too quickly.
She flutters and gets caught in our
eyelashes.
I would swat her. I swear I would,
if she weren't...
So pregnant.

She's a southern belle/man
Hands on her hips; muscles are
prominent
Veins are blue and thick
Like she got a garden hose
Stuck
after all that yard work.
That's what she does
Works a man's job
Wears overalls
rips paint and weeds.
Then overcompensates.
By visiting the salon
Thursdays.

This woman is talking
"This woman is talking"
"This woman is talking"
She isn't saying anything
I can't hear her anyway
I hear the house
I am here for the house.

Our house.
a brief description:
When cockroaches scratch
Their crooked antennae
broken legs over piles of papers
We no longer flinch
It's like hearing the dishwasher
Or the toilet flush.
We let them die
Then we leave them
There.

The floral print woman
Is selling this house
To me
To us
If our credit goes through.
I want it so bad
Not for me though
For mom
And her husband

Steve
It's all that they want.

My step dad
is so excited.
He is a manly man
But there are little girls
With brand new Barbies
less excited
Than he looks
Right now

His eyes are blue
With years shedding
Rapidly
Layers and layers
Piling on the floor
Blue paint piles
Flaking
away
Gone.
Revealing the man
My mother married twelve years
ago

When there was hope
And no gambling.
Before they wanted
Before they spent
Before brothers in jail
Before the fire
Before innocence lost.

They had a home once
But that was then
This is now
It's just a house
Say our friends
Just a house
Says everyone
"Don't worry about it, you've got a
rental."
But then again
They just don't know.

The floral print dress
Nearly stuffs my nostril
She's bending over, pointing to
outlets
"That one is sideways, over by the
window"

The house is small
But God my heart
There are wood floors
I think of horses
girls wearing white dresses

men killing the meat
porches with swings
lemonade in this house
And dogs and cigars.
There will be shutters, guitars and
stories.
Steve will sing
Mom will paint
we won't need
A TV at all.

this house
is a house
for people.

Grandma used to play
with crystals
"look how
they make a rainbow"
she'd say.
All this house does
I stand in the center
is make rainbows

I'm falling

Displacing my hope
There are colors
Inside
And blood
in me
Rushing.

I'll kill if I have to
I'll cut out her tonsils
I'd do anything
Just for these two.
All they want is this house

I wait and we leave
She stands there.
Barefoot.
I threaten her in my head
She will sell it;
she has to.
My step dad and I
We smile and nod
eating hotdogs
Losing mustard out truck windows.
We know that we've won...
At least a little.
We haven't talked to each other
this much in a while.

When I Waited Tables by J. Marvin Brown

I served a couple.
like any
didn't pay them much attention.
was polite
spoke first to the lady.
who smiled.
they paid.
left.

the credit card slip read:
"FLIRTING WITH ANOTHER
MANS WIFE GETS YOU
NO TIP EVERYTIME"

when I need extra money
I think of waiting tables again.
I think of that joke,
the one about the bitch
with two black eyes.

Johnny Pence ("Least of My Brethren") is editor of *The Blotter* magazine. His head is full of ghosts and he has been to Wyoming but not Montana. He's a native Virginian and feels out of place in Athens, GA.

Michael B. Owen ("Homeless, Stranded, Need Help") lives in Chapel Hill and is a member of the Mental Health Association of Orange County. He believes in fostering mental health as a way of combating mental illness.

Alison Overton (art, pp. 8-9) is a Raleigh-based artist and a DJ on WXDU, Duke University radio.

Kelly Skinner says, "I was born in Pensacola, Florida and learned to swim when I was three. I enjoy shells, water, people, coffee, bike rides, music, Sunday afternoons, and things that make me constipated with thought or diarrhetic with joy."

Marvin Brown is a luscious fag living in BoyC [Idaho]. thats not true. there is this necklace tho.

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