

The background of the cover is a painting of cracked earth in shades of red and gold. In the center, two figures are depicted in a close embrace, their forms rendered in a style that blends with the cracked texture of the ground. The figures appear to be of African descent, with their bodies painted in red and white. The overall composition is centered and evokes a sense of connection and shared experience.

The Metropolitan Review

A JOURNAL
OF STUDENT
EXPRESSION

FALL 2012

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EMPIRE STATE COLLEGE

The Metropolitan Review

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OF STUDENT
EXPRESSION**

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*Special thanks to everyone who made this year's issue possible:
our talented students, supportive faculty and professional staff,
Dean Cynthia L. Ward, and my excellent assistant editor, Lisa Nicoll.*

Happy reading!

*Karyn Pilgrim, editor
Lisa Nicoll, assistant editor
Metropolitan Center
SUNY Empire State College*

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Raising Hell
bon *freakin'* appétit
**About Factory Farming and
Seeking Solutions for a Healthier Planet**

by Donna Simons

Donna Simons is a graphic artist, illustrator and writer who came to Empire State College in 2010 to add humanities and liberal studies to her multifaceted visual arts education. After attending residencies and lectures about food, farming and the environment, she felt compelled to focus her thesis on those topics. Combining extensive research, writing and creation of numerous original images, Simons seeks to drive social change through her art. Her portfolio of editorial images and narratives address some of the most troubling issues of our day, including contaminated food and water, drug-resistant supergerms, and global warming.

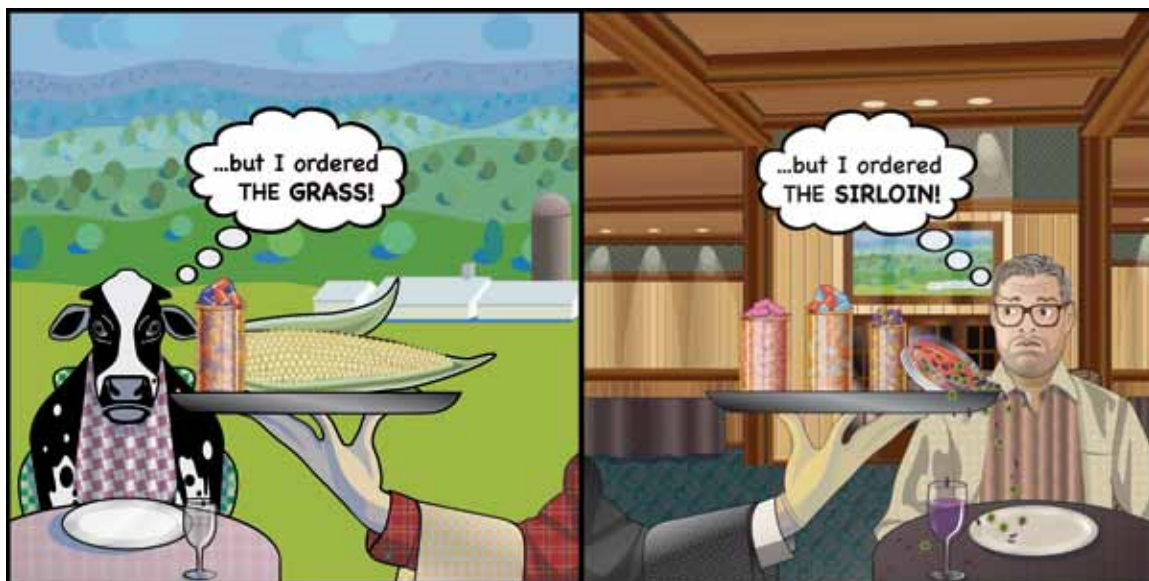
Do you ever stop to think about the origin of your food? Do you believe that the information on food packaging is truthful and complete? If you were about to purchase a piece of meat, poultry or fish from the grocery and saw a list of deadly bacteria, viruses, parasites and toxins on the nutrient label, would you still buy it to feed to your loved ones? Commercially farmed meat seems like a bargain compared to its locally raised grass-fed, organic counterparts, but what is the true cost of the meat we are buying and consuming?

factory farms (aka CAFOs)

Prior to the 1920s, livestock grazed in grass pastures. With the newly discovered vitamins A and D to replace sunshine and exercise, they were moved indoors, which enabled farmers to streamline operations, increase efficiency, productivity and profit. These concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, seemed like a smart idea at first; however, the dense confinement of so many animals in close quarters enabled diseases to spread quickly from one animal to the next.

By the 1940s, antibiotics were developed that effectively reduced the diseases that threatened the herds. It was observed that the cattle treated with the antibiotics grew

farm to table



fattens the animals up quickly, resulting in larger yields of more flavorful meat. This is fantastic for the agricultural and food industries, but detrimental to the cattle that are unable to properly process this low-fiber food source. A corn diet stops the natural rumination process, causes excessive gas that inflates the rumen, and sometimes causes the cow to suffocate. Corn also changes the natural pH of the digestive system, causing it to be too acidic. The excess acid burns holes in the rumen, enabling bacteria to enter the bloodstream and cause liver abscesses. Thus, in addition to low doses of antibiotics already being fed to fatten the livestock, even more medicine is administered to combat illnesses caused by a corn diet.

While high doses of antibiotics kill the detrimental bacteria in the intestines, they also kill the beneficial “flora” essential for digestion, resulting in diarrhea. The already-

weakened animals stand and sleep in their contaminated feces, allowing diseases to fester and spread through the herd. This perpetual use and abuse of antibiotics in farming has become a direct threat to public human health by enabling microorganisms to mutate, become stronger, and develop a resistance to the drugs that could have combated them. These “super-germs” like MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*), *Salmonella* and *E. coli* (*Escherichia coli*) remain present in the meat after the animal is butchered and brought to market. Consumers ingest the contaminated food and can become very sick. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that each year as many as 48 million Americans get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die of foodborne illnesses of which contaminated meat is a major contributor.

got ^{not!} milk?

Dairy cows must give birth in order to begin producing milk. While lactation will continue as long as a cow is milked, the yield will not be sufficient to satisfy the high demand of large-scale dairy farms. Thus, cows must be continually impregnated throughout

their lives in order to produce large quantities of milk. To further increase production, they are injected with rBGH (recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone). This hormone forces cows to produce unnatural quantities of milk, making them prone to *mastitis*, an intensely painful udder infection that causes somatic cells (cells containing bacteria, blood

nutrition labels that tell the truth: milk and dairy



and pus) to be present in milk or anything made from milk, such as yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese and ice cream. According to the *Pasteurized Milk Ordinance*, published by the FDA, cow's milk may contain a somatic cell count of up to 750,000 per milliliter from a single producer and still be sold on the market as "Grade A." The *mastitis* can be so severe that the milk may be discolored, translucent, contain epithelial flakes, streaks of blood and clots. Nonetheless, the tainted milk is mixed in large tankers with the rest of the milk from the dairy. A sample of the blended milk is tested and if the overall SCC is below the maximum threshold it goes onward to be processed. Should a higher SCC be measured the sick animals must be identified, which is challenging due to the large concentration and overcrowding of cows on dairy CAFOs. Once the source of the tainted milk is discovered the animals are given even more antibiotics, thereby amplifying the possibility of "super-germs" developing in these vulnerable populations.

Another complication caused by rBGH is the increase of Insulin Growth Factor-1, a powerful hormone that survives pasteurization and human digestion and may therefore end up in the human bloodstream. Excessive amounts of IGF-1 may result in the transformation of healthy human breast and colon cells into cancer cells. Infants are particularly sensitive to IGF-1 exposure, making them susceptible to health problems as they grow.

dairy air: toxins and the environment

In order to grow enough corn to meet the CAFOs' demands, land is often overfarmed and depleted of nutrients. If new land is needed, it must first be deforested, which means the loss of the unique ecology, the reduction of indigenous animal habitat, and the destruction of natural vegetation otherwise beneficial to cleanse the air of carbon dioxide. The great majority of rainforest destruction is to support livestock production, either by creating pastures for grazing or farmland for growing soy and corn to support CAFOs. Every part of the farming process requires heavy machinery. The machines (used to clear, level, plow, plant, fertilize, water, harvest, store and transport the crops) require large amounts of fuel to operate and their emissions pollute the air.

Corn is particularly vulnerable to infestation and crop-dusters must spray insecticides, herbicides and fungicides to protect them. Watering and rainfall cause the residual chemicals to leach into the ground, destroying life in waterways and polluting drinking water. After harvest, the chemically treated corn is fed to livestock where the toxins accumulate in the fatty tissue of the animals. After butchering, the fat is usually packaged with the flesh or ground up and added to sausage, cold cuts and hamburger meat for extra flavor and texture. In addition to the animals ingesting toxins from their feed, even more poisons are used to control mites, fleas,

rats and cockroaches in and around the filthy quarters where animals reside. In the case of mites and fleas, topical insecticides are often applied directly to the skin of the livestock where they are readily absorbed in to the flesh, which is then packaged and marketed for our consumption.

At the perimeter of the CAFOs are large lagoons that serve as the dumping grounds for billions of tons of diseased, contaminated animal waste. This toxic “soup” leaches into the earth and ends up in drinking water, rivers, streams and local crops, causing a serious health threat to the residents of the rural, often poor, communities that surround the CAFOs. If the nutritional depletion of our soil, pollution from heavy farm machinery, ingestion of toxins and hormones from our food and water were not enough, there also is a lesser-publicized, critical threat to our atmosphere as well. When ruminants ferment and digest their food they belch methane gas; methane is 23 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Livestock farming by far is the most destructive contributor to accelerated ozone depletion and global warming, even more so than all of the world’s transportation combined. Thus, the dense concentration of livestock on factory farms exponentially worsens the global warming catastrophe, which imperils the entire planet.

conclusion

It has been almost a century since the introduction of vitamins A and D into livestock feed: the single historical event

that led us down the path to what is now our commercial system of farming. This agribusiness is a powerful multibillion-dollar industry backed by lobbies, investors, chemical companies, advertisers and our own government. We now have contaminated food, polluted water, accelerated ozone depletion and drug resistant microorganisms to contend with.

If the history of factory farming has taught us nothing else, we have learned that the answer to one problem could create a host of new, unanticipated problems. Thus, each solution must be considered in light of potential consequences in order to derive the greatest benefit and do the least possible harm. Smart, creative, sustainable and socially responsible solutions must continue to be developed to *safely* feed our hungry world, with a population three times what it was when factory farming began. Here is an example of this kind of problem-solving: if existing farmland and resources used to grow corn for livestock were now used to grow hearty nourishing grain and produce for human consumption, the results could include a reduction in foodborne contamination, a slowing of global warming and the end of hunger in the United States. On a grass-roots level, we can make changes in our own lives that have great impact toward a healthier world. Becoming educated about the problems is the first step toward finding solutions.

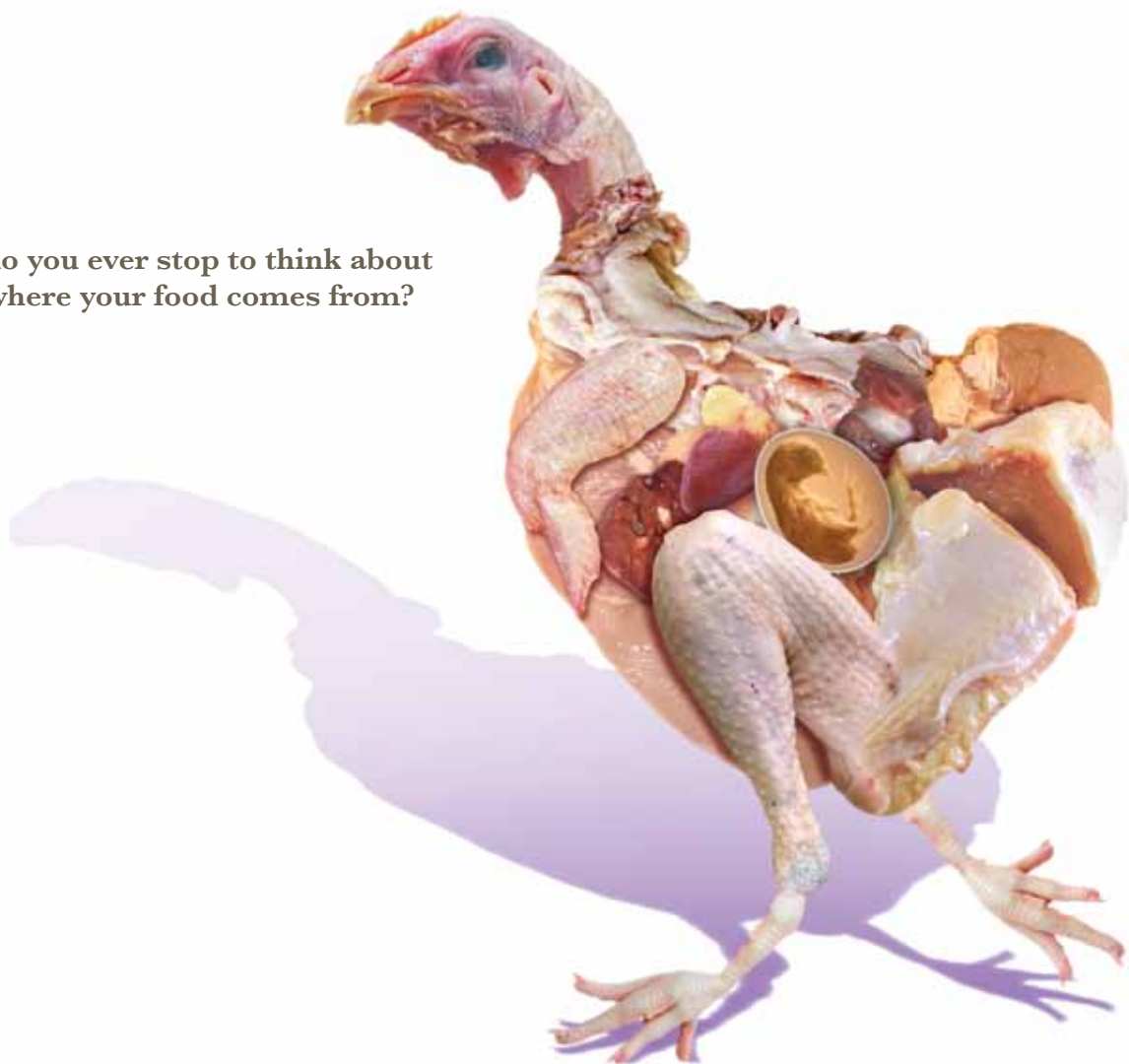
grass-roots solutions

🗣️ police the police

The USDA and FDA ordinances are public record; however, up until now most of us have not seen a reason to delve into them. Look up the USDA requirements for food to be labeled “organic,” “natural” or “free range” and you will find rules that have ambiguous interpretations and questionable accountability. According to the USDA “*Food*

Labeling Fact Sheet,” the sole requirement for poultry to be labeled “free range” or “free roaming” is: “*Producers must demonstrate to the Agency that the poultry has been allowed access to the outside.*” No other criteria are required; thus, a tarp-covered crowded gravel pen, with no vegetation, for as little as five minutes a day, would qualify that poultry as “free range.” Consumers willingly pay top dollar for what they believe to be higher-quality, more wholesome food when it is possibly no different from cheap CAFO poultry. It’s best

do you ever stop to think about
where your food comes from?



to research sources and purchase products that truly embrace sustainable and socially responsible farming practices.

“don’t buy it

Advertisements for meat and poultry can be deceptive. A package of beef might state, “fed a purely vegetarian diet,” but a vegetarian diet could consist of corn and soy, which cattle should not consume. Don’t buy it! Cartoon illustrations of happy cows grazing in open fields enable us to believe we are buying a clean, wholesome product even though the label warns us to cook the packaged meat fully to avoid contamination. The best way to avoid contamination from CAFO meat is to not eat it at all.

In many instances, the same agribusinesses that created the problems offer “solutions” for twice the price. It is daunting to see the plethora of adjectives and claims on egg cartons and challenging at best to find grocers who are truly knowledgeable about the differences from one product to the next. So before you spend twice the price, do your homework and make sure the food you are getting is as wholesome as you are led to believe.

“put your money where your mouth is

If you eat meat, buy it from reputable providers. Locally sourced grass-fed beef, hormone-free milk and organic eggs are far better choices than the factory-farmed

counterparts. They may cost a little more, so just buy a little less. Support restaurants and food suppliers that purchase, use and distribute clean, authentically wholesome and nutritious foods. Buying locally produced food reduces the amount of heavy trucks on our highways, resulting in safer roads, less demand for fuel and less pollution.

Supporting local farms and agriculture also means that your money is circulating within your own community and region. If farms are not close by, purchase from certified providers at farmer’s markets or consider joining a Community Supported Agriculture program where wholesome food is brought to you from nearby farms, not trucked across the country. While it is almost impossible to monitor the SCC in our commercially produced milk, you can buy local milk or choose non-dairy alternatives such as almond, rice, soy or coconut milk. Almond milk in particular most closely resembles cow’s milk and yields great results in cooking by maintaining consistency and not curdling when heated.

“reduce your use

Instead of five slices of lunch-meat on a sandwich you can use four or three. Fill up your sandwich with crunchy colorful lettuce greens, roasted peppers, hummus and sprouts, which are not only healthful but also much less expensive. These delicious alternatives reduce your meat consumption for that meal by 20 to 40 percent.

The China Study by Dr. T. Colin Campbell, professor emeritus of Nutritional Research at Cornell University. Seeking healthful alternatives to animal protein is easy and products are readily available including tofu, hummus, tahini, nut butters, legumes, seeds and quinoa. When dining out, most chefs will go out of their way to satisfy the palette of those requesting special orders. Very often the non-meat options are fresher, more nutritious, satisfying and even less expensive.

“be a skeptic

When digesting the plethora of articles, books and advertisements on the issues of factory farming, look behind the curtain to see who may benefit by influencing your decisions. Any source that would argue in support of unethical farming practices or consumption of unhealthy, contaminated food should not be trusted.

“don’t turn a blind eye

Contaminated food, water, and polluted air, drug-resistant strains of bacteria and avoidable human illnesses are travesties. Don’t put up with it anymore! Support organizations, corporations, legislation, and advocacy groups that protect human health, animal welfare, and sound environmental policies. Stay current and well informed. And, by all means, share what you have learned with those who you care about.

“hoof” note

The plethora of issues associated with factory farming is not limited to the adult cattle referenced in this essay, but also include calves, pigs, turkeys, chickens, sheep and even fish. *bon freakin’ appetit* is primarily focused on the food we are buying and consuming, thus absent from this discussion are the multifaceted ethical issues associated with the mistreatment, abuse, torture and stress experienced by animals on CAFOs. Nevertheless, the sentient beings that have provided our sustenance from the time of our births deserve our reverence and deep respect.

To your health ... *bon appetit!*

Donna Simons

That Time I Went to That Protest

Breukellen Riesgo

I sit at a desk in an office from 9 to 5, and think about how I'll never truly be a revolutionary, and also how romantic it would be if I were. Images of giving up my secure union job to camp in Zuccotti Park and protest the lack of jobs flit across my eyelids, but the cognitive dissonance gives me a headache. Then I just imagine how great it would be to have a bed under my desk.

It's a chilly day in November 2011, and I'm going to be a revolutionary for a few hours at an Occupy Wall Street day of action. Since early this morning, protesters have been congregating to speak out against the vast wealth disparity, corporate bailouts, the inflated salaries of CEOs,

and the general unfairness of the American economic-political system. They've been getting arrested all day, while I've been cozy, safe and bored in my office, if not in bed under the desk. I'm nowhere close to getting pepper sprayed.

A guy from OKCupid wants to meet at Foley Square and march with me. He seems nice and cute, athletic and gingery, and I'll be there anyway. This date could not be more convenient. We meet on Centre Street. He hugs me, and his voice sounds familiar. His voice ... it sounds like my ex's, the one I despise, the one I never want to see again. His smile is an incomplete squint, questioning. I look into his deep-set blue eyes and see a memory better left asleep. This is



Tear Down Wall Street Greed



Flags

a much larger problem than office drone guilt, but not as large a problem as the \$63.6 billion that Goldman Sachs received in federal taxpayer bailouts, so I march on, ex-incarnate by my side.

We're funneled down Centre Street in a tightly woven group of several hundred, sporadic chants catching on here and there. Professionally printed union signs merge with the colorful, handmade banners of the masses. Rainbow flags fly next to the stars and stripes. The NYPD is a thin veil of blue on all sides of us, posturing as storm troopers in their riot gear. They look bored and restless and slightly smug. I try to imagine how they feel when we shout at the top of our lungs, "You ... are ... the 99 percent!" Underneath their stolid exteriors, does some part of them understand that they and we are the same? Law enforcement officers are intended

to be our protectors, and we their providers, but the recent rash of police violence against peaceful and unarmed Occupy protesters across the country makes it seem otherwise ... OKCupid guy keeps trying to make small talk, naturally, because this is a "date." But I'm a bad date. I'm unresponsive and feel awful about it. His resemblance to the reviled ex repulses me. I need to act cowardly, and fast, so I amble away to lose myself in the sea of people. He texts that he's gone home.

By the time we reach the Brooklyn Bridge, the crowd has thinned considerably. There aren't any plans to block traffic or cause a scene. We wave at cars with childlike glee from the safety of the pedestrian walkway. Well, maybe it isn't so safe for the cars, because their occupants wave back, honk their horns, hold signs out



Decolonize Wall Street



He's Cold

their windows in support. These aren't people who participate in movements, but I imagine that they wish they could. They understand that the U.S. is a corporatocracy, rigged in favor of those who already possess wealth or can procure it through fundraising and corporate donations, but they also feel like there is nothing they can do to change a system that is seemingly so much stronger than they are. Like them, I don't know if my presence at a protest makes a difference in the scheme of things, but somehow large groups gathered in one place with a shared purpose do make an impact. To say they don't is to deny

America's bloody and intolerant past. To say that nothing ever changes is to imply that life always was as it is today, and that's a lie.

I run into several friends from high school as they bolt back to the Manhattan side to catch the train, ready to crash for the night. They're committed – they've been out since 7 a.m. I join a small contingent and walk across to Brooklyn, stopping to admire the Empire State Building lit in purple, taking photos and smiling at the cops lined up along the side of the bridge. Some of them smile back.

A 20-something in a hoodie and jeans stands at the foot of the bridge to announce that a “GA” will be taking place in the park in 15 minutes. I have no idea what a GA is, but keep my ears open and learn that it’s a general assembly. I’m being invited to directly participate in the decision making process of a small, like-minded group, but my roommate has a comedy gig that I promised I’d go to, and there’s this guy who is owed an explanation and an apology ... and it’s getting kind of cold.

My own excuses and subsequent abandonment of Occupy for the evening remind me that social movements need dedicated people, even willing to die for the cause. The day has been exciting, but in a peaceful way. I’ve gotten word of arrests, but no deaths. Almost all of us have shelter, food and clean water. We are not yet willing to die, and so perhaps none of us are truly revolutionaries. If not a revolution, Occupy is at least a strong push in the direction of equality and a just economic system, and that push may be all we need.



Indigenous Coalition

On Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*

Nancy Vega

One undisputed joy of New York City living is shopping at a local New York City Greenmarket. As a New Yorker, my weekly trip to “the farmers market” is a pleasure I would never want to live without, for it nourishes my body with nutrients and my soul with happiness. Upon my arrival in any season, my eyes soak up the brilliant colors of the fruits and vegetables in wooden crates. I lift and examine jewel after edible jewel, picking out what appeals to me and placing each object carefully into the cloth bag I have brought with me. In the summer I buy hefty tomatoes grown from heirloom seeds, then take them home and eat them sprinkled with kosher salt. In the fall I shake brown soil from bunches of golden beets that I will wash, smear with olive oil, and roast. As they fill my kitchen with their delicious aroma, I fry the green tops with garlic.

The delicious bounty I describe above is known as “organic produce,” described in Webster’s dictionary as “food produced with the use of feed or fertilizer of plant or animal origin without employment of chemically formulated fertilizers, growth stimulants, antibiotics, or pesticides.” If it is possible to grow produce organically, then why is organic produce the exception and not the norm? The search for an answer to this question began half a century ago with the publication of Rachel Carson’s groundbreaking book, *Silent Spring*.

By reading *Silent Spring*, I learned the extent to which the pesticide dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) was used in the United States after World War II. There was, indeed, a time when birds stopped singing. At the time of the book’s publication in 1962, DDT was in widespread use by both

professionals and regular citizens in a vastly unregulated and often injudicious manner. Desired results were often not achieved – pests often returned in droves despite heavy spraying, and helpful insects were killed, leading to new, unanticipated problems. The use and misuse of DDT resulted in damage to birds, fish, other animals, plants, humans, and the natural environment, and contamination of groundwater. *Silent Spring* shed light on the dangers of DDT, and also covered other pesticides and touched upon the side effects of radiation.

In *Silent Spring*, Carson offers alternatives to pesticides that would be less environmentally damaging and more effective. Some of Carson’s alternative solutions have been utilized – many successfully – during the five decades since *Silent Spring*’s publication. Today’s urgent interdisciplinary search for ways to lessen environmental harms lends contextual background to any discussion of *Silent Spring*.

In the first chapter of *Silent Spring*, Carson presents a scene familiar and dear to the reader: a rolling countryside that moves through the four seasons and their impact on soil, air, and water. Replete with thriving plants, wildflowers and animal life, it is a scene in which humans, in synergy with this sustainable ecosystem, gently remove what they need and nothing more. As the reader absorbs and identifies with the sights, sounds, and smells of this peaceful milieu, we are asked to picture its destruction. Bird populations disappear (hence the book’s title), nontargeted plants are killed, as is wildlife, and humans are sickened and even die. We read that events nearly as drastic as this description are already taking place.

Next, importantly, the reader is invited to ponder the timeline of the evolution of the planet. Carson (1962) reminds us that it took “hundreds of millions of years to produce the life that now inhabits the Earth – eons of time in which that developing and evolving and diversifying life reached a state of adjustment and balance with its surroundings” (p. 6). Presented with this fact, it is easy for the reader to understand Carson’s point that the demands placed on the Earth by today’s industrial society to adapt to the plethora of new chemicals being presented to it daily is a physical impossibility. Moreover, in 1962, chemicals were being developed at the rate of 500 per annum, and it is chilling to ponder that “according to The National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides, we produce pesticides today at a rate 13 thousand times faster” (Gore, 1992, p. 141). The list of chemicals is so long, and growing, that according to Atchia and Tropp (1995), the United Nations Environment Programme formed the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals to help the developing world make choices to reduce its toxic load (p. 186).

Prior to reading *Silent Spring*, I thought that the book merely warned of scenarios that could happen. By reading the book, I learned that the mid-20th century DDT debacle actually did cause the deaths of massive amounts of birds and fish, as well as illness and even deaths of human beings in the United States and other countries. The DDT debacle was able to occur due to ignorance, politics and greed. Motivated by profit, chemical companies produced and marketed insecticides. Post-World War II surplus airplanes were given new use as crop-dusters. The outcry of ecologists was dismissed. The public was marketed to and duped as to the safety of this new miracle product. Regulatory action was not taken until the side effects of pesticide use became so glaring that they could no longer be ignored.

The first, and in many ways the most important, strategy Carson (1962) advocates is the need for a paradigm shift. She calls the phrase “control of nature” arrogant and urges us to become aware that we share the Earth with other creatures that are living populations and “cautiously seek to guide them into channels favorable to ourselves” (pp. 296-297). She urges us to adapt “methods aimed not at destroying a particular species but at managing vegetation as a living community.” We are asked to observe and allow nature to solve problems in a successful way (p. 81). Carson (1962) quotes the entomologist G.C. Ulyett, who urges us to “abandon our attitude of human superiority.”

Carson’s call for a shift in how humans view our relationship with the Earth has been heeded by some. Eight years after the publication of *Silent Spring*, the Natural Resources Defense Council was formed to “safeguard the Earth: its people, its plants and animals and the natural systems on which all life depends” (NRDC 2012). The council now has 1.3 million members, a testament to the widespread support of its goals. In January 2012, NRDC “filed a federal lawsuit to block nanosilver, a potent antimicrobial pesticide, from market access” (NRDC 2012), an example of its continuous litigation and dissemination of information to the public to defend the Earth from, among other toxins, the injudicious use of pesticides that Carson warned of. Thirty years after the publication of *Silent Spring*, in his book *Earth in the Balance*, Gore (1992) states the same need for a loss of arrogance and the need to see ourselves not as separate from the Earth, but as part of it (p. 6). The United Nations Environment Programme seeks to enable “nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations” (UNEP 2012). Multitudinous other examples exist of individuals and governments awakening

to Carson's plea that we view ourselves as part of the Earth and not separate from it: the entire green movement has sprung from this idea.

Carson (1962) states that imported plants are the "primary agent in the modern spread of species" (p. 11) because they likely import pests as well, and these pests consequently lack their natural enemies. She relates that the first plant importation occurred as the result of the movement of land masses 15 million years ago, but that humans have accelerated the process. She states that quarantine is an expensive way to buy time to stop the importation of pests on plants and of invasive plants themselves, which are problematic. While Carson does not advocate quarantine as effective, strict laws now govern the importation of plants. The United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service issues "[s]pecific permits ... necessary to import specific plants, plant products, and organisms into the U.S. and across state borders" (USDA 2012). The current strict guidelines for plant importation are an example of a pest control strategy without using pesticide, and although in *Silent Spring*, Carson appears not to put much confidence in quarantine, laws governing the importation of plants have likely played a role in reducing imported pests. However, Carson foresaw the impossibility of achieving 100 percent pest control under quarantine laws; because insects are so tiny, they can hitchhike on an airline traveler undetected.

Another solution to reducing the problem of pests is to end or amend the practice of acres of farmland being devoted to a single crop which, Carson (1962) states, "undoes the built-in checks and balances by which nature holds the species within bounds" (p. 10). This has come to fruition through current organic farming practices in which increasing crop diversity, according to Gomiero, Pimentel and

Paoletti (2011), plays an important role in pest management and in controlling crop disease, as well as in enhancing pollination services. Organic farming guru Eliot Coleman uses these methods at his Four Seasons Farm. In a recent interview for *The New York Times*, he states that he does not use pesticides because he "has no pests," which he attributes to his "careful attention to soil health and the needs of each plant." He explains how he grows "35 to 40 different crops ... without pesticides," proof positive of the benefits of crop rotation and diversity. (*The New York Times* 2012)

Another of Carson's important strategies for pesticide harm reduction is her call for increased state and federal regulation of pesticide use. An example of how this strategy has evolved from 1962 to the present is the 1972 Federal Environmental Pesticide Control Act (FEPCA), which augmented the 1947 Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFCA), and according to Hough (2003), delays the registration of a chemical until it can be shown that it will "not cause unreasonable adverse effects on the environment." However, according to a fact sheet published by The Natural Resources Defense Council, labeling requirements under this law "are insufficient to protect many waters across the country" and are at risk of being further weakened due to lobbying by chemical manufacturers. (NRDC 2011)

Carson advocates using plants to assist other vegetation. Rather than spraying roses for a nematode worm infestation in a Holland park, marigolds were planted and the roses thrived. A 2004 article from the journal *Nematology* found marigolds were to be more effective than pesticides in controlling nematodes. For control of ragweed, Carson suggests planting dense shrubs to cover ground so that ragweed cannot

invade it. Likewise, to control crabgrass, she proposes improving the health of the lawn so that there is no room for it.

Lastly, the demands of the public for organic food are a testament to current consumer awareness about the dangers of pesticides. Carson (1962) tells of “a strong tendency to brand as fanatics or cultists all who are so perverse as to demand that their food be free of insect poisons” (p. 178). I believe that she would be pleased to find that, according to the website of the Organic Trade Association, 2010 sales of organic food and beverages were \$26.7 billion, with organic fruits and vegetables showing the highest growth. Four Seasons Farm, owned by the aforementioned Eliot Coleman, is one example of a thriving organic farm, and proof positive of the possibility of a farm being both organic and profitable. But it is consumer demand that is the main driver of the growth of the organic food industry. The fanatics of Carson’s day are the drivers of today’s “double-digit growth sector.” (Food Marketing Institute 2007)

Carson challenged the theory that pesticides are a necessary evil. She advocated nontoxic solutions to pesticide use. My research shows that the methods of reducing insect populations, natural controls, and pesticide alternatives that Carson advocates for in *Silent Spring* are still in use today. It is a well-known fact that over the past decades there has been an increase in the level of public education, state and federal regulations, consumer demand for food safety, and citizens’ desire to become proactive in demanding that government take actions which will slow the trajectory of contamination and destruction of natural resources. Wargo (2009) writes of advances in “the field of ‘green chemistry’” in which researchers are developing pesticides that are less harmful to the Earth (p. 293). It is my belief that Carson’s

call for a paradigm shift in the way we view our relationship with the Earth is one of the most important lessons that the public learned, and can still learn, from *Silent Spring*.

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Your Brother's Keeper

Miguelina Rivas-Cruz

In recent years, globalization has allowed companies to look for new ways to expand their businesses and markets internationally, encouraging intercultural business communication as an integral form of conducting business in small and large organizations around the world. To understand the importance of positive intercultural business communication, it is necessary to understand how the combination of interpersonal relationships, communication and economic class make up a cultural identity and how they factor into business interactions (Jameson, 2007). The breakdown of global culture within organizations, cross-cultural conflict and communication, social and business life in the U.S., global etiquette, and the barriers to intercultural diversity are all determinants of the effectiveness of intercultural business communication.

According to Ladegaard (2007), because globalization converges the various business cultures across the world, the idea of identifying and working specifically with a national culture is almost nonexistent, but not necessarily in global organizations. As companies establish and conduct business globally, they have to implement many standards, but as employees continue to provide feedback, it becomes clear that the same standards cannot be used across different cultures. The global employees will not share said standards, but will instead use the people's perception of national cultures as an entry to help employees develop a better understanding of the culture and how the standards can be implemented.

Businesses generally want the same things – that is, to grow, provide customer satisfaction, and generate profits. Businesses consequently ask the same questions to achieve their goals, but ultimately, the answers they receive may not be the same because of the different dynamics of the individual, culturally diverse stakeholders (Rosen, Digh, Singer & Phillips, 2000). In many cases, whether abroad or nationally, when diverse groups of people get together to discuss aspects of business, their processes vary based on personal backgrounds and experiences. The members' individual experiences drive their group's decisions, observations and feedback. For example, one organization that works with religious educational groups must take into consideration the employees' limited work schedule, be sensitive to gender dynamics when scheduling meetings and allow more leeway for feedback from the religious community, while the same organization in another field office with a more diverse group of employees has less restrictions and more open dialogue with their employees. Although the company has similar goals in both parts of the organization, the process in which the outcomes may be achieved will vary due to the different approaches by the distinct groups.

Although a global set of business ethics can be applied within an organization, it may still fail to fit together with their management practices because of the cultural differences of each country to which the ethics are introduced (Weaver, 2001). Since diverse groups in different settings can influence the outcomes expected from setting to setting, global companies need a contingency plan to incorporate effective ethics management in a culturally diverse environment.

As cultural identity changes over time, people grow; new ideas are introduced into their culture, and emotions influence decisions.

Ethical standards can be uniformly placed, but inevitably, humans must still manage the outcome. In many cultures, the most important and respected part of an employee's interactions is his or her conflict resolution skills. The ability to find ways to identify and satisfy the interests of all parties is vital, and equally so is the ability to maintain the flow of communication pertaining to issues detrimental to the success of the business (Ojelabi, 2010).

This is especially true of the Asian cultures; for example, a study on Chinese and American employees determined that Americans are affected psychologically more by direct conflict, that is, conflict brought about by face-to-face interaction, than the Chinese, who demonstrated physical discomfort by the indirect conflict, or conflict produced by negative behavior toward someone who is unaware it is happening. Since the conflicts were not resolved directly, as is customary in the Chinese culture, the employees displayed the symptoms (Liu, Nauta, Spector & Li, 2008). This clearly indicates cultural backgrounds are in sync with how employees express conflict behaviors and how organizations must learn to use this information to provide better intercultural communication within their organizations. Communicating, whether in strict professional environments such as the ones usually used in the United States, or a more social relaxed environment such as the ones used in the Middle East or Latin American countries, needs to be culturally sensitive to provide optimal results.

The social aspect of cultural identity is the part of life that plays a very important role in the global business world. In many cases, it is vital to bridge the gap between social and business

identities. Pires (2011) posited that society could affect social transformation through the use of traditional and children's literature associated with the schools' curriculums (pp. 251-262). Representations of diversity in children's literature can contribute enormously to building positive attitudes and comprehension of diversity-related issues. For instance, when a child reads a story with diverse characters, the child learns tolerance and cultural identity. Through constant exposure to diversity, the learning becomes a natural facet of the person he or she will become. Although schools cannot be the sole educators, it is the place where most guidance is given to children, and people accept it as the responsible unit for delivering this guidance. In areas with large immigrant populations, the constant change becomes a challenge, as educators must find ways to incorporate the new demographics and cultural changes.

After Sept. 11, educators were not alone in having to face the challenges of working with multicultural populations. Local and national organizations in the United States had to re-evaluate their methods and whether their actions opened the door for harm from outside entities. Entertainment companies, such as television and video gaming companies, changed their products to foreground the terrorist attacks by including them in either their television shows or as the enemy in military action games (Newsweek, 2011). This creates a unified enemy in terms of politics, but often creates disparity amongst the various cultural groups. The new cultural dynamics also changed the job market as new and specific jobs created new demands. Security operations, microbiology and other biosciences jobs went to the private sector, where networking and relationship-building became vital. Networking and understanding the business community became an art form in which those that are flexible and open to

learning become successful (Crawford, 2011). And yet, though the social aspect of business is an integral part of a successful partnership, first impressions are just as important and can have a lasting effect.

Across the world, people are commonly told to make a good first impression. So even though this is not a new concept, providing a positive impression on the first meeting in the global business market is very important. The term “etiquette” was first introduced by the aristocrats of France to explain the intricacies of maneuvering within the courts. In a global market, proper etiquette is vital to build strong, positive business relationships. Simple things, such as knowing when to shake hands or if bowing is preferred when introductions are conducted, can be confusing if someone is not prepared. Business cards or letters of introduction are common and even expected in most places, but gift-giving also can be an integral part of building a professional relationship in some places (Chaney & Martin, 2006). In many Asian countries, because the hierarchy of management is extremely important, a letter of introduction is expected so that the appropriate level of management may be invited to the meeting.

A very challenging part of business etiquette is the social aspect of the business relationship. When employees socialize after work or on company-endorsed excursions, the interactions and how they behave have direct correlation to the business’ productivity and profits. So important has this become, universities have developed etiquette classes for their students because there seems to be a cultural gap between young business graduates and experienced, older professionals when interacting abroad (Lazorchak, 2000). This is particularly evident during professional social gatherings when alcohol is involved. An inexperienced

professional may fail to display conservative limits to drinking, while a more experienced professional may have a better understanding of how his or her social interactions will translate in professional surroundings. Further, even though a less-experienced person may know how to behave in a professional, yet social, setting, due to intercultural differences, behaviors still can be misunderstood.

A diverse group of people who discuss and share ideas is invaluable in improving the communication and intercultural tolerance of global businesses, though it sometimes creates confusion and misunderstandings as people see and interpret things around them differently. Having someone who can skillfully manage the relationships among various organizations and diverse cultural backgrounds is extremely important for the success of a global organization (Hachmann & Potter, 2007). In some cases, this can be a midlevel management position that serves as the liaison between the organization and its employees to manage the transition between the company’s ethics and the employees’ intercultural identity.

Many interactions are based on what people perceive to be the cultural norm because of what they learn through various media, such as television programming, newspapers, movies and internet news. According to Zayani (2001), media is an extremely powerful educational tool that can break down cultural stereotypes, initiate cultural dialogues and foster good governance (pp. 48-54). Unfortunately, the media is sometimes the barrier that causes a rift between culturally diverse groups by providing bias and one-sided opinions. The daily political and news coverage, particularly on topics such as the Middle East, Israel and the immigration of minorities, reflect such biases on a daily basis.

We can better understand intercultural business communication by breaking down the complexity of cultural identity as it exists through the individual values of global culture within organizations, and is influenced by cross-cultural conflict and communication, social and business life in the U.S., global etiquette, and barriers to intercultural diversity. Intercultural business communication is a complex yet integral part of global business that requires the understanding and tolerance of the various cultural identities, the demonstration of respect for colleagues around the world, and a conscious effort from global organizations to incorporate their standard ethics in a manner that will translate clearly with their international counterparts.

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The New Blackface in the 21st Century

La-Rita Gaskins

Between the days of the Deep South blackface minstrels and today's urban hip-hop gangsta rap music, black Americans have endured a legacy of racist media programming in the form of cruel assaults against their humanity, intellect and culture. While there are many great black achievements and contributions to be recognized, there are obvious negative stereotypes that strangely remain a part of the media cycle, and that sustain and market undignified roles and images associated with black Americans.

Gangsta rap, known for its offensive influence on youth culture, reveals trends of degrading images and debasing references toward black women in their videos. It is a culture given the green light to promote widespread negative influential programming through music. It is an invasive criminal element that has forced itself into the environment and culture of American life and associated itself with the African-American experience. Gangsta rap is the new Stepin Fetchit, Amos 'n' Andy, Superfly minstrel of the 21st century. Its association to black music must be made clear, because what gangsta rappers are portraying as an art form of rapping that began with hip-hop music is not black culture: it is street and gang culture.

In gangsta rap music videos, black women are hos and bitches, yet never previously in the history of black music has there been such vicious and ignorant content by black men about black women as part of the historical legacy of African-American music. The history of black America's music was artistic, entertaining, and powerfully influential and without relentlessly derogatory associations. Hip-hop, which is rooted in rhythm and blues music, began before

rap and became an amalgamation during the mid-1980s by adding poetic styles of rapping to what the singer performed as vocalist. The coming together of vocal melody and rap combined melodious lyrics and poetic spoken word about relationships, community, dance, being cool, breaking up, love, life in the ghetto, surviving, education; some of it was socially and politically conscious. Like its predecessors of jazz, blues, rhythm and blues, funk and gospel, the music of hip-hop rap was part of a continuum in black music culture that garnered appreciation from around the world and served to influence what is known as pop culture today, as evidenced by such artists as Lady Gaga, Madonna, Justin Timberlake and rapper Eminem. When rap music became gangster, it brought into question the motives of not only the rappers but their corporate backers who have chosen to reduce the art forms of classic R&B, funk and dance fusion in hip-hop rap music by associating it primarily with gangster culture.

In observing the behavior of both the rappers and the corporate entities backing them, interesting parallels come into focus between gangsta rappers and what slave masters did to reduce human beings. During slavery, black women also were sex slaves who were called "wenches" by their slave masters who raped them, and at times fathered children that the masters would disown. Slave masters reduced black women's humanity by labeling them "nigger wenches;" today's controversial rappers do the same when they represent black women in their videos as "bitches and hos." To this degree the gangsta rapper reintegrates the construction of a "modernized enslavement" that parallels the physical and psychological

slavery endured by his ancestors. It is not enough to simply point to a cause and effect without, for example, understanding where that cause and effect may be coming from.

In bell hooks' *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-discovery*, she discusses the misogyny in rap music and how destructive images of black women have become more intensified in this culture over the years. A group of activists from Spellman College very publically criticized rapper Nelly's "Tip Drill" video, where an ATM card is run down a black woman's behind (hooks, 2005, p. xiv). hooks points out that the repulsive implications of this display makes it seem as if young black women in these videos accept being referred to as "ho and bitch." Their silence sends a message. However, they are dominated by the patriarchal powers that dictate, control, exploit and employ them, which is a patriarchal system represented by CEOs, celebrity rappers and institutionalized patriarchal norms. Though Spellman College students and activists make it clear that date rape, domestic violence and prostitution is never okay, it will take more than just a "Spellman College" to spotlight the severity of this negative expression readily impacting the minds of young vulnerable listeners and followers.

For centuries white racist stereotyping portrayed black people in various forms of media such as films, sitcoms, radio and Internet as buffoons, pickaninnies, sambos, coons, monkeys and other derogatory references, and these portrayals have been sustained through media in very significant ways. These very stereotypes impact one's beliefs and behavior. If you are the intended target you feel shame and anger.

In J.D. Leary's book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, she talks about repeated traumas visited upon generation after generation in black communities, and the removal of what

she associates to this behavior as cognitive dissonance, "... the only way they [white slave masters] could make their actions acceptable, and so resolve the dissonance [contradiction], was to relegate their victims to the level of sub-human" (p. 54). Dissonance also is found among gangsta rappers and their followers who find themselves confronted by the informed, educated and politically astute black community and, in some cases, whites who have joined forces to expose a negative mentality associated with gangsta music and what is clearly a form of denial on the part of the gangsta rappers when exposed to their role in negative gangsta rap.

In 2008, "Hip Hop/Rap vs. America" introduced a panel discussion of black women and men who sought to address the element of sexism, homophobia and gangsta rap vernacular in rap music. The panel included cultural critics such as professor Eric Dyson, Brittany Johnson of Columbia State Community College, Angela Donaldson of Bowling Green State University, and the Rev. Al Sharpton. They confronted rappers Nelly, T.I., 50 Cent, and others over the violence that their music is promoting and the subjugation of black women as bitches and hos in their videos. On the subject of "bitches and hos," rapper Nelly's defense was: "I don't put a gun to a woman's head and make her be in my video." All of the rappers revealed the dissonance between themselves and their role and behavior in contributing to unhealthy and inhumane associations to the black community. Johnson states that she was very disappointed in rapper T.I. because he was laughing while Dyson was making a point about the demeaning associations that their videos are sustaining with regard to African-American women: "I felt very offended because it seem like he [T.I.] was not taking the discussion serious" (<http://thesop.org/story/music/2008/01/08/hip-hop-vs-america.php>). The rapper also evidences denial using cognitive dissonance to disassociate from

any wrongdoing or the consequent shame and guilt that he might otherwise feel when hard pressed to explain his role in furthering gangsta vernacular.

bell hooks comments on the misleading references in hip-hop culture regarding the notion that “if it feels good, it is good.” This type of message is being fostered in the midst of an AIDS and street gang epidemic in African-American communities. Progressive young black women question the effects that references to them through rap music media, such as “bitch and ho,” will create in the minds of young black males about them. They are concerned at this young age about their future ability to find suitable young black men for partners, and sustain these relationships. Much of today’s young African-American male population justifies and embraces patriarchal domination espoused in the lyrics of these rappers who are their heroes and role models. They escape truth by copping out and using the same rap when caught between the challenges of reality and the delusions of a world they scramble to explain.

In 1993, the Rev. Calvin O. Butts, a respected and highly influential pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, N.Y., led a protest rally against negative rap music to make the point of showing the industry and artists that black people were tired of their communities and children being exposed and subjected to degrading content in rap lyrics. He and others sought to express a symbolic message by amassing boxes of rap recordings and videos to be destroyed publicly by a steamroller, in the middle of the street in front of Sony Corporation, a distributor of the music. This act of defiance was met with fierce opposition by rappers over what they saw as a violation of their “freedom of speech” and rights. It turned into battle between generations of Black people over the behaviors of rappers to engage in

negative images and foul content through rap music. The angry rappers and their followers severely castigated Butts and others in the community for attempting to destroy their music:

Nearby, a group of protesters that include prominent rappers like Freedom Williams lashed out at Mr. Butts, contending that he wanted to stifle the creativity of his people. Gary Jenkins, a 31-year-old lawyer, shouted, “You’re steamrolling our dreams, you’re steam rolling our aspirations, you’re steamrolling who we are.” (<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/06/nyregion/harlem-protest-of-rap-lyrics-draws-debate-and-steamroller.html>)

Butts and a number of concerned protesters and community leaders were not attacking the art form of rap music, rather, they were against rap music with sexually explicit lyrics glorifying guns, gangbanging, bling and materialistic wealth. Nevertheless, the rap artists and their supporters failed to realize this point and would take no responsibility whatsoever for the outcome of their messages. They were not about to sympathize or even apologize for the language content, and for certain, they were not going to walk away from what they were being paid for.

This divide in the black community caused by a demand for higher standards on the part of rappers revealed a rift based on class distinctions, and generated anger that one class should attempt to dominate the social standards of another. There is the mindset on the part of some, who may have faced a lifetime of social and economic hardship, that survival by any means outweighs concerns about misogynistic gangsta rap; however, moral leadership and responsibility towards one’s own community weighs in the balance and it is a major challenge to face. Leary observes a pattern exhibited

by the black community gangsta rappers and the community as a whole when she explains, “It was common practice for slave owners to set one class of slave against another. Slave owners perpetuated feelings of separateness and distrust ...and when the master ‘promoted’ a slave, that slave joined the master in the rank of ‘oppressor’” (p. 16).

Today, the rapper is willing to be an oppressor in his community because he is gainfully employed and empowered by the media corporation to use oppressive language in music, hence their creation of thuggish and other degrading stereotypes about blacks, divisive constructs in support of one’s exploitation of another. Their supporters in the younger generation see nothing wrong with the music, claiming as they did in 1993 in reaction to Butts’ protest, “you’re steamrolling our dreams.”

The effects of media stereotyping is today synonymous with dumbing down in order to assimilate and gain access to some level of status and power, even if it is subjugating, outrageous and offensive. It seems that this exploitation is evidenced by 20 years of black youths wearing sagging pants as part of a hip cultural ideal; it also is part of a historical force which keeps black Americans at odds and powerless even as they endure sustained cultural assault.

In 1928-1943, the radio show *Amos 'n' Andy*, written and performed by two white minstrel actors, Charles Correl and Freeman Gosden, became a huge success on WMAQ Radio Station in Chicago. It aired six days a week to a large audience of whites amused by the racial characterizations associated to the Negro population. Author Arnold Shanksman (1978) states that in 1931, some 750,000 outraged African-Americans signed a petition demanding the National Broadcasting Company cancel the show. It was ignored and later adapted to

television, using Negro actors, followed by a series of *Amos 'n' Andy* movies that lasted three more decades:

... the 1931 campaign, though it did not succeed in achieving its objective, was not without positive results. Scores of blacks and even a few whites – wrote to express their sentiment about the way radio and movies portrayed the Negro. Many of these writers confessed that prior to this ... they never realized how the entertainment industry degraded Afro-Americans. (Shankman, 1978, 236)

Shows such as *Amos 'n' Andy* appeal to the notion of black inferiority and whites who need to feel that blacks were indeed subhuman in some way; additionally, these white racist constructs associating demeaning characterizations to black people were run over and over again to foster ideas of blacks as imbeciles and buffoons.

Through media, ideas of blacks as divided, disoriented, uneducated and lazy, in ghettos and on welfare come up time and time again, despite statistics that show there are more whites who are actually on welfare. The prevailing thought behind the association that equates the word “welfare” to black people is held in place to subordinate black life politically and socially by using negated references and ideas that tie black people to a second-rate existence. Author bell hooks (2005) calls it the “domination culture” that started with African enslavement and the attitudes of whites:

White folks knew that they were lying about African slaves who labored from sun-up to sun-down when they then told the world that those same slaves were “lazy.” White supremacy has always relied upon a structure of deceit to perpetuate, degrading racial

stereotypes, and myths that black people were inferior, more “animalistic.” Within the colonizing process, black people were socialized to believe that survival was possible only if they learned how to deceive. And, indeed, this was often the case. (p.14)

To follow up on hooks’ analogy, writer Roy Hurst (2006) asserts that Lincoln Perry, the actor of Stepin Fetchit, played the role of a lazy, simple-minded black man who could never do anything right. He was known for his low mumbling and shiftless behavior in films; he symbolized the black sambo image and was well maintained in film for many years. Black people fought arduously to have him removed. Writer Roy Hurst of National Public Radio narrates:

... by the end of the 1930s, Perry’s [Stepin Fetchit] star began to wane. The NAACP was gaining some influence in Hollywood and Perry was in a constant battle with Fox Studios to get equal pay and billing as his white co-stars – a battle he never won. By 1940, he walked away from Hollywood, and within just a few years he was broke. To the emerging civil rights movement, Perry was a symbol of something black America wanted to forget, and he faded into obscurity. Watkins found Perry in 1976 in a nursing home, recovering from a stroke. “He wasn’t defeated,” Watkins says. “Although he was bitter, he was still fighting to reconstruct that image” (www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId).

Stepin Fetchit promoted an emasculated image of himself as a Black man. The name alone implies a lowly person, diminished in spirit. And interestingly, some rappers associate themselves to very similar diminutives by creating characterizations like Snoop Doggie Dog, Old Dirty Bastard, Naughty By Nature, and Niggas With Attitude. No self-respecting human being

will call himself by such a name unless he has low esteem. These rappers are being exploited for their ignorance and vulnerability and are paid millions to reinforce ghettoized perversions and stereotypes about black culture.

It is not a wonder that this programming helped to create self-hatred among black people because white racist stereotypes also function as archetypes within families, communities, institutions and other societal roles. Even such foods as watermelon, lemonade and fried chicken have been associated negatively to black American culture.

The dastardly images of blackface minstrels morphed out of history, a history which first began in 1848 using white male actors and comedians who humiliated dark skin color and the Southern colloquialisms of slaves. This daunting form of comedy from the past helped establish the first racially offensive media to target black humanity and captivate an era of marketing that adapted new racist stereotypes as a form of entertainment. One of the ways that these negative constructions in media work is by having one’s humanity associated to a subhuman form; what that accomplishes to devastating effect is to divide black people from each other. It produces pathologies in the form of self-hatred within the group, for example: skin color and living with issues regarding light vs. dark complexions. It is one of the most divisive and destructive dysfunctions to have happened within a group of people who share common ancestry and cultural connection.

As a young child, you are exposed from a very early age to confusing interactions around skin color, features and hair that are exchanged between adults within the black community. It is not the only example, but it is one of perhaps

several divisive behaviors that black people have unconsciously absorbed and that they feel powerless to undo.

In May 2011, an article in *Psychology Today* targeted African-American women as the most physically unattractive women in comparison to whites, Asians and Native Americans. This article stirred racial sensitivities and injurious feelings among black women who have endured a history of internalizing ideological references associated to skin color, Afro hair and physical features. Though an apology was issued and the article immediately removed, it represented a negation of black humanity as far back as the 1848 blackface minstrels.

Black women not only suffer the psychological damage of this process from generation to generation, but they also suffer physical damages to the health of their own hair, resulting in over-stressing the hair to conform to the impossible white standard of constant combing and pressing and chemical processing. When the Black Power movement emerged during the 1960s, it promoted black pride and self-love that ushered in beautiful Afros, cornrows and braided styles to symbolize the embrace and pride of one's ethnic representation and cultural inclusion. However, the ignorance and insecurity on the part of some whites, particularly in places of employment, associated Afro hair to a militant symbol of subverting, destroying and undermining the white establishment.

A recent case in point happened in 2009, when a caricature of first lady Michelle Obama and President Barack Obama appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine depicted as terrorists. Michelle Obama, who normally wears her hair straightened, was in an Afro, dressed in combat fatigues. She held a grenade and the president wore a dishdasha, which is a long tunic commonly worn by men in Arab countries.

In 1981, a landmark lawsuit case was fought in court when a black woman working as an airline stewardess for American Airlines was fired for wearing her hair in cornrows. This case led to the first discrimination lawsuit in court over black hair rights in America.

Wooly hair, dark skin, nose types and the size of lips have all been measured to the standards of white acceptance. In Hollywood, black women with dark skin are using skin-lightening techniques to stay gainfully employed. Black people come in a range of color hues, with ethnic types from African to Native American. White supremacist media offenses have blacks scrambling to find solutions to alter their physical features and dark skin and women in the gangsta rapper videos on some level maintain these symbols of assimilation to feel included in any way they can, even if it is part of a demeaning representation. The women in the videos of rappers allow themselves to be subjugated in a number of misogynous connotations that suggest that they'd rather be paid to be a bitch and ho. This is similar to Hattie McDaniel, a large, dark-complexioned black woman who played mammy roles in films such as *Gone With the Wind*, and defended her role by stating that she'd prefer to act like a maid than to be one.

Negative television shows like Jerry Springer and Maury, with host Maury Povich, are popular among young viewers, which include black, white and Latinos, and they feed off of shocking sensationalism across racial lines. Like gangsta rap, these shows promote violence, vulgarity and ignorance, whether black, white, female, gay or otherwise. Everyone is willing to be exploited because negativity sells. For example, *Snooki's Jersey Shore* uses a young Italian woman to portray a degrading form of aggression, which includes physical fights, food fights, imbecile behavior and foul language as part of her theme

for a reality show. According to TMZ, Snookie earns \$30,000 per episode for doing it. However, Snooki and her partner JWoww were denied a filming permit in Hoboken, N.J., for her series featuring the two reality stars because the mayor of Hoboken stated that she wants to protect the safety and quality of life for the Hoboken residents.

Black people who have stood in marches, demonstrations and protests against negative stereotypes of their humanity also want to protect the quality of life for their communities and their image. But today's gangsta rap music along with a number of other stereotypes found in films and sitcoms is continuing to flood the African-American community.

In fairness, gangsta rappers cannot share all of the blame of negative hip-hop alone because they are employed by the corporations who silently work behind this dark outfit as entities. Rappers are visible so there is a tendency to attack and place blame squarely on the shoulders of rap artists. But rap artists are employed, marketed and signed to a contract. It is the corporations who finance and promote bitches and hos in the videos, sexually explicit rap lyrics and the rise of bling, gun, sagging pants and thug culture through rappers. Black rappers have to understand how they are being used to commit cultural genocide against a powerful legacy in black music culture, including rap music. Former rappers such as Chuck D, Master P and Run DMC, have given up their careers in rap music because it no longer fits the creative mode it first began. For example, rap group Soul II Soul's lyrics state: "Satisfaction becomes a shining example, a test of a sample of new race that has ample supply of positivity – you mean flow well like electricity so you see a clear way with no ambiguity ..." (www.lyricsmania.com/get_a_life_lyrics_soul_ii_soul.html).

This sort of positive rap content in music has been replaced with gangster violence and misogyny. Even young white followers of hip-hop rap express their disappointment in the downturn of what began as rap music to what it has now become. They enjoyed the rhythmical incantations of clever rhymes and flowing beats and sounds. Today, corporations use rappers to promote the most negative and disgusting aspects of controversial rap in adapting new stereotypes using gangsta rhetoric, sagging pants, gold teeth and hoodies.

Film maker Spike Lee, who directed many great films such as "Do the Right Thing," "Malcolm X" and "She's Gotta Have It" spoke at an assembly for the Ubben Lecture Series at DePauw University in April 2003, and is quoted as stating this about negative gangsta rap music: "...those negative behaviors are influenced by popular music, music videos and films." He cited best-selling rapper 50 Cent as the highest-profile recent offender:

The reason why he's huge is because he's been shot 12 times... How more legitimate can you get? He got shot and lived to rap about it. This whole mythology and fascination with gangsta culture ... look at the title of the CD, Get Rich or Die Tryin'. That's crazy. That is the motto of many of these young black kids.

Lee says the CD's booklet displays pictures of guns:

"... and this whole fascination of drug stuff. It is crazy, insane. He's [50 Cent] on the cover of Rolling Stone this week, and at the end of the article his mother comes in the dressing room proud as a peacock showing everybody who'll look, the custom made bulletproof vest she made for his 5-year-old son. Bulletproof vest for a 5-year-old kid and that's supposed

to be hip, something we should strive for. That's some b.s., I'm sorry," Lee said to applause (Levy, 2003).

Lee's point is a very candid look at just how insane both the music and film industry have become in promoting a music culture with a disregard for human life through negative gangsta rap culture.

The rising perversion in media is filled with lyrical content that is of a sexual assault nature, which promotes the power of patriarchal dominance through music. Just very recently, conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh apologized for calling Sandra Fluke a slut. Fluke, a three-year law student of George Washington University, was verbally assaulted by Limbaugh on the position that employers should be required to fully cover contraceptives for women even if they have religious objections. Limbaugh stated that this makes Fluke a "slut" and misconstrued her point by saying that she is asking the government to pay her to have sex, which is not what she communicated to the Senate.

Like the rappers of gangsta music, the behavior of Limbaugh is typical of a hate-mongering bully against any one who is assertively female, a person of color, and who has radical ideas for creating change, equality and justice as a human right. Indeed it was good that the sponsors pulled out of his radio talk show, and for the president to contact Fluke and applaud her in taking a stand. However, when Limbaugh raises the issue that "rappers can say anything," he exposes a level of hypocrisy and contradiction within the corporate structure that is glaringly obvious. It is one that allows the offensive content of rappers to call black women "bitches and hos" in their music and admonishes a white radio talk show host for calling Fluke, a white woman, a "slut."

A petition recently circulated asking for the resignation of XXL Magazine editor Vanessa Satten, who happens to be a white woman, who states she never saw the video before it was allowed to be released of the 45-year-old rapper Too Short telling young boys how to turn out young girls sexually; encouraging them to get to them before they become teenagers. This is the kind of anti-female content that targets the young listening audience. However, this contradiction, under a different scenario amounts to a sex crime punishable by law. There are a number of men in prison today for acting on behalf of their sexual aggression toward women or girls, while rapper Too Short is given license to encourage this behavior through his music. He is given the power to spread patriarchal dominance and misogynous themes. Both rapper Too Short and editor Vanessa Satten have apologized, but Satten's position with the magazine company came under fire, not rapper Too Short.

In 2007, Don Imus's national syndicated show, *Imus In The Morning*, called African-American female basketball players of Rutgers College "nappy headed hos [whores]." He apologized after coming under fire for his offensive language; however, there is a glaring contradiction here, with corporate sponsors of hip-hop music simultaneously approving, financing and promoting rap artists who call black women bitches and hos in their music. For example, these lyrics by Dr. Dre, "Bitches ain't shit but hos and tricks/ Lick on these nuts and suck the dick/ Get the fuck out after you're done/ And I hop in my ride to make a quick run" (<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/drdre/bitchesaintshit.html>). The hypocrisy exposes what bell hooks describes as a culture of patriarchal politics and enormous contradiction. In other words, Imus went under fire, but not the corporate backers of the rappers. As hooks (2004) explains, patriarchy is a political-social

system that gives males the right to dominate females, a culture in which men are allowed to negate women and ignore standards that support female rights. “They were taught that God was male. These teachings were reinforced in every institution they encountered – schools, courthouses, clubs, sports arenas, as well as media ... ” (www.arizona.indymedia.org/news/2004/07/20613.php).

To engage in a fuller meaning of what blackface minstrels have come to symbolize culturally amounts to the unveiling of Pandora’s Box to see a history of images of black Americans that stereotypes them as monkeys and coons. Not even our first African-American President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, have been able to escape the reminders of such tasteless associations.

From then to now, the kaleidoscope of black life has been cast against the stone wall of racism, racist media and its subtle and overt manifestations; this remains the battleground for black independence and equality.

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Artist's Biography – Liberty Always Prevails

Raúl Manzano

Raúl Manzano is an artist, author and mentor at SUNY Empire State College in New York City where he teaches studio art, art history and conducts museum lectures. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the School of Visual Arts and a Master in Arts at Empire State College. Currently, he is pursuing a Ph.D. at Union Institute and University.



Raúl Manzano,
Liberty Will Prevail,
2005 - 2006



Raúl Manzano, *Field of Dreams*, 2005 - 2006

Painting Field of Dreams

The painting *Field of Dreams*, 2005 - 2006, oil on canvas, represents immigrants who work in the American farms believing in the land of opportunities only to realize, or not, they are slaves of labor. The image of the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of hope becomes their worst nightmare. The shackles she holds around the basket of flowers is a reminder of the treatment and social conditions these workers are subjected to. This painting is based on Diego Rivera's *El Vendedor de Alcatrazes*, 1938, where he depicted a working class woman making her living with a basket of flowers on her shoulder.

“As an immigrant, I imagined the likeness of the Statue of Liberty and the myth of this legend as one of a fairytale: everything will be fine at the end. But for others, that fairytale became an illusionary hope, more like a nightmare.”



Diego Rivera *El Vendedor de Alcatrazes*, 1938



Raúl Manzano, *USA Today*

Artist Statement – Images

Maria Toro

These pieces are part of my chakra series. I started this project with the purpose of creating visual interpretations of the chakras. In Hindu and Buddhist religions, the chakras are energy centers that reside at different points in our bodies. My project is based on

the Hindu chakra system where there are seven major chakras running vertically through the body. At the base of our spine resides our Root Chakra that grounds and connects us to the earth. In our lower abdomen resides the Sacral Chakra where we hold our creative energy. The



Let It All Out

Solar Plexus Chakra in our upper abdomen is the center for our personal power. Our Heart Chakra in our chest helps us love ourselves and others. As the center chakra it also connects the energies of the upper and lower chakras. Our Throat Chakra is a vehicle for our expression in every way. At the center of our head is the Third Eye Chakra where we learn to see within and without ourselves. Last but not least at the top of our heads is the Crown Chakra which connects us to the universe.

Each chakra is a vessel for different kinds of energy that we manifest and control. They are balanced and tuned in different ways and associated with many aspects relating to a person's physical, spiritual and psychological growth and development. My purpose all along was to put a visual to all the information I learned about the chakras. As an artist I wanted to understand these powerful abstract energies in visual ways. I wanted to create a picture for the energy I was trying to find within myself.

At the start of this project in Digital Atelier, I had no idea what my subject matter would be or become. So I asked myself, "What do you know that you would like to understand better?" I found that I wanted to express my knowledge of the chakras and put the many words I had read into images. For each piece, I had an idea of what I wanted to express, but I let the chakra manifest itself as I was able to abstract my thoughts. My experience as a fine artist and graphic designer helped me push beyond my first concepts. I instinctively thought about color, composition, subject matter and concept, but I mostly let my inspiration and energy take over. As a result, each piece became an expression of my own experience with the chakra energies that manifested through my creativity. These chakra collages are composites of online images that I manipulated to form visual expressions. Each piece is digitally created with some aspects of

the manipulation very controlled and others free formed. Each piece is inspired by imagery and information that I found about the chakras and perhaps my personal aspirations for my own chakra development.

My pieces are not named according to the traditional Hindu chakra names because they are hard to relate with without previous knowledge of the subject matter. My pieces also are not perfect interpretations of each chakra. These are simply my perceptions according to my energy, knowledge and experience. My series is all an inspiration and so I continued the trend by naming each piece according to the feeling that it inspired in me. I named my pieces when the project was completely done. During a subway ride home I viewed each piece and found a feeling that each inspired in me. I would like each viewer to have their own experience with the chakra piece as I did. If my work inspires anything, I hope it makes the viewer present, creative, powerful, loving, expressive, awake and connected.



Emergence of Self

Sculpture Headpieces

Sheryl Robin David



Sheryl Robin David, *Cloche Series II 2003*, Sculpture headpiece made of cotton crochet thread with seed beads and cowrie shells.

© Photo: Donnie Roberts



Sheryl Robin David, *Antiquity 2001*, Sculpture headpiece made of cotton crochet and cowrie shells.

© Photo: Donnie Roberts

Sheryl Robin David, *Healing Crown 2002*, Sculpture cotton crochet headpiece with sterling silver beads and turquoise chips.

© Photo: Donnie Roberts



Soul Food

Anita Diggs

Fifty-Second Street was a relatively short block but, back in the 1960s when I was in the fourth grade, it seemed like the longest stretch of road in the world. My teacher, Miss Yallowitz, announced that we were going to use food to celebrate our different backgrounds. To make sure that we understood our homework, she went down the row: “Irene, ask your mother if she will make baklava or another Greek delicacy. Justine, maybe you can bring in some borscht or gefilte fish. Yung can ask her parents for a dish of chow mein. I’m sure Anita’s mother would be delighted to cook us some soul food.”

I heard no more. Whatever soul food was, it didn’t exist in our house and, up until now, I’d been Miss Yallowitz’ favorite girl. Through no fault of my own, I was going to let my beloved teacher down.

The bell rang. I dutifully picked my brother up from his second grade classroom and started the long walk down 52nd Street. It was cold. I was desperately unhappy and Brevard did his tiny little best to cheer me up.

“Maybe Mama can get a soul food from the store,” he suggested helpfully.

“No. No. No,” I moaned. “Miss Yallowitz said cook not buy. I should have just told her the truth.”

Brevard’s little mittened hand squeezed mine. “I still love you, Nita.”

And so we marched wearily, not noticing the postal trucks crammed with bright, shiny toys. If Shammy the Junkie did shuffle past, we certainly didn’t see him. Our friends tried to engage us in a foot race and were met with stony silence.

We trudged silently up the two flights of stairs to our apartment. Mama opened the door and, to my surprise, two of my aunts had come for a visit. They were sitting in the kitchen. The warmth of the oven which was turned on to provide heat, the relatives with their arms stretched out for a hug from us, the long grief-filled walk all balled up in my chest.

I sobbed.

Brevard sobbed.

Mama panicked. “What,” she screeched, “happened to y’all on the way home from school?”

Aunt Cora gathered me in her arms and told Mama to shush her yelling. “Tell me, Nita,” she coaxed gently.

I gasped and sniffled out my terrible dilemma. “The teacher says Mama has to cook some soul food for me to bring to school. But Mama can’t do it. She don’t know how to cook nuthin’ but stuff like collard greens, ribs, rice and stewed chicken.”

To our utter astonishment, Mama and her sisters stomped their feet, banged the walls, leaned on the kitchen table for support and called on the Lord to help them stop laughing as tears of mirth streamed down their cheeks. This mystifying merriment seemed to last for hours.

People are Animals

Melissa Bynum

For all of my boasting about staying alive on the streets of Brooklyn as if I live in a rap song, there's very little I can do to help anyone else. Local news still churns with stories of rape, kidnappings and murders that happen practically under my nose which I'm completely unaware of – or maybe just hyperaware of the chicken bones and feral cat turds I'm keeping a dog from eating, or digging out of its throat.

Parker makes me look good. When we arrive, however sweaty and murderous I am from trudging through the dazed, double-parked or disenfranchised human cholesterol that is Brooklyn during the day, Parker makes me look like I can train an animal to behave as a throw pillow. He's shy and waggy with his pleading sea lion stare until you just have to touch him, but he peels away if you reach out.

Me: "If you squat down, he'll come to you. Reach under his chin and ear instead of the top of his head." They do, he does, and I can tell by the look on the petters' faces when he leans his sweet, plushy snout into their fingers. He meets all of my clients.

I have a dog walking and pet sitting business in Brooklyn and now I finally understand where money comes from. In the middle of the summer of 2008, at the onset of the global financial crisis started in the United States, I was laid off in what could be known as The Great Reason to Fire People We Don't Like. I was a marketing project manager at a large advertising agency – a job I was promoted to and relocated back to New York for less than a year earlier. With three

weeks of severance and benefits, a car voucher and a sturdy box, I was home in time to watch *The View* on a Monday.

"I'm just going to be a dog walker," I told Willie in the mailroom the previous Friday. I had won this opportunity with one phone interview after several other local candidates with actual marketing degrees or degrees at all applied in person. I read the sparse job description online and managed an hourlong conversation using "strategy, branding and measured results" as much as possible. I Googled the word "marketing" during our conversation. My success in job interviews hovers around 105 percent counting the jobs I've acquired through casual banter while gainfully employed. I brag, assuming the other side is obvious: I don't keep jobs for very long. I've walked out, been downsized, dated a subordinate, been harassed by a superior, and worked myself out of a job by being so damned efficient. I was such a horrible paralegal I can't even say what the final offense was that freed me, because I didn't ever know what I was doing there. I've served, managed, produced and usually answered someone else's phone. I've worn a green apron and steamed milk for addicts and followed bankers on trading room floors, which are as close to Duke basketball games as I ever want to be. I led tours at the Museum of Sex and wrote for a reality dating television show set on a boat. What's a jobs forecast? Unemployment always seemed like a good time to travel.

I am inadequate at long-term planning, but I can read. All reports, whether by journalists disguised as bloggers or bloggers pretending to be journalists, would have followers believe that having a job at all was a sorrowful game

of musical chairs and if the dirge stops while you're in the mailroom convincing Willie you figured out "Lost," you'll be sitting out for a while. According to people allegedly in the know, almost 10 percent of the population of New York was in competition for jobs that did not exist. (Negative 10 also is the apartment vacancy rate here regardless of the health of the national economy and I've yet to be homeless.) Percentages working as they do, 90 percent of the population still had jobs and the money had to go somewhere. The only job I needed was finding it.

A second priority was enabling me to better care for Parker, whose brain was withering away like an Alzheimer's patient during my 12-hour work days in the city. We also were both still recovering. A few months earlier I let him off of his leash while I was helping some friends unload a car, because he never leaves my ankles. I didn't notice him walk across the street to sniff another dog until I also saw a town car barreling down the road. My first reaction is to call his name and his only reaction is to come. A jacked up pelvis and a nub for a tail are possibly the only reminders he has of his fight, but it doesn't take a psychologist to draw the link between my new professional caretaking intentions and the nightmares that still occasionally shock me awake.

A mutual friend had referred me to a dog walker in the neighborhood earlier at my request to employ one. Pam had no memory of my speaking with her before when I learned her rates were out of my budget as a client. As a potential competitor, her rates were fine. I was diligent to the point of leaving her two voicemails over a week before I slipped into the unemployment haze of chain smoking and passive neighbor stalking from the window. "Mrs. Klevitz must be having a party. She bought two bags of ice."

Pam returns my calls a couple of weeks later and decides to take me up on an offer to fill in for her for two weeks while she's on vacation, starting next Monday. This last-minute panic for coverage is due to two other dog walkers bailing on her, a warning I note not only for my own future difficulty at taking vacations, but I've also heard that Pam is "mean," "repels people" and "might be autistic." At first, I think the reason she doesn't tell me the exact address where to meet her is because she is safeguarding her client list like a CIA operative. "There's a mailbox at Church and East 5th Street. Meet me there."

"Ok, when?"

"When I'm done with my first dog."

"When is that?"

"I pick him up some times between 9 and 11."

"Okay. What time will you pick him up today?"

"I'm leaving now or in a half hour."

"Okay." Pam doesn't know the addresses of most of her clients because she's been walking dogs in this neighborhood since she was 15 which also is why some of them pay half the rate of others, a fact she neglects to tell me until we are settling up my pay after she returns. Fortunately for me, her math is so awful even with the aid of a spreadsheet and her MacBook Pro, she ends up overpaying me. Logistics are not important to Pam. It's hard to tell what is important to Pam. This job is for her, what every other job has been for me – something to do. She's been doing it for 10 years, lives at home and doesn't pay rent. She doesn't advertise – no website. She may have business cards, but I've only seen a piece of paper with her scrawl left as any token of her presence. That, and the

water bottles left behind, the glasses she uses and doesn't put away, the spoon dips in the casseroles in the refrigerator. She sets a low bar.

Pam is completely unhelpful on how to acquire clients of my own except in her way of being so odd that three of hers speak to me about "switching" and "Are you willing to poach?," which is just a lawyerly word for "steal." I shrugged off all offers. There are enough hipsters with dogs in Brooklyn for everyone willing to pick up their poo to get work. The couple in the gray house at Ditmas and Marlborough, though, with the red-haired cocker spaniel that put his floppy furpaws on my knees, wiggled his nubtail and growled at Pam when she said, "Don't let him jump on you," hate her. A month earlier, they rewrote a check to her because she had "spilled beer all over the first one at a Yankee's game." She wrote novellas filled with unsolicited advice from "You need doorstops" to her preferred brand of poop bag. I learn these things not from the couple, but the notebook Pam has kept with reports of the dog's walks. As long as I don't mistake the check they write me as a rolling paper, I'm poised to Gehrig this Wally Pipp with minimal effort. The couple gets a second dog eventually and Pam quotes them \$35 which is much more than the standard \$5 increase for an additional "sibling". This I know because I have been looking up other more worldly competitors online. Ziggy and Speedy, cocker and Newfie mix respectively, are my first regular clients for \$25 for an hour walk.

There is only one other walker in the hood that I've heard of and now I have to make friends with him. Dave wants to hang out so we can cover each other for vacations and sick days, maybe throw clients to each other if they are out of our area. And he's the guitarist for '80s rock band King Missile – known for their leprous hit, Detachable Penis. Finally, someone sane. Dave is only four months ahead of me, laid off from

a proofreading job, and he's also gone through Pam's basic training. We're both looking for appropriately medicated colleagues. He sends so many clients my way, I eventually have to stop advertising because I don't have time to return the messages.

Contrary to initial impressions, the poop is not nearly as irritating as the keys. Every lock in New York has a glitch that won't ever be resolved. *The screw on this one comes out and scratches your knuckle, watch out. You have to use both hands and pull up on the door when you turn the key. The key has a little divot. The lock was installed backwards. You have to turn it slowly. You have to hold the door knob, but make sure you're guiding the lock in the right spot. PLEASE DON'T LOCK THE BOTTOM LOCK! WHY DIDN'T YOU LOCK THE BOTTOM LOCK? Can you come over and let me in, I'm locked out.* The keys are the only practical leverage I have to ensure that I'm paid and it is the portion of the job for which I am the most unqualified. Four friends of mine in different parts of the state hold spare keys to my apartment because my track record for keeping up with them warrants the need for assistance. Despite raised blood pressure, I have been able to keep my client key loss to one. Do you know that inch-wide space that the elevator doors leave behind when they slide open? You drop something close to it and think, "I'm so lucky. I'm so glad that didn't fall down the elevator shaft." If it does, you can shake your head "NO" until your ponytail draws blood from your cheeks, but what falls down the dark nowhere space in the elevator is only coming up with the help of firemen. The client called the fire department even after the spare set was easily recovered. Note: this is not a free service offered by the FDNY. While it is always a pleasure to hang with the city's bravest, they found no less than 20 other keys in the dungeon of this building, a driver's license that expired in

1980, and assured me that only the certifiably paranoid actually call them in these cases. The Bichon's Mother also was the only client to fire me several months later over an unrelated incident wherein I learned an expensive lesson in the finer points of neighborhood gossip.

Pauline is a close-bitcher, tall with cold sores, which are all I can look at when she's leaning over me like an old diseased tree. She is never seen moving anything but her mouth, which is why I was shocked when she told me she was a dog walker. The Bichon's Mother came to me from Pauline. She was walking the dog until an incident in which the truth would still be in question if anyone cared about either one of them, but the separation agreement was amicable and mutual to the extent that the client took the recommendation for a new walker from someone she was terminating. Pauline's fondness for me has everything to do with her general lack of allies and my newness on the scene. Like Pam, her weirdness is proudly visible, but Pauline's manifests more hatefully. Her stories are unrepeatable not only because of her frequently-flung bigoted vocabulary, but the stories themselves defy my ability at alteration for discretionary purposes. They are, intact, the wildest, most creative entanglements, and mostly assertions about the private lives of the people who have entrusted her with their home and furbaby.

Targeted most frequently was her former client, the Bichon's Mother. One day Pauline cranks at me from across the street, "Hey;" she's standing in the doorway of the building I need to enter to deposit the pooch and she knows it, because Jackson lives on her floor. "You still walking [the bichon]?"

At the time of the question, I still had the keys, but was in the middle of a three-week furlough while the client had some family in town that would be walking the dog instead.

I stay across the street and move on, miming the dog pulling me around the block one more time. Shockingly, she manages a swift lumber and catches up with me.

Dogs seldom help a situation wherein you are trying to flee someone passive aggressively. I think it's incomprehensible to them why humans do not scream, "Look, it's another one of me!" every time we see each other. Jackson likes Pauline. His brain is the size of a lime.

"You still walking her?"

"Yeah."

"Somebody else has her during the day. I saw someone else."

"She has family in town, so I'm off for a few weeks."

It doesn't matter that I start to walk away; Pauline immediately puffs up a cumulus cloud of havoc.

As I pull the dog away, she spews, "She fired you. She got someone else to walk that dog! That's awful. I told you she was nuts!" She's still yelling as I turn a corner.

The Bichon's Mother eventually becomes aware of her new reputation in the neighborhood for being the person Pauline calls a whore. I've yet to meet anyone that actually believes anything Pauline says, but the ladies have a confrontation. While Pauline is dropping like a rock her lack of propriety, she grabs hold of my name and drowns me as well.

“We all know what you did to Melissa. Taking food right out of her mouth!” I get a phone call from Bichon’s Mother.

This client kept me on a short leash from day one, requiring me to sign in my arrival and departure times every day and she was paying me an extra \$5 at each walk for the assurance that her dog would be walked alone. I required that she pay upfront every week since it’s only important to me that people are functional enough to pay. I also was watched by neighbors to testify on the time and solitude of the poor dog – a fact I was assuming already, and do assume, at every house. In this case it was confirmed by chitchat with eye-rolling neighbors who couldn’t care less.

That said, I’ll take paranoid clients over ones too willing to discard their privacy any day. I’ve seen clients fresh from the shower in towels, or not, every drug imaginable on the coffee table, vibrators in the dish drainers, mice, roaches, and one life-size naked portrait of the client with her dog. She’s leaning on a tree and holding a pear and the dog is at her feet. There is no backdrop, just a painting of a tall naked lady with dog and tree and pear, on white. I’m using the plain view doctrine here, of course. It’s hanging on the same wall as the dog leash! If it weren’t a further complication of privacy issues I would reassure the paranoid ones that their counterparts have flogged me with unwarranted intimacy to the point of complete disinterest toward other people’s lives. I pretend to see little outside, too – drug deals, cruelty, celebrities, a branch of snow breaking over the heads of a couple in the midst a fight. I’ve rejected conversations with trolling journalists and developed opinions about police officers in at least four different precincts.

I wasn’t officially warned when I was laid off from the advertising agency, but I knew I would be among the first to go long before

I started training the CEO’s niece how to do anything for which I was responsible. My boss and I didn’t agree on much except mutual disapproval and that we were each in love with a dog. His rescued lab cost him at least 10 grand in surgeries in the first year he had him. “I could have bought a lion for what this dog has cost me,” he said after returning from the vet one day. I snarfed coffee into my nose, laughing so hard, and couldn’t stop even when coworkers were giving me wide-eyed kiss-ass stares. Sucking up has a bad reputation for always being disingenuous. An original thought from him was a step up from the usual deluge of Monty Python quotes or that story about meeting Dave Matthews in a tiny café and hanging out, drinking a beer with him, that one time. Dear Everyone Who Went to College on the East Coast in the early ’90s, Please Stop Telling That Story. I overkilled the laughter, but it’s important to encourage good behavior. Realizing our scrap of common ground himself, we talked Dog often and after mentioning his “idiot dog walker” one day, a cubemate came over and said, “Can you imagine being his dog walker?”

I’m not paid to tell my clients the truth. *I didn’t notice there was a blizzard outside – Is it really that bad? Your dog doesn’t pull that hard. No, I never get poop on my hands. I love a heat wave.* I cheerfully lie because I finally love the product I’m selling and I don’t open cabinets, closets or read so much as a refrigerator magnet because I already know the best part of my clients’ lives. Why would I go looking for information that could screw that up?

I am not qualified to offer a how-to on starting your own business. Anything I’ve eventually done to legitimize my work I did out of legal obligation or as an advertising ploy and I learned how from my crafty former employers. Incorporating my business myself and paying

taxes, business insurance, a standard operating procedure for everything – I created all of these from the resignation that if I was 17, I would be happy just being a dog walker, but at 37, I'm a small business owner.

I'm as far from a rugged individualist as Parker is from a wolf and I feel more like a homeless person than Thoreau gone to the sidewalks to live deliberately. I need my clients to keep and love the jobs that I cannot stand, thrive under fluorescent lights and believe it – and that it's good – when their bosses say, "We're like a family here."

I ran out of business cards about a year ago and now sometimes I just write my email address on a scrap of paper and give it to people if they ask. I don't pass out my info freely anymore and I never got around to making a simple website because, frankly, I haven't needed it. No one cares if I'm articulate. If I write an email to a

client over two sentences long, they won't read it. There is enough brain atrophy to send one back to college to finish that degree. Money still just comes from people who have it, no big whoop.

Overcoming the lethargy, keys and humans is as easy or as difficult as getting the door open. On the other side waits the bug-eyed scufster who likes to lean against my leg and have her head rubbed before the walk. "Who has a fuzzy tumtum? I know you do. I know you have a fuzzy tumtum." Maybe Pam could speak Dog a few years ago, but I plan on still being fluent when I graduate and sell my business to Dave.

Jackie, the Jack Russell in Park Slope, is a submissive urinator. She pees whenever she's excited, which is every time I walk through the door. Maybe a strange return on my sweat-equity investment, but that's a measured result and there is shit in everyone's job.

Near the Water

Maria Cortez

The well is located in the northwest corner of the courtyard. It sits between the kitchen entrance and double cement sinks. The courtyard is at the center of my grandparents' home. The bedrooms, kitchen, living and dining rooms are on the perimeter of the courtyard. Opposite the well, in the northeast corner, are two massive wooden doors that are the entrance to this house. I was eight years old the first time I visited my grandparents in Atlixco. The town name Atlixco in Nahuatl means "near the water."

A beautiful mural is painted on the wall directly behind and above the well. It is done in vibrant pastel colors common to Mexican culture. In the foreground, a young indigenous woman sits at the edge of a well. She is dressed in clothing of the region and her long black hair is styled in two braids. She rests her head in her hand and leans upon her bucket. Standing before her is the Savior preaching of love and family. The background shows several adobe homes in close proximity to each other. The well where this young woman sits is the source of water and gathering for this community.

My grandparents always greeted us at the door. We would step into the courtyard where hugs and kisses were exchanged. My grandparents always remarked on how much we had grown in the past year. The mural and the well are the first things we saw of the interior. We also said our sad goodbyes in the courtyard always glancing back for one last look at the well and the mural just above it. After my grandfather passed on, my mother, who was now retired and living here, and grandmother welcomed arriving family at the door. When my grandmother passed

away, my mother and stepfather greeted arriving family. When my stepfather passed away, my mother alone greeted family at the doorway.

The well itself was about 5 feet wide and rose only about a foot above the ground. The interior was about 15 feet deep and the water so clear you could see the bottom without having to squint. It was covered with a wooden lid and a latch door to be opened when we needed to fetch water. I was 10 years old the summer I first fetched water from the well. I was considered old enough for the task without any fear that I might fall in. Each morning, anyone of the three generations present – that is, my grandparents, their children and mates, and their respective children – fetched water from the well for drinking, cooking, washing and bathing. Always present was the smell of beans in a clay pot cooking over my grandmother's wood-burning stove. The rhythmic thump thump sound of hands making fresh tortillas could be heard before breakfast and dinner. Of course, neither could be possible if we did not have the water from the well in the courtyard.

I loved fetching water out of it. As any child, I welcomed the opportunity to get wet and playfully threaten cousins with a splash of cold water. When we thought the adults weren't looking, we huddled together peering through the open lid and dropped our little plastic toys into the crystal clear water below. We then pretended to come to their rescue and fish the toys out with the bucket. We made a competition of making faces while gazing into the crystal clear water to see who would be the first to laugh at the other's reflection. My grandfather would tell us stories about his youth or stories that would teach us about living

honorably. We huddled at the edge of the well and listened to him while one of us leaned or sat on the bucket. My grandmother cleaned corn, read the newspaper or braided her hair, never more than a few feet from the well.

A generation later, I recall my mother lovingly bathing my 2-year-old son in the same cement sink and using the same wooden bowl my grandmother used to wash her silver hair so many years ago. As I stood there chatting with my mother, I noticed that in the background, the mural was beginning to lose some of the vibrancy of its colors.

In December 2000, and after several years of absence, I returned home. Recently becoming a grandmother, I looked forward to bringing my granddaughter so that she too could spend summers here as her father and grandmother had.

A day after my arrival, Popocatepetl rumbled. Fiery volcanic rock spewed hundreds of feet into the air prompting officials to put Atlixco on standby alert for evacuation. We were caught by surprise when the first ash fell. My mother was crossing through the courtyard and observed the sky quickly darkening. She screamed out “Cay ceniza!” “Ash is falling!” Gray ash fell upon her face. Without speaking or even knowing why, we both scrambled in search of an additional cover to seal the well. We didn’t want any possibility that ash could seep through the cracks in the lid. Gray ash fell like rain.

It really didn’t make sense that we wanted so urgently to cover the well. You see, for some years now, it had ceased to be the source of our water. Our home, like all others in this section of town, was now tapped in to a municipal source. This was part of a modernization program that also included other things such as paving the roads. Once the roads were paved, fewer

horses and more cars could be heard passing by our home. Most recently a bus route had been installed.

Like the town, we, too, had become modernized and had changed. My siblings, cousins and I, now all grown up, were scattered around the U.S., and busy with our families, commitments and responsibilities.

The ash seeped into the kitchen, bedrooms, and the dining and living rooms that surrounded the courtyard. Our home slowly vanished under gray.

I hadn’t noticed my mother becoming weaker or that the gray on her beautiful face was not ash but death courting her. Several months later, my mother reluctantly left home for the last time for medical treatment for kidney failure. The well dried up forever shortly after her death.

That year and for the very last time, I closed the large, worn wooden doors leading into the courtyard of our home. I never looked back at the nearly faded mural of the young woman, the well, the clay homes in the distance, and the Savior speaking words of love and family.

Three Fables

Lisa Nicoll

INTRODUCTION

Fable are stories that are typically very short – Aesop’s are often only a paragraph long – and use talking animals as main characters. They also include a moral, or teach a lesson. What further distinguishes a fable from other kinds of stories is its clear, black-and-white plot: this character took this action and then that happened as a direct result. A fable can be almost as spare as an outline, but perhaps with a little more meat on its bones.

In professor James Wunsch’s *History of Children’s Literature*, we were asked to try our hand at writing fables. I used each animal’s natural behavior as a jumping-off point and discovered that I really like this form. It is challenging and satisfying, not unlike a puzzle. Here are three of my fables.

THE KANGAROO AND THE DITCH

There was once a pack of hungry dingoes who would frequently feast on a tribe of peaceful kangaroos. One day, beset by the dingoes once



Kangaroo

again, the tribe leapt into a ditch. This ditch led into a valley rich with all the grasses and leaves the kangaroos could eat, and the dingoes lost sight and scent of them. And so the kangaroos stayed.

Some years later, what was once a verdant valley, due to drought, became a dry ditch. The kangaroo tribe grew weary after many days without food and water. Their attempts at hopping out of the ditch failed; none could leap high enough to get out. Taking smaller leaps up the sides only caused the dry earth to crumble and the kangaroos to tumble right back down into the ditch.

There was one young kangaroo, Joey, who never listened to anyone but himself, or so it seemed to the elders. Every day he leapt and leapt, higher than any kangaroo had leapt before.

“Control yourself!” they’d shout at Joey.

“If you leap too high, the dingoes will see you, and that’ll be the end of us all.”

Still, Joey leapt. He just couldn’t help it. Leaping was fun. He was born to leap. Truth be told, Joey didn’t think he could leap lower, even if he wanted to.

“There is such a world outside of our valley,” he would explain. “I can see grasses and trees and rocks and resting places right over our ridge. There is even a giant bowl full of water!”

And one afternoon, while all the kangaroos slept, Joey leapt – higher and higher and higher – until he soared right out of the dark dry ditch.

Joey ate the grasses that covered the hills. He drank from the cool water of the great bowl. And when he saw the dingoes coming, Joey

soared, moving in great leaps and bounds. No dingo alive was quick enough to catch him. And so Joey leapt, and so Joey lived.

The moral of the story is: jump for joy, and you won’t get stuck in rut.

THE HAWK AND THE GOSSIPS

Everyone knows that a red-tailed hawk will eat a mouse or a squirrel or a rat or a pigeon if he sees one, or will bring it home for his children or wife to eat. But there was a neighborhood of creatures in a wood and these creatures, some of whom were mice, squirrels, rats or pigeons, did not see that this was the hawk’s nature. Whenever they saw one another, these neighbors would talk about how terrible the hawk was, and why can’t he eat nuts and seeds like the rest of us, and obviously, his parents didn’t love him enough, for him to grow up to be a murderer with no respect for other creatures’ lives.

Meanwhile, Red-tailed Hawk soared high above them, riding a thermal, his keen eyes scanning the trees and ground below for even the slightest of movements.

“I have worked up quite an appetite,” he thought. “I’m grateful to you, Sun, for shining so brightly this morning, and I thank you, Clouds, for clearing the way for Sun to shine through. It’s a great day for groceries!”

And in that instant, Red-tailed Hawk noticed a small circle of movement on the ground, and it was growing larger.

It was, as you know, the woodland creatures. Not all of them – only those who were complaining about the hawk, and blaming him for all their troubles.



Hawk

As Hawk swooped in, he overheard bits of their conversation and concluded that he was doing these particular creatures a favor. Some along the outskirts of the circle were quick and got away, but those in the center were hopping mad. “You can’t win!” “What’s the use?” “This world sure has changed since I was a kid.” “Why can’t

these hawks eat seeds and nuts and people’s garbage like the rest of us?”

“What terrible experiences these groceries are having,” thought Hawk. “Oh, well. I’ll give them purpose in this great, green world!” And – snatch! Snatch! Snatch! Red-tailed Hawk picked the juiciest ones of all. “Keeeyaaaay!” he cried, as he swept back up to ride a helpful thermal home.

The moral of the story is: choose your focus with care. What you see is what you get.

THE CURIOUS LLAMA

It was a dark and stormy night, and there came a knock at the barn door. The family of sheep who lived behind this door huddled closely together against the back wall, alarmed at the sound. “That can’t be good! That can’t be good!” they lamented, until the door burst open, and a coyote came in and ate every last one of them.

When he was finished, he returned to the woods where his brother sat, awaiting news.

“Easy-peasy,” Coyote said to his brother. “They just stood there and let me eat them. They yelled a bit, but that was that. They’re gone, by the way. I ate them all. But there is a barn a few doors down also packed with something that smells delicious, so you’ll get your fill there.”

The brother, now incredibly hungry and eager for a meal, nodded and trotted down the lane to the llamas' barn, where the crias (that's what llamas call their children) had just been tucked in.

Knock. Knock.

"I wonder who that is," the llamas thought. The crias popped up their heads and began asking many questions at once. "Mama, do we answer it? And if we do, does one of us, or do we all? Is there a protocol for such a moment? How exciting and curious! I wonder who this could be! Let's find out. After all, it is our house!"

"Good questions, children! Now, watch and learn how a llama lives." The crias stood and watched their mother walk to the door. And with a whoosh and a smile and "Welcome!" she greeted the coyote.

"Good evening, sir," she said. "Who are you, and what is the nature of your business? What brings you out so late at night? Shouldn't you be at home in bed? Why, I should think someone might be worried about you." Mama Llama tilted her head and sniffed the startled coyote as she interrogated him in her disarming manner.

No one has ever asked me that before. Everyone runs, or freezes in fear. What is happening? I'm so confused. Something's not right. I gotta get outta here! This is what the coyote brother thought, but because he was confused, here is what he said:



Llama

"I am Coyote Brother, and I am here to eat your family. But that's okay – I don't have to. I'm sorry! What's happening?! How-ooooowwlll!"

And as he ran away, Mama Llama closed the door and spat. Then she turned to her children and said something that Einstein said, too.

"The most important thing is to not stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing."

The Innocent (fiction)

Lydia Landesberg

It all happened so fast. I was helpless to do anything. The screeching of brakes, the harried, horrified young mother in her SUV, the neighbors, police, ambulance and most of all, Carla, lying like a broken plastic doll on our quiet street.

When I look back at my life up to that day, I can see that I was living in a dream. In that dream, I had absolute faith that by living my life in a certain way I would always get what I deserved, and I believed that I deserved to be blessed. Well, I woke up to find we don't get what we deserve and excuse me for saying so, but going to church on Sunday isn't going to make any difference, not in the slightest.

†††

My daughter, Jeanette, was a working mother. From the time her son was born, I cared for him so she and her husband could earn a living. Brendan was a wonderful baby who cried little and settled down easily for a nap. Taking care of him was a piece of cake. Then his sister, Carla, came along. She was different and much more like her mother had been: colicky and restless. She learned to shriek before she could talk, she learned to run before she could walk, and she did everything early. After bringing up six of my own children, I was well-qualified to care for Brendan and Carla. The equipment changes, but the nature of babies doesn't.

Some people resent having to care for their grandchildren, but I never minded. After my husband Roger died, I was happy for the distraction. Of course, there were times when it was trying. Brendan didn't like that his sister needed so much attention and he would start to

carry on, banging his toys together and throwing them. He made as much of a racket as he could, which only made his sister cry harder. There's nothing that can try your patience more than a small child.

I'd get to their house in the morning, around 8:15. Their dad was gone by then, but my daughter left later. We had our routine. I'd clean up the kitchen while they watched Sesame Street. Then I'd get them dressed and we'd walk to the park. Brendan liked to ride his tricycle. Carla sat in the stroller. My friend Vida also watched her grandchildren, so we'd sit and talk while the kids ran around or played in the sandbox.

After the park, we'd come home and I'd fix a little lunch. They liked cottage cheese and canned peaches or Skippy peanut butter on Ritz crackers with banana. My daughter always insisted that I give them a piece of fruit with their lunch. She wanted them to eat healthy. I loved to read to them after lunch, before naptime. My son-in-law, Justin, worked for a publishing house and they had the most beautiful picture books I ever saw. The kids would snuggle up on either side of me while I read, their pudgy fingers smearing the illustrations with whatever they'd eaten. More than once, the three of us fell asleep right there on the sofa before the story was even finished.

Jeanette got home around 5:30. The kids and I were always happy to see her by then. I was ready to get back to the quiet of my cozy apartment after a full day of babysitting. Being a grandparent is nice because you get nights and weekends off.

Life went on this way for a few years and it was quite pleasant. We were so proud when Brendan went off to kindergarten. What a big boy! At first Carla was miffed that her brother was gone in the mornings. As much as he made her cry, she missed him when he wasn't around. We rushed home from the park now because Brendan would be home for lunch with pictures to show us and *homework* to do. As time went on, she started to look forward to the day when she would be old enough to ride what she called the big "mellowbus." We were all so sure that day would arrive, just according to schedule.

I was never an overprotective kind of parent. My mother used to tell me, "When a child falls, God puts a pillow underneath him." I believed that. I never fussed too much when the kids fell down or if they pushed the limits of caution. There's a good lesson in it when they scrape their knees, I figured. You don't want them to grow up to be fearful.

All six of my kids married and had kids, and all have careers. I have 15 grandchildren! 15! Some of my friends don't have any. Can you imagine?

†

It was a beautiful autumn day, one of those golden September days when the sun shines without glaring and warms without getting hot. The breeze carried the earthiness of fallen leaves. Brendan was about three weeks into the first grade. He had such a nice young teacher. Miss Aran, I think her name was. It was a Wednesday, I remember. He had cub scouts on Wednesday after school and didn't get home until 4:30. I had set up a webbed folding chair in the driveway so I could sit and watch Carla as she rode her bike. The training wheels were uneven and the bike tilted from side to side as she rode around in circles. She was very particular about what she wore and that day she had on yellow

shorts sprinkled with dragonflies, a bright blue shirt, and a yellow sparkly headband. Her sneakers had lights that blinked every time she stepped down on them.

Around 3:45 I heard the phone ringing in the house. I remember I said to Carla, "Now don't you go anywhere, Little Miss. I'm going in to answer the phone and I'll be right back."

"Okay, Gemma" She said, still riding her bike in circles. That's what she called me. Gemma.

It was Vida on the phone. I could hear the twins playing a video game in the background. She wanted to know if I had heard the news about the school principal. Everyone suspected he was having an affair with the fourth grade teacher. Vida was always the first person to get the gossip, and I had the dubious honor of being the first person she called. I had the phone pressed to my ear and I was looking out the back door at the driveway when I heard the bells of the ice cream truck. Carla *loved* the ice cream truck. "Listen Vida," I said "You can tell me later. I have to go. The ice cream truck is here."

I hurried out to the driveway, but Carla was not there. Panic seared through my chest. She wouldn't go without me. I had told her a million times

I wish my life had ended that day instead of what happened. I would die a thousand times to bring that bright and shining sprite back into our lives. I would die a thousand times to spare Jeanette, Justin and Brendan the pain they will continue to feel long after I'm gone. I would die and go to hell a million times if that would help. It would be easier than living with the guilt. My Brendan won't even look at me anymore.

†

Now that Vida's twins are in school, we've been taking the bus down-county twice a week to the prison. There's this program for women who have babies while they're serving time. They are always looking for volunteers to watch the babies. I love the newborns. Children are born innocent. I see my Carla in every little face, in the tiny closed fists and chubby soft legs. I like to think that maybe her spirit comes back a little bit in every newborn.

If my husband, Roger, may he rest in peace, knew I was going to the prison and working with those people, he'd turn in his grave. Funny thing is, the women in that prison are not monsters like you might think. Carla didn't deserve what she got, and neither did Jeanette or Justin or Brendan. I have to wonder if maybe some of the prison ladies didn't deserve what they got either. The babies didn't. That's for sure.

As for me, I don't know.

Artist Process, Drawings

Aniko Nemeth

I believe that it's my ability as an artist to emotionally link an observer to the painting.

My process begins by working with live subject matter and drawing a sketch using a fine, light lead pencil. As a point of reference, I take a photograph to capture light and shadow. I design the pencil sketch composition at an elevated point, simultaneously deciding on a center of interest and determining the color palette.

A very fine wash is applied over the raw white, then, I carefully erase the fine pencil lines before applying the first layer of color. I use my photography to make my observations. My goal in watercolor painting is to capture the sensory warmth of my object. I carefully adjust areas by lightening and adding warmer or cooler mixes until I feel my senses are pleased with my intent.

The light and dark colors start to form a realistic picture of my subject. The added color creates depth and drama. The painting begins to display a natural loveliness and beauty. My desired goal is the bend and cast off on specific areas of my subject. I feel that in



Artichoke Heart

order to really finish a painting, it requires going back to slightly add more color and/or touch-up areas to soften any rough edges. I remain true to my passion to achieve a specific response from all of my paintings.



Irises

Artist Statement

Marvenia Knight

Spring Flower (2011)

Feb. 13, 2012

As a child, I made watercolor paintings of flowers, trees and butterflies. These themes remained with me as I explored other mediums. In high school, I created landscape paintings in oils, acrylics and oil pastels. In college, I concentrated on graphics and advertising design studies. I received an AAS in Graphic and Advertising Design in 1981 from Parsons New School. I am a SUNY Empire State College student. I expect to receive my Bachelor of Art degree in graphic design in 2012.

Spring Flower (2011) is a monotype print creation – a technique that I like using because I can combine fantasy and realism in the same composition. It involves printing my own painting while using as many materials as I like to create a unique image. The theme is a spring flower. The painting comprises layers of water-based color ink on a plate. The image is transferred to paper through a press. It then becomes a unique image of colors that were squeezed together on paper. There is white under the bright red. The white and red were



Spring Flower (2011)

applied with broad-bristled brush strokes. I used a plastic knife to reveal the white color underneath the red by making thin hatch marks in the red background. The white hatching gives the appearance of movement. I consider this to be a depiction of the wind bending the black stem. I lightly rubbed a tissue across the black color to create texture in the stem. The texture, a blurring effect, creates a sense of flow as it

bends to support the yellow and white petals. The intense red background is meant to depict the strength of the plant which is awakened by spring following a cold winter. My intent is to give the viewer a depiction of a plant that combines fantasy and realism.

From *Teacher, Father Figure and a Friend*

Annie Leavitt

In this excerpt, Annie Leavitt recalls a moment of focus, in this case on writing poetry as a child, when one teacher's encouragement resulted in a new sense of self.

When I was 12 years old, I would go to my mom's office after school. She was working as the director of social services for the Brooklyn Borough president, which meant her hours were certainly longer than my school day. This arrangement allowed her to keep an eye on me and on her work. One day, I finished my homework early. I asked my mother for a pen and a pad of paper, and walked into a vacant conference room. Although it was quiet, I never felt isolated.

The Big Blue Marble

*The world is a beautiful place;
it's a big blue marble when you see it from space.
The world went through some wars in the past
some went slow and some went fast.
The War of Independence
gave us our freedom in the legal sense.
So the American flag did stand
to prove the freedom of our land.
I love the world, just let it be
and let's find the friendship key.*

"The Big Blue Marble" was the first of many poems I wrote while sitting in the conference room of the Brooklyn Borough president's office. I felt such satisfaction as I put the last few words on the paper. I read my poem over. "Wow," I thought, sitting back in my chair. "I actually wrote this!" I took a deep breath and smiled as I suddenly felt very proud.

My English teacher, the Rev. Sheldon Flory, encouraged my love of reading and writing poetry. Mr. Flory was the first person to notice my potential for poetically describing my thoughts and feelings on paper. At first, my self-consciousness and lack of self-esteem prevented me from being able to acknowledge what he was saying. But he persisted, and I trusted him.

"Myself as a Young Flower" was my first real and focused attempt at writing poetry. I had lost my father to a heart attack five months after starting at a new school, and am deeply grateful to Mr. Flory for taking an interest in me and for teaching me to focus my feelings and my fears into language.

Myself As a Young Flower

*It is Autumn
the beginning of a new year
at Darrow.
I feel like a new flower
that blooms in the vast green fields.
Ready to take in the sun, wind and rain
that this enormous community
of mother nature will provide.
As the year progressed
This vast world of fears and unsureness
has decreased dramatically.
Like a hurricane reaching the point
of maximum force
and then slowly dying down.
During this period of nine months
I grew.
My petals opening
taking on the responsibilities
that Darrow has shined on me
and casting off her fragrance and beauty*

*That I have saved
in my stem and leaves.
Now that these nine months
are slowly coming to a close
I feel that I have changed.
From that of a delicate little flower
scared to open up
and absorb the experiences of the world
to that of a strong beautiful flower
giving off her fragrance and beauty.*

When I finished writing this poem, I realized not only how cathartic it is, but also that putting words down on paper is a great way to express myself. There have been times when I've had difficulties talking about what is on my mind and what I'm feeling. Seeing my thoughts and feelings on paper makes it much easier to share them. I have my teacher, the Rev. Sheldon Flory, to thank for that.



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