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Volume 66, Spring 2008



The Literary Magazine of
Fairfield College Preparatory School

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We want our publication to be authentic to the writer’s adolescent experience and desire to publish poetry and prose that is: clear, concise, and evokes the senses, taking the audience to the writer’s imagined place through strong images, and a good sense of rhythm. It is believed in Jesuit education that an academic endeavor may be an encounter with the divine: Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam. That is to say that in the authenticity of our written thoughts we may unknowingly stumble on truth. Our intent is to give our students’ words a place to land, serving as an accomplished venue to acknowledge their lived truth. Send submissions of poetry and prose from September 1st until March 1st to jchesbro@mail.fairfield.edu.

Short Stories

The Drifter

It has been three years since I started this journey across the United States. I first started in Delaware on April 3, 1995; I walked out the front door of my house and never looked back. There was no real reason for it I just needed change. I've been walking ever since that day. No certain path, just up and down trying to walk beside major highways ending up in different cities every some odd days.

Over the journey I have gathered some interesting possessions that I keep in a back pack that I found thrown on top of a median. The bag has one strap that is torn off and the remaining one is slung over my shoulder. There are three zippers but I can only get two to work. The color of the bag has been fading from the sun that beats down each day. It started out as a forest green color that looked like the leaves of trees in the spring but now its turning into a brownish color like when summer is starting to turn to fall and those once beautiful leaves start to decay. Although the bag looks a bit beat up it still does its job. I take everything I get and toss it in.

You may be asking where a drifter like me obtains any new possessions. Well I always want to maintain a place in society even if it is under the radar and no one notices it. So each time I enter a new city or town I bargain with people to obtain basic necessities like food, a place to stay, and even sometimes a shower. I strike up deals to do chores to pay for what I am using of theirs. It's the charity of the people that fills my bag. I have been told that I have a personality that could befriend anyone and anything. This is probably what keeps my journey moving along. The people that I stay with tend to take a liking to their dirty guest and usually like to send me off with a parting gift. These gifts range from food to a beat up teddy bear handed to me by a three year old girl.

Each thing in my bag reminds me of the places that I have been to and the people that I have met along the way. Some people take pictures to remember where they have

been, others like to collect interesting rocks. I have my nap sack of memories.

I remember the first house that I stayed at when my time was up, and I had finished fixing a leak in their shed which happened to be my home while I stayed with this family. The owner even handed me a key. Yes, a key but not one to the house or shed, but to a car that he had wrecked a few years back. He said it was the closest thing he had ever been to death and he kept it as a good luck charm. He felt that I might need a bit of luck as I continue. So I took the tarnished key and tossed it into my bag being careful not to break it due to the crack it had in the center.

Its gifts like this that really stay with me throughout my journey. A lot of families send me off with food or a bar of soap. Yeah, these are thoughtful things but they are used up and gone like my memories of them.

So on with my journey if I feel my welcome is starting to wear thin or my job is done then I know it is time for me to set off again. There is no rhyme or reason to why I pick a family, I just walk up the steps to the door or the stairs to an apartment and ask. Time and time again I get the door slammed in my face but, when that door opens and I'm invited in it's always a different experience.

I remember one family I was staying with each night before everyone went to sleep they would gather and play a board game. It seemed real Brady Bunchesk but it was one of the best experiences I had thus far in my three years. Every night was a different game they said. While I was there we played Risk, Monopoly, Life, and Pay Day. So each day I would spend cleaning in their house thinking of the game that we would be playing that night. Finally, on the day that I chose to leave the family gave me a portable Mancala game. I took it, put it into my bag, and was on my way.

The memory of that family will be intertwined with all the other memories sitting at the bottom of my bag. Sitting on top is the teddy bear I got from the curly blonde haired girl. Next to that is the rock given to me by the pimple faced teenager in Pennsylvania. Above that lays the key which is covered up by the book of songs handed to me by the Professor in Connecticut. All of them are the web of my memories that I cling to at night when I am not with a new family and I am left to sleep underneath the most natural roof there is (the sky). I get lost in it once again, finding myself trapped in the happiness of my past.

It's been an interesting ride so far. I'm just walking the parallel yellow lines for now and will continue to do so until my luck runs out. I'll take my nap sack of memories and make like one of those old cliché movies and go off into the sunset.

Coffee shop

The black and white leaves scraped across the unforgiving asphalt without a sound, losing pieces of themselves in this tireless quest to achieve their fate of one day being crushed into nothingness under the foot of an apathetic passerby. The wind, erratic and skeletal, brought with it a chilling feeling of gloom and despair. And as the morose sun finally drifted below the horizon, the last bit of hope for the future was extinguished along with it.

Mr. Smith began his trek home from work in the same, routine manner as he had been doing his entire life: he picked up his briefcase, put on his hat and coat, and drearily walked out of his cubicle without a word to anyone. The people in his office had given up trying to greet him altogether, and just lived their lives as though he did not exist. Mr. Smith left the building without looking up and quickly began walking towards his car. He could not feel the wind slapping against his face and he could not hear the leaves crackling under his polished black shoes as he shuffled through them. He did not see, hear, smell, touch, or taste anything out of the ordinary, because really who has time for change these days? As he had done everyday, he got in his car and began driving to his destination, wherever that may have been. He did not turn on the radio or the heat, he just sat and drove.

But as the miles kept on flying by, it occurred to him that there was something out of the ordinary: he was actually thirsty today. A trivial thing as thirst was not a problem to Mr. Smith but nonetheless he pulled off the road to a quaint little coffee shop to get a quick drink. The door swung soundlessly in as he entered the shop and although there was a crackling fireplace roaring in the hearth he felt no warmth from it. The old woman behind the counter looked as ancient as the store itself, but her mouth unveiled revealed a wide grin. Mr. Smith ordered a large, black coffee to go and told the lady that he was in a hurry even though he had all the time in the world.

"You know, that coffee is made with a secret ingredient" she cooed. "But I won't tell you what it is until the next time you come back here." He reminded her of the cursory manner of his visit, and assured her that he would not be returning. She gave him a wry smile but did not protest. "At least warm yourself by the fire on the way out, it's mighty cold out there." She replied, but he was already up and out the door.

As Mr. Smith flew towards his car, he hastily took a sip of his coffee and abruptly stopped. He really did not realize how cold it was out here. He hugged his coat tightly around himself and took another sip. Suddenly, he heard a sound from beneath his foot. It was the crackling of a bright crimson leaf, and he bent down to pick it up. As he did so, he looked around and realized that there were hundreds, thousands more like it all around him. He stood up and finally felt the wind whipping around him, and saw the dark blue hazy sky twinkling with millions of stars. He smelled. The crisp, warm air, brought back memories of when he would run through the fields with his children happily frolicking behind. How old were his kids now? He wondered. Are they ten, twenty? Are they already married with kids of their own? He resolved to find out when he got home. He realized that there were a lot of things in his life that he needed to work out as soon as he returned home. And as this realization hit him, he also realized that on the way back from work he was not truly thirsty, but instead thirsty for a little reality in his life. He rushed to his car, but now for a different reason.

He sped home as fast as possible and his newfound awareness of the world was still with him. He could hardly contain the joy in his heart at finally being able to see his wife and kids for the first time in what seemed like ages. With every bump in the road he felt more and more exhilarated at this newfound sense of being inside him. In what could have been a heartbeat or an eternity, he found himself pulling into his driveway. He wrenched open the car door and without even bothering to shut it rushed towards his house. "I'm home!" he shouted. . But the sight that met his eyes took his breath away. His house was old and decrepit and no one had lived there for years. The flowers on the front stoop had long since wilted and the paint was peeling down to the floor.

And as he finally looked down, he saw for the first time his long, gray beard trailing down to the floor.

To this day Mr. Smith has been trying determinedly to find that coffee shop once again but he has had no luck in finding any of the answers he needs. Driving day after day and night after night he still cannot understand that all the answers to his questions lie within his heart. Even though many years have past, he now knows what that ingredient in the coffee was, but maybe he is not ready for that answer yet. Perhaps no one is.

Escape

As I sit alone in this forsaken place, a burning pillar of moonlight is my only friend. It's been too long since my plane was shot down on one of my many bombing campaigns over Vietnam. My left wing disintegrated before my eyes as if it was made of dust against the open air. I was in the jungle for a mere hour before being captured. If I had not stumbled upon the camp of Viet soldiers as their faces were half engulfed in their rice bowls, I probably would have been shot on site. Either that or the jungle would have gotten the best of me. During the day I am let out, but only to work around the base camp along with the other P.O.W.s. We are treated like animals, but then again they probably know I wouldn't hesitate to kill every one of them if I had the chance. I don't even talk to any of the other prisoners. Some information on the war would be nice, but I'm sure they're just as lost as I am. It's always good when the excruciating days come to an end. The nights however, belong to me.

Sleep does not come easy in a place like this. The earth underneath me is my carpet, and the small scattered pile of hay makes up my bed. I call it my pen, because it has the benefits only an animal could take a likeing to. I was only half conscience when they first dragged me into this place. I didn't go in willingly, but the butt of a gun will make even the strongest of men drop. When I first arrived I thought it looked similar to the tool shed in my backyard, but once I got inside I was disappointed to find it was even smaller. If I sat in the center of this fortified shack, I had about four feet in all directions. The dirt attaches itself to me as if I was born with it; no matter how much I rub or claw at myself it never disappears. If I had a reflection to see myself in, I would probably think that merely treating me like an animal was enough to turn me into one. I often wonder if I will ever see my wife and son again. The little sleep I get at night is littered with reflections of them. I toss and turn as they lay just beyond my grasp, and as I get close enough to touch them, I wake.

The nights are becoming terribly long, and I fear that if I don't find something to occupy myself with I will begin to go insane. What could possibly be done in a place like this? I began by crawling over to look up at the piece of night sky that was visible through a small window on the ceiling. I did this almost every night and have begun to familiarize myself with the stars. This small window was the only luxury I had. However, it did not take long for this activity to get old, and I fixed my view on the rectangular piece of moonlight resting on the pen floor. It reminded me of the many blank canvases I used to stare at during art class. They represented an opportunity of endless possibilities, but I could never think of anything to paint. My wife enjoyed many varieties of artwork; I began to think back to the many rooms of my home back in the states. Littered with art, I did not care much for it, but my wife insisted that, "a piece as beautiful as this one could not be stuffed in a closet!" She said this about all the works that found their way to the walls of my home. I remembered how I loved my home, the smell of home cooked food, the sound of my son playing, and my piano. I loved that instrument; I have been playing it all my life. I had a baby grand piano in the middle of the living room. It was a comfortable size, fitting perfectly into the center of my living room. I can recall countless nights where I simply could not stop playing. I snapped back to reality, and once again was presented with this rectangular gathering of light in front of me. And at that moment, the idea came to me.

I held out my index finger and pushed hard into the ground, until I felt the earth push back. I began by making a long rectangle, and then I began to create each key individually. I started from the left and worked my way across; the finished product came out perfectly. I laughed to myself as I let my finger fall down on the note farthest to the right, the highest and sharpest sounding note of them all. As I did this the note rang out in my head, it was so real, and it even caused me to look behind me in a startle. Was I going mad? I had trained my ears long ago to recognize each note; however I was surprised I still remembered them after being out of practice for so long. I started off slow; I began playing the first song I ever learned, the famous "chopsticks" getting a feel for the silent sound in the night. Then I began to visualize myself back in

my living room, playing all my favorite classical composers. First Beethoven, then Bach and all the others I could remember. I was playing to the sound of my beautiful wife cooking my favorite meal. My son was stretched across the floor driving his toy car across his unfinished homework assignment. How could I discipline him in such a perfect moment such as this? My hands were two separate beings, mastering each key as they moved from left to right. I played and played through the night. I played as the morning sun pierced the sky. My music rang over the sound of the helicopters, through the gun fire, and up until the marine's foot burst through my holding pens door.

I remember I was still visualizing myself in my living room when I saw him. Despite the stubble on his face, cigar in his mouth, rifle in hand, and his sweat drenched flack jacket, he looked like as pure as an angel sent from heaven. "We've come to get you outta here soldier!" He threw me his canteen, and before it was even fully in my grasp I inhaled all the water in it. My need for hydration was unimaginable. "Mind if I keep this?" I asked the marine. He shook his head, "There's plenty more'a that back at the base, dontchya worry you need it more than I do" I looked down to where I had drawn out the piano the night before. One could barely make out the keys, and fingerprints littered the once perfect rectangular imprint on the earth. Still, it was the only thing I considered special in the camp. I began to fill the now empty canteen with the dirt I drew the piano out of as a small memento. I closed the lid tight with all my strength, and made for the chopper. A month later I am happy to report I am back safe at home with my family, and the dirt I collected from the camp now rests on top of my piano.

The Tree

The traveler strode across the lush grass, next to the dirt road, where horses towing carriages pranced along in gallant leaps, jumping and bounding in the chestnut air. Then the traveler came across a small hill with a tree at top. The tree was full of green leaves and a minty whiff of fresh bark and moist summer air swirled in his nose, however there was an uncanny idleness about the tree and he suddenly became aware of all his sense—he must be dreaming, he thought. There was a man at the top of the hill. "Let me show you something", this man said. The man was a normal man, nothing special about him. Dreams are often ignorant to the miniscule ornaments that define our ephemeral beauty, for in dreams, momentary value is irrelevant; it is character one must note. So, he followed the man away from that odd little tree. Down the hill they walked, without talking. As they walked, it occurred to the traveler that the terrain was rapidly changing, from green grass into a corpse-like mud hill smothered in waste. At the bottom was a town, "Look", the man said.

He looked. He walked further, clouds like fierce hawks blocked sunlight and the people on the outskirts on the town seemed disinclined to greet these two men. Inside the town, the houses were all made of moist clay with faded layers of vanilla paint on the outside, and crimson red roofs that reminded the traveler of the pueblos he had often seen in photographs. In the streets there were throngs of people, yet it was quiet. All that could be heard was the shuffling of feet and occasional bump to the shoulder. People were doing things: buying fruits, trading jewelry, reading hand-written articles about the typical murmurs and idiosyncrasies of this lame town, engaging in aimless dialogue and inarticulate gossip—this town was a paragon of a medieval village that had no purpose except to praise their king. "Come with me" the man said. They dove into the masses and were pushed and shoved, spat on, given malicious looks and an infrequent shout of hatred. Suddenly, tension burst like a dam in the streets and a riot broke out for no particular reason. "Why are they fighting?" the traveler asked. No reply.

They swiftly eluded the asinine frenzy of cursing old men and walked into a watch tower building that towered like a pylon, which, on its bottom floor, only had a passageway to a staircase. The staircase spiraled and swirled like a spire of mystery up and up; every once in a while there was a window, which the traveler would look through and see the riot returning to a somber and despondent assemblage of workers. Up and up the clay stairs they walked without a word. "Why are there no lights in this city?" the man asked. No reply.

They finally reached the top of the staircase in a little room with an old television, a bed, and a faded wooded desk that had been whittled away at by an apparently bored philosopher. The traveler quickly concluded that this room must have been a prison or simply a lonely dwelling for a dry poet. The man, again, said, "Look." What to look for this time, the traveler wondered. There was a large mirror that the traveler had not noticed when he had first come into the room, so he cautiously slithered over to the mirror, apprehensive of his reflection. The glass in the mirror was in tact and bordered by a bronze frame that had rusted like time. Then, when he stared into the mirror he saw nothing; yet, the mirror reflected everything else in the room. The traveler gaped in awe at the glass, confused and dumbfounded at why he was missing from the reflection of the room. "Look" the man said, pointing to the window. "Wait, why am I not in the mirror?" the traveler asked. No reply.

The traveler walked over to the window and looked out at the mundane city. Suddenly, panic broke into the streets. Not a riot this time. Then he looked into the sky where the clouds displaced themselves into the atmosphere and the radiant sun became larger and larger in the sky. Then a glaze of honey amber sunlight poured down from the sky, slowly as a molasses waterfall, except it was tangible sunlight. As drops of the sun trickled from the sky, the people of this city ran and fled for their lives, but they were no match for the malice of the sun, for it kept melting and the liquid dripped onto this town until it was covered like icing on a cake, or gold on a coin. The traveler turned around in dismay, but the man was no longer there.

A Sad Day's Stroll

It was a foggy day, staring out to sea from shore that April afternoon. The waves calmly rose up, held for a moment, and crashed forcefully onto the sand and then, with not the tenacity to continue, retreated under their newer counterparts, to be lost in the sea again for another dozen years.

I find it astonishing how they lose significance when put among more of the same, those little water drops. You analyze any one of those under a microscope, and you find yourself with nothing more than broken down pieces of fish bone and seaweed. But I could swear if you looked equally at the teardrop rolling down my cheek, you'd be amazed to find so much more than various cells from my tear glands. Ah, you would find something no scientist could analyze. That single teardrop harbors the cells of fear, the atoms of an approaching adulthood, and the neutrons of a childhood left behind.

My seaward gaze was broken by an inner desire to change the subject. So, as it happened, I began solemnly strolling down the beach. After walking for some time, I saw a young couple smiling, arm-in-arm, gazing into a stroller, braving the elements of a still chilly early spring. The contents of the vessel couldn't be seen from my angle, but it was as clear as this beach on any other day that a bundled newborn infant was its primary cargo. Both parents struck me familiar, but I couldn't identify them from recent memory. I let it go as a mistaken resemblance, and further down the beach I went.

After a little ways further, a young child, just two or three years of age, ran by me, almost taking me out by the knees. This came as a complete surprise to me, as the beach was nearly empty and I didn't at all see him coming. The fog can't cover that much... can it? I suppose so, I mean there he was, frolicking in the wet sand, running toward a sandbar that had formed several feet off shore. He jumped and splashed and played. He chased sea gulls and clumsily tumbled into oncoming waves. I never saw his face, but something about the gait of his stride when he ran and the pitch of his laughter fingered a note in my mind. Again I racked my brain, but hopelessly dismissed it and continued on my way.

I found myself lost in thought when I saw another child emerge from the fog. He looked similar to the first, but aged to the first steps of maturity. He was turned away from me, digging in the sand. He was probably around seven, but somehow I could see straight to his soul, and knew his heart was older than that. I saw his parents, the same ones I saw before but again aged to a degree; the father's hair was receding and showing signs of gray and the mother had what resembled wrinkles in the corners of her eyes. The child seemed lost in his games, without a care in the world. In just a few short years, I thought, he'll have so much on his mind he won't be able to sort it. For now, though, he has the inhuman gift of a free spirit. The three of them were so familiar. How I knew these people, I couldn't place. But I did. Somehow.

I passed them by and continued on my walk. A long jetty extended into the water far into the distance, and distracted me from my thoughts. I also saw a group of kids, nearing ten years of age, running down the beach towards me. They, too, looked familiar, all slyly grinning and snickering as they passed. Then, still a ways up the beach. I noticed a boy buried in the sand, crying. Only his head stuck out, and he faced the opposite direction from where I was. I hustled to help him, but I was still a long way off, and he was able to dig himself out before I met him. He turned up the beach and ran, with the still familiar gait, crying to his parents down the beach. I wanted to help the child, but he ran around a dune and out of site. I again pondered how I knew this boy.

I continued on my way, now keenly focused on recovering an obviously missing segment of my memory. But I again fell into further confusion, as I saw a girl walking towards me, holding the hand of the again aged child. He was now at least sixteen, and I find it difficult to call him a child, but nonetheless, I must. Before I could see them clearly, he stopped in his tracks and turned in front of the girl, his back to me, whispering something in her ear. Whatever he said was inaudible from this distance, but its comedic value was evident in the hint of a dimple on her cheek. She, too, seemed unusually familiar; her soft facial features and lightly toned skin tickled my soul in manner I had not felt in months, as did her playful giggle and friendly smile. She glanced at me over the shoulder of her boyfriend as I passed. She seemed to recognize me in the same regard as I did her, but neither of us could place

each other in the manila folders of our memory. We both continued on our separate ways.

I continued on for a while, pondering, thinking, racking my brain. But then I saw him again, far in the distance. He was alone this time, standing on the beach, staring out to sea. As I approached, he seemed sad, lost in thoughts. A broken heart? Divorced parents? A friend who moved away? I couldn't say for sure, but it was definitely significant, as not many situations place a tear on the cheek of a boy that age. I passed behind him; he was too lost in thought to notice me.

I walked on for a long while. So long, in fact, that my mind reverted from the entire confusing situation, and returned to thoughts about my future. I was almost old enough to be on my own, no support team, no one at my side when I fall. Just me. I found this scary. Would I make it? I wasn't sure. At this point, honestly, I was doubtful.

But one more time I saw him again. One last time, and that was it. He was much older, and was playing with two little children. I also saw a woman standing off to the side, with soft facial features and light skin tone. The man threw a football to his young son, and the child caught it and ran toward his father. They ran into each other, and the father fell on his back playfully, bringing his child with him. He glanced in my direction, and stopped laughing with his children. He stared deep into my eyes, and I stared back. After what seemed like ages, he smiled an oh-so-small smile, and went back to his children. The fog had cleared. I walked on, satisfied. It was then I knew I would be okay.

If I Met John Daly

As I stood behind the ropes during the Masters, I watched many a golfer pass by with an array of differing personalities. Most golfers were relatively the same, focused intently on their game, yet as John Daly came nonchalantly walking down the fairway, the corner of my mouth tucked up into a smile. His style was different, puzzling and natural, and I couldn't help but be taken back by the way that he carried himself.

I stood on the third hole of Augusta National anxious as to how this fat, cigarette smoking, walking advertisement for Hooters would attack the hole. Nicknamed the flowering peach, the hole is a dog leg left measured at three hundred and fifty yards, with the green strategically tucked beyond a row of trees and over four threatening bunkers. For John Daly however, there was no question as to his club selection. He of course pulls out the driver. Daly was doing the unthinkable, yet for him it seemed all too predicable. He was going to attempt to drive the ball three hundred and fifty yards, over trees and a row of deadly bunkers, and onto a small sloping green. As John shifted his feet and his club face, a murmur softly roared throughout the crowd. He looked all too comfortable as he loosely gave his club a waggle and sharply pulled it back with all his might, cocking his wrists with aggression as he reached the top of his back swing. He pulled the club down and through the ball with tremendous leverage. An audible thud was heard as the ball was sent roaring over the dangerous trees and hazard. With room to spare it cleared the bunkers and landed on the green. As it hit, the crowd erupted in a cheer louder than I had ever heard. John pulled out a cigarette, lit it up, and shrugged his shoulders as he walked down the fairway. John Daly's name at the top of the leader board. "How could he take a risk like that with so much on the line?" I thought to myself.

After the round, I looked at the score board, and saw that Mr. Daly had dropped ten shots since I saw him on the tenth hole and finished fiftieth in the tournament. I shook my head and laughed as I walked into the little sandwich shop that was adjacent to the course. I glanced around the room, and to my astonishment I saw Long John Daly sitting amongst a group of

people laughing and conversing. I felt compelled to talk to him. John seemed all too normal sitting there, and it made me feel comfortable. " Hey John." He turned, ashed his cigarette and shook my hand. " What's up kid?" He said with a smirk.

"Rough day out there huh?" I said casually through a cloud of his thick smoke rings. "Ehh, you know I went for it and didn't come out on top, always next week, I guess. I was going for that number one spot, nothing else really matters." He said with an air of nonchalance. " I saw you on the third, that was pretty impressive, not many guys can hit it like that." I said this with sincere enthusiasm.

"You know what it was, I had a drink at the turn, and the bourbon really increased my courage." He laughed at himself lightly, as he took a drag of his cigarette. When he said this, I couldn't help but think of all the awful things that I read about John Daly. He recently divorced his third wife, he lost over fifty million dollars gambling, and he had weight and substance abusive problems. This wasn't exactly the guy you would expect to be competing on any professional golf tour. As I sat next to him in the sandwich shop I couldn't help but wonder how good John could be if he really put forth some sort of desire to clean up his act.

"Hey John, I heard you used to be as good as Tiger is that true?" I said as sensitively as possible. "Ya," he said, "I used to keep up with that old Tiger back in Junior golf, but not any more. Tiger's one of those fitness freaks, and as you can see that just ain't me. I drink more in one night than Tiger drinks in a month, and I don't practice at all, so you do the math." I laughed a bit, but more out of pity than out of humor. I got up now and said my goodbye's to John, who was casually finishing his third sandwich. "Hope to see you out there soon John, it was nice meeting you."

"Nice to meet you too kid," he said with a half smile, which was barely visible through his cloud of smoke. "Hey kid," he said, "Enjoy the game of golf, and don't ever take it too seriously." As he said this he threw me a golf ball. The ball was a NXT tour number four with a Hooters logo on it. I couldn't help but laugh as I walked away that day from the sandwich shop. What a character.

The Portrait

The portrait that Peter created was of a young woman named Rachel, the girl of his dreams. Peter kept the portrait at his studio among the rest of his personal favorites. It brought a smile to his face whenever he looked at it. When he felt irritable or lonely, one look at Rachel's portrait soothed any turmoil in his soul. After that, he would close his eyes and pretend. He pretended that Rachel, held snugly in his arms, her body pressing against his, belonged solely to him. It was a stupid fantasy, nothing more than a young man's wishful thinking.

The portrait of Rachel was in fact the only portrait Peter ever painted. Peter greatly preferred landscapes to portraits, evidenced by the pictures of bright blue beaches and snow white mountains that hung in his studio. Among those pictures, the portrait of Rachel stuck out like a sore thumb. Many dealers and collectors questioned its place in Peter's gallery. Nevertheless, they complimented the portrait's beauty, and while Peter thanked them for their kind words, he never took their comments in stride. He didn't need to be told something he already knew.

It was almost funny, how one woman could affect Peter so profoundly when he only met her by chance. It happened one December morning on the subway. Peter walked onto the train, and laid eyes upon the most gorgeous woman he had ever seen. She was stunningly beautiful, unlike any woman Peter knew until that moment. Her dark hair reminded him of a starless night sky, and her blue eyes shone with the same clarity as a glassy lake. Her pale skin, coupled with her eyes and hair, gave the woman an almost ethereal quality. Enthralled by her beauty, he could not look away, despite knowing that it was rude to stare at her like this. To Peter, she embodied perfection.

The woman caught his gaze and lifted her eyes to meet his. She smiled. Peter's heart felt like it was going to burst as her visage branded itself into his mind's eye. "Is there something wrong, sir?" she asked.

Peter shook his head violently. "No, no," he said quickly, then grinning sheepishly. "Nothing's wrong. Nothing at all."

She gave him an appraising look. "If you insist." She laughed and outstretched a hand. "I'm Rachel. Nice to meet you, ah...?"

He gladly shook her hand. "The name's Peter."

"Peter," she repeated. "Nice to meet you, Peter."

He fell in love with her then and there. Rachel's voice filled him with passion and yearning, much like a siren's song. He wanted to hold her close against him, to know all her secrets, and above all else, to love her deeply. He wanted to speak to her, and she to him, but every time he opened his mouth to speak, the words eluded him. A thousand different thoughts raced through his mind, but not a single one formed into a single, concrete thought. Peter could only watch helplessly as Rachel got off the train, but not before flashing him a smile and waving goodbye. Peter weakly returned the wave. Then she was gone.

When he arrived home that day, he set to work at creating the first and only portrait of his career, and would not rest until it was completed. When he finished, the portrait's likeliness to her was strikingly similar; Rachel's image had been imprinted into his mind, after all. He could never, ever forget someone like her.

It wasn't until after Peter finished the portrait that he wondered whether or not he would ever cross paths with Rachel again, much less see her.

Peter would, in fact, cross paths with Rachel again.

A month after he first ran into Rachel on the subway, he saw her again at a café just a block away from his studio. He had only dreamt of meeting her again, yet he never entertained the notion of actually meeting her again. At that moment the feelings for Rachel that he bottled inside himself threatened to overflow, so he rose from his seat and attempted to make himself noticeable. It was only after he waved that Peter caught her eye and earned a small wave in return. Feeling a sudden surge in confidence, Peter moved to greet Rachel in person, but she was out the door before Peter could reach her. He ran after her, but to his misfortune he discovered that Rachel had merged into the sea of pedestrians, causing him to lose sight of her completely.

She had slipped through his fingers once more.

Peter reluctantly, glumly thought it best to move on after that. It was foolish of him to chase after a woman he scarcely knew, his logic often chastised. So he tried dating other women. Admittedly, Peter felt that these women paled in comparison to Rachel. At the very least, it was fun for a while, and Peter forgot about Rachel during his dates. Yet the portrait, tucked away in his studio, always reminded him of his undeniable, irrational love for her. He once moved the portrait out of his sight, but to his irritation Peter was drawn to it no matter where he hid the portrait. Worse still, the vision of Rachel remained lucid inside his head, despite the many weeks that had passed since their first meeting. No matter the distance between himself and the portrait, he could still clearly remember Rachel and her beauty.

Eventually, Peter started seeing traces of Rachel in the women he dated. Sometimes he saw a glimpse of her radiant smile. Other times he looked into a woman's eyes and saw Rachel's instead. It drove him mad. The portrait's existence continued to torment him as well. Every time he gazed upon it, a deep-seated loathing of the portrait bubbled beneath his unquestioned love for Rachel. Peter often contemplated destroying the damn thing. However, much like he had failed to summon the courage to talk to Rachel during that second encounter, so too did he fail to gather the courage to destroy the portrait.

Then, one fateful day on the subway, Peter ran into Rachel a third time. Ironically, he saw her on the subway, just as before. At first he thought he was dreaming. He dreamed of moments like this so often that Peter genuinely felt that the line between reality and fantasy blurred for a few breathless moments. His heart boomed like a drum in Peter's ears. It drowned out every sound in the train car, while his eyes filtered out every sight except for the woman of Peter's dreams. This was his moment, he resolved. It was now or never.

He swallowed his dignity (or lack thereof) and spoke the two words he wanted to say for so very long. "Hey, Rachel."

Rachel looked up from her magazine, a confused expression on her

face. She locked eyes with Peter – another unforgettable, breathless moment. Rachel tilted her head to the side, looking visibly confused. "Excuse me?"

"It's me," he blurted. "Peter. Remember?" He grinned nervously. "We met... a long time ago."

She was quiet for a moment. "Oh," Rachel said, forcing a smile. "Hello again, Peter. Nice to run into you again!" But the look on Rachel's face betrayed her kind words. Peter was naïve, but he wasn't stupid. She didn't remember him at all. The confusion in her eyes was enough evidence.

His laughter was hoarse and hollow as he turned away from Rachel, then got off at the next stop without saying goodbye. So much time of his time wasted dreaming of one woman. A woman who neither loved nor despised him; he was nothing but a stranger to her, and she to him. Peter walked aimlessly through the city for hours, lost in thought, wallowing in his own self-pity. Somehow, he found himself at his studio, and Peter instantly knew what he had to do next.

He rushed inside, picked up an unopened can of paint, and with a heart-wrenching wail, doused the portrait with it, effectively destroying it for good. Peter stared at the ruined picture, panting heavily as the black paint dripped onto the floor. For a moment he felt vindicated; the portrait would torment him no more. But then he realized that Rachel's face remained clear inside his mind, like he was gazing into his own reflection. He succeeded in destroying the tangible portrait, but the mental one would always be with him, haunting Peter for the rest of his days.

Peter closed his eyes. Rachel's perfect face stared back at him. He smiled. No longer did he smile with hope for a brighter future with her, but with a bitter understanding of himself and of reality. But at the very least, he could still pretend.

Poetry

Frosty Moon

The late autumn snow begins to fall
Mother Nature has sounded her call

Deep in the woods so far and forgotten
November's rusty leaves all shriveled and rotten.

Winter's arms climb over the eve
As the frosty moon whisks and weaves.

The forest breeze whispers a chilly song
The snow is welcome to tag along

His rough and weather-beaten hands
Fade numb in this icy tundra land

A crunch, a step or two
The big brown beast sings his own tune.

Alone, so alone in the wilderness
Just his frigid hands and his bow, but nonetheless

The hand pulls back and lets it go.
The arrow slices straight through the snow

The forest gasps
As the arrow grasps

The arctic breeze dies
And the snow subsides

Mother's creation lays dead
In a steaming crimson bed

The whistle of the trees, the stars and the moon
Haunt his ears with a mystical tune.

Lost

The boy stands underneath the moonlight
His eyes staring across the open space
He takes in all that is in his sight
The land takes the boy in an embrace

Yet he's left searching with open hands
Eyes left wandering for what he wants
The map left blank doesn't guide his plans
So his mind will be ringing with taunts

Each new day he wakes for lonely trips
Finding himself lost in the world's abyss
He keeps himself quiet with strong lips
Wondering if he truly exists

For when a boy desires of too much
He will find himself lost without touch

Winter’s Slide

The Storm slowly assembled, layers
upon layers fell from the darkness,
that blanketed the jagged rock.

Winter morning came, sun
arose over the white terrain,
rays beat down.

Layers became heavy,
drip upon drip, the
rock now unstable.

A crack lets out
and the face
crumbles.

The Passionate Pitcher

The passionate pitcher proving himself yet again,
Surely leaves his place inside the bullpen.
Spring's sweet air overpowers the stench,
Of his previous residence on the dugout bench.
Baseball season appears so quickly,
Leaving the field looking ever so sickly.

The crowd roars as he ascends to the mound,
But the pitcher hears his heartbeat; not another sound.
Thump, thump, thump is all he hears,
Rhythmically expunging his doubts and fears.
His foot touches rubber, ball in hand.
He confidently looks in, pupils expand.

The passionate pitcher sails upon a placid ocean,
As if words could describe such a flawless motion.
Perhaps it is fate how the ball crossed the plate.
A swing was too late; the fish caught the bait.
Happiness now engulfs the field's vapidity,
Since man and ball can live harmoniously.

The Abyss

Take a plunge into the abyss,
hands disappear in the darkness.
The sun’s rays are hindered by the

waves. Line sways in the tempo of
the ocean. Grime lets my hand glide,
it looks as if all has died down
below. I think there is no hope,

water penetrates to my skin,
regulator thrusted back in.
Bitter taste consumes the dryness,
I look for water in excess.

Rhythmic breathing breaks my composed
thought. The sound of a beat foreclosed,
races the breathing. Some motion
lures me to explore the ocean.

A sharp bang returns my focus,
ascending I feel the sun’s rays.
I have returned from the abyss.

This Is Just to Say

I have eaten
the entire tray of meatloaf
that was left
on the stove

which you
previously mentioned
was to be
for dinner

Forgive me,
it was so
hot, moist,
and full of flavor

This poem mimics William Carlos Williams' "This Is Just to Say."

Hoard

Crimson morning rays kiss ocean blue skies
Roaring car engines deafen nature's glory
Scurrying commuters all searching for the prize
They move about, never changing the story

The work day grows longer, always the same
Constantly in search of yesterday's dream
Their hands grow tired, and who's to blame?
They keep their mouths shut, their insides scream

Briefcases latch, heads lower, as they head home
To lightless houses and sleeping wives
Lying in restless beds their thoughts roam
The next day's workload, slicing their dreams like knives

For this we were not created, oh Lord
Please do not let me join the hoard

The Last Moments

Summer is only minutes away.
Outside others are free.
The sun beams through the pane onto

my throbbing temples.
Chalk dust chokes and my tie
tightens. My head throbs,

sweat drips, and the clock ticks
as freedom yells throughout
the halls which run toward daylight.

My hands cramp, and feet stamp
hastily, as I reread the same question
over and over, but I only hear summer.

New Beginnings

Waves, jagged peaks attack.
The wind cries in fear,
As the coast accepts.

The clouds open up,
To expel mad rain
Upon the sad shore.

Waves bounce in anger,
The wind swirls the sand.
Patient is the coast.

So had it began,
So does it subside.
The coast is dormant.

From natures fury,
Forms a beginning.
The shoreline at rest.

Purgatory

Crackling fire on the horizon,
but it cannot be reached.
Too far and out of reach,
the dark concealing the path.

They want to feel the warmth,
but tree and root block the way.
Only farther the fire falling back
about to be gone for eternity.

They ponder how they came
to the eternal dark of the wood.
Why did He give them it,
a life in dark forever on.

Feeling alone they have given up,
dark totally covering everything,
but one of them beginning to think
maybe they should have acknowledged Him.

Sidewalks

To my left
traffic, smoke, cement,
ugliness rising, a rose!
the tar and mold peeling
stinking and fuming

A woman wildly talking
expletives flying from her mouth
her company beside
Her
a trash can
noise, wild, abusive
noise

a million tongues
tangled on the telephone poles.

Right and above
the open sky
distant rain clouds whispering
rolling-
a dying leaf
never to fall

a woman
a child
speaking to each other
with the softest words of

silence.

I'm divided
until corner, I turn!
and off the sidewalk
I stray

The Dragon

there is a corner of my shelf
you have come to occupy
weathered and weary, dreary life
you sit alone, but ask not why

tethered skin- once shining and ripe
now forgotten, lost in fables
no time of magic, no damsel
brewing stardust, the round tables

under your wings i lay asleep
dreams sift through embers, through fire
a silent paramount of rock
castles upturned, blood red desire

one wintry morn' i gazed at you
fearful eyes wrought with plague and shame
i sat awake but dared not speak
my dream-lost, and with it, your name

The Wildfire

The peak of the redwood wept,
as the furious inferno spread
at the sight of mass obliteration.

One need not be in close relation,
to become conscious of the shattering
or the sweltering stench of

liquefied bark that grasps
the senses with relentless fervor, as
footsteps narrow in

separation while the dweller
cried in desperation,
left only with desolation.

To Make a Catch

The very earth below his feet
trembled as the rival
narrowed in separation.
His only duty, to conceal and secure,

the spiraling fury, now
released and shot out.
The longest second,
in recent memory.

Hands jump out,
no one shouts.
Fingers clasp,
with unyielding force.

The pigskin, now
placed at his side.
The pylon falls,
as he crosses the plane.

The Emerald Peninsula

A warm breeze blows from Spain.
The sound of the wind and the waves
crashing on cliffs, imitates an airplane taking off.

The land is laden with green cobble stone,
with little thatch cottages
surrounded by blue ocean.

It’s quiet except for the people,
singing and carousing at the local pub,
drinking their stouts and ales.

The notes of fiddles and bagpipes
accompany the smell of baked bread,
as the people return to their whitewash cottages.

A Perfect Storm

The wind gusts at last light this eve,
As the gulls soar inland for hope.
My outstretched arm looms for the rope,
The clouds grow black and gray this eve.
Crashing waves shake everything here,
As the wind whips across my face.
The sun's last rays have left with grace.
The water foams on my skin here.
Light breaks through once again to say,
Make out the shore it's close to home.
The stale sea's current starts to foam.
The perfect storm, I'd never say.

From Dark to Light

Darkness fills this frigid land,
clouds obscure the moon,
until only shadow remains.

Icy winds howl and branches sway,
flora lost to winter's death,
form a lifeless earth.

Frost emerges on oak tree bark,
and glazes the grass and bush,
giving land a splendid glint.

Ice and shade hold the earth.
Warmth is spent for now,
until the spark of hope forms on the horizon.

Clouds disperse and winds fade,
frost shines from radiant light, as
warmth returns and sun remains.

This Lovely Cocoon

She looks up at the stars. They look down at us, their thousand eyes soothing the soul of the girl breathing lightly atop my chest. The threads of the hammock gently sway back and forth to the soft breeze that comes and goes like the raging waves in the sea. The hammock is firmly tethered to the tree; I know that. But somehow, in her reality, it's floating. I can see it on her face, she knows it is. And there is no propulsion system on this hammock, to the best of my knowledge.

My head is spinning faster than the shooting star that just crossed the night sky. She is happily weightless. Gravity is there, though, I can feel it. I mean, the corners of my mouth must be pulled down by something, right?

You see, I just can't explain it. Why is it that gravity only works on my soul? Her lips are perfectly upright, her eyes gaze with fascination at the endless wonder above, but I cannot help to turn, just to the slightest degree, to the left. I find myself gazing at her... no, she is blurry and out of focus. My vision sets on the worn dirt and crushed leaves beneath our woolen cocoon.

Night

each day around the same time
our bodies fail and we fall into a place
that no eyes but ours can see.

we arrive here and visit the worlds that
we long to see during the day-
the worlds that are unknown to living eyes.

worlds that we can only visit in this death-like state
which is such a beautiful thing,
and seems so peaceful and calm.

it's amazing that merely hours from now
we will awake from this state,
leave the place we have come to love,

and come alive once again.

We Lax Bros

THE LACROSSE PLAYERS.
11 ON THE GREEN TURF.

We lax bros. We
Are pros. We

Rep mesh. We
Bro sesh. We

Is chill. We
Bank bill. We

Stay fly. We
Never die.

This poem mimics Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "We Real Cool."

Latin

I do not know a word of it. So is it dead? To some, yes; others, no.

Latin—it must have been announced through the air one fine morning. The crowd must have lost its clatter, and fallen into silence. Running heart racing, no sliver of patience to spend in waiting. The crowded hearts of the crowd thumped.

A language that clutched lemon drops from imaginations.
In between the sunrise and sunset is only perception.

A poet slays an idea and then assembles it with words so that it can be reborn to another. Words are the brain's vehicle, an amorphous and translucent mechanism only illuminated by wonder. A poet must have thought: What world will my pen take me to today?

Do Latin words die? Or do they fade and blur, gently stirring an idea in our minds?

Latin is dead. Yes, they have told me so. But, when someone in the very far future picks up a scripture from our time and reads it, will they know what we are trying to say and the ideas which we desperately try to convey?

Maybe our words will age like wine. Or perhaps, they will rot like meat—the flesh of men who once spoke Latin. Those who announced it, wrote it, and thought it.

Or, maybe, just maybe, they will remember the ideas we stood for.

Lend The Stars Your Heart

Lend the stars your heart,
and they will lend you their hand.
They'll carry you from the start,
to a place you'll soon understand.

This night is fading to dark,
but you can still see the way.
Make a fire from this spark,
and guide yourself from yesterday.

You cry at the doves shadow,
as our ball of fire disappears.
No one can tell when the wind will blow,
but only you can let go of your fears.

Help these halves become one,
mend into something not two.
Dance with the angels of unseen sun,
and break out into the blue.

Trust that love will quell,
everything in our lives that is wrong.
And know that time will tell,
everything that is meant to be strong.

Hope is the best of all light,
in a time of dim dismay.
Faith is a beautiful and promising sight,
to see things will be okay.

So lend the stars your heart.
They'll carry you from the start,
and take you by the hand,
to a place you'll soon understand.

The Indoor Meadow

The sliding doors open to form a gateway
To the belly of the beast;
And with the same fate as Jonah,
I become its feast.

The fragrances of fat and sugar
Make me feel dirty in my own skin,
Their musky breath engulfs me
And suddenly I hate this world I'm in.

Like cattle they wander along
Down this artificial fluorescent-lit hall,
Mindlessly parading
Throughout this mystic mall.

They are labeled by the brands
That scar across their chests,
Wearing these names and logos,
These new-age family crests.

And they throw away the money
That they worked so hard to earn
In the shops and stalls that line these halls
Around each and every turn.

But if it makes them happy,
And if that's what it's all about,
Why not let them go in peace
Even if their souls die out?

And suddenly it dawns on me,
As I look down upon this pen
Of superficial shoppers,
That maybe I'm one of them.

I don’t want to believe it,
It’s too horrifically possible to be true-
I had thought that I was different
And had better things to do.

My eyes can’t help but dissect
The blank minds in this human zoo,
The shallow shells that graze-
This is all they seem to do.

Oh! But what if I am wrong,
And am making a grave mistake,
Not knowing who they truly are
And labeling them on this quick take?

And even more, who am I
To cast a judging eye
On the couples and the kids
Who I am passing by?

And I can adopt their values,
Whatever those may be,
Or I can remain an outcast
Alone in this sinful sea.

But why even pick a side,
What would that do for me,
If once my days are gone,
No one remembers me?

After all these reflections
I drop my head and sigh,
For this has been going on for ages,
Our enslaving habits seem to never die.

My questions remain unanswered
But I realize with a prayer I send
That this is how it ever shall be,
A world without an end.

Satire

Coffee

Basic coffee orders have now become a thing of the past. Nobody actually likes coffee; rather, they like the idea of coffee. Coffee is no longer a drink anymore; it is simply a flavor. Only in this country could such a seemingly simple process become so severely complicated. One slip on behalf of the barista could merit a divorce from the annoyed customer, even if the problem was simply that a whole packet of sugar was put in, rather than the ¾ of a packet the customer requested. We have gone all the way from old reliable (a small regular coffee) to an "extra large, six shot espresso vanilla macchiato."

The corporate warriors mercilessly crawl in every morning at the crack of dawn to the same spot, dressed in suits made about as meticulously as their coffee. They are the true traditionalists. Some orders are easy; "large coffee, cream and sugar." Others get more complicated. The health addicts try to save calories by consuming only half of a packet of artificial sweetener and skim milk, both of which claim to taste "just like the real thing." They have to stir their own cup themselves because even with an education, some baristas are completely devoid of the true intricacies of how a drink is properly stirred. Some have even gone as far as to request simply black coffee and doctor it up themselves from their car. They have to avoid the tragedy of too much milk or cream, which when added excessively without request, can cause an absolute catastrophe.

After the sun officially rises and the children are finally bused off to school, the minivans and monstrous SUV's bus themselves into the parking lot. Upon reaching the counter, their order leaves the barista both perplexed and astounded at the painstakingly fussy detail of their order. "Hi...um, okay, I want a large triple shot, extra hot, non-fat, soy, skim, two pump hazelnut, half caf, no whip, no foam, latte with an extra cup and a travel top." For the non- health oriented, it is all about the "double tall, extra whip cinnamon caramel mocha", made popular with its absolutely decadent taste and six dollar price tag.

Even with teenagers, it is practically the same thing. After school all the kids flock in like groups, with their own entourage trying to flex their popularity around. Their arrogant aura approaches the counter before they do, and forget requesting a drink, for them it is all about "I want," (not even a "Hi" or "Could I please have?") "Oh my gosh, I want a small iced coffee with three sugars, three Splendas, extra non-fat milk, extra ice, filled a quarter of the way with water, whipped cream and fill whatever space is left with coffee, but make sure it is half regular half decaf." There is essentially no coffee in what they are ordering. It is nothing more then a hot candy bar in a cup. Kids do not actually want coffee; they want to be seen buying coffee. It is the sophisticated thing to do. They will get noticed because they're young and they're drinking coffee. They use it as an accessory, and eventually throw out most of the five dollar drink anyway.

People used to need coffee to begin to function in the morning. They would groggily awaken from their sleep, scratch their heads and mindlessly shamble out of their bedrooms to the coffee maker in the kitchen where they proceed to spend the next half hour trying to slosh water, a filter and ground coffee together while aimlessly trying to find the "on" switch because no one with sleep encrusted eyes can really tell how to turn the coffee pot on. After brewing a successful pot of coffee, many were able to officially flip their functional switch and begin their day by drinking rather large gulps of steaming black liquid. Coffee became a basic necessity just to be able to function at a viable level throughout the day. It was the original "energy drink" that people used to enjoy throughout the day in an attempt to retain some semblance of consciousness as they worked.

Now coffee has become a convenience, an exclusive goal, something to brag about. "I have to get up early so I can get my coffee." It is amazing to see the dedication and risk people go through just to get to the "best part of waking up." Many individuals now try to operate cars, dress themselves and put on makeup in the car while driving just to get to the special coffee made specifically for them, all while risking the lives of the other people on the road doing the exact same thing rather then just brewing their own in their own homes.

Tom Petty's Super Bowl Scare

PHOENIX – A uniform feeling of apprehension gripped the team of doctors that accompanied Tom Petty to his Super Bowl performance. They could be seen on the sidelines gnawing on their fingernails, and some even visibly praying.

A few months earlier, when Petty's caretakers discovered that he had been invited to play at the Super Bowl, none of their reactions were positive. "He enjoys playing his old guitar for the other residents at the home, and I must admit that he is still quite good," says Joseph Barker, one of Petty's doctors. "That's not what's got us all so worried. It's the singing we're concerned with. Tom's had some respiratory problems in the past, and this will be an extremely stressful activity for him. He obviously hasn't actually performed in quite a while, and we're concerned that he may be overestimating his abilities. We'll be close by, though, and we're certainly prepared for anything that might happen."

Fast-forward to halftime. The crowd is electrified as Petty takes his walk to the center of the heart-shaped stage. Opening with "American Girl", Petty dispelled any notion that he and the Heartbreakers had lost their ability to play with their ages. However, many a face bore a grimace as Petty began to sing. Even his own face looked as pained as the words coming out of his mouth for a minute or so, but he fought through it, shortly replacing his cringe with a smile. With Petty's easing into the rhythm came the relaxation of the band members and doctors alike.

The first of Petty's only two real falters came halfway through "Free Fallin'", when with a look of terror, he realized that the IV tube that he was connected to was being clogged by his bassist Ron Blair's foot. After about ten seconds of very pointed stares, Blair realized what was happening, and promptly moved.

The next fifteen minutes went smoothly, and the doctors stationed on the sidelines looked as though they were in the clear. However, during the closing song, "Runnin' Down a Dream", Petty's vocals seized halfway through. His mouth hung open, and he grabbed at his chest. The team of EMT's on site elbowed through the crowd and up to the stage. Doctors crowded around Petty, who was now on the ground. Subdued chatter filled the University of Phoenix Stadium as all 71,101 people in attendance wondered what had happened.

After 20 minutes, relief engulfed the entire stadium as Petty's hand raised, shaking slightly, from the sea of doctors surrounding him with a "thumbs up." As he was wheeled away, on a stretcher, the shaken Petty was handed his guitar upon request, and allowed to play the closing rift to "Runnin' Down a Dream". This was met by a staggering roar from the crowd, and Petty exited with his pride, for the most part, intact.

The Perfect Year

It's that time of the year again! Everyone is busy sending out their Christmas cards to family and loved ones. My family loves this season! We have always anxiously awaited the cards that arrive daily. We especially enjoy the ones that include a photo of the kids or the family. Lately though, we have been receiving Christmas letters instead of the old traditional Christmas cards. The letters are at least a page in length and describe, in vivid detail, all the happenings of the past year. It's all about perfect homes, perfect jobs and perfect kids who are smarter and more talented than anyone else's, and of course, perfect dream vacations. Do these folks ever have any misfortune? Apparently not! I believe a more realistic letter might read like this:

Happy holidays to all of our family, friends and neighbors!

It's been a disappointing, but nonetheless busy year for us as we relo cated to a smaller place down South. After the loss of Jim's job in New York City, we found it difficult to make ends meet and had to make a change. We were not able to quickly sell our house due to a variety of serious problems. A faulty sewer kept potential homebuyers away due to the pungent odor it emitted. The faulty heating system shut off one winter's day, causing the pipes to freeze and then blow up. This caused extensive damage to the home. After much angst and stench, we finally found a "live one" who took the plunge. Thank goodness!

We are finally situated down here, but the kids are not adjusting very well. It's been a battle. Johnny was anticipating making the soccer, hockey and football team in high school, but that didn't happen. Susie applied to many colleges but was denied admission to most. On a brighter note, our silver artificial tree is up and decorated beautifully. It's only fallen twice so far this year. The colored lights, tinsel and decorations from all our prior vacations, (when we used to go on vacation) really make it feel festive, even for being in this warm climate.

Some good news to report, Jim is finally out of jail! Susie and Johnny are so happy to have him back after that huge shakedown in New York.

Things just don't feel the same here though. I miss everyone from back home. We did adopt a dog from the pound. He is a precious Pit Bull that is part Rotweiller named "Spunky". Unfortunately "Spunky" lived up to his name and had a little too much fun with one of Susie's girlfriends and bit off her hand. We are still dealing with those legal fees.

We are looking forward to getting through the holidays and hope the New Year brings us some good fortune. Best Wishes to all of you and all the best in 2008!

Merry Christmas and may you all have a Happy New Year!
The Jones Family
Barb, Jim, Johnny & Susie

Survivor Boy

For me it is all about survival. I grabbed at the zipper of my tent and pulled it open. This is a bright new day and I live like true men should. I climbed down from my tent perched on top of my bed. You truly aren't a real man until you have spent a night in a tent or made your own wig wam. I happen to have done both. My gray tent sits like a rock on top of my bed and then my wig wam is stuck in my closet. I emptied it out to make room for it. I made it all myself with a large tree as a base and other long branches around it. I then used my mom's monogram towels to cover the outside. This was a big fight in my house but they just don't understand.

I pulled on my camos and strapped on my bandana. There has been a pungent odor that is starting to evolve on them but its all part of the life. I then pushed my hands into my mom's blush and rubbed three lines underneath both of my eyes. My war paints are now applied and I am ready to battle nature. I looked over at my poster of my idol Les Stroud. If it wasn't for him I would have never learned about the true outdoors and how to survive like my elders did before me.

I ran to the stairs and slid down the railing all the way to the kitchen. I then whipped open the doors and plunged into the raw environment of mother nature. It is time to find my food. My mission this week is to live off of the land. My main sustenance has been earthworms. They start to go down like spaghetti if you close your eyes and nose and swallow as fast as you can. Many people don't know this but they are actually a delicacy in some countries. I am not exactly sure which ones, but I'll be ready for my visit there some day.

I round up around a dozen worms and a few mint leaves that my mother had been growing next to the deck. A survivor boy such as me knows that you have to take whatever the land can provide you with. Now it is time to start a fire.

I dig deep into my pockets and pull out my trusty pocket knife. I got it last year when I earned a merit badge for the Boy Scouts. I quit soon thereafter because truly the knife was all that I was in it for. After that it just wasn't cool, and they just weren't rugged enough for my liking. I cut down a few twigs from a maple tree in my backyard. I laid them down just like I saw Les do one time on TV. I made a mini tepee with them. After this I tried lighting them with my box of matches. The stupid wind kept me from creating my raging fire. It is probably a good thing; my father is starting to get mad at all the dead spots in the lawn.

So it was time to get down to business and eat my meal of mint leaves and worms. Of course I have my canteen of Sunny D too. I never leave home without it. Water is a bit overrated. This is a topic I have been trying to bring to Les' attention for the past year. I have sent in 26 letters explaining to him why Sunny D is a better thing to put into his own canteen on his trips rather than that clear liquid with no true flavor. I haven't heard back from him yet, but the new episodes of "Survivor Man" start on the Discovery Channel next week. In the first episode he is tackling the Sahara Desert so I don't see any reason why he wouldn't love my advice. As I take down my meal I have come to realize how hot it is outside today. I must do anything I can to cool down. Who knows what will happen to me in these conditions if I don't. Many people don't know it, but seventy degrees and sunny can become a perilous situation if you're not careful.

I run down to the brook in my backyard. The rain water has gathered here next to a large evergreen tree and is running slowly. It is a perfect place to cool off. I take off my shirt and lay down in the water. I roll a bit to lather my body with the mud hoping it will be an insulator keeping the coolness in and the heat out. I cover myself in it. You see, this is an old trick that someone used in the past. Believe me, it's the best thing to do in times like these.

"Stevey, what are you doing? Get inside this instant and take a shower. Are you out of your mind rolling in the mud when you know your Grandmother is coming over for dinner tonight." My mom's voice rang out from the French doors. It broke my concentration. I reply, "Mom, I refuse to let you know what my mission is this week. I can't come in. I am living off the land." She looked a bit angered at this and she said, "Stevey you have ten, nine, eight...don't you dare let me get to zero mister! Get in here this instant otherwise you are grounded." My eyes started to water and my voice began to tremble as I said, "Fine mom! But you just don't understand me and the life that I have chosen. I am the Survivor Boy!" At this I ran as quick as I could into my house dodging my mom's hand which was aimed at the back of my head and ran up the stairs to my parents room where I laid on their bed and looked out the window and admired the great outdoors. As the water for my bubble bath is starting to accumulate in the tub, I can't help but think that nature has won this time.