

*Do you want to live forever? Ask Adam Thorn, Michael Penny,
Lauren Finn, Eric G. Müller,
a new Best In Show & The Dream Journal.*

The Blotter

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MAGAZINE



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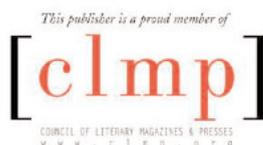
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“English-Speaking Peoples”

If I frequently find myself feeling grumpy about things, which I do, I console myself that I am mostly grumpy regarding things about which I can do nothing. I am also grumpy about things that I can do something about, but do nothing. Mostly, though, it's the vastly stupid stuff that bugs me. And the vastly stupid stuff is truly a laundry list. If we were following editorial boilerplate, we'd list a couple or three reasons, just for color. I don't feel like dredging them up presently, so I won't inventory them in this space. If it helps, you can list a couple for yourself, and use your own grumpiness as a frame of reference as we go on.

Anyhow, being grumpy is a bad habit of mine and one that grates on K's nerves. Not that she isn't occasionally grumpy herself, but I far outgrouch her on all fronts, and I get that it does bug her, I really do, but as I explain to her, it is my way of releasing my frustration without *acting out*, if you will. Being grouchy is a steady steam-leak that prevents...well, a larger steam leak.

And there's too much of that going on as it is. Celebrities. Sports figures. Corporate executives. State governors. The states themselves. Entire political parties are forming, exploding like supernovas and reforming into new systems as people try to deal with their frustrations with life, liberty and the pursuit of...whatever folks are currently pursuin'. Free speech. Fast food. The right to Lady Gaga. Pick your poison, says I. This spring, I even gave up watching the news. For Lent, if you will. I stopped taking the daily dose of malfeasance that typically kept me in a dark funk.

But K is tired of the grumbling and refers to me as General Malaise. She spikes my breakfast with Flax Smoothies in the hopes that this will alter or shake up or grease the skids of whatever causes my doubleplusungoodness. Still I frown. Get some exercise, she orders.

So I pull on my tennies, go to the gym, and walk. When I'm down, I am an inward-looking kind of guy, so the natural beauty of a walk in the park is wasted on me. I find it better, if a result is intended, to plod against the mechanical tide of a treadmill. I walk and think and walk some more, and the prattle of the world sort of...sweats away. I tug down the brim of my ball-cap so I can't see the news on the TV's depended in front of the treadmills, tuned to the various news channels. I walk and walk to escape the foolishness.

Walking, unlike other forms of exercise I've participated in, is one of those things that you can do where your brain may actually turn off. Disengage, if you will. You can chug along on the treadmill, and suddenly find that you have moved a couple of miles down the virtual road. Your body falls into an upright-primate groove and just keeps doing what comes naturally, while you get...well, rest.

Occasionally, however, I'm still frustrated after miles of traips-

ing. Call it what you want. A mental kidney stone that I cannot pass. When I find that I need to act out, however, I must admit that I engage the very product that is said to be the crux of our violent bent, the electronic *raison-d'être* for our cultural downfall. I play a video game.

My personal choice, my guilty pleasure, is Combat Flight Simulator. Dropping into the Supermarine Spitfire, Mark IX, I fly over Europe in a digital 1943. The armies of the Third Reich are feeling the pressure from east, west and south. The Allied forces are finally connecting victory to victory. I'm in charge of my squadron. Nine yards of 30 cal. The sun in my eyes hides danger. Check my six.

Grrrr. Not at all close to what I consider *the moment*. That singular point in time when human civilization was tested to the utmost, and yet found to be worthy of continuing. Say what you will, but for me, that title is held by the Battle of Britain – now seventy years past. Late summer, sunny days, when a relative handful of young, very young, men took to the skies.

But I think that historians are beginning to see things a bit differently. It seems that as we chug along on time's railroad, and 1940 fades far behind us, scholars are re-analyzing the moment and the two combatants and reaching new conclusions. Not that the Spitfire was made and flown by good people, but only the British making prettier airplanes faster than the Germans could.

And can a moment be both a high-and-low water mark for civilization? I suspect that the current citizens the civilization of the United Kingdom would not wish their grandpas to be tagged in the same Venn diagram as the Third Reich, and I agree with that. The EU was not on the radar – not in 1940 anyway. More to my point, that *The Few* (as in “never before was so much owed by so many to so few”) were brave is indisputable. Brave, and cool and calm. In my opinion, it is also beyond doubt that they were on the side of *good*. Call it schoolboy simplemindedness if you want to, but that's how I learned it, and it's stuck in my head that way.

And revisionist history? Apparently, while our *news*-talking-heads get more strident and editorial, it is the current style for television history to be taught as if one were speaking about a species of which one is not a part. Both sides of a story presented with eloquent distance and dispassionate cool, as if there were merely *events*. I understand the frequent fallaciousness of a good versus evil argument, but the *history channel* often ignores it altogether. Are we globalizing into a society that refuses to look backwards, because it might be an ugly view? There were bad people. The Nazis. Stalin. And so on. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Stop mincing words about them.

Ahh, here I go again, getting grumpy. Well, after I shoot down this FW190, I 'spose I oughta do a couple of victory laps on the old treadmill.

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CAUTION

Exploring the richly heady, occasionally misty-time-smear'd yet still well-defended borders betwixt good taste and fine literature since 2003.

“How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love My Doppelganger”

by Adam Thorn

None of the oak trees in Transylvania grow leaves. During May the general public suffer from asthma attacks because of the pollen emitted from the rotten trees. It's odd. People are frustrated, trying to deal with cars, bills, UFO abductions, I-Pod playlists, the end of the world, metronomes, old condoms beside them at the bus stop, hallucinations, crank calls. It was more difficult than I initially assumed it would be coming off of America's favorite flavor of benzodiazepine, Klonopin. The little yellow and blue pills look as innocent as tick tacks but they allow you to be something bigger, careless, fast and incredible. Doctors prescribe it like it's a resolution although the effects of the drug are temporary, thirty-six hours to be exact. It gets easy to take one to deal with the morning, with a few for hangovers, to play a concert, to walk down the street.

It's May. I'm working at this Carvel Ice Cream in downtown Transylvania where I share my name with a locally well known musician, which is unfortunate since I'm a musician. That day I'd been working for eight hours and this old white guy comes in and orders a vanilla waffle cone right after I'd been washing my hands for ten minutes staring

at my ghostly visage in the mirror. “You look worn out” he says. He has on these black rim glasses near the bottom of his nose that make him look like Burgess Meredith from “Rocky”. I give him his waffle cone and he inspects it as if ants are crawling out of it.

“Couldn't ya put some sprinkles on it?” he says. I put a good portion of sprinkles on it and hand the waffle cone back. I'd been putting sprinkles on ice cream cones for a little too long that day.

“That will be \$2.45, sir,” I say. Every ceiling fan you can hear creaking and every tennis shoe squeaking on the tile floor and then there's the cacophony of the cars outside and the guy to my right making a vanilla milkshake. The scream of the machine is driving me insane.

“Urrr, these aren't evenly distributed, they are all sideways. Can you see that son? Can you see that this is not what the customer wants? You kids don't know what customer service is. When I was eleven I was working at a shop and I knew everything about the customers. I knew their flaws and weaknesses. Somebody had a limp, another had a problem with Mexicans, and another was terrified of being caught in a thunderstorm. I never had a prob-

lem with Mexicans. Guess how old I am.”

My eye twitches and I day-dream about this guy having a heart attack.

“Maybe, maybe I haven't taken the time to get to know you?” He holds out his hand “Even Pillohs. Is something occupying your mind, all these skirts flashing by maybe? I saw some saucy young thing on my way in. Saucy Puerto Rican sex puppy, mmm-mmm. No, never had a problem with Mexicans.” He has all this hair shooting out of his nose and his ears. At the moment I've been without the pills for four days, the point when most people cave in and go to an emergency room because the Internet convinces them they are going to die or become the victims of paranoid delusions.

“Do you even get benefits here? I mean can you say that you put your heart into your work, that you're proud of it?”

“Pills,” I gasped.

“Pillohs. Evan Gaven Pillohs. Son you have to enunciate.”

“Evan Gaven Pillohs,” I say. “There is a line forming behind you. Do you want me to make you another cone?”

A couple kids in line are listening to one i-pod and look strung out.

“No. This is my cone. This is the cone I bought, I'm stuck with it. It's going to melt on me when I walk back out into the sun. It's 86 out today. You can't waste things. For God's sake don't be wasteful.”

“If you don't want anything else that will be \$2.45, sir.”

“Now wait, see, I'm an unsatisfied customer, I'm in this predicament because you haven't served me properly.”

What I say next is, “You wrinkled whore, go fucking buy your own sprinkles and glue them to your pussy dogs.”

The manager is standing behind me. The manager who suspects me of illegal parking. The manager who said that I spent too much time in the bathroom and could be weird in my own “private



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way” as long as it didn’t disturb the customers. The manager who accused me of taking money from the register but couldn’t prove it.

It’s a Tuesday in early June. The old stairs creak in my building on Transfusion Street when I come home. Paranoia, bugs, and flies are under those stairs. Grease sizzles in the hallway.

There is eight hundred dollars under the refrigerator.

That’s enough money for a lot of things. The neighbor’s daughter who came back from a stint in Korea last week is sunbathing in the yard adjacent to my apartment building. She has on a two piece navy blue bathing suit with white stars on the top. She takes the top off. They are eventful breasts, ripe, but those of an athlete. Their yard is surrounded by towering bamboo plants so she has the idea that no one can see. She rubs herself and has this mobile phone up to her ear. Her arm moves like a snake over her stomach glistening with sweat. She puts the phone down and puts her hand down further. She picks up a book and sets it down. It is almost impossible not to watch but I pull the shades down. I feel paranoid so I put on WTHM and listen to this raspy girl singing *It’s okay baby! all in your head / we’ll stay in bed and listen to things fall apart*. I share this abode with a lesbian creative writing major who tazes numerous occupants when she suspects them of premeditated rape. Sasha Savientes, who sells

pot, lives downstairs. She’s okay. My other neighbor, Welma, or the whale, is so fat that she just sits by her door and listens to everything happen or cooks steak. The lesbian on the other side of the wall is screaming for some reason at her dog George Wallace. I think she bought the wrong kind of cereal at the store or maybe she’s watching my neighbor in the yard. I knock on Welma’s door across the hall.

“I need help. I need to talk to someone.” She has a bathrobe on and she hasn’t combed her hair since her husband died a year ago.

“I knew you were coming.” Some kind of bird is being prepared.

“Welma, what the hell is that?” I say in reference to the giant poultry corpse.

“Oh, that’s a peacock. My brother, well, he works with peacocks and this one committed suicide.”

“Like in a zoo?”

“No, on a farm in Gladionna. It kept running into a wall over and over again until it died.”

“I don’t know who I am anymore, Welma.” I look at the peacock, now featherless.

“Well, I’ve done a reading and your spirit animal is a Kuala bear named Beach Bubbke who is having trouble learning to climb trees.”

“What does that mean exactly? Does it mean I’m fucked?”

“It means, well, it means you have a long way to go and it is going

to be very painful but rewarding in the end.”

“Thanks whale. Happy cooking.”

“No, wait. Your spirit animal has to find the right tree to build the perfect hut in order to find serenity.”

“Koalas don’t build huts.” I say.

“You’re just ignorant. You watch too much TV.” She slams the door in my face. I consider running into the wall.

Seven in the evening; waiting for Cal to come by because her boyfriend Kevin is a walking pharmacy and she’s agreed to bring some Xanax which is a lot better than beer for sedation. She’s a speed freak and sleeps with him for chemical purposes. Waiting, thinking of things I forgot to do. I forgot to take out the garbage. I forgot to pay the electric bill but remember I can send it in late with an overcharge fee. The worst thing I forgot to do is get away from my doppelganger, the other Michael Asteri.

“God, it’s dark in here,” Cal says when I open up the door. She’s come equipped with a Starbuck’s coffee and giant red purse. Her t-shirt says Too Busy to Fuck which isn’t funny. She puts her index finger on my chest in a manner of eternal tease, this line pulling me in from a toxic lake to be eaten.

“I’ve got something you want,” she says. Her teeth are as big as a horse’s. I try to look through her for a second, the pouting blowfish lips and the all-American green eyes. We’re fixing our kids pizza on a Saturday evening, playing with them on the beach, going to a funeral of a relative I’m relieved is dead. The dream of it moves through my mind, Polaroid after Polaroid. Signing divorce papers. Driving to a new city.

“Michael, ground control to Major Tom. You are so fucking out of it.” She hands me a plastic bag with the red pills in it. I take one right away and swallow it without water.

“What were you doing just now?”



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"I was doing things that I do."

"You were watching her. Jesus, you can see everything," she says looking out the window at Anya.

"You shouldn't look out the window," I mutter.

Cal pulls herself away from the window reluctantly.

"You don't look so hot Michael."

I lay on the bed and she pulls a roach out of her wallet.

"Can I smoke this here?"

"I guess. Can I look through your purse?" Cal nods.

Ritalin, a roll pill, an eighth of midi, a sketch notebook, shoelaces, a digital camera, a plastic dinosaur that glows in the dark, a cell phone, a dead Starfish. She hasn't waxed her mustache in a while but obviously couldn't care less so it makes me care less. Italians can get away with it.

"So what have you been doing here all day?"

"Withdrawaling. I think I'm getting the hang of the still life stuff pretty good." She doesn't laugh.

"Do I seem real to you right now? She asks. She examines each tooth in her mouth in the bathroom mirror.

"Real? Why?"

"I read that panic attacks cause people to feel like they're losing their minds because of the cortisol levels in the brain overflowing. You think that's true?"

"Yeah, sometimes. How's

your band doing? Did the Ohio girl leave?"

"I don't want to talk about it. They suck, I mean we suck. I don't know. Everybody likes Animal Collective. Anyway, I mean do you ever feel like you're losing your mind?"

"Well, no."

Cal smokes the rest of the pot by the window. Behind her the downtown skyline is pink and orange and Andy says if you can enjoy the sun for a few minutes a day you aren't completely fucked. The skyline isn't posh like the sunset over LA or San Francisco or New York but it's better than a lot of things. The Xanax kicks in and it feels like falling. The jukebox at the bar down the street is playing a B 52s song called "Rock Lobster". It's odd how the sound carries.

"You know what I feel like, Michael?"

"You want ... my bagels."

"I don't know who I am, like I've lost my identity."

"I can relate to that. Most of our relationships with other people are goal oriented and involve money."

"Stop quoting the Internet. If I wanted to read Marx I would check a book out. I wanted to talk to you, you not anyone else." She flushes the roach and brings my guitar over to the bed but doesn't play it. "Man, it's not just like someone has the same name as you. I mean that is unfortunate, but there is a part of me that is already dead and it's clawing

at the part of me that's still going, devouring the good parts. There's some stuff still left, you know? Whatever makes me pick up a guitar or paint although I know I'm not gonna be a Gucci diva or Ameer Mann."

"There is no famous."

"Yes, there almost is. I can see the DVD right on your book shelf. Why do you have that, it sucks?"

"Someone gave it to me."

Cal strums a few eerie chords on the guitar and it mixes with the B-52s song and Ashley yelling on the other side of the wall.

"Don't freak out or anything when I tell you this. Just listen. Nobody ever really listens. Promise."

"Okay."

"Okay, don't tell anyone this. I drive to Wilmington in the middle of the night and to meet this old guy, this real estate agent with a small dick."

"How small?"

"Three and a half erect. He likes to video tape the stuff but he gives me two-thousand for an hour for it."

"I..."

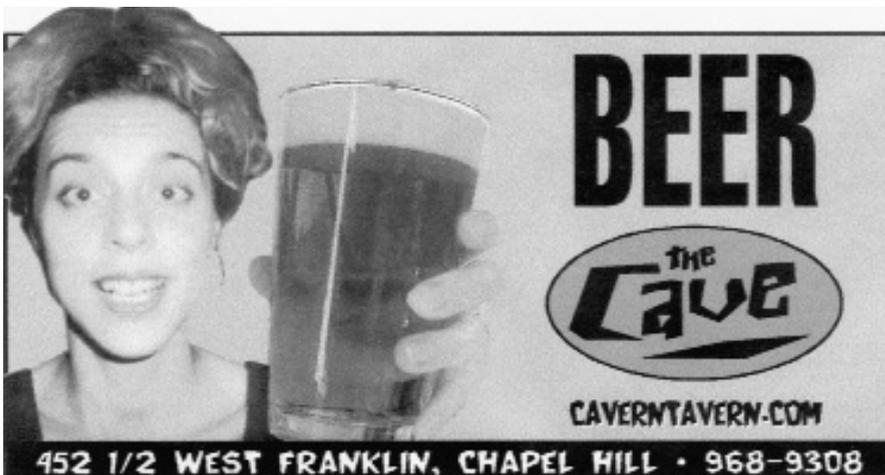
"Just don't speak. I know what you're saying. I need to tell somebody this. He falls asleep because he's on more uppers and downers than Brooklyn. It's strange he doesn't have sex with me. The only thing he's ever done is hug me."

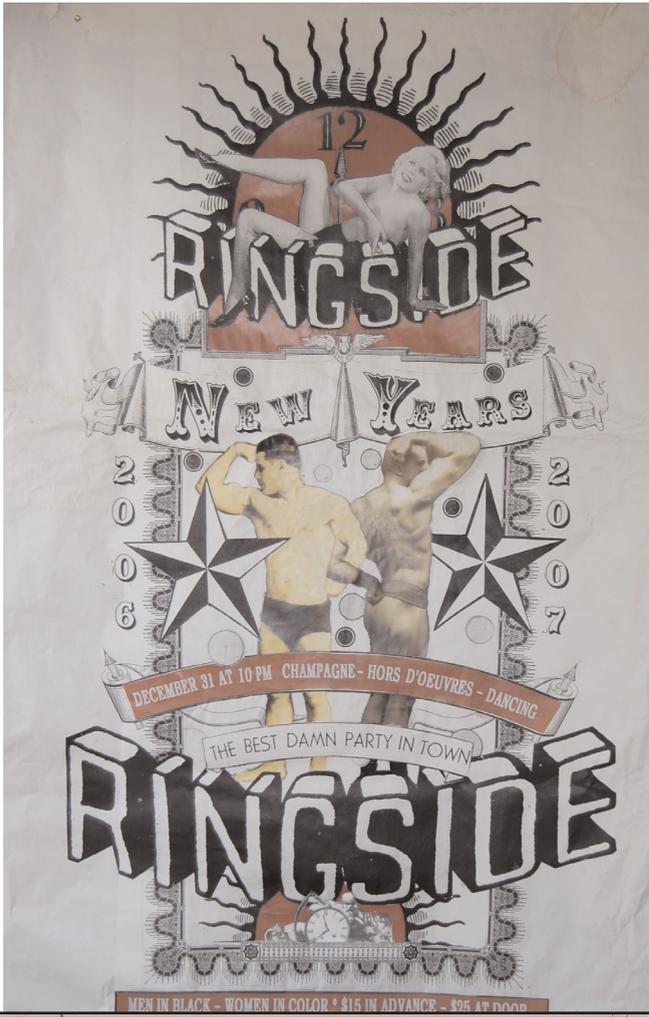
I bite my tongue because all I can think is how...how is something like that possible, always with her?

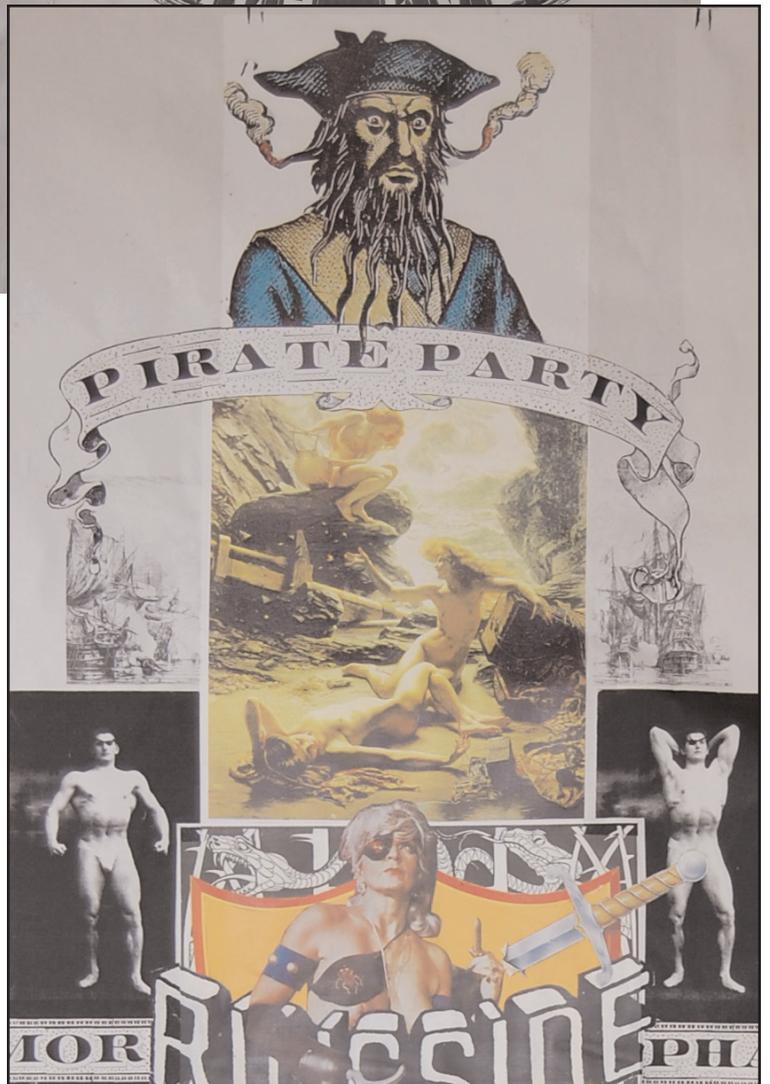
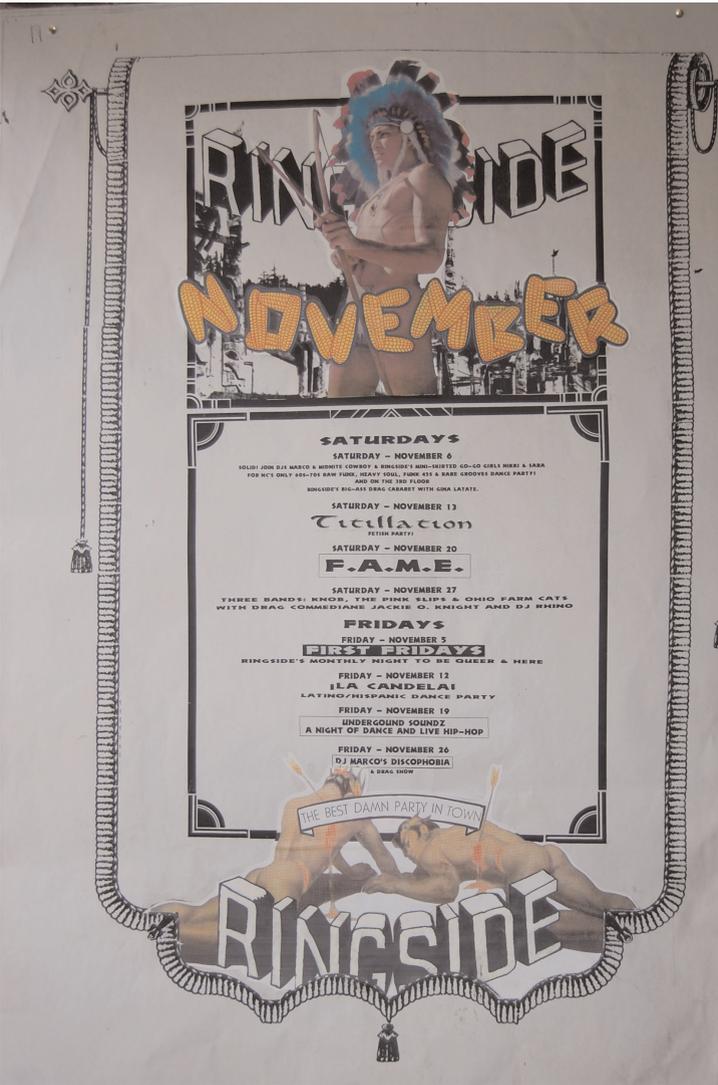
"He makes me pretend to be his daughter. What's really strange is, I did some research and his daughter was hit by a drunk driver a couple years back. He makes me describe how college is going; what my dorm room is like, what I'm doing for part-time work, if I have a boyfriend. Michael, he makes me wear her clothes."

After living in this apartment building for a few months this detail isn't as shocking as it might have been previously.

The sunlight is fading out of







Michael Penny -
Durham, NC
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the room so I turn the lamp on beside the bed. Cal is crying.

"After it's all done I leave the hotel and walk on the beach. You can see the lights in the rooms of the hotels, especially the Sheraton. You know what I think about? All the people who are just watching romantic comedies to distract themselves from something they've lost."

"It works for withdrawal."

"Everybody's going through withdrawal, from something I mean. This guy wants his kid to be alive. I feel like I'm helping him in some strange way. You think you are the only person who's ever been in pain? Somebody's dog gets run over you know, their wife fucks somebody, they go bankrupt, they go insane and no one takes them seriously. We all lose something we were used to getting."

"What was her name?"

"Who? Oh, I don't want to say it. I just, I can't tell anyone else. You know I don't think that you need those, um, pills. You keep running out of them and you never get any better."

"Well, they aren't supposed to make you better. They're a platform for ..."

"For what, being dependant, for being reduced to this creature that broods in a dark apartment that he now doesn't have the money to pay the rent for?"

"Okay, well what do you think I should do?"

She looks at me in a way that seems deviant.

"There is nothing wrong with you. You aren't great looking but you can play the personality card. Some people don't even have that. I'll admit you're awkward."

We stay in the bed and fool around. All the worry disappears. Cal's body is cold and hot in different places and I run my hands over her navel, up and down her legs. She wraps her arms around my back to help me into her. While we're doing this I can see myself in the mirror on the wall and try not to look. After I come I go between her legs and forget about careers, about names, and

about the lives we are stuck in. Cal clenches my head with her legs.

"I need to come so bad, make me come, that's all I want, just make me come." The jukebox in the bar down the street is playing a Sonic Youth song. Afterwards she's crying and says that she has to go pick up Kevin.

The other Michael Asteri resides in a split level ranch style house on Echo Street. He turned into a vampire at the age of twenty-six. That's the legend. He had someone living with him for close to four months named Rola Johnston. I would get his mail a few times a week. He has a subscription to *Guitar Player Monthly*, a hospital bill for which he has amassed five hundred dollars in overdue fines. Rola's mail stopped coming in February. People say he ate her. They play his music on WTHM in the middle of the night. There's this one song that goes *I wish you were dead! I'm not your 13th shade of blue! I wish you were dead.* When the song comes on I pace back and forth until I take a pill and do controlled breathing exercises in the bathroom with the fan on and the lesbian talks to her dog George Wallace the other side of the wall.

Friday in mid June: My band The Coffin Kids play a gig at the Morgue with Casual Furious and this electronic band from out of town called the Mystic Tinsels. They look like they just smoked a joint. Someone turns the reverb up so high on the PA that the words are incoherent. The bartender sings Sunday Bloody Sunday to herself even while they are playing and says we get twenty-free PBRs. Andy, the drummer in my band, drinks about twelve beers and I have thirteen. Casual Furious are so casual that they don't even bring their instruments so the electronic band plays for a couple hours and half the crowd takes blood shots from a stray cat out of boredom. This group of kids in the back of the club play video poker the whole time. This blond guy comes up to me twitching before we play.

"Are you Michael Asteri?"

"Yeah, sort of I guess."

"Wow, bro. It's great to meet you. I listen to you on the radio all the time. Did you really eat your girlfriend? That's rad, I mean it's a funny story and shit. I thought you wore sunglasses all the time?"

"They broke."

"Oh, man that's too bad. I heard they were badass, like Animal Collective."

"Yeah. They were badass Animal Collective."

I know it's useless to explain that I'm not the guy although I have his mail. He has a subscription to *Guitar Player Monthly*. In one of my darker moods I wrote his dad about borrowing money for my long anticipated sexual reassignment surgery.

"Well, what do you like about my music?" I ask the kid for laughs.

"I, you know I dig on the whole post-punk thing and you know it's popping and shit, badass like Animal Collective but you know with a...twist. I'd love to buy you a shot later." I give him one of the Coffin Kids CDs out of my back pack for three bucks and tell him it's a little different than the other stuff but still like Animal Collective badass. The set goes pretty well. We steal some equipment, microphones, cables, speakers. My drummer frowns at me.

"Just this once" I tell Andy. I stuff it all in the back of the van. I get so drunk that I make out with this tall guy in front of everyone and he gives me a blowjob with the bathroom door open. People scream. Michael will inevitably have some explaining to do.

July. George Wallace was found in the hallway. He had starved to death and now the Lesbian cries all the time. Cal moved into the apartment because Kevin couldn't move out of his dad's basement. She watches the neighbor sunbathe some afternoons and draws pictures of spiders interrogating people. She does or doesn't have a job at Starbucks but her trust fund seems inexhaustible. We stopped sleeping together with the arrival of a conservative tattooed

vegan named Randy. He says I shouldn't drink milk and should refrain from calling the stray cat downstairs my nigga'. The lesbian thinks he's an artistic genius because he spray paints portraits of retarded kids for charity but they all look like blobs floating in an unevolving sphere.

The walls in my apartment building have vertical vanity mirrors glued on them beside the stair well. It's a pathetic attempt at establishing a referential motif in the decorating scheme. I can't see my own reflection anymore. I see the other Michael Asteri. I've been wearing tinted sunglasses because the daylight gives me migraines. When I open the door Cal is on the couch smoking a bowl. She has on black Victoria's secret underwear. Kurt Cobain's mock-messianic face floats across the TV screen. Another VH1 countdown special.

"What is that smell?" I ask politely as possible.

"Fucking blood hound. Sniff, sniff, sniff." Cal mumbles like a zombie transfixed by the concert footage of Cobain getting beaten by a crowd member and Chris Novelselic coming to Cobain's aid.

"What's burning? Did you leave the oven on again?"

"No. I cooked a fucking frozen pizza yesterday. I turned the goddamn oven off. After I turned the goddamn oven off I ate the goddamn pizza and washed the plate I ate it off of. You want to get high, I got a lot? Why don't you relax? You never relax. You know why?"

"Because I have a career path, because you are a living breathing fire hazard? I might as well just have a dragon living with me and that fucking mustache is turning into a beard, my God!"

"That's exactly right. No, I'm lying. You, my friend are an addict. Come on, I'm trying to help you out."

"You are trying to help me? Get a t-shirt and a pair of jeans, oh God I can see your...Jesus Christ."

"Oh, yeah you like my Christ. You did. You wanna be Paul

and I'll be Jesus?"

"Just turn the kitchen appliances off., get your boyfriend away from my guitar. Don't call me an addict while you are sitting there like that smoking away your grandfather's trust fund."

"Shut the fuck up."

"What did you say?"

"Where's the crack, Huckleberry Hound?"

Cal's Italianisms are accentuated by the neighbor's mid-grade marijuana. She's been eating her out from time to time for an eighth. You might call it unfortunate that Sasha Savientes lives in downstairs or you might call it convenient, but everybody who smokes her stuff always thought it was laced with something stronger, something more extravagant. Whole groups of college freshmen have been so stoned on her pot that it took them an hour and a half to make it to the Wendy's on Lee Street. One time a kid passed out in his friend's arms because he couldn't "feel his balls anymore". I estimate that the money Cal's grandfather left will last about six months or less. I walk over the cold linoleum in the kitchen. The orange oven light is on.

"It's definitely on!" I shout over the television. "I think what's happening is that your pizza crumbs from yesterday have been burning at a low temperature since whenever you cooked the pizza. When did you cook it?"

"Chill. You're...you are freaking me out. Maybe I should get Savientes' opinion on the matter." Cal says.

"Oh God, please don't bring that in here."

"I'll bring whoever the fuck I want in here. Fuck you. Randy's coming over tonight and he's going to play me all his new songs." Her hair falls in her face and I try to look through her but nothing's there anymore. Our imaginary children have joined gangs and mutilated their legs with serrated edges when no one was looking. They steal furniture from old couples.

"How do you like that? When you're trying to sleep I'm

going to make him dry hump me on the couch!"

"I don't sleep anymore."

August-

I'm standing in the middle of this field near God's Miracle House of Deliverance off of I-40. I pull hard on the cigarette I'm smoking and put it out in a Quick Stop cup. The air hitting the side of the church sounds like an animal clawing to get in. The other Michael Asteri overdosed or blew up according to who you talk to. I walk up and down Frankford Street most days in my sunglasses humming his songs. I live with one of his old girlfriends now. Somebody gave her some bad acid and she can't tell the difference. Randy pulls up in his dad's Miata while I'm standing in this field naked waiting for a UFO.

"Jesus, what are you doing out here like that?"

We drive to Dunkin Doughnuts. Randy sings in the car *I made it through the wilderness/ oh yeah I made it through/ didn't know how lost I was...* I get out of the car because Madonna creeps me out.

"Hey, you can't just get out here in traffic. Why don't we go get something to eat or um, do you want to go get coffee?"

I keep walking because he's an idiot. I walk to Michael Asteri's house and pull the covers over my head and try to sleep. The wind howls in the trees outside and I'm not afraid.



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The Blotter

The Best Damn Party in Town - Michael Penny and "Ringside" poster art

I have always had a rather ambivalent attitude towards these pieces. Of course, I have been gratified that people seem to favorably respond to them, but despite this, I can't deny a sense of irony that prevents me from thoroughly enjoying their success in this respect. I have always regarded my true medium to be the music I compose. I studied composition at the NC School of the Arts, and for most of my life have devoted all my study, and invested all my most devout creative efforts in this direction. Yet, I never feel that I have connected as a musician while these trifles, which given even the most generous assessment could hardly be regarded as serious art, instantly succeed with just about everyone who looks at them. I've had to wrestle with this and the only thing I can come up with is that

visual art is very simple and convenient for people to absorb, they merely have to look at it, whereas music, existing as it does in time, demands complete attention, that you give yourself up entirely to the experience. And also, I have a sense that art is less vulnerable to the tyranny of the "taste police" that seem to control and limit people's exposure and acceptance of music. It seems to me that people are much more free to individually like what they see in art than what they hear in music. These pieces can be regarded as a sort of frozen composition, representing the same artistic impulse, the same expression as in my music, but stopped in time and made visual, so I try to at least content myself with this understanding...for what it's worth.

I am an accidental artist in this medium. Most people know me primarily as the proprietor of a night club, Ringside which I opened in May of 2000 and closed in May of 2008. Yet, the primary reason I initially opened a club was to free myself financially so that I might create...though of course, I was soon chasing my tail. I don't know that I recommend business to any artist. It's probably best just to be poor and create. I sometimes have found that people were suspect of an artist, of their commitment to art when they are engaged in business. When I was referred to as bar owner, Michael Penny, in a review for one of my musicals, I knew that it was time to be done with it. But I did learn something from this, and that is that if you have connected with your creativity...if you rely on it, have these pathways open in your spirit, it comes to you whenever you call on it regardless of the medium. Whether it's designing a space, creating a cocktail, organizing a drag show or just a great party, this is the same resource that you call upon. Thus, when it became necessary that I make a monthly schedule and adver-

tisements for Ringside I went to this resource, dug around until I found a way to express what I wanted Ringside to be, as well as what it was happily becoming. This was the practical motivation for my turn at visual art. I don't know if advertising pays, but this sort of advertising was very effective in creating and reinforcing in people's minds what this place represented...who it attracted, who it didn't attract, what the code was for Ringside, eclectic, sexually ambiguous, open minded and fun. This was the theme and this is what these posters said to my customers over and over again...and this is what I got in return.

During the five years or so that I created one of these every month... I would be thinking about what I would do next...would keep my eyes open to funky images I could incorporate, a theme perhaps. I would gather images from books, magazines, flea-market art. I would collect books on borders and fonts that I might use. Then, it would become time to begin making something...and for three days or so I would begin cutting out possible images and begin playing around with them. Sometimes I would have to take a trip to Kinkos and resize things or make multiple copies of things to expand a border, then back to work rearranging and trying to come up with something that eventually would visually express this intuitive thing once more. Occasionally, I would go straight to what I might have originally conceived, but more often the art found me as I was searching for it. This would often happen as two diverse unrelated ideas would come together and click...then importantly, I would know where to stop. There were some practical parameters: Because color was rather expensive I would try to limit the amount I would use in a given poster and the dimensions were roughly those of my show windows on Main St. Once I had finished my original, the next step was to enlarge the entire piece in black and white on the oversize blueprint copier. Then, the color portions were



enlarged separately at the same size, cut out, and then pasted on the large black and white enlargement. I never regarded the originals as the finished art, it is the posters where everything was corrected and made to what I ultimately wanted the finished piece to be. I would generally make several of these large posters to be displayed around the club...one always in the front windows of Ringside, where I enjoyed watching people on the street stop and absorb them. This was the reward. This went on for about 5 years...at least one a month and quite often an additional poster for a particularly exciting or interesting evening or event. When the streets and sidewalks in front of Ringside were idiotically and irresponsibly torn up for a period of about two years for a project that should have taken 6 months at the most...and no one walked in front of my windows anymore, I no longer had any motivation or need to continue creating them and that was the end of my life as a visual artist...and the end of Ringside as a business.

I've often thought that it would be rewarding to create again in this medium, but it seems that this was of just a time and place for me, when I had a reason, the resources, the audience, and the unfettered drive to express myself in this way. But, it's a nice legacy for myself and that special place that so many of us loved.

- Michael Penny, July 2010



"The Roadie"

by Eric G. Müller

We'd talked only once. I don't even remember how he came to be our roadie. He was an anomaly in our entourage. Amongst all the weirdoes and freaks that liked to hang around our group he was the most clean-cut and conservatively dressed, looking more like a stereotypical bank-clerk than a roadie for a hard rock band – but he was the best we ever had. All the other guys who drifted in and out just wanted to be part of the scene, often hustling some of the equipment while they were at it. Our band had little money to offer, so we made do with just about anybody who was willing to pitch in and lend a hand.

He was efficient, had technological know-how, saw what needed to be done and actually did it, far surpassing our expectations. He was organized, gave excellent suggestions, could fix anything, and worked untiringly. On top of that he was one buff guy – a good qualification for someone whose prime job it is to lug heavy equipment around. And he always smelled of Old Spice aftershave. Always.

After an endlessly long and tedious rehearsal we had a little chat over a cold beer, both of us slumped deep into the old couch under the slanted roof next to the PA system. It was

way past midnight and my ears were still ringing in the wake of our high-decibel workout in the converted barn. I don't even remember what we talked about, except that he chided me for my technological illiteracy. "Come on, man, you play in a rock and roll band that relies almost exclusively on technology and you don't even know how to change a fuse. All musicians should be able to repair their own equipment. Trust me, there's no way you can always rely on people like me to fix your stuff." I felt dumb, but agreed, confessing that I had no clue about where to begin or how to proceed. "No problemo," he said, punching me a tad too hard on my left shoulder. "I'll help you, buddy." I was psyched because my keyboards and amps often broke down and here was a chance to become more self-reliant.

I never saw him again. Two days later I heard he was dead. He'd gone to a party with some of the guys he'd met through our band, Tokolosh, where he was persuaded to try some heroin. He'd never touched drugs before, not even marihuana. He wasn't even much of a drinker. Together with his girlfriend, who was as clean as a Swiss dairy, they injected the dirty stuff they were handed. Unwittingly they gave each other the golden shot. I didn't even know his name.



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The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

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mermaid@blotterrag.com

His face is thin, but bulges with a mouthful of chewing tobacco wadded in one cheek. He grimaces, because it tastes blandly bad. Would that he could spit it out on the ground, but this option does not present itself, because he is alternately in his parents' empty living room and a schoolroom from some earlier time in his life, high school or college perhaps. It is a plain room, with muted colors, olive greens and gray-blues.

Is there anyone else in the room, or in adjoining rooms? He wants to know, but stands still in the middle of the room, or at the wall, depending on whether he is in the living room or the school room. The furniture morphs between upholstered chairs and desk/chair combinations, with books underneath and graffiti gouged in the tabletops. Who is he looking for, that should be sitting in the room with him, but isn't? Family member. An Uncle that died fifteen years ago. A girl that broke up with him after she moved to the Midwest whose face was beautiful but which he cannot recall.

Here is a window he can look out. The day is sunny with the diffused light that thin clouds cause. The search becomes confusing, because there is only a memory of the person being in the room with him, rather than an image of that person. He feels a strong disappointment that neither person can be seen, and that he cannot search for them in other rooms, but must remain in this room, a feeling that he has only just discovered. This sense of loss, of having misplaced, colors everything, the sharpness of the edges of tables, the lamplight, the particles of dust in the lamplight.

He finds a kitchen, but where he has seen it before, where it has been part of his life, is not clear. The sink is partly filled with cloudy water. No dishes can be seen, but it is understood that they are beneath the water. He tries to clear the wad of tobacco from his mouth with two fingers, so that he might make himself something to eat. A sandwich perhaps, or a handful of cookies. There is a cookie jar on the counter somewhere. The tobacco taste in his mouth is strong but not defined – bitter, yes, but an old, dry flavor as well. He turns the spigot over the sink, but the water doesn't come on. The sink makes an antique, clunking noise - the sound of air in the pipes. He makes a sandwich, but cannot take a bite, because of the foul taste remaining unrinsed in his mouth. The sandwich spills from his hand onto the linoleum. He leaves it there, although he knows that he should clean it up.

There is the feeling that he is in a place of his childhood, although this is no longer his parents' house. Perhaps it is a neighbor's place, down the street from his house. The feeling is hopeful now, a powerful nostalgia for winter snow on the street, flakes falling from the dark into the glare of the streetlights, running home for supper in buckle-boots. He wants to say good-bye to whoever's house this is, to be polite and tell them that he has to go home, but there is no one to speak to. Suddenly, without confusion, he is at the end of his street, a good run up a darkened pathway. He senses that Mom is home, and Dad, and supper is on the table. The cold of the snow is tempered by that warm home feeling.

02/05" - cyberspace

Best In Show

by Phil Juliano



"Drunk off of Palm Wine in a Small African Village"

by Lauren Finn

"Obruni!" they yell,
laughing as they point at my blotchy red skin,
burnt from the inescapable wrath of the African sun.

I find that most children chase me through the village,
touch my skin and run away.
They are curious
but scared.

Some children sit on my lap
and offer me palm wine.
They are bold
but too generous.

Soon enough their mothers pull me from my seat
to teach me foreign dances.
They laugh in native tongues as I swing my hips
Front and back,
Side to side.
I blindly stomp my cumbersome feet
kicking dust up from the red earth
to join the dance around me.
I make a mockery of myself
for the sake of friendship
and a few smiling dark faces.

Later we sit together
as the sun stretches shadows across the warm earth,
we shell groundnuts,
talk about the new year,
and sober up on perfectly overripe bananas.

Oh to be a stranger!

CONTRIBUTORS

Adam Thorn sent his submission from a UNC Greensboro e-mail address, but is otherwise an enigma wrapped in talent, immersed in mystery!!! Or out of town and not checking his e-mail. It could go either way.

Michael Penny? See page 12!

All of the Ringside posters were photographed on a very hot July afternoon by our staff photographer, **T.J. Garrett**. See more of his work at www.tijaye.com.

Lauren Finn of Commack, New York is a senior at Elon University studying psychology and philosophy with a minor in criminal justice. In 2nd grade she wanted to be a dolphin trainer when she grew up, but now she just doesn't know anymore. For the time being, she enjoys writing poetry and thinking about all her possibilities.

Eric G. Müller is a musician, teacher and writer. He has written two novels, *Rites of Rock* (Adonis Press 2005) and *Meet Me at the Met* (Plain View Press, 2010), as well as a collection of poetry, *Coffee on the Piano for You* (Adonis Press, 2008), and numerous short stories. He lives in Ghent, New York.

Phil Juliano's Asheville, North Carolina was very hot and humid when I visited this July. It was, nonetheless, wonderful.

Final Tid-Bits: Yes, of course I know the difference between they're and there and their. Sometimes I just don't give a rat's ass. The English language is a harsh mistress, with metal claws and this really fancy *bustier* that she only wears if you're good all week and somebody had better scrub the kitchen floor, it aint gonna be her, pal. Only a few more weeks of summer-weather reading left, so quit putzing around and get down to it - the really heavy hard-cover stuff that weighs down on your lap and your brain. Visit your local independent bookstore, they have air-conditioning, comfortable chairs, and plenty of things to read - I don't want to hear any of you saying, "I'm bored." Got it? *Good!*

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