

PRESTIGE//8.12

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MINUTIAE #8

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DEPARTMENT OF SALUTATIONS



Welcome to MOGAVO and the Future of Energy! My name is Clyde Burbank, Vice President of Media & Press for MOGAVO, an innovator in the world of residential and commercial energy. MOGAVO could not be more pleased to be the new owners of Minutiæ Publishing after purchasing the company from one of our sister corporations Ridgecomm to help with our printing needs. You see, MOGAVO is at a crossroads now, and we need all the printing resources we can to help spread the word about clean, newable, and safe energy in our new publication MOGAVO Monthly.

In the upcoming first issue of MOGAVO Monthly, we explore the exciting world of Hydraulic Fracturing. We've enlisted beloved comic artist Chris Ware to illustrate the story of Colorado families who have signed into exclusive land rights agreements and are now living the life of luxury. What once was unused rock shale and untouched aquifers are now big screen televisions, wide rimmed automobile wheels, and top of the line MOGAVO-brand air filters. There's a lot of hulla-baloo surrounding Hydraulic Fracturing or "Fracking," and I'd like to use this letter right here to clear up any confusion. Some horses just lose their hair, and all water is flammable.

Also, we'd like to address what happened across 1600 acres in the Mojave desert in early Spring when the earth below a solar thermal power station owned by competitor NextEra Energy Resources suddenly collapsed into the ground. There are rumors that MOGAVO had purchased the subterranean rights to the acreage and burrowed it out, according to rogue amateur

video footage of several hundred AVOGOM dump trucks hauling dirt away from a nearby quarry entrance. MOGAVO has no relation to the Alan Vincent Operations Granite & Ore Mining dump trucks seen in that footage. In fact, how can we be sure that the footage is even real and not an elaborate CGI-prank? The videographer, Benoit St. Clark, hasn't been seen since the footage was leaked to the press. Come forward, Mr. St. Clark, and prove you didn't make this on your Mac computer.

Leaving these baseless accusations behind, MOGAVO is committed to the future of you turning on light switches, heating your schools and providing an unbiased publishing platform for Minutiæ and its new sister publication MOGAVO Monthly. MOGAVO Ahead! ♦



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AGENCY OF CÖRRESPONDENCES + COMMUNIQUEŚ

Gentlemen, I represent a very wealthy industrialist with a dying dream: to be walked into the heart of the Amazon to replenish his youth with the waters of Xicochi. I hope I have attached enough Minutiæ Points for him to reach this prize level.

Ashton Q. Klonder
Lawyer, Estate Manager
New Canaan, CT

Gentlemen, inside this cherrywood box is a pistol. A pistol that has only been fired once, by an unknown man. In this cherrywood box is three million dollars. Find the unknown man, and claim your reward.

Martin F. Klonder
Lawyer, Estate Manager
Carmel Valley, CA

Gentlemen, thank you so much for coming to the Johnson & Wales University job fair. I received several confusing comments from students who came to your booth. They said that when they walked up, the booth would slowly back up away from the student, for almost a hundred feet. The students found it particularly difficult to retrieve any literature or speak to your representatives who, I might add, were wearing shiny silver unisex jumpsuits along with highly reflective futuristic helmets. When one of the students asked where to get one of the futuristic motorcycle helmets, your representative responded in a digitally-decayed voice “they are hovercraft helmets, dummy,” and the booth began to back up. We look forward to seeing you again next year!

Mark Whitlock
Student Affairs Coordinator, Johnson & Wales University
Providence, RI



“I just— My wife cannot know. I do love her, in my own way, but not in the way she wants me to love her. I need this. Please.”

CONTRIBUTORS

Clark Dawes ("Costa Rica Report," p. 7) is a journalist and the only Minutiæ staff member currently in prison.

Tam Parsons ("Sports Round Up," p. 12) is a writer, actor, dancer, singer, guitarist, painter, sculptor, photographer, film critic, standup comedian, chef, teacher, D.J., magician, prancer, and maritime lawyer living in Los Angeles. This is her first time covering sports for Minutiæ.

Andrew Witty ("The Rap Game Today," p. 15) is an aspiring writer from Brooklyn and the C.F.O. of GlaxoSmithKline, a massive multinational pharmaceutical company. Check out his Kickstarter for bringing Lovaza to schools in Detroit in an old cherry red Ford pickup.

Nicholas Knocker ("Dance Like Your Wife Depends On It," p. 19) is the pseudonym of a very famous writer who did not want to use his real name because he is embarrassed by how badly his piece turned out. Let's just say he likes playing games about thrones...

Ronaldo Cantone ("Hover Craft, Hover Never," p. 20) is an award-winning busboy at a local diner.

Karen Lisa ("Watch Your Baby," p. 21) was born in Chicago, grew up in Denver, briefly lived in Tucson, then moved back in Denver, then spent six months in Toronto, four in Charleston, one in Atlanta, then went to Houston, back again to Denver, had a three day stopover in St. Louis, spent some crazy years in Little Rock and Portland, and now she calls Miami home. But really, after all that, is any place really home, Karen?

Raquel O'Brien ("Black Van," p. 23) is 91 years old and has written a piece for every issue of Minutiæ since 1960. For many years, however, she was credited as "Robert O'Brien" ~ but then one

day, Robert walked into the office and said we should call him "Raquel" from now on. And that was that.

Mr. Cooper ("Smokin' In The Boys Room," p. 25) is the school security guard and says you can't park in this lot unless you're a student. He doesn't care if you're dating a student. The lot is for students only.

Dr. Frosty ("Movie Reviews: Ted & Total Recall," p. 27) is a supervillain who has the power to slowly lower the temperature of a room several degrees over the course of an hour and also to always know exactly what time it is.

Jean Paul Gotye ("Somebody That I Used to Whoa," p. 29) is a musician, a fashion designer, and a combination musician/fashion designer.

Dan Davis ("This Month's Contributors," p. 2) is the editorial intern for Minutiæ responsible for assembling the bios for this month's contributors. Since he's known for his office hijinks, his supervisor Mr. Molina warned him not to do anything funny with this month's list, like put himself in. Well, guess what, Mr. Molina? He did.



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HAPPENINGS IN THE CITY

MUSIC

ConAgra Fairgrounds/Buggsley Pavilion

September 8: A series of recent personal disagreements have left 1970's jingoistic rock band Grand Funk Railroad in shambles. Not to be deterred, competing band founders Mark Farner and Don Brewer have dedicated themselves to finishing the remaining slate of state fair tour dates, albeit as competing Grand Funk tribute bands. After both sets, Farner and Brewer will stand on opposite ends of the stage and demand the audience vote by ballot as to which performance they liked best.

Lamprey Federal Wetlands

September 8: Emboldened by the success of New York City's Summer in the Park concert series, officials have rezoned part of the Lamprey Federal Wetlands to make way for a September concert event taking place on September 8th. Bands include Jars of Clay, Wetter The Better and Poison. Guests are encouraged to bring snacks, blankets, DEET and bowie knives.

Boppbopp Arena

September 8: The Jennifer Tilly Old Time Medicine Band returns to promote their new album "Ain't This Whiskey On Us?" Some friends of the band are scheduled to stop by like Geronimo Joe, Farry Hall's Loyal Sons, MC Old Scratch, Chief A.K. Smokestack, Little Robin & The Bluegills, and Wynterthyme. And don't forget to put on your Jennifer Tilly masks when "Sourpuss" starts playing.

THEATER

Their Town: This new theatrical addition asks the question: "How come everyone in Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* moved around invisible props? Where did all their stuff go?" It then attempts to answer that question with a brutal, unrelenting three-hour rape and pillage pulled off by a neighboring village, leaving *Our Town* without so much as a bowl to put invisible apples in. Opens September 8. (Rasmussen Hall, Westmont)

Two Girls, One Cup: Two Girls, One Cup tells the harrowing story of two blind, indigent street children whose only sole possession is the stone cup their mother gave them on her deathbed. Together, the two eschew social norms to reach unexpected heights, with a little help from the cup along the way. The play marks the debut of writer Anne Frankesh, a serious woman who has not had the internet or talked to many people in nearly five years. Previews begin September 8. (Brinkley Artspace, 2713 W. Fillmore)

Pottsville, USA: Hank Trowler returns from a nineteen year hiatus from the stage to lead the ensemble in this post-apocalyptic musical set in the year 2424. If you like men on eye-patched horses, group of feral Dickensian orphans, villains on advanced metal stilts, a church organ swinging from the ceiling, actors on spider sticks, or getting your money's worth, then you will love this five hour epic featuring a shorn cougar. Opens September 8. (Igor Reitch's Stage & Seats, 5483 Arisdale Rd.)

FOOD

Moonshine Pairing: Strap on your coal miner lanterns, it's dinnertime! Regional craft moonshiners will be pairing their clear, toxic libations with whatever they find in the dumpster behind noted Italian restaurant Teddy Q's. Interested diners need only to show up and make the high-pitched squeal of a hennypeck quail, lest they be mistaken for security guards and beaten. The service starts up on September 21st, but if you say you're with Royce, they'll let you start on September 8th. (Behind Teddy Q's, nightly 2am)

Goode & Bad: While Chef Issac Goode is away (On The Menu, Page 18), Chef Marissa Bad presents her Ladies Night menu featuring lots of eggs, from hard boiled to octopus (unfertilized). (September 8th - September 24th, 904 St. Marks Ave.)

MOVIES

It's that time of year for the Falling Leaves Road Show. Los Angeles area film critic Keith Oberly has hit the road with the best 16mm films of autumnal leaves. Don't miss out Danish filmmaker's landmark leaf film *Turning*, 3-hours of a singular leaf moving in the wind. (September 8th, 3pm, \$25)

The men of the Windsor Club will be screening *Time*, a film by USC graduate student Mark Applebaum and financed entirely by the men of the Windsor Club. Each year, the men of the Windsor Club search out a young filmmaker they hope has the ability to create a highly pretentious film that they can screen and then ridicule with the young person in the room. (September 8th, 9pm, Windsor Club Membership Required)

READINGS

Lindsey Reich will be reading from her memoirs "Men I Took Advantage Of." The book chroniclers her experiences of seeming like a very level headed woman at first, but then slowly unraveling and turning relationships with men toxic. In fact, she manipulated her boyfriend, a book publisher, into printing the book just so she could be appeased and stop throwing plates on the ground (September 8th, 8pm, University Gift Shop)

MISC.

Hypnotism Reversal Session: Victims of popular hypnotism shows looking to have their mental triggers reversed are encouraged to meet Dr. Lagsly Chronos on September 8th. Potential attendees are asked not to bring whistles, clap loudly or carry any form of pocketwatch, pocketwatch, pocketwatch.... (The Chronos Celebrity Medical Center Annex, 7th Floor, 1221 N. Oslo)

Doorman Fantasy Camp: Enrollment is open now for Doorman Fantasy Camp, a one-week intensive that helps prepare hopeful doormen for a life in the industry. Daily breakout sessions will focus on common topics such as: attire, demeanor, hailing a cab, softly suggesting tips, and how to receive leftovers from rich people who live in the building. The fall's first program begins September 8th. (AstroLegal Building, 17 First Street, Floor 12, Downtown)

Clean Up: The city will be conducting mandatory tidying sessions on September 9th following all the messes that are for sure going to be made on September 8th. ♦

THE HISTORICAL CITIZEN - 1912

Amidst the excitement of the Games of the V Olympiad, disaster struck Stockholm in the form of Master Villain John H. Mastodraminus. Mastodraminus, a former Pinkerton and dastard known most recently for his theft of the Swan Diamond, made his entrance to the games after snuffing out the Olympic Cauldron. Since then, Mastodraminus has marred almost every aspect of the games.

His first theater of mischief laid upon the track and field arena. He replaced the weights with hollow replicas and the javelins with the weights. In the middle of the Great Britain versus Sweden tug of war, Mastodraminus tip toed up and snipped the rope in two, causing both teams to tumble backwards as Mastodraminus jaunted off. Finally, he repainted the running track lanes into a jumble, watching the runners bump into each other from a safe distance in the stands, dressed up as his foppish alter ego Count Jaulaunt.

Mastodraminus continued his reign of devilry upon the games over the course of the next four weeks. Faulty fencing sabres and uneven bar distance meddling were the least of the Olympians' worries. The sailing regatta proved to be an utter disaster, as Mastodraminus had drained the Nynäshamn passage, leaving all the boats on a dry seabed. Mastodraminus continued to watch from afar as his hot air balloon passed over the furious athletes.

As the games wound down towards the end of July, there had been few sightings of Mastodraminus. Yet, just as sure as the sun rises in the East, the clever devil struck again, appearing in the middle of the Olympic Stadium to announce he had replaced all of the medals with tin! What a true villain he is! Mastodraminus left the games in

a cloud of smoke with a trunk full of the gold, silver and bronze medals. Through the windows of his dirigible, one could see the members of the Australian womens swim team on his arms. He's done it again! ♦

SMOKES & MIRRORS - 1910

In 1910, the 102nd Annual Magician's Consortium was hosted in Prague, but, for reasons previously unknown, the event was never held again. Minutiae has uncovered a radio transmission from the event filed by intrepid correspondent Pippa Edison, and presents here a transcript of her report for a look at what would ultimately be the last Annual Magician's Consortium.

PIPPA EDISON: As you can clearly hear behind me, it's all hustle and bustle at the 102nd Annual Magician's Consortium. What began in 1808 as a private gathering of sixteen prestidigitators has grown substantially over the years, and is now considered the world's largest magic event, drawing over 150 magicians and thousands of magic fans from forty-seven countries.

Joining me now is Thomas Hennemore, the head of the governing body of the Consortium, the Board of Illusion. Mr. Hennemore, what can visitors expect from this year's Consortium?

THOMAS HENNEMORE: Well, Pippa, that's the beauty of a magic show. The only thing you can expect...is the unexpected!

PIPPA EDISON: Wow, I'm~ I'm speechless! I didn't expect~ Is that a real dove?

THOMAS HENNEMORE: She may appear to be a dove, but don't be fooled. In truth, she is...a phoenix!

PIPPA EDISON: [yelps]

THOMAS HENNEMORE: No need to be alarmed! When magic is on your side, anything, even a flame...can be captured!

PIPPA EDISON: [applauds] Unbelievable!

THOMAS HENNEMORE: Thank you.

PIPPA EDISON: Mr. Hennemore, much has been made of the infamous Mobius Trick. Can you tell us a bit about it?

THOMAS HENNEMORE: Yes, the Mobius Trick was created in 1817 by Edmund Verrig, the first head of the Board of Illusion. Many called it the most complex illusion ever created, and Verrig responded to the accolades with a challenge: anyone able to figure out how the trick is performed would become the next head of the Board of Illusion. It took thirty-six years for someone to come to Edmund with a solution. The Board of Illusion has been determining its presiding member in the same way since.

PIPPA EDISON: And you've now been the head of the Board for twenty-three years?

THOMAS HENNEMORE: Yes, that's correct. I'll be performing the Mobius Trick momentarily, actually.

PIPPA EDISON: We're looking forward to it. Thank you for joining me, Mr. Hennemore.

THOMAS HENNEMORE: Thank you, and enjoy the show!

PIPPA EDISON: While Mr. Hennemore prepares for his performance, the last audience members are finding their seats. It certainly is a full house for this centerpiece illusion, one not likely to be forgotten by any man, woman, or child here today.

[violin strings keen]

PIPPA EDISON: Ah, it looks like Mr. Hennemore is taking the stage.

THOMAS HENNEMORE: Ladies and gentlemen, in accordance with tradition, I present: the Mobius Trick.

What you are about to see is a feat of daring. A defiance of death. I will bend the very laws of nature to my will!

[orchestra swells]

Voila!

[audience gasps, screams]

PIPPA EDISON: Oh god! No! This cannot be what Mr. Hennemore intended!

[wailing]

UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE: Their flesh! It's like they're melting into each other! Is there a physician in the house?! Please, for the love of god, someone find a doctor!

PIPPA EDISON: I think I'm going to be ill, I-

[footsteps racing away]

SECOND UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE: Miss, are you all right?

PIPPA EDISON: Yes, I think so~

SECOND UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE: Please, step aside, we need to make a clear path to the injured.

PIPPA EDISON: Yes, of course~

[sobbing]

THOMAS HENNEMORE: What have I done? WHAT HAVE I DONE?!

UNIDENTIFIED CHILD'S VOICE: Mommy? Get up, mommy.

PIPPA EDISON: Mr. Hennemore, perhaps you should step away from~

THOMAS HENNEMORE: No, I did this, I must help them! I can reverse it, I can~

THE SESQUICENTENNIAL

[cries of agony]

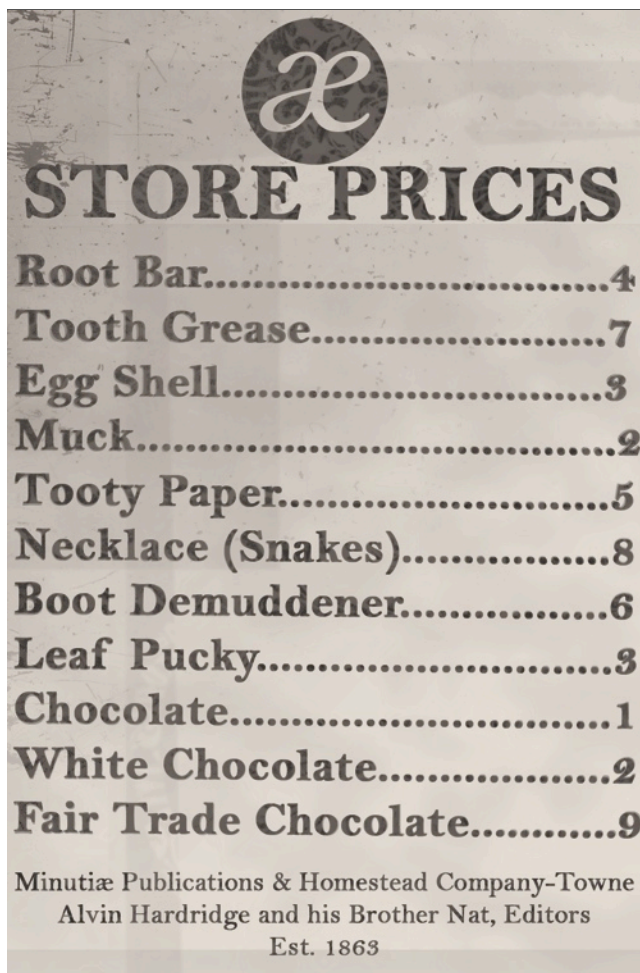
PIPPA EDISON: Mr. Hennemore, stop! You're making it worse! Please, just leave it for medical professionals!

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE VOICE: My son! Someone help my son!

THOMAS HENNEMORE: If this is what my magic has wrought, there is only one thing left to do.

PIPPA EDISON: Mr. Hennemore, what are you doing? Please don't attempt any more illusions! What is that in your hand? Are you going to~

[electricity arcing, glass breaking] [terrified screams] [static] ♦



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STORE PRICES	
Root Bar.....	4
Tooth Grease.....	7
Egg Shell.....	3
Muck.....	2
Tooty Paper.....	5
Necklace (Snakes).....	8
Boot Demuddener.....	6
Leaf Pucky.....	3
Chocolate.....	1
White Chocolate.....	2
Fair Trade Chocolate.....	9
Minutiæ Publications & Homestead Company-Towne	
Alvin Hardridge and his Brother Nat, Editors	
Est. 1863	

Prices at the Minutiæ Homestead Company-Towne Store in 1863. All prices are in Minutiæbucks.

BROADVISIAL - 1965

With the world around us a terrifying landscape of riots and war it is my advice that the American public stay indoors and turn on their televisions for the new fall line-up. It is our God-Given right as Americans to enjoy a relaxing evening. Yes, I said it was our God-Given right! And if anyone tells you otherwise, they are a Communist!

Green Acres

This television show takes two classically wealthy city dwellers and throws them on a farm where they have to try and survive amongst livestock and country bumpkins. While the husband tries to adjust to his surroundings, the wife, a true American, vows to never give up her old lifestyle. Eva Gabor shines as a beacon of classic wealth amongst the pig squalor. The nod to vaudevillian slapstick comedy makes this show a necessary watch.

My Mother, the Car

In this wacky situational comedy, Attorney David Crabtree purchases an automobile that contains the soul of his deceased mother and the spirit of America's automotive progress! Crabtree, played by Jerry Van Dyke, brother to America's favorite Cockney actor Dick Van Dyke, shines as a lovable scamp whose goal is to provide the best for his family. The car, a 1928 classic Porter touring car, voiced by Ann Sothern (a Broadway beauty) brings a touch of class and sophistication to the role. This relatable family is sure to survive for many television seasons! A talking car! What will red-blooded Americans think of next?

Chop-Suey

This animated cooking show is hosted by the chef I.Y. Yunioshi. Yunioshi is voiced by Mickey Rooney, reprising his classic role as the Asian character from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, focusing on making meals for the whole family. In my opinion, Rooney kills as usual playing the role of the Asian cook. However, I feel the show has too much Chinese food in it, and I suspect this is probably a propaganda message from the Hollywood Communist Elite. Rooney hilariously ends the show with this review for each dish, "It good, but not good as Chicken Fried Lice!". The same could be said about the show, Mr. Yunioshi.

Thunderbirds

This show and all other outer space or futuristic shows are completely unrealistic. This world would never happen. Where are the class lines? Where is the old wealth? Where are the classic cars? You can't tell me that, in the future, they aren't going to drive Cadillac Sedans! Those things are beauts and will never go out of style. Plus, there were way too many references in this show to the lesser "Thunderbirds" giving up all for the "Greater Good". Hey, space! Why don't you take a walk over to China and give them back their Communism.

Nihilism Unplugged

This Do-it-Yourself low-frequency pirate show focuses on starting your own protests and riots. Starring two awful hippies, Ron "Sloppy" Slopaski and Trent Rosenhart, the show confuses discussions on civil rights with a sincere need to point out why the Chinese are a bunch of bananas. And call me patriotic, but aren't there some Commu-

nist undertones here? You can "Marx" me down as a big No "Tank" You.

CBS News presents RhinoVision

CBS, a worldwide leader in technological innovation, has done it again. The everyday news is filled with visions and sounds of terror on our streets, threatening the well being of proud White Americans. Instead of showing us images of violence, RhinoVision lets the anchors describe the smells of the news, leaving any images up to your own imagination. And if you are a good American, your imagination shouldn't be that frightening.

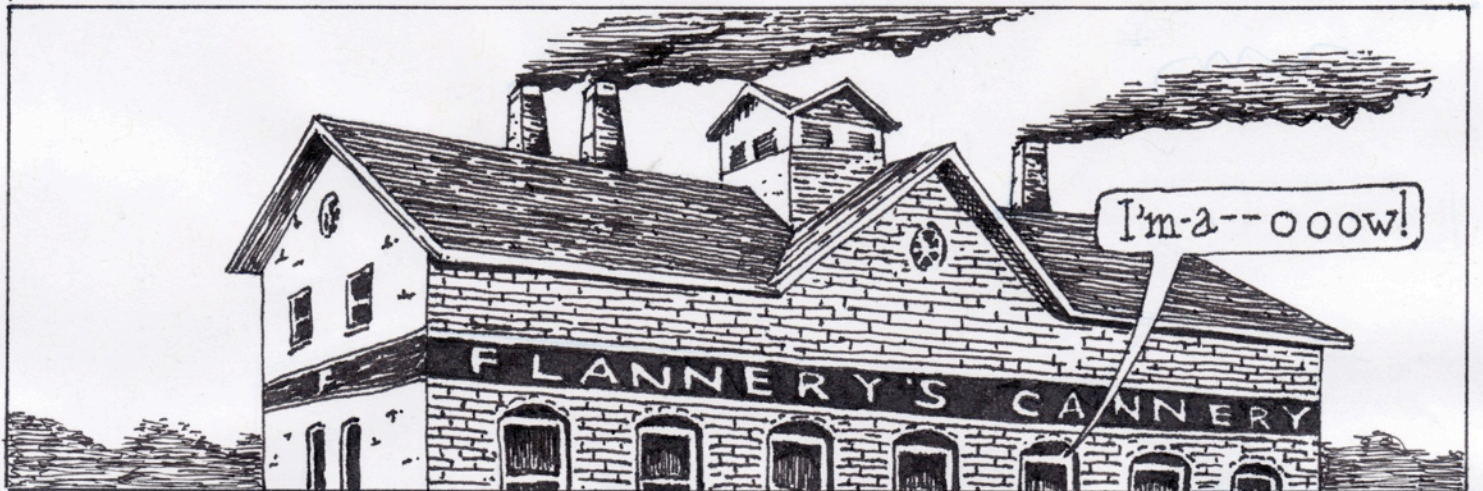
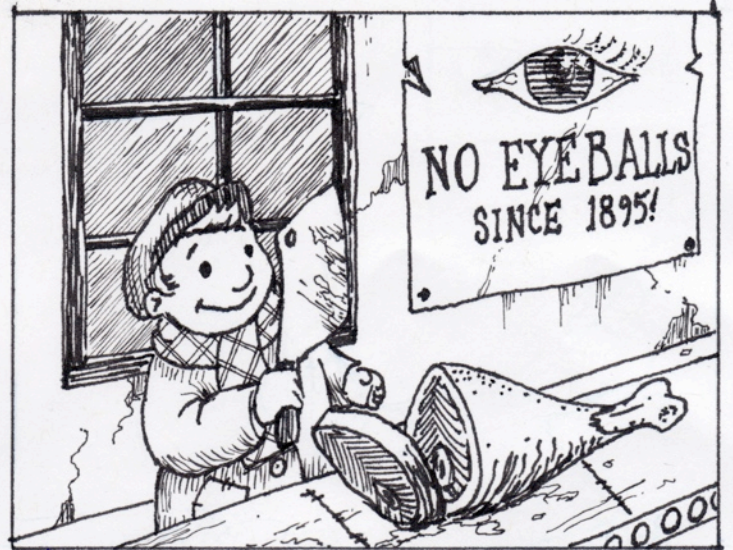
Handsome Man Walter Cronkite says of his decision to anchor the show, "After announcing the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, I would do anything to get out of the disturbing news game." On the first broadcast Cronkite stated "In Vietnam they report the smells of smoke, gunpowder, burning oak, and singed skin." How's that for terror, eh, Communism? Put down your triangle hats and come out with your hands up. Uncle Sam's got a present for you and it stinks.

Remember, readers, if someone tells you that they don't agree with the tenets of America, send their name and address on a self-addressed sealed envelope to:

Minutiæ Magazine
687 9th Ave
New York, NY 10036

And remember to stay indoors and enjoy the red-blooded entertainment that is television!◆

THE SESQUICENTENNIAL



Punk'n Patches

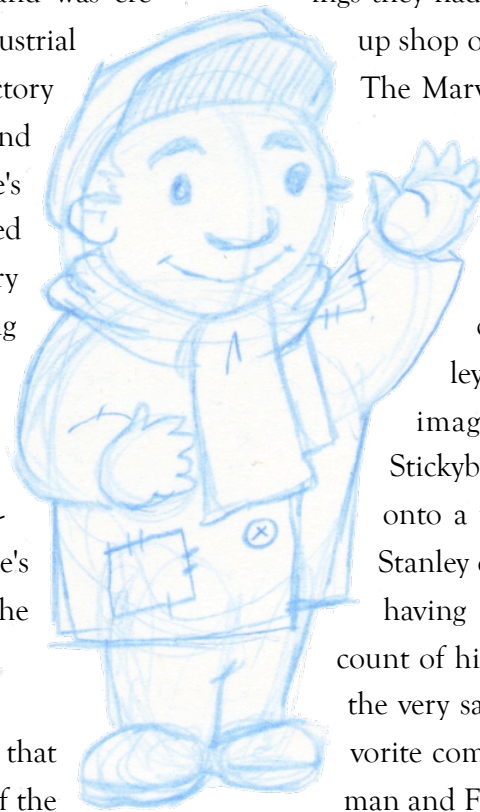
Conceived by Royce G. Tiggles, Punk'n Patches was a full page comic printed in Minutiæ from 1892 to 1938. The serial featured the exploits of plucky child factory worker Punk'n Patches and his mother Mama and was created as an affront to the Industrial Revolution. However, as many factory owners wrote in their support and admiration of the comic, Minutiæ's creator Alvin Hardridge pressured Tiggles to incorporate real factory names in return for advertising money. This was one of the earliest known instances of product placement.

Over time, Tiggles grew increasingly frustrated at Hardridge's demands and involvement in the strip, and in 1901 left for a period of only six months. Tiggles quickly returned after learning that the writing, drawing and inking of the comic was being done by a small army of child workers. The youths, nicknamed the Marvelous Minis, worked seventy hours a week in the attic of the Minutiæ Glue Smelterhaus, where

the never ending noise and pungent fumes intoxicated their growing brains. Upon Tiggles' return the Marvelous Minis found themselves unemployed. The intrepid children used what little savings they had to hitch a train back East and set up shop on Fifth Avenue.

The Marvelous Minis started out small, yet soon grew the three panel comic format to a multi-paged string-bound book containing a universe filled with tales of extraordinary children. The leader, Stanley, became known for his wildly imaginative superheroes including Stickyboy, who had the ability to clutch onto a parent and not let go. Eventually, Stanley changed his name to Stan Lee (not having a surname to begin with on account of his orphanization) and, yes, that is the very same Stan Lee who created your favorite comic book characters such as Spider-man and Friends.

So, when you read a Marvel comic book, think of the benefit of Minutiæ's proud heritage and history of child labor when it was legal and not ever since, we swear. ♦



TELECASTATION

In the Emmy nominated drama *Pass/Fail*, Patrick Silverman struggles to navigate the dark and competitive world of collegiate cheating, paper writing and pill popping for grades. Now, Home Cinema, the channel that broadcasts *Pass/Fail*, is struggling to navigate the increasingly competitive scripted drama cable television landscape. As *Pass/Fail* ends its four season run this fall, Home Cinema has yet to create another hit show with flops such as *Mist River* and *Calling Carde*. Even *Laredo Junction*, starring indie heartthrob Curtis Morales from *Biography of a Broke Homeboy*, didn't make it past it's first season. Meanwhile, other cable networks continue to snatch up pitches at a record pace resulting in a serious lack of possibilities. Now more than ever, creating the new high end prestigious television drama has become more difficult.

"We've reached the end of mining ideas from literature and graphic novels," says Greg Brahtheind, VP of Scripted Content at Home Cinema, "Everything's been used or is in development already." To stay ahead of the game, Brahtheind and Home Cinema have been grabbing at anything they can get their hands on, including turning doctoral history theses into pilots. "We shot a few episodes based on a thesis about the first Seminole War from a doctoral candidate at the University of Washington. The first episode ended up being six hours long and half of it was in the Creek language." A project based on research papers from NASA scientists is currently circling the development offices. "We figure there's gotta be plot and characters in there somewhere. We've got a whole room of writers working on these."

Down the hall is the Development Pen, a stuffy room full of television writers working on the ideas. "The first day we realized that three of us had all independently written scripts about an unsuspecting comic book store owner who becomes a vigilante," says Kirk Lukvirder. Amongst the ideas up on the cork board are: To-Go Menu, Permission Slip, Prescription and Nutritional Facts, crossed out with a fat red X. "Turns out AMC was already working on a Nutritional Facts show," says Lukvirder, "so we scrapped that one." The writers in the Development Pen are all hoping to land jobs as executive producers or show runners if an idea hits. Almost all of the scripts are similar: a middle-aged person has an unsuspecting secret that pushes them into morally ambiguous situations. The most current draft of *Permission Slip* follows a school bus driver who moonlights as someone who "slips" into places he doesn't have "permission" to go into. "We're really trying," says Lukvirder with a sigh.

It isn't just the well of high quality drama that's drying up. Every network is searching high and low for comedy, reality, game show, and event entertainment. Except, oddly enough, for NBC. "I don't see the problem, actually," says NBC entertainment chief Robert Greenblatt, in his trademark cargo shorts and zipper t-shirt, before showing me a poster for NBC's new *Poke or Slurp* reality show, in which contestants are prompted to poke or slurp a viscous brown bubble. ♦



THE RUNWAY

It is not too bold to state baldly that the monocle has long been a symbol of elite standing and statement of exceptional genetic favorings within the gradient choirs of society. And while it has stood the test of time, along with the tufted-leather reading chair, the wide-rimmed champagne glass and the mid-breasted utilitarian flask, it has slid down the scale somewhat of itemized accessories in the heated side of the pedestrian “Hot or Not” column.

However! I am here to announce with clapping glee that the monocle is back at the top of the list, triumphing over romper-suits for ladies. It is now the time to dust off the case and wear the monocle with pride, much like the beloved social-page staples: Controversial boxer Rubin ‘Hurricane’ Carter, sinister and cat-loving Sir Patrick Moore, famed lesbian Karl Marx, the majority of Gilbert & Sullivan’s musical characters and of course, the cheerfully obsessive compulsive Count Von Count.

Having acquired my monocle the only way it should be acquired, via questionable inheritance, I have come to learn that a large swath of “Generation Sext” has no idea the rich history behind the uniglass, nor the proper etiquette for donning it. So in light of spiking deathbed requests, let me impart a brief lesson:

It must be worn on the right side, regardless of natural dominance dexterity, as that is the side of the face reflective of the left-sided brain, the cortical hemisphere known to favor the mathematical, political and gin-drinking-party-winking cognoscente. The chain of the monocle, or “Senator’s rip-cord” as it was known in the twenties, must hang just past the chin at a two finger’s distance from the wearer’s smirk. One must remain poker-



faced and emotionally neutral while sporting the lens, for if the eyebrows raise in disbelief at say, a poorly made stock market investment, the lens will fall comically, most likely into one’s wide-rimmed champagne glass.

It is important to know the back-story of the monocle, for one will find that inquiring minds will want to know all in this era of advancing retinal technologies. The etymology of the word, “Monocle” supports the grandiose mythology of the accessory’s birth. Deriving from the French words “mon” and “oncle” translating directly to “my uncle”, the moniker provides the answer each high-born esthete delivers upon hearing the question, “My, wherever did you get that?” Thus the questionable inheritance of the eyeglassette is constantly certified. In fact I myself received my monocle from a far-away relative in the West Indies, who upon his timely death, had it delivered to me in a velvet-lined box by a well-trained, world-traveling monkey with his own Delta SkyMiles card. Questionable? Indeed.

Now that you are fully informed and can embody the elegance of the optimal optometrical style, squint your eye and take a good look at the world. How does the world look through a monocle? One-sided? Yes. But bright, my dearlings and compatriots. Bright and early, well-polished and pearly.

Cheers. ♦

EDIBLES

GOLDDINGER

As the state of Massachusetts prepares for its September 1st ban on edible gold, animated crowds on both sides of the debate have begun to reach a fevered pitch. Some, rightly concerned with the often barbaric process of gold extraction, believe that there can be no gold-flecked donuts or \$300 hamburger garnish without undue suffering to the thousands of exploited miners at the bottom levels of the \$6 billion industry. Others, however, are adamant that the naturally occurring resource deserves a second chance. And, without thin flakes of tasty gold rimming the glasses of our rare margaritas or dusting our Wagyu steaks, the world may be missing out on a key culinary enhancement.

On at least one front, there are no arguments: Edible gold occurs in nature. Since man has been able to fashion crude tools with his bare hands, he has found and eaten raw gold. Early hieroglyphs and Sanskrit pressings indicate that gold was eaten as early as the year 4000 BC, pressed into thin sheets and sandwiched between cakes of mud and refuse. Of course, our palettes have changed dramatically since then. You certainly won't find mudcakes on the after hours menu at Don Roccio's, the high end Boston eatery on the city's North Shore. What you will find, though, is plenty of gold.

"There's a richness to it," says executive chef Chris Pantello. "It's delicate and supple, but can really maintain its purity when sourced right. There's simply no other edible mineral like it." Of course, sourcing your gold from humane vendors may end up being a trickier process than you think.

Most of the inflated cost of gold comes not from the product itself, which generally serves as a thin coating or texture enhancer alongside other, more vibrant flavors. Instead, the exorbitant cost of a single ounce of edible gold lay primarily in the process of extraction. Due to the brittle nature of the resource, dedicated miners agree to be force-fed until their fingers become soft and pillowy. A metal tube is inserted down the throats of young, virile men in places like Eritrea or the Yukon wilderness, bypassing their gag reflex while filling their gaping stomachs with protein-rich, high-fat slurries that are specially designed for the task of gold extraction. In the end, a properly fed miner can provide up to 1,700 kilos of edible gold a year, with a personal payday in the many, many thousands. Yet, one horrific truth remains: the life span for such work is a paltry three years, before saline imbalances in the corpuscles begin to rectify themselves and the worker loses their deft, pudgy moneymakers.

Proponents of the product argue that sanctioning the diners and chefs that choose to serve edible gold are missing the point. With proper regulations and a free market that allows for healthy competition, they challenge, the days of fat-fingered Eritrean miners will soon be behind us. Yet, for now, the ban continues full steam ahead towards its inevitable enacting at midnight on September 1st. Until then, wealthy (albeit not exactly healthy) food enthusiasts are stocking up on edible gold wherever they can find it. Don Roccio's will be hosting one final soiree to celebrate the flaky indulgence, culminating in a midnight kiss goodbye to one of our culture's most perplexing and divisive foods. ♦

FROZEN GETTING FREEZER

After years of exhaustive consumer testing and product development, coupled with an innate sense of market value, global leading frozen food manufacturers are nearing the end of their decade-long race to the bottom. Nearly all of the world's most recognizable frozen consumer product brands – Swanson, Birds Eye, Hungry-Man and Van de Kamp, to name a few – have been working together in unprecedented cross-market coordination to de-elevate the quality and consistency of many of the nation's most popular quick serve meals.

By all accounts, the shrewd business strategy appears to be working, as hordes of cloudy-eyed office workers pulled a record 26.4 million frozen meals from their grocery store aisles in June. In fact, as the food paste and wet proteins thinly sheathed under microwave-questionable plastics have continued towards a homogenous and completely indistinguishable future, dough-jawed consumers have only increased their consumption needs. In recent polling, an overwhelming majority of consumers who purchased the Van de Kamp 99 Fish Stacks bucket agreed that the food was “okay” and “did the job” of keeping their stomachs engorged between the hours of 11am and 3pm. Several of those polled returned their questionnaires with opaque grease stains, obscuring their written responses.

As the coordinated rollout to the final phase of product devolution begins, disheveled consumers can also expect the brand packaging to change dramatically. Until now, each pre-packaged frozen meal existed as a series of small pockets, individually containing a different component of the ‘fully-

balanced’ meal. The corn never touched the mashed potatoes which never touched the Salisbury steak, and so on. It now appears that the charade is largely over, as the basic starches that have come to form the nutritional underpinning of such seemingly varied meals has unraveled, revealing calorically identical foodstuffs that merely look different. The chicken pressings and dense roots consumers have come to expect from their meatloaf slices also make up the steamed ‘carrots’ and puddings found under the same clear plastic window.



Moving forward, your frozen purchase will be little more than a single gaping rectangle, with each salty meal component sliding around gracefully under the wrapping on a sheen of thin gravy. The epiphany came several years ago, when ConAgra product developments heads, toughing it out with another late night at the lab, decided to pick up a few DiGiornio Pizzas to snack on while they worked. Enamored with the seamless way the pizza-ish makers combined the entrees and desserts onto a single sheet, the ConAgra crew began tinkering with different plate layouts, before doing away with the boundaries altogether. Since then, pizzas with burgers for crusts and pancakes on a stick with syrup-injected sausages inside have continued to push the limits of what is socially acceptable as food, much to the public's delight.

The lone holdout continues to be lunchtime foodstuff mega-producer LeanCuisine, an industry giant largely responsible for the push towards unintelligible meals in the first place. Their savory Hot Pocket line revitalized a flailing food sector, leading consumers into the “bread plus anything” heyday we're currently experiencing. In an effort

to remain relevant against Marie Callendar potpies and Claim Jumper boneless wingloafs, Lean Cuisine corporate has begun rolling out PocketSlops, a slurry of indistinguishable flavors pressed inside a round of tangy dough. Priced at \$0.89 for a package of four (well below the once-vaunted \$1 threshold), this latest market coup is sure to get the attention of the rest of the world's frozen food producers. Should such trends continue into the new fiscal year, consumers can happily expect the bottom of the frozen foods market to completely fall out. So what's next? Not even science can predict. ♦



ON THE MENU

It seems like every week a new hot bar or restaurant opens up in Downtown Los Angeles. As an emerging culinary frontier, I guess I should go down there with my girlfriend and check it out. Bridgett, who'll probably be my fiancé soon if neither of us don't stop this, seems to enjoy seeing what's new in dining. It gives us something to talk about.

Take **Handle & Wisk**, the dinner-for-breakfast concept from superstar Raul Banzalez. Bridgett and I were able to muster up at least an hour of conversation about which bread is better to soak up egg yolk. We both feigned happiness over the exciting set of breakfast cocktails, with colorful plays on the Arnold Palmer, chocolate milk and free refills on mimosas. I couldn't remember the

last time I had pancakes so fluffy, but I used that excuse to fill a fifteen minute void in the conversation.

We certainly will never forget our visit to **Towel & Sink**, the farm to table small portion communal dining experience from the recently Bouchon-departed Wang Hardiway. We attempted to enjoy the braised short ribs with fresh kimchi slaw, but there was this annoying couple we were unfortunately seated next to at the beautiful large oak table. Despite our glances and eye rolls, this couple continued to have polite conversation without any disdain for one another. Not once did they open a newspaper or ask if there is a television that can be turned on nearby to that channel with the woman who looks like the girl I dated in college.

Finally, the recently reopened **Port & Mesa** features a seasonally rotating menu prepared by different chefs each month, such as **Big & Small's** Peter McTinie and **Goode & Bad's** Issac Goode. We were simply whelmed by the presentation of the late summer heirloom tomato salad, and scooped up nearly every last bite of the provencal roasted chicken to prove to her father she's not in a dead-end relationship. Yet, what I'll really remember from Port & Mesa is the chocolate torte that Bridgett and I shared with separate forks. As the check came, she complained of cramps and took a taxi home, while I explored the exquisite bar for the next two hours, getting a warm vibe of the clientele. I continued to walk the streets of Downtown Los Angeles to search out a new gastropub, only to find myself somehow back in bed with Bridgett, clutching to the fading memory of the girl I loved in college who died in a car accident. Tiffany... Tiffany... Your name is heard in the wind. ♦

GUIDANCE AND ADVICE

Susan Alan-Wenswick is a prolific Life Specialist, working in the metro Miami area. She has written several books, including most recently Piecing Together Puzzle Life, based on her blog Puzzle Life.

I've been unemployed for almost a year and a half and afraid I'll never find employment. I'm starting to feel like the world has just rejected me. What can I do?

Take a look outside, sister, because that's where the old rules are. We're living in a brave new world and if you're feeling rejected it's time to inject yourself right back in there. Start a home-made honey business, or resell vintage clothing online, or find a new avenue for your skills when your publisher drops you. I didn't know when I started my *Puzzle Life* blog that it would become the hit it did. Just goes to show that when life has you down, it's then you have the most to come back up with.

I was using the "do the corners first" method of your Puzzle Life philosophy, and I was so focused on me that my boyfriend up and left. How can I apologize, and integrate him better into my life?

Now that you have got your corners done and have a proper Me-Foundation, you're ready to build on that by bringing others into your life. Maybe it's an overbearing mother or a free wheeling sister, a philandering ex-husband or a ram-bunctious teenage daughter. There's space for everything within the Puzzle Frame. For example, I recently ventured into turning my popular blog into a self-publishing hit. While the results may

still be out, I'm happier and more optimistic than ever. Just remember the maxim: "Some people are sky, some people are grass, and only a few can be the sun."

Hi, Susan, it's Martin from Biscayne Books, we're wondering when you're going to be picking up all the damaged copies of *Puzzle Life* from your book signing?

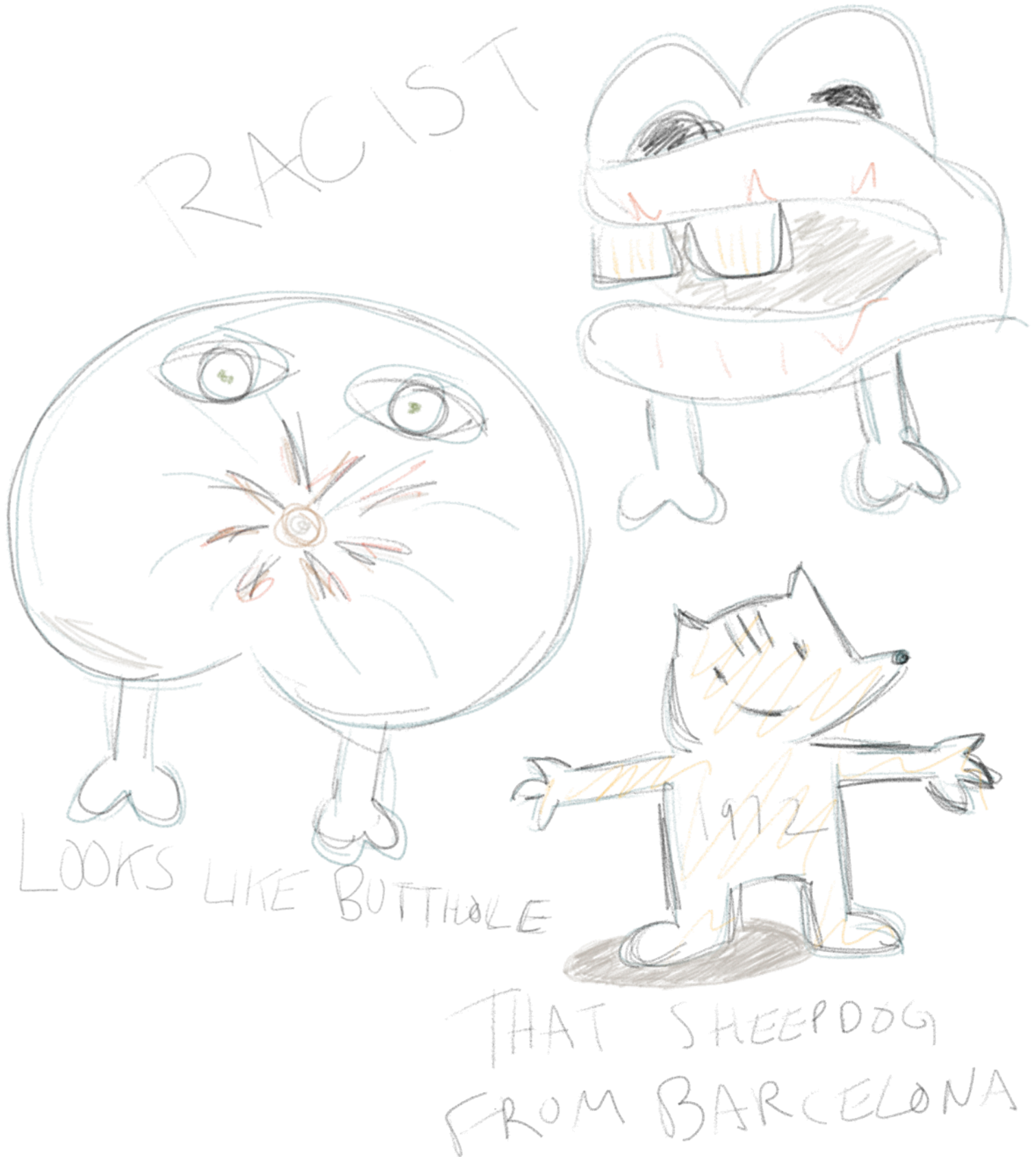
Thanks for the update, Martin. Part of the excitement of being a strong independent business woman is the risk, and sadly I was not able to sell all of the books at my recent signing. There was a very emphatic turnout and I always wanted *Puzzle of Life* to be a slow burning grass-roots book club book.

It's Martin again. I remember how they got damaged. You tripped into the display after refusing to leave the store.

Everyone likes to be fashionably late, so when only my florist Gregor DeChanté Grove and his non-English speaking Polynesian confidant had turned up for the book signing after two hours, I knew that the throngs and hordes were only around the corner ready to flood the store. Sadly, there was some confusion between myself and your security guards. I ended up pinned beneath a pile of my own unsold books, triggering the fire suppression system and damaging the paperbacks. It could really happen to anyone who decided to wisely invest their savings into self-publishing a book based on their Boppbopp-certified blog. But, as we say in *The Puzzle Life*, sometimes pieces just have to be jammed together because they've been in the box so long they've warped. ♦

DESIGNING THE OLYMPICS

Dafid Swithrich, lead designer for the London 2012 Olympic Mascot Design Team, leads us through the mascots that didn't make the cut.





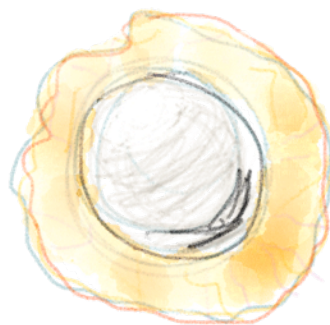
ALIEN
TOO
SEXY!

EXWIFE'S
NAME

KAREN



CAN
OF
COKE



IMPOSSIBLE TO FIT SOMEONE
INTO A SUIT OF BALL
OF PURE ENERGY AND
SPIRIT OF HEALTHY COMPETITION

LEMONADE'S STAND

How do you solve a problem like Anastasia? That's the question that tortured, pleased, and ultimately ruined my grandfather, Richard Lemonade. And standing here, on his beggar's grave in one of the worst parts of the Kremlin, I can't help but wonder – will it ruin me too? If so, I hope the madness takes me before the Rodgers and Hammerstein estate sues me for my unauthorized "Sound of Music" reference in the first line.

The story starts on a cold summer day in 1918. A Bolshevik execution squad allegedly murders the teenage Princess Anastasia by shooting a bullet through her tiny imperial skull. It seems like a merciful death when compared to my grandfather's; he died from a bullet to his *confidence* from the rifle of *public opinion*. The doctors insisted it was "cirrhosis of the liver." But they aren't the ones writing this story, now are they?

As a young reporter on the *Cincinnati Enquirer's* Moscow beat, my grandpa stumbled upon the story of Anna Anderson. She was a dark-eyed skirt with a keen eye for suckers and a habit of calling mental institutions "home sweet home." She claimed to be Princess Anastasia. She said she'd survived the execution squad. Any guy with a lick of sense in him could see that the only thing she'd survived was a nasty fall down the ugly tree on Whore Island. But young Richard Lemonade was never known for his common sense. He once spent a year of his life designing a device that would allow a man to carry a horse. And you know what? It sort of worked.

Grandpa became the most vocal supporter of Anna's story. He was going to make his bones on this story and maybe, just maybe, snag himself a princess bride in the process. However, Anna's erratic behavior led many to question the veracity

of her story. Her only recollections of her Romanov past consisted of dancing bears and painted wings – things she almost remembered.

There would be many tests of my grandfather's faith in Anna. At an embassy ball, she famously confused the salad and dessert forks. She claimed to love dancing the mazurek, although it is a dance distinctly *Polish* in origin. One time she told my grandfather, "I'm actually the tiny mouse inside Rasputin." Who was he to believe? Should we all stop believing in God just because miracles stopped when the camera was invented?

Grandpa Lemonade could handle the jeers from people who thought he was a loon. Heck, he could even handle losing his job at the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. "They fired me for asking all the right questions!" he told me. *Enquirer* records show that he was actually fired because he had failed to report European basketball scores. But the one thing Grandpa couldn't handle was Anna's marriage to an eccentric American professor. He also couldn't handle the sight of a hot air balloon, but that's a different story. A story I wrote for *Parade Magazine*.

Grandpa lived out the rest of his days frantically trying to win Anna's love by proving her story. He took to writing various scenarios of how Anna escaped her Bolshevik captors. Here's an excerpt of one from his diary:



ANNA: Please don't shoot!

BOLSHEVIK #2: Not shoot? What's in it for Boris?

ANNA: I'll dance for you. I'll do a new dance every night for 1,001 nights. You'll see.

BOLSHEVIK #3: I object!

BOLSHEVIK #7: I'll allow it.

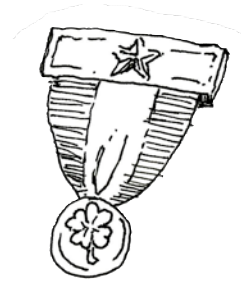
BOB DYLAN: Hello, everybody. [Anna escapes while Bob plays "Mr. Tambourine Man" on the balalaika. The *electric* balalaika. The audience boos. *Philistines*.]

Grandpa died a poor lonely old man. On his deathbed he was attended only by his wife, his three children, and the Governor-General of Canada. The Prime Minister couldn't even be bothered to send a card. At least Grandpa died believing that his work would one day be vindicated.

If you're the type of person who worships at the altar of science and believes in things like DNA evidence, I suggest you stop reading and head back to your god damn Solyndra jobs. You already know what I have to say. Scientists conclusively determined that Anna Anderson was not genetically related to the Romanovs in the spring of 1994. "The Sign" by Ace of Base was topping the charts.

I can't bring my grandpa back to life, but just maybe I can repair our family legacy if I can discover the real Princess Anastasia. Historical records show that if Anastasia were alive today, she would have to be 111 years old. That likely means one thing: I'm running out of time.

I've looked up Princess Anastasia a bunch of times on Wikipedia. I've asked my friends if they've seen her anywhere. I found one extremely old woman at a nursing home but she was fully Cambodian. I'm at my wit's end.



Maybe I'm just a man chasing after the ghost of a young girl. Sort of like *The Lovely Bones*. Have you read *The Lovely Bones*? I haven't, but I've heard it might be relevant. I left my copy in the seat back flap of a Delta flight from Denver to Montreal. If you know how it ends, please send me a personal email at richardlemonade3@dicklemonade.zune

Do I worry about going crazy like Grandpa Lemonade sometimes? Sure. I had a dream the other night that people had started eating glitter as food. But if I learned one thing from Gramps, it was that you can't be afraid to chase an idea just because society labels you as "crazy" or "a dead-beat dad." So I'm going to follow this little electric rabbit of a story all the way to the greyhound track finish line. I've been spending a lot of time at the track these days. Dogs don't judge. Well, they don't judge humans at least.

Anastasia. It seems to me she lived her life like a candle in the wind. Smokin' hot, leaving a mess all around her, and probably fashioned from wax. At the end of the day, does it even matter if Anastasia actually survived? Sometimes I think we're all Anastasia. And then I realize that's impossible. Because Dame Maggie Smith is Anastasia. You heard it here first. But officially, you never heard it. ♦

THE NEW LUXURY

When the St. Regis Paris opens in early 2013, it will boast amenities garnered from the last 100 years of five star luxury hotels. "Aside from being in one of the greatest cities in the world for food," says Martin Ulrich, Vice President of New Operations for Starwood Hotels & Resorts, the parent company of St. Regis, "We have gone all around the world and brought the most premier services to Paris. From Dubai, the exquisite luxury of the room design. From New York, the grand lobby and expansive bar. And from Tokyo, their advanced lavatory experience." The St. Regis Paris aims to be the greatest hotel in the world; frankly it may very well be.

This much became clear on a recent press tour. As soon as I walked into the demonstration room set up inside a warehouse, I was whisked to a world of calm and relaxation. The air in the room is flown in from the Himalayas, and the room temperature is constantly adjusted based on time of day, outside weather, and the clothes one is wearing. The beds are a mixture of spring coiled with clay, the sheets are from a 150 year old textile mill in Scotland, and the mints on the goose feather pillows are prepared by the in house chocolatier. Yet, for all its luxuries, the most fascinating part of the room is the restroom.

Upon opening the door, there is only a drain, two woven handles extending from the ceiling and two rubber tiles to prevent feet movement. An intercom panel allows for the guest to press a button, and a highly trained Japanese Fecal Excavation Crew enters the room. I was delighted by the calming music as the four person squad in dark hazmat suits entered the room. After placing my hands on the handles, my pants and undergarments were removed and placed in a secret com-

partment in the room. Standing naked with my arms and legs outward, the crew proceeded to gently ease the feces from my large intestine out my anus by rubbing my stomach and using a low-charged electrical stimulating wand on my colon. The excrement was collected in a customized St.Regis Tyvek medical-grade envelope to be sent to the house lab technician for analysis. The crew then used a fine spray bottle of arctic water and wetted towels (again from Scotland) to clean my anus, legs and feet of any fecal mater. Finally, with my pants back on, the faceless crew left.

Friends, I felt, for the first time in my life, truly empty. Having a grown person rub down my stomach until strong contiguous tubes of feces dropped from my anus was like nothing I had experienced since infancy. We spend the shocking, primitive and frightening experience of using the restroom all alone, and having a trained crew gave me complete pleasure. Even the phrase "going to the bathroom" sounds as if we are cutting ourselves off from the world, and this luxury service brings the world back in. I know that once the St. Regis Paris opens up in early 2013, I plan to spend a lovely evening at one of their two premier hotel restaurants, and then retire to a suite overlooking the Sene, eagerly awaiting the highly trained operatives to remove the doody from my butt. ♦

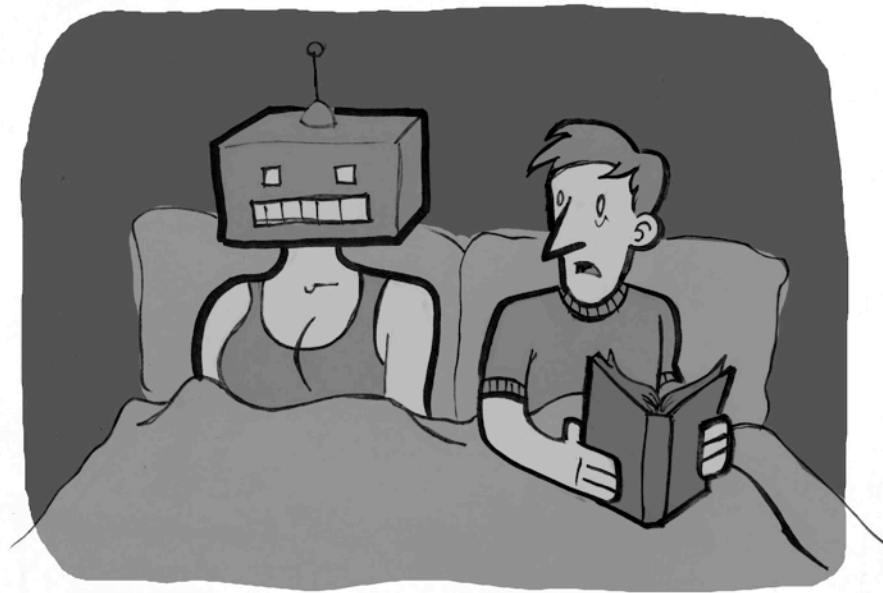
SECOND THOUGHT

Sorry to interrupt your regularly scheduled programming, but I recently spit out my chowder as I watched an "it's not TV" broadcast of another in a long line of "listen here" programming. When I heard the question "why is America the best country in the world?", I was ready to nod and smile along to a great speech. Instead, what was

forced into my ears was a diatribe of never ending idiocy and just plain wrongness.

Fear not, fellow citizens, for America is still the greatest country in the world and we always have been. Just look across this vast nation and you will see proud men and women working tirelessly everyday, living out the American dream of having a dream and dream fulfillment through hard work and ingenuity through the course of innovation, aside from technological or theological, in a sociological non-experiment that has proliferated all, if not every, facet of our American-born duality as keepers of trust and liberators of truth and prosperousness without the need to ever denigrate one another, ourselves or each other from what was and will always be a land of thoughtfulness that each other, without recourse to reconsider a "land without denizens" and never, and I could not stress this more, be amongst one and the flag that bathes so beautiful in the morn-

ing of the Atlantic, the midday of the Rockies, and the sunsets of the Pacific coast as we all have known for the past centuries that the quarries of the Dakotas and the mineries of the Pennsylvania, the fisheries of Maine, to the fields of Kansas and its brethren and sistren, we shall never falter, never surrender, and never allow ourselves to be conquered at which point we strike a new course and dream, an ever growening dream of liberty to the never ending struggle against suffering and towards suffrage, against sorrow and towards strength, against fear and towards hope, as Martin Luther King once said, quoting the great George Washington, the first shepherd of our flock, we shall never be one without each other, to unset each and between a rock and His majesty, this land is a line that cannot be broken, unseen or twisted, unless by the hands of its people. Never truer words were ever breached by the mouths of a leader, and that's your **Second Thought**. ♦



"I just— My wife cannot know. I do love her, in my own way, but not in the way she wants me to love her. I need this. Please."

REËNROLLMENT

The halls are quieter than I remember. Longer, too. At least I left my four-inch business heels at home, buried under a mound of dirty clothing. Or maybe they're tucked beneath the beige IKEA desk, tangled around an errant set of earbuds. Or by the Craigslist couch I spend three nights a week sleeping on because I can't find the energy to turn off the TV and climb into bed.

The lockers are smaller; not that I have much to put away. My lunch today consists of two Go-gurts and three turkey meatballs in a plastic tub. This isn't part of the act, just the final scrapings of what I had in my fridge.

The best part about pretending to be a teenager again is that I never really stopped being one in the first place.

My Chuck Taylors are much quieter on the marble floor. In fact, I'm such a sneaky fake teen I manage to startle the woman behind the counter in the main office. I have to pretend to clear my throat before she notices me, and even then she jumps and reflexively pushes her computer mouse away, as if her attention to the details on the screen have somehow hurt her by not preparing her for this moment.

I stand, silently at first, shifting on the balls of my feet as I wait to be addressed. When the heavy-set woman is finished shooting me her heart attack eyes, she asks rather briskly what can she do for me? I tell her I'm a new transfer student, and I reach in my jacket for the forged transcripts I only just printed from my HP InkJet thirty minutes before. I hope the ink had time to dry.

The office woman, already embarrassed by her reaction and annoyed by my presence, takes little more than a cursory glance over my shoddy forgeries before heading back to her computer. A few

clicks and a crash or two on the spacebar, and I've got my homeroom settled. A few more mouse swipes later and all the hard work, the planning, the strategizing is done. Now it's time to settle in for the hard stuff.

At 27 years old, with a waifish frame and diminutive demeanor, I have just become the newest member of the Brookens Preparatory High School graduating class, right here in St. Petersburg, FL.

I am a journalist. My name, for the next few months at least, is Natasha Endall.



Being a teenager in America is really hard. That must be why all the rich foreign families want to send their kids here to grow up: they appreciate a challenge.

By every measurable statistic, the American education system is failing our children. Test scores in New Hampshire, a state once considered to be a shining beacon of the benefits of state-sponsored education reform, have fallen year over year in nearly every category since 2009. In Texas, access to alternative education facilities have been so severely hamstrung by line-item politics that one out of every seven children will leave high school as a functional illiterate. In old port and steel towns like Jacksonville, FL, Dearborn, MI, and Sandusky, OH, almost 40% of children living in households earning less than \$75,000 a year will drop out of school and never return.

If you think these numbers are staggering, you're not alone. All across America and on the

steps of Congress, marches have taken place, cafeteria sit-ins have occurred, pamphlets have been handed out. But with a penniless national government unwilling to intercede on states rights and local leaders already cutting general services to the bone, what's to be done? Even transparent politicians and educational activists will look you dead in the eye and give you the truth: there simply isn't any money.

Just don't tell that to Mark Bunkley, dean of Brookens Preparatory High School. Here in St. Petersburg, Brookens is a shining star, a well-funded example of the inherent power of capitalism. The leafy suburban campus claims just 780 students across grades 9 – 12, with average class sizes no larger than fifteen kids. In Little Rock, AR, sixty percent of the city's students spend their days in a series of temporary classroom modules, thirty-five kids a period. These modules are the sort of pick-up-and-go shelter solutions that arrive out of nowhere when a disaster strikes. But with two of the three largest high schools stalling for cash on long-overdue renovations, the biggest disaster may well be the state budget.

At Brookens, each desk is outfitted with Microsoft PixelSense technology, a digital touchpad that allows for instant file transfer among devices, as well as video programming and interactive learning applications. That's why the lockers are so small; the only thing students need to haul from class to class are flash drives, which hang on lanyards from around their necks like royal jewels of the educational elite.

And elite, they are. At \$53,000 a year per head, the uniformed boys and girls who race through the tile halls at Brookens are some of the most monetarily gifted students in the world.


Dean Bunkley assures us that it's all being put to very good use.

"The vast majority of tuition is returned to the students", say Bunkley over the phone. "Often, it's in the form of physical property, like their uniforms and flash memory sticks. Some of it comes back to them by way of the faculty, where we continue to actively and aggressively pursue the best educators in America. Much of the rest of the money goes towards resources, like our digital library or the recent addition of a wheelchair-accessible high dive for a few of our more strategically-challenged students."

All of this money, this stuff, serves a singular purpose: to better prepare each one of the 780 enrolled students for an eventual life of luxury and privilege. Brookens remains the single biggest preparatory school for secondary educational institutions like Brown, Penn, Tufts, Wellesley, Vanderbilt, Yale and Princeton. Basically, if your college only goes by a one-word name, odds are that you got there by starting out at Brookens.

So what's it like for these students? In a nation of falling averages and broken school systems, they are given the best and expected to thrive. What if they don't? Or – worse – what if they choose not to? With so much handed to them and so much demanded in return, defining success may go beyond the measurables of any state exam.

As a new kid, the first week is always the worst. You haven't mastered the layout of the buildings, so you're constantly searching for familiar landmarks or numerical indicators. To everyone else, you seem like a gaunt woman-child stumbling around with a mix of fear and confusion on your face. Whatever it is, you clearly don't belong in the pack.



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Being real-life 27 and fake-kid 17 means that you have a lot of reading to catch up on. Or, rather, TV watching. Within two hours, I realize that my paperback copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* is not only not going to get me a conversation, it's exactly the sort of reading material an adult masquerading as a teen would trudge out. In my itchy uniform and canvas sneakers, I feel like one of those aliens that landed on Earth and took over the body of a human. I'm walking around, pretending like everything's cool and I totally fit in, when really I'm a mess of jutting elbows and mixed signals. In the rare instances I find myself engaging with a student, I realize that I'm not talking about the things that high schoolers talk about, I'm actually only talking about the things I think high schoolers are talking about. And the knowledge gap is widening.

No one bothered to make pretend-me an It Gets Better video, but that's still exactly what happened. In a fit of self-pity, I threw out the *Laguna Beach* DVDs I had mistakenly assumed people were still obsessing over, and spent a night in my crappy studio apartment drinking red wine and trying to remember the Pythagorean theorem. The next morning, with my first ever pre-high school hangover, I was paired up with Jeremy* (*not his real name) to compare homework. His was encased on an iPad, a digital version of the sloppy five-subject notebook I was still toting around. As his thick fingers easily scrolled through the PDF file, I couldn't help but notice how meticulous he was. All of his answers were fully worked through, with expandable bullet points if any portion needed further explaining.

We bonded over my notebook, a 'relic' he kept laughingly referring to. When the few scant pages of the homework I had attempted came up, Jer-

emy noted dryly that one of my pages bore a red wine stain in the bottom corner. He laughed, deeply for a boy, and told me that math nearly drove him to drink sometimes, too. Then he asked me where I'd 'scored the handle' of wine, and in lieu of telling him I bought it myself, I chuckled wistfully and changed the subject.

Through Jeremy I met Tina, the spunky blonde cheerleader who seemed to want to know everything about my sex life. Maybe things are different in the near-decade since I barely graduated my rural middle school, but I was shocked at the assumption that teens are just rampantly orgasming all over St. Petersburg. If Tina's constant enquiries were any indication, real-me was getting a lot less play than fake-me could have, with a little more eyeliner and few inches off the length of my school-issued skirt.

By winter break, I felt like a kid again, with the only exception to the cliché being that I actually was supposed to be a kid. Again. My small crew of Tina the now-popular cheerleader and Jeremy the bookworm had blossomed to include Trent the goth kid and Martin, the Austrian foreign exchange student who always seemed so shy that he never took his hands out of his pants.

We weren't exactly the Breakfast Club, but in a school full of privilege, we were probably the closest thing to it. Not that any of these kids had ever heard of the Breakfast Club.

My reincarnation as a Brookens Preparatory senior was beginning to give me more closure on my own teen past than I had anticipated. The modest high school story I grew up living was littered with hookup failures and misguided attempts to seem cool. Once, in tenth grade, I became utterly convinced that a senior boy named Luke Grasznor was going to ask me to the prom,

based purely on the fact that one day in the hall he told me that he liked the way I smelled. I stopped showering for two weeks, with the implicit idea that you can never have too much of a good thing, especially when it comes to stench. In the end, Trent asked out a ninth grade girl whose parents had just emigrated from Bratislava. If you can't out-stink a girl from the Eastern bloc, what chance do you have?

But by early spring at Brookens, the lies were beginning to compound themselves. It's one thing to tell a bunch of high schoolers that your parents work for Enterprise Rent-A-Car and that's why you got moved to St. Petersburg for your senior year of high school. It's quite another to look your best friend Jeremy in the face and act like you don't know who or what the Rugrats are, or that you were too young to remember Kid Rock's early hits.

I often found myself jotting down scraps of stories I had told this person or that person in my five-subject notebook, a penciled in look at the frayed edges of the truth. Stories only became more problematic when I blended them with my own true history as a way to keep myself sane. Natasha Endall was becoming something more than just a one-year figment. She was, in ways, becoming me. And, to my surprise, I was also becoming her.

With Jeremy, it never seemed like work. For a high schooler, he seemed so much older and wiser than the other kids that it put my ageist ideas to rest. He was kind and compassionate well beyond his years, with a genuine concern for my occasional post-work drinks that he (rightfully) thought of as post-high school trouble signs. Tina, for all of her chirpy quirks, quickly made herself a confidant, always pushing at the edges of the enve-

lope that contained my growing relationship with Jeremy.

Trent the goth, constantly clad in black and spouting anti-establishment rhetoric whenever possible, became a close friend if only at his own insistence. Outside of this job, my liberal leanings wouldn't have extended as far as Trent's dangerous talk of bully redemption and sacrificial heroism. Yet there was something strangely satisfying about the way he was able to sum up Brookens so succinctly. On more than one occasion, Trent and I would drive to the Sonic and share some tater tots, while I checked my phone and he categorized all the cliques of kids he's go after first in the event of a school shooting.

Martin, the foreign exchange student, wouldn't stop making sexual advances at me.



The pressure that American students feel often manifests itself in odd ways. For all of our deep discussions and sacrosanct confessions to each other, the group of teens that I had befriended rarely seemed engrossed in the truth. Rather, much like millions of high schoolers across the nation, they undoubtedly locked in to a self-preservation instinct, where underlying truths and bared wounds leave nothing but permanent emotional scars.

Besides Jeremy's mathematical wizardry, none of us were particularly bright students. At times, it felt like we were all going through the motions of a high school educational experience, no doubt

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zombified by the years of institutionalized neglect that had preceded our senior year. Why, with so many tools at their disposal, were four otherwise bright teenagers on the verge of failing out of one of the most gifted programs in the nation? And why was this happening all over the United States?

Answering that question requires a short lesson on policy. Since the mid 1950's, the United States federal government has repeatedly decided to stay out of state politics on the issue of education. While different testing methodologies across state lines have sown confusion and frustration with many high level analysts looking to correlate student aptitude with school systems, most research seems to miss the point. It's not how a student is tested, but why. And with no concrete nationwide governing body to assertively answer these and other tough questions, the students of America may not get an answer to their educational woes any time soon.

For Brookens, the path seems clear. Graduate, coast into a New England scholastic powerhouse for four to seven years and glide out the other side with a slick diploma and the seal of economic approval. Yet nearly every high school alumnus interviewed for this story (most of whom declined to speak on the record) expressed a level of measured disappointment at the process that had been handed to them. Money, it seems, may not directly equal rising test scores after all.

What is true, is this: students raised inside upper-class homes simply have more opportunities to interact and succeed on a group level. From polo to Easter egg hunts, these children are constantly rubbing elbows with rich, experienced members of society, or congregating with like-minded peers outside of the classroom. This so-

cialization, more than anything, is the reason why students succeed.

There is a Mason-Dixon line of poverty, where the bottom drops out on the educational experience, and it's just above \$52,000 a year per household. Any more, and your successful path into the world of business is all but assured. Any less, and your chances of rising above gas station attendant at some point in your career start to plummet. Again, money is the indicator, but it's not the cause. With fewer opportunities to interact and build a successful group foundation (be it due to a series of necessary summer jobs, or the rural expanse making regular group functions difficult), the rich will become more socially fulfilled, educationally richer, and monetarily wealthier as a result.

More than anything, that's why this group of teens I had ashamedly come to identify with seemed to fail. All of us were one-year transfer students, including Martin from Austria, who didn't quite understand the temporary nature of his stay, and kept on insisting I marry him.

Like almost every other teen high school experience, the one-year experiment of Natasha Endall became focused on the prom. It seemed only natural, after all, that the culmination of a year's worth of undercover work would happen on the one night when everyone agreed to become someone else entirely, done up in dresses and tuxedos that otherwise seem so foreign.

Over the seven months that I had become embedded at Brookens Preparatory High School, I had begun to feel the sort of pressures and commitments that I had largely pushed from my memory in the decade since my previous high school experiences. Especially here, in the warm underbelly of a dying system, the latent insistence

that we all must somehow act as tentpoles of success for education in America was overwhelming. As we neared the inevitable awkwardness of the senior prom, each of us grew more fractured. It seems that no one escapes high school truly unscathed, regardless of his or her money shield.

Trent's passing discussions of school shootings had grown more fervent. When he managed to drop an entire notebook full of diagrams and printed pages on homemade nail bombs, I grew concerned. The intense toll of a year at the nation's most well regarded prep school was beginning to take its toll.

Tina had become obsessed not just with my (non-existent) sex life, she had meticulously charted the teen exploits of every other cheerleader on her squad. At one point, I walked in on her in the digital library, graphing the information and whispering furious bits of information into a tape recorder. In the high stakes arena of private education, Tina had begun focusing on the trivialities to spite her education.

Even Jeremy had begun to show the signs of wear and tear after a rigorous year at Brookens. He began to routinely accuse me and other teens of binge drinking, but would promise not to tell if we spilled the beans on where we'd gotten the booze. I tried to explain to him that a small amount of high school drinking was to be expected, but the always mathematical Jeremy seemed convinced that a larger problem existed. Typical avoidance.

Martin, the Austrian exchange student, was so out of place in this teen pressure cooker that he had been put on probation for accidentally wandering into the women's changing rooms during a swim meet. When Dean Bunkley found him, he'd taken almost every piece of underwear in the en-

tire locker room and stuffed them into the front of his shirt, out of fear. Poor Martin.

We were all on the edge, ready to burst away from the forces surrounding us, demanding more. My routine reports to my editor had become sporadic, and even when they arrived the parcels of information seemed nearly indecipherable.

There are a dozen places like Brookens throughout America, but they aren't educational facilities. They're practically internment camps, where friendship and meaningful relationships come at such a high price, the mental debt can be overwhelming.

Maybe I couldn't save the dozen other Brookenses in California or Oregon or New Hampshire. I couldn't even save the other 776 uniformed high schoolers around me. But, maybe, if I told the truth, I could save these four misfits that I had come to love.

Sitting next to the dumpsters out behind the squash building on prom night, my secondhand pink dress tattering at the shoulders, I burst into tears. I told Jeremy and Trent and Tina and Martin everything, from the day I got my assignment through that very first day, with the Converse sneakers and the Go-gurts. I explained to them about my reports to my editor, my obsessive use of my camera during our intimate moments of friendship.

I revealed to them that I wasn't really Natasha Endall.

And that I wasn't really 18.

It turns out, neither were they.

Jeremy is not Jeremy. He is a 24-year-old *Wall Street Journal* reporter, doing an extended piece on teenage drinking. His math skills are a natural by-product of his job staring at graphs and spreadsheets all day, and he was convinced that his hard-

hitting piece on the underlying alcoholism affecting today's affluent teens would break him away from the monotony forever. Instead, all he got was me, an occasional wine abuser with one too many red wine stains on her homework.

Tina is not Tina. She is an up-and-coming junior editor at *Vanity Fair*, and she's actually a very spry 32. Her cheerleader demeanor wasn't entirely an accident – she worked sideline gigs throughout college and even spent a year moving her body for money at Boise Arena Football League games. Now, she is firmly entrenched in the politics of slick magazine writing, and an explosive piece detailing the sexual exploits of upper-crust teens is exactly the sort of thing that shoots you to the top of the Condé Nast ladder.

Martin the Austrian exchange student is actually Marvin Kholicky, a convicted sexual predator who is now currently serving 17 years at a medium security facility outside of Jacksonville for his time

spent at Brookens Preparatory High School. In an oddly perverse way, he was truly the most honest of us all.

Most shocking of all, Mr. Bunkley announced on stage at prom to being Alex Karras, the acclaimed actor behind the lovable George Papadopolis character from hit 80's TV show *Webster*. He is currently on trial for fraud and improper use of state funds.

Being a teenager in America is really hard. What's easy, apparently, is pretending to be a teenager. I did it for several months, living amongst a youth that I felt disconnected with yet deeply longed for. I thought that I could fool them all into believing I belonged, so that they'd treat me as an equal and let me into their world. I wanted to understand why America's children were failing out at such staggering rates. And in my blinding search for acceptance, I became the most deceived. ♦

“This Fell Sergeant, Death”

Death came over, and we shared a cigarette outside.
I caught a glimpse of his medals when
He pulled tight his coat to hide them-
That charcoal overcoat with the resewn buttons.

God, he was tired. So heart-beaten and long-lost.
On the exhale, he squinted one eye,
And casually measuring the calligraphy distance
From one star-cloud to another, said:

“I tell you what, philosopher,
If there are more things in heaven and earth, well, you keep 'em.
I've been living out of luggage for too long,
Taking people from one party to another.

I can't find the light in your hope misplaced,
One day all will dim, abject and disgraced.”

I'm no John Shakespeare,
So I had nothing to say to his honored Reckoning.
We finished our smoke in a closed silence,
And when he left, he stole my lighter.



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