

*writer's*

*writer's*

*bloc*

# contents.

6. You Can Try It All by Jenna Galbut
7. Mostly Children by Jacob Kose
9. Still Here by E. Paris Whitfield  
Six Years from Now by Ayesha Khalid
10. My Choice by Erin Barlow
11. The Space Within by Burnell Ashton McLeod
12. The Inner Tube of Attitude by Shawn Chappelle
13. The Importance of Free Will by Jake Braly
14. What Did I Do? by Shane Tate
15. Wrapped Up by Hannah Deixler
16. A Successful Man by Landon Chavis
17. To Call This, Life by Garrett Evenson
18. Prisons by Katerina Athanasiou
20. For Want of a Lighter by Lucas Whaley

# writer's bloc

adina rubin-budick

president

vice president

emily foreman

treasurer

kierra jones

jack newton

content editor

caitlin parker

layout editor

public relations

eleni konstantopoulos

shane kalb

cpep liaison

copywriters

jacob braly

landon chavis

leela chantrelle

erin barlow

elizabeth young

jim schechter

advisor

cpep executive director

special thanks to

the cornell prison education program (cpep)  
board of trustees and donors  
volunteer professors and teaching assistants

mary katzenstein

milk not jails

marge wolff

cornell university student assembly finance commission

cayuga and auburn correctionals  
facility and staff

our talented contributing writers from  
the cornell campus, auburn prison, and  
cayuga correctional facility

writer's bloc literary journal is an independent student publication produced by students in the cornell prison education program and cornell university. writer's bloc is an independent student organization located at cornell university and is responsible for the content of this publication. this publication was not reviewed or approved by, nor does it necessarily express or reflect the policies or opinions of, cornell university or its designated representatives.

# Letter from the staff

In this issue of Writer's Bloc we are thrilled to welcome the submissions of Cornellians from the many different parts of our academic community. We asked students from the Ithaca and Qatar campuses, as well as students in the Cornell Prison Education Program at the Auburn and Cayuga correctional facilities, to collectively brainstorm a quote from psychologist Viktor E. Frankl about throwing off external constructs and defining one's own circumstances:

*"The one thing you can't take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me.*

*The last of one's freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance."*

As students in one of the world's most competitive universities, the authors in this issue are acutely perceptive of external pressures, as they are inherent in the academic and intellectual challenges posed to them on a daily basis. Yet beyond this point, these writers grapple with other forces pushing and pulling them in every which way, such as the pressures of growing up, choosing a path or a partner, confronting natural disasters, and meeting societal norms. They explore the danger of failing to defy external constructs, and the unfortunate possibility of forgetting to color outside of the lines.

This issue features the strong voices of individuals demanding to be acknowledged and heard as individuals. Through their words, we realize that bars are a mere physical confine to the human spirit, while there are many other seemingly impenetrable barriers on the path towards individuation. With passion, awareness, and determination, these writers demonstrate the importance of asking the question posed in the piece by Garrett Evenson, "Would I really like to call this life?" In asking this question of ourselves, we beg ourselves to observe the life we live in and whether it is all we desire it to be. Drawing from the spirit of our writers, we at Writer's Bloc hope that our readers will ask this question of themselves every day with the intention that you too will come to understand the immense potential you have to choose, change, and transform from the inside-out.

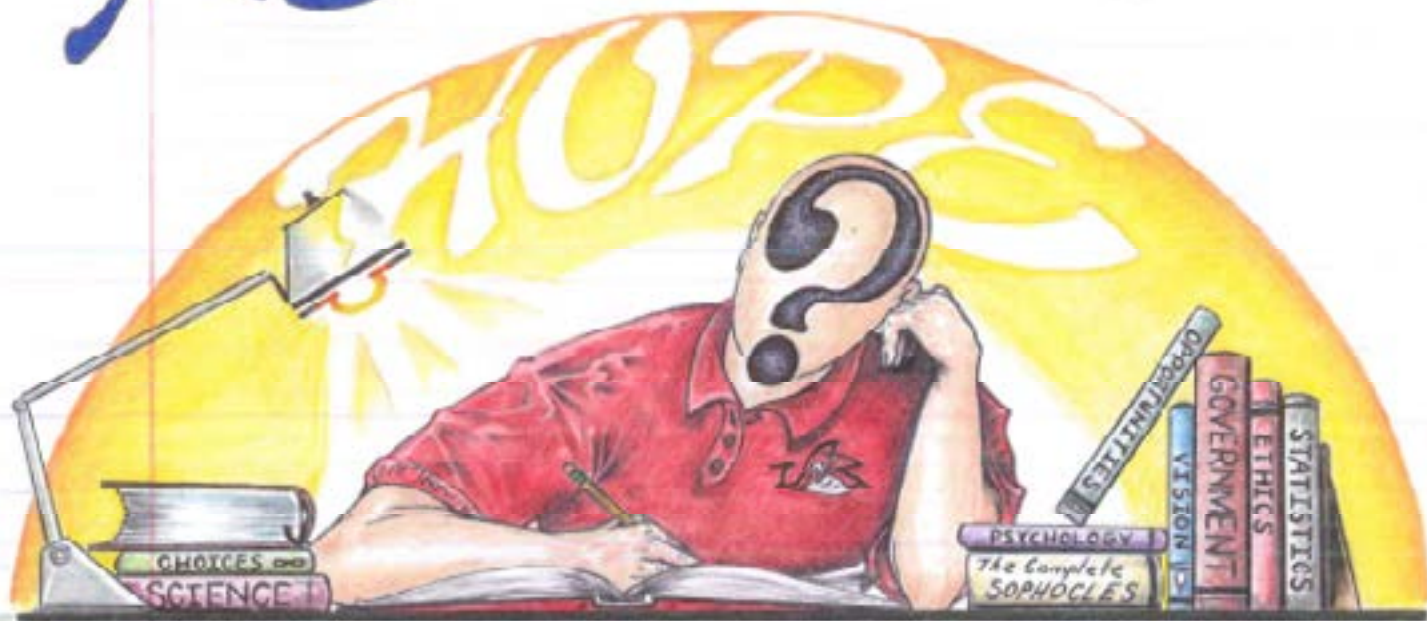
Happy reading, as always,

Writer's Bloc Staff

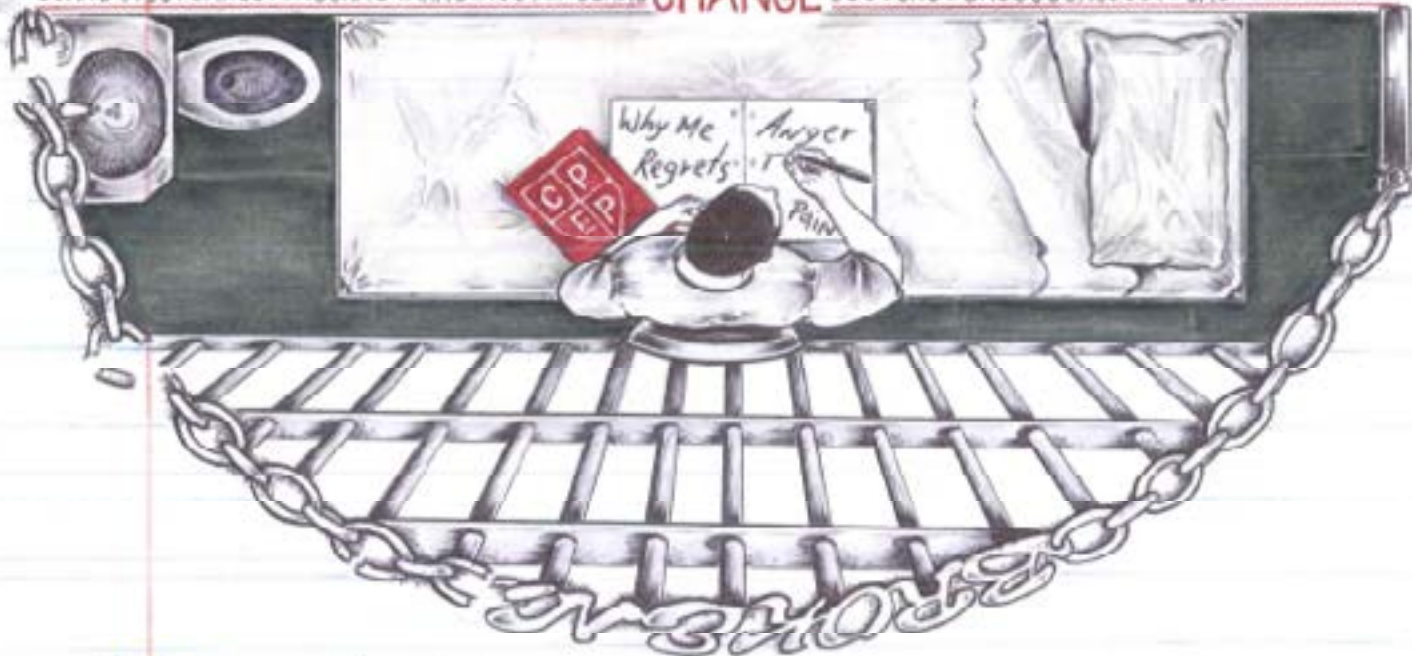
# A New Page

by Burrell A. McLeod

# REWRITE



GCAAGTACTGAACTGACCAAGTAAAGTACTGAGCAAG **CHANGE** CGUUCAUGGACUUGGACUCGUUCAUGGACUGGUUCA



# "LSTC 3TL"

! " # \$ % & ' \$ ( ) \* \$ + , \$ - . . Jenna Galbut

I can sense your blazing glare from across the room.

I find it difficult to evoke,  
Every time I start to choke,  
I feel like I'm being strangled.  
Like an animal trapped and mangled.  
As if I am in a cage;  
On display, or on stage.

Chain me,  
Fetter me,  
Try to break me.

You can try it all.

My mind is untouchable.  
I am an impenetrable fortress.  
I set myself free a long time ago.

6

# Mostly Children

Jacob Kose



On a line where people wait  
mostly children were there, and me.  
I had to say a few things  
because I was the tallest,  
so I told them all about themselves,

and no matter what you say and how,  
that it's easier to be smart  
for other people than for yourself.  
The secret is start dumb and get smart,  
not the other way around.  
I usually figure God must exist  
because there's usually a bathroom around when I need it.

Know when to shut up and pray. Mouths are beautiful, disgusting creatures.  
No one is more excited by, but petrified of, French kissing than dentists.  
Sometimes you'll make the following observation: he's an idiot.  
But she doesn't care -- he's talking to her, about her.  
Hold that thought as close as she does.

You self-absorbed prick, she'll say other times.  
And every man'll look up  
because mostly thing apply, children.  
But you look toward her with indulgent tenderness that tells her  
which prick she was talking to.  
I was a virgin back then,  
and the tragedy of intercourse is the regeneration of the soul.

The sole reason for being is to experience everything for the first time and the  
last.

I broke my pinky playing dodgeball the day my mother wept and my grandpa died.  
I had never felt any of those things happen before. My pinky hurt a lot.  
You don't have to cry for other people, but you don't know that at the time.  
You'll still believe in God and sex and death, I promise.  
Is everyone here in line for the iPhone 5?

*writer's bloc*

*fall 2012*

8



**Quentin Lewis**



# Still Here

E. Paris Whitfield

I'm yelling, yet no one seems to hear the torturous agony in my voice.  
And I'm learning, perpetually, studying through all of these many books.  
My mind, races back and forth between the beautiful past and a bleak future.  
My legs sprint in this quicksand. I haven't moved a bit. Days sandwiched into years.  
Eyes brimming with what will become forgotten-to-fall tears.  
As the heavy hand of time ticks, my faith remains.  
Even while my freedom has been barbed, wirely-caged.  
Still I Dream.  
Still I Hope.  
I am me, regardless of what's been told, or even after seeing all that is beyond my control.  
Knowing not how much more I can or will endure,  
circumstances being what they may...  
Still I reach for those distant clouds, to feel that sweet wet-rain,  
to be bathed by those enigmatic sun rays.

I'm still here...

And I will not be ignored.  
Nor will I slip-conveniently, quietly, unabsolvedly-away  
Every time I close my eyes, I am freer...  
No matter that, I am still here.

## Six Years from Now

Ayesha Khalid

Nothing will ever be the same,  
After we're all done here.  
They say we can't step into the same river twice,  
And we've got six years of it.  
No.  
Even then,  
This does not end.  
So, let's take heart,  
And a deep breath,  
And dive right in,  
For six years and more,  
For all that's worth it.

9

# My Choice

Erin Barlow

10

“What college are you in? What major?”

The words spilled out from the TA’s tongue almost without thought. A vacant look claimed the faces of about a third of the class— upperclassmen, I deduced, who were now contemplating why they made the grievous mistake of arriving ten minutes early on the first day with us freshmen. Oh the unending litany of trials, tribulations, and introductions that make up college.

A round of replies circled the room in the monotone voices of people too asleep for conversation at nine o’ clock in the morning. I watched my new classmates exchange knowing looks and occasional grins of solidarity with each response. Everyone was squeezing each other into mental cubbyholes, no matter how ridiculous the fit.

I braced myself and kept it short: “Biology. Pre-med.”

Sage nods. I wondered if the expressions on some people’s faces even registered. The mental eye-roll face that declared “Yet another one of those, like rabbits.” Or the speculating look: “Will she make it?” Then there was the scornful expression that looks past my words to the supposed dollar signs in my eyes. It has never been about the money but people will see anything they want to, whether it’s there or not, in other people and in their own shadow.

“I want to help people,” I explained simply. But words spoken so often lose their meanings and are labeled cliché.

There was another shooting in the news that night. A couple suicides too and updates on the civil wars in the Middle East. Somebody somewhere is always starving, somebody is dying and somebody is making a dumb mistake that will haunt them for the rest of their life. Sometimes the world feels like it’s falling apart around us.

I meant what I said about wanting to be a doctor to help people. If I preach about safety and making the right choices, somebody will very helpfully point me to a church. Nothing I say will convince them to ease up on the gas, turn down drugs, lower guns and sit down to talk like the civilized creatures we claim to be. The world is full of problems — all served up on a tasteful silver platter of fancy words and political correctness. I can’t control that... I can’t control people’s actions or what they do to themselves and the world.

But neither can they control me. How I face the world’s problems is my choice and I refuse to cower in my room beneath the covers, or waste time searching for someone to blame for our troubles. I won’t close my eyes and pretend everything is okay. So when newspapers fill with blood, crises and bad decisions, I study all the harder and stiffen my resolve to do something about it.

Every generation has its share of fighters, leaders, problem-solvers and peacemakers. I choose to heal. After all, there may be many problems in need of solutions but sometimes people need fixing too. This is how I do my part. Really, despite all the voices trying to convince me otherwise, my choice is the only one that matters.

fall 2012

writer's bloc

# The Space Within

Burnell Ashton McLeod

*dedicated to my wife Sonya*

There is a space within the heart of a woman that no man can ever understand.

There's a space within the heart of a man which he himself  
cannot understand, yet alone comprehend.

*You see!*

It's this yearning for value, based upon principles overestimated  
by bad statistics, that forges an identity forced to be kept  
up by lies.

We lose ourselves therein, searching to find credence with a hope,  
a dream, or perhaps a chance at an opportunity to come alive.

Whereupon, this space within — who you are — finally  
becomes aware of the “real self” that has all along shared  
one home intertwined at our soul's core.

I believe that these challenges are passed down from  
one generation to the next, tracing traits and misdiagnosed  
conditioned circumstances of purpose until finally they become our own.

It's the space within us that ties the reality of  
human consciousness to our overall destiny.

A fortress paved with much trial and error,  
defined by its good or evil counterpart and mere standpoint,  
shapes our social interactions.

It's difficult to give solace to a worrisome being  
who has just now realized this

Truly, I'll cherish this awakening.  
I have found that this journey has only just begun;  
from cocoon to caterpillar until our soul's final butterfly songs.

This longing to find our space within...

*writer's bloc*

*fall 2012*

# 12

## The Inner Tube of Attitude

Shawn Chappelle

*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines inner tube as:*

*1) An airtight rubber tube inside a tire to hold air under pressure*

*And it defines attitude as:*

*1) Posture*

*2) A mental position or feeling with regard to a fact or state*

*Contemplate the marriage of these two words for a minute.*

When I was 9 years old, I was kicked out of elementary school for fighting too often. The school counselor said, “Keep this up and you’ll never amount to anything.” This marked the beginning of an internal alarm that I was being submerged into a culture of silent suffering. I thought, “This guy doesn’t know me,” and I feared hardly anyone would identify with my plight. So I rebelled. I quit school after my 5th grade graduation. I’ve never been to junior high or high school.

My attitude then was of the youthful rebel breed – live fast, die young and make a good-looking corpse.

Years later, I was confined to a juvenile detention center. There, I was reminded once again “you will never amount to anything.” This came from a staff supervisor who was supposed to maintain my “care, custody and control”.

It was during this awful isolation period that the similitude of my bike came to me.

I always loved bikes: pedal bikes, niopeds, motorcycles and tri-cycles. Anything with two, three or four wheels I favored. What I thought of my bike this time, however, was a bit peculiar. I thought of my tires and the air I’d frequently pump into them. I felt a connection between that process and the need to protect my young soul, that special force within from being “flattened” or corrupted by external sources or influences. I strategized how best to fortify my heart and arm fortresses with the thickest most flat-proof structure imaginable. Somehow I knew, with certainty, that there was something precious and special inside of me that would amount to “something” and I did not want to spend years having it tucked neatly into obscurity. So I picked up a dictionary and read it from cover to cover! I loved the way words played tennis in my mind and helped clarify dubious concepts, enabling a more prolific array of expressions to convey my chaotic thoughts.

Today, I realize that someone’s opinion of you is not your reality. That your situation doesn’t define who you are, you define who you are through thoughts, desires, actions, and choices which will manifest itself in the eventuality of destiny or as Ann Haymond Zwinger so succinctly put it:

“Dryness promotes the formation of flowers buds... flowering is, after all, not an aesthetic contribution but a survival mechanism.”

That’s the inner tube of attitude.

# The Importance of Free Will

Jake Braly

The concept of free will is frequently seen as the most important aspect of living; we are able to make our own choices instead of following a path already set down by predestination. However, there are still many moments in which circumstance is seen as shaping the actions of participants. Many Nazis claimed that their actions during World War II were simply the result of following order. In other words, circumstance forced their hands to action, and they were cut off from free will. Stanley Milgram's experiments seemed to also show this truth, that free will could be cut off in certain extreme circumstances. At the same time, though, we can see through this argument almost immediately. There is always an option to go against the grain and fight against odds—no matter how monumental they seem. Nazi Germany had its Oskar Schindler after all.

Bravery is best seen where the odds are overwhelming and when it seems hardest to express one's free will. Often those who only have their will left are those who accomplish the most; many social reforms have been caused because disenfranchised groups simply reacted to the conditions meant to oppress them. Instead of allowing these conditions to shape what they were, these groups fought back, unexpectedly, against their conditions and achieved reform. Ultimately, those who are remembered and respected are people who didn't allow their own free will and their own identity be shaped and changed by others' desires. They operated in their own way despite whatever circumstance in which they found themselves.

People often act uniquely in the same situations in unexpected ways, even in situations that don't seem as dire as the ones I have outlined above. Many of my friends from high school that I speak with over school breaks describe high school differently from how I remember my experience. At the time, I believed that we were all reacting to the same events that we experienced in the same manner. From a crackdown and height in tension in the school because of a racist scandal involving our high school president, to the aftermath of the suicide of one of my friends, school-wide changes were implemented in both cases to monitor the students. They may have put the same restrictions on us, but everyone reacted differently. Many of my friends didn't push back against the school, but those who did found that they were able to provoke the school into actually addressing the issues. It is our different reactions that make us unique from one another, and those who pushed back witnessed the power of operating uniquely. No outside force can ever truly control or predict our actions, and sometimes doing the unexpected is what is truly necessary.

13

*writer's bloc*

*fall 2012*

# What Did I Do?

Shane Tate

What did I do, but be your friend?  
How did this come to an end?  
Was it all of the care, concern, support?  
Was it how I stood strong against the demons you fought, like I was your last resort?  
I sat for hours and listened,  
Held you close and wiped the tears that glistened.  
I gave you the last of my money,  
Laughed with you when nothing in my world was funny.

What did I do and when did I do it?

It was always love.  
I thought I proved it.  
Was it my honor and honesty that turned you off?  
Oh, I get it. I'm cut from a different cloth  
And you are allergic to that fabric.  
You feel more comfortable wrapped in the average.  
What did I do but sacrifice my blood,  
Keep you surrounded in trust and hugs?  
What did I do besides give away my freedom?  
Because I wanted to see you keep breathing  
And keep your mother from grieving.

What did I do and when did I do it?

Was I there too much when things went wrong?  
Too much of a rock for you to depend on.  
I guess you secretly hated me taking you shopping,  
Putting something special in your Christmas stocking.  
And you couldn't have liked me defending your reputation  
Against the slander backbiting and false accusations.  
I can't change who I am and what I do.  
My loyalty is real and my love remains true,  
But no longer are they for you.  
I won't stop being me due to the view I see,  
Doing what I did for you was just being me.

14

What did I do and when did I do it?

# Wrapped Up

## Hannah Deixler

# 15

I spent last weekend in Manhattan. Although I had watched hours of Hurricane Sandy storm coverage and had read about the blackouts, the displacements and the flooding, I hadn't really understood what had actually happened until I walked through lower Manhattan and saw small storefronts with smashed windows, trash piled on sidewalks, and a lingering fear that traveled through the brisk autumn air. Although I was seeing the city ten days after the disaster, Sandy's bitter aftertaste remained.

However, what was more striking than the "CLOSED INDEFINITELY" signs that rested on windowsills throughout Tribeca, was the overwhelming selflessness New Yorkers showed. I had read accounts of marathoners who had, in lieu of pitying themselves for training for a cancelled race, distributed food and blankets to families in Long Beach. I had watched the relief concert. I had re-tweeted celebrities' tweets about the Red Cross. I had even texted to donate in a sorry attempt to help from afar. But what I hadn't understood — and couldn't understand until I saw it first hand — was the sense of community and kinship among New Yorkers, that brought the Upper East Side resident who had been unaffected by Sandy's breath to the streets of Queens with food and water. I couldn't understand that, despite the racing and honking and mania of New York City, anyone who had something to share — money, food, bedrooms, electricity or love — did so. The stories I had read were not those of the most magnanimous, but were rather representative of what was happening on every block. I couldn't understand how extraordinary it was that that New Yorkers, in all their varied forms, came together in the wake of disaster in a beautifully genuine way.

Those who had made it through Sandy's ferocity could have easily moved on, gone to work, and lived their lives as they know them. But they didn't. New Yorkers — as a community — felt violated, afraid, and vulnerable in a way that they hadn't since the Twin Towers fell. However, the remarkable strength and goodness of the human race brought them together to help one another, friends and strangers alike. Despite the devastation there remained a sense of pride that swept around each corner of the city grid, proving the resilience of the city, and the innate goodness of New Yorkers.

It is easy to fall into bouts of self-pity, anger, jealousy and sadness when the world throws us a curve ball. It is natural, even understandable, to focus on that which we don't have, that which could have been (but isn't), and that which we wish hadn't happened. However, as New Yorkers of every shape, color and size proved, that is only one way. Instead of bathing in sorrow, New Yorkers found hope and turned that which had happened into that which should be.

It is all too easy, when wrapped up in my own story, to forget about everything I don't see or feel everyday. It is all too easy to forget that I have a choice — we all do — to do and feel good. For me, it took this trip out of my self-contained bubble to realize — or remind myself — that the world and the world's people, are awesomely good. Humans (even me!) are optimistic, resilient, giving beings, especially in the face of crisis and we have the power to do big things if we simply allow ourselves.

*writer's bloc*

*fall 2012*

- \$/#001223#.\$4 &'

Landon Chavis

Fine silk rests in loose folds around your waist.  
Scotch projects small warmth from your belly,  
And you've got nowhere to go.  
You are a man who has made it,  
A success by your own standards.

A clock ticks on somewhere, inevitably,  
A growing layer of dust resting comfortably  
On your awards and accolades.  
You look back on the quilt  
Of choices and events that is your life,  
And can't help but smile with pride.  
A quaint fire paints everything  
A comfortable shade of amber, revealing  
The face of a man who is truly satisfied.

What grand things you've done.  
"Follow thy heart" you say, and damn the rest.  
And, surely, the rest are scorned,  
For they stopped interfering many years ago.  
Now it is just you.

You've never been bothered by simple pleasures,  
For a goal reached is your greatest joy.  
There was never any time for superficial celebrations,  
Where sweat turns your clothes into a second skin.  
You've never needed to look into another's eyes,  
Never wanted to share your bed or your home.

You've always chosen to be an individual,  
And for that alone you are a rare jewel –  
A success.

You settle into your chair, its familiar creases  
Conforming nicely as they have for years.  
Tilting back your glass with the confidence  
Only nightly practice can bestow, you taste  
Familiar hints of smoke and leather you've grown to love.  
No telephone to disturb you, no television to cloud your mind  
Just how you like it, a man defined by his choices  
An utter success.

You sit back and smile for a thousand nights more  
And nobody says a thing.

fall 2012

writer's bloc

16



# To Call This, Life

Garrett Evenson



I would like to finish someday.

I would like to stand up and shout at a stranger that I've stood up,  
that I've stepped off the pedal down I-95 South,  
and that I've stepped out of the jeep and didn't crumble when it finally stopped raining.

I would like to call this, life.

I would like to come home to you.

I would like you to say, "Babe, there's something wrong with the car," so I could fix it and make you love me.  
So I could make you want to stay in and trace the raindrops over my knuckles,  
so I could make you want to scald your tongue again on the coffee I picked up from Pike's,  
so I could laugh about my day.

And I would like to call this, life.

I would like to dream again.

I would like to justify buying that wrought-iron bed frame we picked out instead of pretending to dream on the  
floored mattress where the cement meets the bricked wall.  
Instead of dreaming that the candle purposely tipped and singed the skin on my shin when the power shut off,  
instead of dreaming of fumbling in the comforter,  
instead of dealing with the burnt oaks and cracked concrete.

This too, I would like to call, life.

I would like your wrinkled hands.

I would like your wrinkled hands to wrinkle with mine  
from age and not from the water in the sink.

From too many afternoons of roughhousing with the guys in Gig Harbor until it pours on us,  
from gripping too many IKEA mugs when I make you drink your tea without your usual amount of honey,  
from signing too many birthday cards with the same silver pen,  
from changing too many diapers and editing book reports after we've already cooked and gotten the  
other kids ready for school tomorrow,  
from clenching mine at 3 AM under the sterile lights and vending-machine coffee.

This especially. I would like to call, life.

I would like that.

I would like all that.

But they were never really ready for school tomorrow, were they?

And our hands never quite wrinkled like we thought they would, did they?

Because we couldn't have children,

and you like to go inside when it rains, so we never really got sick from the wet and the cold

and you never really filled those cracks in the concrete but you did purposely tip the candle

so now I can't dream anymore and you can fix your own goddamn car

so you won't scald your tongue for my day anymore and now I'm standing somewhere in Discovery Park

and it's stopped raining so of course there's no stranger at whom to yell, "*I'm not falling apart anymore*".

And I would really like to finish someday.

But now it's stopped raining, and you're not here – so how am I supposed to?

And would I really like to call this, life?

writer's bloc

fall 2012

# Prisons

Sleep deprived, over-committed, and drowning in work, I was feeling that classic mid-semester stress. It was probably around this time last year, in fact. It was a Thursday, meaning I was in marathon mode – running from the farmers’ market to a prison trip to a book discussion for my favorite course, “Prisons,” which happened to be during the midterm for another course. Luckily, my professor agreed to let me take the test on Friday. Having just switched majors, I was trying to prove to my new department (and to myself) that I was capable of doing well. But not even my determination was helping me focus.

It was just one of those weeks. Regardless of where I sat down, I reread the same paragraph 40 times, only after ordering yet another coffee and then being too jittery to sit. I wanted desperately to read these long articles that outlined major planning theories, the crux of my studies, and immerse myself. But I couldn’t. Words were dancing around the pages of my American City Reader and I was fundamentally screwed. I tried to calm myself, but I was anxious. How was I going to get everything done? Why weren’t there more hours in the day? Here I was leaving school, taking a chunk out of my day to visit a prison and have a book discussion when I wasn’t even on top of my own work.

Luckily, as we drove outside of Ithaca into colorful scenes of Upstate autumn, my frantic feelings weaned. Arriving at Cayuga Correctional Facility was somewhat of a shock. I never realized how limited one’s outdoorspace is when in prison. It was the first of many realizations that evening. After a small tour, our class was split into two groups so that we could intermingle with prisoners and participate in a reading circle. Cornell’s Prison Education Program works with CCF to bring courses to prisoners. Our professor, Mary Katzenstein, is a main proponent of the program and organized the event for our on-campus class called “Prisons.”

We had all read Geoffrey Canada’s *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun* and were supposed to discuss our thoughts and reactions to the book. Canada shares his childhood stories of inner-city Harlem in an attempt to unravel the social norms and culture that can lead to criminal activity. The book, an insider’s perspective, tries to unpack the environments and circumstances that promote violence.

The last time I had done a literature circle was my senior year of high school, so I wasn’t expecting much. But what came out of it was far more inspirational than I could have ever predicted. The initial conversation was undeniably awkward. Here we were, prisoners and Cornell students, sharing our ideas and thoughts, trying not to make assumptions about either party. Self-conscious about the elitism associated with coming from an Ivy League school, I was

18

# Katerina Athanasiou

especially careful about any comment I made. I feared someone would call me out for my suburban upbringing or blatant ignorance. But they didn't. They actually listened and inquired about the points I made. Everyone was curious. Before I knew it, the conversations started flowing naturally. These students were far more engaged and engaging than any of my peers during section. Instead of a professor pulling teeth to get people to contribute, there was an outpouring of excitement. Everyone cared! And in fact, they had perspectives that we didn't. These books we were reading, the literature we were analyzing – they lived it. They could explain first-hand the pipelines from neighborhoods to prisons; they could understand things we couldn't.

Whenever someone mentioned a text they'd read previously or referenced a certain study, one man would eagerly jot it down, hungry for any new book suggestions. He was perhaps the most influential to me, personally. He asked questions, challenged everyone and contributed often to our conversation. But he gave us one piece of advice before we left that truly stayed with me. He said, simply, "I would give anything to be in school right now. Value it. You are so, so lucky. If I could tell myself something 10 years ago, I'd say work hard in school."

He – and the other inmates – were so passionate about education. They kept telling us how lucky we were, how much they'd love to be in our shoes. I felt guilty for feeling so frustrated with school. Somewhere in that hour of conversation, it happened. Something within me was reignited. I was suddenly filled with a powerful direction and inspiration. I returned home that night and ran into my apartment to greet my roommates. They were unwinding, telling stories and relaxing together. I was, of course, sad to miss out, but I was also excited.

I tried to articulate what happened that evening, but I couldn't quite. Instead, I grabbed my textbooks and ran over to Stella's Coffee Shop. With a large coffee beside me, I began to read. I stayed up till two, bathing in urban planning terminology and theories. The process of learning about things you really care about is amazing. As I sat there on a Thursday night, excited about garden cities and Jane Jacobs, I realized how lucky I was.

Everyone gets so much advice. Apply for this job, take the LSAT, follow these rules, be in this major, get practical skills, exercise three times a week, have the time of your life, follow your passion. Most of the time, it's about starting some new habit or path. But his advice was so simple: Value what you already have. It's so easy, sometimes, to forget the beauty in education. College students often get caught up in exam schedules and papers, which are juggled an onslaught of other activities. We forget, at times, our immense privilege.

19

# For Want of a Lighter

Lucas Whaley

We were ten minutes north of Melbourne, Florida, still an hour from Cape Canaveral, when she pulled over onto the side of the highway and calmly told me to get out.

I can't be sure why I didn't argue. Maybe I had been waiting for a way out. Maybe I just felt like walking on that glorious late summer day. Maybe it was the gleam of barely restrained violence in her eyes.

Whatever it was, I got out of the car.

Quickly.

"Look," I began, trying to explain myself. But apparently, the sound of my voice was more than her self-control could handle. Her face contorted into a grimace that, quite frankly, looked painful to wear.

"That way's New York!" she screeched, stabbing one serrated finger toward the windshield before stomping on the gas. The car pounced forward, knifing across the grassy patch between lanes in what I was pretty sure was an illegal U-turn.

I spared a second to watch the car disappear into the crowd of automobiles heading south, then turned and began my march north. It was quiet on my side of the highway. I supposed, as I walked, that I should have seen it all coming. I wasn't the easiest person in the world to live with and I hadn't even been trying to be cooperative. Still, after thirteen years, I expected a little more understanding from my own mother.

You'd think that, after thirteen years, I'd know better.

There is a class of humanity that can only be met while hitchhiking the main thoroughfares of this proud nation. I am, of course, referring to camper, or trailer, people. Like crocodiles in the sewers, mole-people, or that serial killer with the hook, camper people have long been relegated to the realm of urban myth.

I'm here to tell you—these strange and legendary creatures actually exist.

A group of them picked me up an hour into my sojourn and got me to Daytona Beach before nightfall. The ancient Winnebago that slowed as it passed me, and finally pulled to a stop a dozen feet ahead, had a golden glow about its once-white paneling, as if it had been coated in the dust of angels' wings; or had been used as a filter for a few hundred cigarettes. Either way, my feet screamed thanks to their generosity.

Salvation in a tin can. Like sardines packed in holy water, blessed by a priest and three nuns...or, in this case, an old hippie and her very obviously sexually promiscuous, teenage daughters.

You may feel that, since none of the daughters actually tried to have sex with me, it is unfair of me to assume that they were "easy"—however, it is my strong belief that three sisters in matching tank tops emblazoned with the title, "Porn Star" are making more than a fashion statement. They are making a declaration of intent... in triplicate. Besides, from the making out and heavy petting, I'm fairly certain they were having sex with each other at least pretty regularly.

I learned a few things on that ride to Daytona Beach. I learned that a thirteen-year-old boy would happily become the slave of a sixteen-year-old girl in a porn-star tank top and cherry lip-gloss. I learned that the same thirteen-year-old boy would not even notice the flavor of lip-gloss until hours later. And I learned that camper people smoke the finest weed in existence, apparently while listening to a lot of Pink Floyd. Seriously, I didn't even know those guys had that many albums.

As the sun set on another exciting day, I was left standing on the sidewalk near a stretch of beach with three ounces of Bud, a plastic canteen of peach schnapps, and a King James bible in my backpack.

I wandered onto the beach drinking the schnapps and sat down on the hot sand to roll a joint using Bible paper. (I naturally assumed this was its purpose, since the alternative just seemed too weird.)

It was at that point I realized I didn't have a lighter.

20



“And would I really like to call this life?”



“The sole reason for being is to experience everything for the first time and the last”



“It’s this yearning for value, based upon principles overestimated by bad statistics, that forges an identity forced to be kept up by lies”