

bicycle days

(If this journal ever makes any money, 50% of all proceeds go to Carrie Cutlip. The remaining 50% of proceeds go to Christian Aid, for support of indigenous missionaries.)

introduction ...

My diary - Kris Kemp - from 1994 to late 1995. This journal was written when I lived at 529 Clematis Street, apartment #3, with various roommates. During these two years, I worked odd jobs, and put together (sold ads for, did ad design, writing, layout, distribution, etc) a small maga-zine called the FLO, which flashlited renegade culture in downtown West Palm Beach, Florida. For transportation, I had a bicycle, and would ride it all over the place, connecting the dots to form some type of bigger picture (often, more or less, a canvas to justify myself), helping people, and trying to make sense out of the experiences I had living on my own, and trying to earn money doing what I liked (writing, photography, fliers, publishing), although the jobs (cooking, bus work, and freelance flier jobs) sustained me financially.

At the time, downtown West Palm Beach, FL was undergoing a metamorphosis from an abandoned playground favored by poets, musicians, punks, curbies (cool, urban, restless, boyish, independent, eclectic, shorthairs) - girls who fit the majority of these adjectives, artists and the people they attract, to a place where curious residents of suburban prisons (gated communities, dotting the landscape west of town) spent their time when they were on parole (from house arrest). The small, one-bedroom apartment in which I lived housed Gary Greenwald, a bright & thrifty computer-savvy web/graphic designer, Phil Gilmoure, a waiter, social butterfly with a clever comedic sensibility, Angel Lozada, a drummer from Puerto Rico who started his own landscape company, and myself.

For brief intervals, Phil and I slept on the floor in one room, sleeping bags for beds. Angel and Gary slept in the other room. Gary built a wooden bunk bed with a desk underneath, then surrounded it with a tent that zippered up, for privacy, security, mosquito-avoidance reasons. A long, narrow closet ran alongside both rooms. On the closet walls I hung posters of bands I liked ... My Bloody Valentine, and some others. At the end of the closet, I placed a table, typewriter, lamp. At least once a week, usually several times a week, I entered the closet and typed my thoughts, trying my best to remember the days events, and finding words to describe the pictures in my head. These pictures in my head--events, memories, dreams--were put on paper to form this loose collection of writings, a scribbled confessional for this 24 year old in a state of suspended adolescence.

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Just returned from the Blue Buddha. Andy told me that Echo was doing film for a class project and got Stephanie and Chrissy in the nude. Andy said he was in the nude, too.

"Whattya mean?"

"You know Echo?"

"Yeah."

"Well, she has to do this film for her class project. The two girls were dressed as pixies, but all they wore was pixie wings, and Dave and I pretended to be neanderthals."

"They were completely naked?"

Andy nodded. "Except for pixie wings."

"Wow."

"Yeah, and I didn't even know they were gonna get naked. We were upstairs behind Lost Weekend, you know--the Everglades?"

"Yeah."

"And I was groping around, bent over and look up and Stephanie doesn't have any clothes on and neither does Chrissy. My Mr. Johnson started to wake up so I acted like a gorilla and didn't really look at them. I just kind of looked down."

"Wow. Who has the videotape?"

"Echo."

"I think I'd kill myself if I saw it."

"No. They're gonna show it here."

"Here?"

"Yeah. I don't know when, but Echo said she's gonna show it here. Probably Friday. At the grand opening."

Now here I am typing this shit and madly and fondly remembering when I met Stephanie three evenings ago at the Buddha. The Blue Buddha (TBB) is this cozy and lovely vintage fashion/thrift store full of 60's, 70's, and classic 80's clothes (which happen to be all the rage at the moment, especially among ravers--dancefans of techno, ambient, house, trance and all the categories of new electronic music that's usually played at 120 beats per minute. A large number of ravers take drug, as they don't drink. Usually they take X, acid, or smoke grass. Usually it's X, though, unless they can't afford it.) So anyway this sort of culture bunker is where I met Stephanie, a beautiful and friendly shorthaired girl---blonde--a curbie is what I call them, an acronym I won't go into now but basically it stands for a short-haired girl who exhibits four out of seven characteristics. Anyway Stephanie is just beautiful, perfect and at the time Kathy Jarosz, the energetic owner/designer/founder of TBB, is upset about her grandmother who happens to be really sick and near death and so Kathy is rambling on and on which is a great thing because she needs to talk about it and I'm listening to her and the more she talks the brighter her eyes get and I know that after about fifteen minutes she'll be okay since she needs to talk herself into an answer and inbetween the jumbo-word-sandwich she introduces me to Stephanie. What a doll. End of sentence. And to make a long story more pointless Stephanie is the girl who is naked on this video. Whoa ...

But right now, Angel, my roommate, is reading the Flo. I don't know whether he's interested in it or he's just trying to make me feel good. who cares? he said Andy's last name (Conejito) means "little rabbit". Andy, the same guy who I had a conversation with above, is the writer and cartoonist for the Flo. He's friends with Elena, this girl who speaks fluent Spanish and is always telling me about some cousin who escaped from some Spanish-sounding, communist-controlled banana republic and how I should do a story on them for the Flo and I keep telling her the flo is about local people to which she replies that I've so sold out and changed and I didn't used to be that way and that now I have a big head and bla, bla, bla. Anyway, Angel's a good guy. Has a lawn service and works at Miami Subs. Unlike me, he's not a slacker. I wasn't until recently. Blame it on Gary, an old high-school friend who told me about welfare and getting food stamps and now he's on both. so now I'm on good stamps and hopefully will be getting welfare money. At least I'll be doing something productive with it not like the people who shuffle into Blessing's Market across the street and use the food stamps on alcohol or liquor. then they leave and step into a taxi. I know social security won't be around when I'm old enough to get it. Heck, the world probably won't be around when I'm old enough. So, I figure if I can get my money now I can do more productive things with it. Why not.

I have to work in ten minutes. I work at a club across the street called Respectable Street Cafe. It's a small, progressive club that opened eight years ago and has always been pretty popular. Tonite a club opened down the street, around the corner. It's a gay club, but I suppose it welcomes straight people, too. It's called Enigma. My friend, Aaron, did some of the work inside, decorating and stuff; he works for Sudka productions.

So here I am on food stamps and getting paid under the table at RSC and hopefully getting unemployment compensation so I can save up to get a decent computer to improve the FLO, this magazine that I put out. Make it more of an information ala what's going on type of thing with good graphics, comics, pictures and style to boot. hmmm . . .

It's so smoky over at RSC, sometimes I feel like wearing a surgeons mask like all the ravers at The Edge do, theirs usually smeared with Vick's Vapour Rub to enhance their trip on X or whatever. It's cold tonite (50's -- cold for Florida) so all the club heads will be garbed in their favorite outfits that they can never wear when it's hot which is about all the time. Ha, ha, ha. Clubs are a funny place, that people would actually pay to be in a room with others who don't talk, listen to music from the eighties, smoke cigarettes even if they don't because the person who is smoking beside you is inches away, feel lonely, drink beer, feel lonelier, make small talk, etc.

Gary Greenwald made a funny comment this afternoon: "I've been masturbating so much I'm surprised my toilet isn't pregnant." Today is Thursday and whenever you approach the weekend, conscience seems to rise to the occasion to remind you where you need to be. I need to get rid of my television or at least control my habit of getting R-rated movies, fast-forwarding to the nude parts, and then immediately taking showers. I've lost my mind. And doing this only makes the journey that much more unexplored. There are so many things to do and so many people to meet and just so much but for some reason I haven't been doing it and I'm growing older. I'm dying. You're dying. And what are you going to do. Not about dying. But what are you going to do.

And last night after work, rather, this morning, 5am at Denny's, Rodney Mayo, the owner of RSC, shy, with the mind of philosopher who seems to be arm wrestling with an entrepreneur, is saying: "If it doesn't matter what you do, then you might as well do everything." He has a really good point and I told him that was encouraging. The "Charleston Chicken Sandwich" was terrific and memorable and we were all digging the conversation behind us ... two guys and two girls and one girl who said how she wouldn't mind being had by eight guys and the guy kept on reassuring her to go on (as he enticed her, led us by default) and that is was okay and that everything's okay. He was squeezing her brain like a sponge and she just kept on talking. Bla, bla, bla.

And now i must return to calling Epic's Surf & Sport's manager at the downtown shop, David, and make amends for screwing up his Epic ad. I didn't even put the address on the store merely because the issue was late, partly my fault, and I didn't have time to make the necessary corrections. Next time, or from now on, rather, I'll realize that making sure the ad is correct is more important than making sure the copy is correct. here goes.

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"I -

Liz is over here now. Jon Eagle, too. Eagle puts out this mini-magazine, 3am, a full-color booklet comprised of unique pictures, quotes, and interesting stories. Well, he only put out one issue, actually. Worked at a place that had a color printer at the time so he managed to do it for free, then sold it for a buck each. Said he wasn't motivated to do it again. Can't blame him. Florida.

Now I'm talking to Liz. She does heroin.

"So, how did you start getting into heroin?"

"My boyfriend" sucking her lollipop. "I don't know ... "

"So, why did you try it?"

"Cuz I'll try anything, once in a while, or maybe more than once."

Right now, she's reading Interview which I won't re-subscribe to next year because it is weak, basically. Good pictures, though, but it's downright strange as far as story ideas and I don't mean that as a compliment, either. Gary should be here any minute now. Angels preparing to go to Puerto Rico to see his family for Christmas. And I'm going to call Anita, oh, I was going to call her Monday ...

Now we're talking about Mexican food and salsa and Angel brought over these bag of Tostitos and Liz and and Angel are throwing the chips into their mouths and talking about drugs. Now she's looking at Moonfest pictures and asking where these pictures were taken bla, bla, bla ... "I don't have a drug problem," she confesses. "My only problem is that I keep running out of drugs."

Now Liz is way out on the junk that I just helped her put into her arm and Gary Greenwald is playing Asteroids (remember Asteroids, from the old Atari game system in the early eighties?). Liz is in the bathroom. She's been fixing her hair for the last fifteen minutes and doing imitations of Catherine Hepburn. She says she's been doing that for years.

I think there are bugs in this hat that I just threw to the ground. Now my eyes are itching and my arms are itching. No good. Liz's eyes are broken, blue pieces of glass. Her pupil is

the same clearness as her eyeball, or whatever that round thing is that is larger than the pupil blue.

I'm gonna take Sunshine's bug (Sunshine is Gary Greenwalds girlfriend) to Target so I can pick up this answering machine and we'll take Liz with us to babysit her.

of how our lives are measured in moments and how those moments are picked by culture-vultures swept between their (our) claws, suspended above what's real and then later, returned in watered-down messages, court-reporter symbols, politically correct heiroglyphics.

She wouldn't want it any other way. I followed her into the bathroom as she tied off the her left bicep. Like a pirate holding his knife in his mouth, Liz held one end of the rope in her mouth, clenched her jaw, while pulling the opposite end with her other hand, tightening the noose around arm. Silently, like a crowd that quiets in the moment before someone is hanged, I watched Liz as she proceeded to strike a Bic lighter beneath a spoon of heroin crystals. They bubbled restlessly. With the skill of a surgeon, she put the needle to the spoon and withdrew the plunger, absorbing the cooked soup du jour.

Then she broke the silence.

"Now when I find a vein I want you to pull it."

"Pull it?"

"Yeah."

"Aren't I supposed to push it?"

"No. Pull it."

"Okay."

I followed her instructions and it reminded me of high school chemistry class and I felt tremendously sad and slightly nostalgic as I withdrew the plastic plunger. Blood spit into the mixture of heroin and water.

"See. You got it. Now push it."

In a painfully careful motion, my fingers slowly prodded the plastic.

"Yeah. That's it." Her head fell back. "Keep going. All right. That's good." Her hand slowly took the needle from the vein. A thick, tiny pool of blood appeared at the surface.

"You did good." She smiled. Sighed. "I'm high. Wow. Whoa ... " I watched as the heroin began to take effect. The drug accelerated, driving itself down the highway, finding it's route along her body's intrastate, weaving in-and-out of common traffic like a drunken speeder who's destination belongs to fate, asleep at the wheel ...

She began talking nonsense. The words weren't even connected by verbs. Her eyes, I noticed, became clouded broken bits of blue glass. Beautiful and lost and lovely and sad. All those discarded emotions flowing through her slurred words.

Gary sat in the living room, playing Atari. The pseudo-Jaws theme song (to the Asteroids game) served as appropriate background music when Liz exited the bathroom and sat down in front of the mirror behind the hallway door. She sat, arranging her hair and gazing into the mirror and slurring her words. Sitting crosslegged, she swaying to the music inside her.

Friday

It's Friday afternoon and I checked my messages and one was from the State Attorney's Office. Some girl or woman, Renalda Mack, who asked me to call her back. I did. She's not in. I left a message.

I don't have a business licence for the Flo, a monthly arts & entertainment magazine that reached 10,000 issues two months ago. It's free and I don't make a profit on it, but Michael Ross (a writer/publisher ... iCE magazine, and other assorted 'zines), said it still has to be filed under a non-profit status like REVIVE, this downtown entertainment organization I used to be part of last year.

I searched Liz's purse. She has three needles on which my fingerprints are all over because I couldn't decide whether to hide the needles or the entire purse. I decided on hiding the entire purse. Put it into the attic and threw her clothes into my collection in the closet. I hope it--the call from the state attorney office--has nothing to do with her.

Mark will be here at 4 and we're gonna go mountain biking. Not that there are any mountains around here. There aren't. But, there's this wooded, rough terrain behind a K-mart out west where we'll go. Been biking for two years but never done that. Looking forward to it. I beat off this morning and felt cheap afterwards. In my guilty introspection that followed, I kept thinking of Liz and her thin, bruised and withered arms. Her whole

body is looking thinner and she's too thin to begin with. She's a junkie. And she's falling apart physically.

Well, it's still Friday, and I don't know what to do. To be honest, I'm pretty stressed out about that call from the State Attorney's Office. I want that to be over with. It's a waste of time for both of us. Not that, I guess. I'm stabbing in the darkness like some blind thought collector and I'm still not getting anywhere. It's funny how whole periods of time and huge amounts of work can be gracefully and silently erased by the stroke of someone's pen. Five words said as an afterthought but five words too much, or a brief message on one's answering machine. It's like that old adage: "Big doors swing on small hinges." Government is so afraid of what it can't control, no matter how natural. I mean, look at the environment and everything the government does to try and protect it instead of just letting it take its natural course.

And now, across the street from me stands Larry Corning, holding a cigarette and stabbing it to his mouth now and then. I'm surprised he doesn't hear this typewriter. I can tell he's lonely. Sometimes a person can just tell that. And I wonder what he's thinking. Sometimes I think he's trying to figure out what's important and what's not important. Sometimes I think everything's a waste of time. He returns inside the building. And all of the sudden, I feel terribly lonely again. And I wonder what his girlfriend feels when she's making love to him--this brilliant, idealistic, young-thinking, one-armed man. He's a whirlwind of ideas, connects territories and plays a real-life Monopoly on this street called Clematis, betting big on turning it into an arts and entertainment boulevard. He's a terrorist. He's a genius. He's mad. He's lost. And about that arm. He lost it in a Jeep accident seven years ago. His heart is in the right place. And when he smiles he lights up a room for it is a genuine smile; his eyes smile, too, and he has this terrific chuckle. Sometimes I want to run up to him, like I do Rodney, and give him a big hug and tell him everything's going to be all right, but that wouldn't be very businesslike now would it and I fall into protocol although I sure don't dress that way. I don't even know where I am anymore.

No one lives here. It's Florida, where all the artists are con artists and everyone is running from something, using this place as a pit-stop, no more, no less. They are on their way somewhere. It's lonely. It's empty. And everyone's eyes move about desperately, their pupils contracting, expanding, taking it all in because there is nothing to take in here and that is why people generally have an open-mouthed expression at the slightest change because it's amazing to them. They say they want it, but they don't. They would get run over by it and complain about the heat which they all ready do. Why don't they just move? Perhaps it's just geographical. Gary put it well when he said: "Florida's like a bad dream no one woke up from."

Saturday afternoon

Everything was happening so downright alive last night. Electric. Across the street from RSC, The Blue Buddha had a fashion show. Extremely cool. Twelve tribe members, two guys and the rest girls, mostly curbies, made up the procession. They'd leave the front doors of the Buddha, wander across the street to the sidewalk in front of Respects, dancing, singing, skipping, parading, and I was completely fond for it.

Andy, the analytical-political-witty mind who draws and writes the snappy dialogue in his cartoon-sketches for The Flo and helps in distribution, was the caboose of the fashion train. Watching him, I started laughing. Dressed in silver pants, he walked in long, deliberate steps, dropping each knee close to the pavement, walking real low and sleazy like.

And Stephanie and Chrissy looked made, too. They did, I think, five outfit changes. I say I think because I had to go to work and probably missed one or two of them. It was mad and Kathy, the owner/designer/creator of these eclectic costumes, was alive and talking up a batch of of great lonely sentences. I think she was on something that made her smile because her eyes had flashlights in them and she was soaking up everything and tasting the streets and the music was alive and rapid and the heartbeats were trying to catch up to it. While the parade of models struts the street, there's this young cat working two record players, turntables, and inside The Blue Buddha people dancing like they're crossing the same bridge and the peanut butter is all smoth even for those who like crunchy can, or will have to, learn to tolerate it. And I kissed Chrissy on the cheek a few times and then apologized and she said, "Why are you apologizing?" and I said, "I don't know," and she said, "Don't apologize," and kissed her some more and she smiled. She smiled. She smiled. She smiled. She smiled. And then later, when Anita was about to leave and I was taking a break from bussing tables at Respectables (waiting for more ashtrays to fill and empty bottles to crowd the tables) and sitting at a booth, she came up to me, introduced her lovely and pretty friend, Charsa or Charis, or something like that and then said, "This is the coolest guy I know. I love this guy. Have you ever met this guy? This is the coolest guy I know. And YOU (in my direction) never call me (then looking to her friend). He never calls me." And then she leans over to kiss me, and I'm lost and connected in this small peck of affection; another kiss, I kind of chew her mouth and she laughs and she leaves and her friend has braces as well and I feel connected and I'm home again.

of how earlier that night, there was this strange anticipation and apparently a fight out in the parking lot and everyone, well at least Alex, this bouncer, and I, were looking for Chris Sargent, the main bouncer, at RSC. We saw him and he said: "Those guys over there

just beat the hell out of some kid."

Me: "Are you trying to catch them?"

Chris: "I'm just trying to point him and the other guy out to the kids friends. They're gonna kick his ass and those guys are scumbags. They deserve it."

Me: "Where are they?"

And Chris is all ready gone to the adjacent parking lot, behind my flat. And I love this, running after him, being part of something bigger than myself, the irresponsible actions that fail to promise any guaranteed results, chasing experiences rather than results ... I am digging it so deep, I feel like I'm in a dream that's the opposite of a nightmare. I feel completely alive and strangely exaggerated and it's downright intense. And I'm chasing Chris, as he barrels across the parking lot, a tackle in this surreal game of football. We arrive to the area where this one guy and another cat are fighting. They're in a blur, on the ground wrestling. Then this Irish guy who's bald and says he's from New York, and the guy who was in the fight begin to fight. I'm thinking how I never want to go to New York if losers like this are there. These two clown are arguing, exchanging verbal blows. Then this big-Adonis-looking blonde guy appears and runs after one of the Irish guy's friends. I find this younger guy, who's smaller than them and this big guy is the younger guy's friend. I find out, at this moment through bits and pieces of the conversation, that two guys for no reason beat up this younger guy who's smaller than them, and this big guy is the younger guy's friend.

"Go get 'em!!! Go, get that asshole!!!" I'm yelling and the guy takes off and the bigger guy is closing in and I'm alive and I want to see them collide and I want to see that asshole get his ass kicked like he deserves and they're taking off down the street and how I wish I had my camera when I think of it now, with 3200 B&W film so I could maybe do a "night on earth" photo spread for The Flo and include all the madness that accompanies alcohol, music, and the collective loneliness of a few hundred people, plus the lust and the drugs and the sex and the violence. It may fit together like a jigsaw puzzle but the picture it makes must be addictive. I'm blabbing. Anyway, these two cops squeal around the corner and Chris rushes up to one and says: "Get that guy. See that guy that's being chased? They, him and another guy, just beat up a kid for no reason and messed him up bad."

After work, I talk to Chris and he says he saw the police car drive by with both of them in the backseat, or maybe it was two plocie cars with one of them in each back seat and the good thing is they were gotten, those scumbags. Yeah. Rodney thre out that keen idea of "tragedy and fashion" and if I would have had 3200 film I could have captured both that night. Arg. Need to get 3200 B&W.

This next section is penned by Gary Greenwald (copyright, 1994).

The fertile octopus flew through the reed in all its bloody ink splendor. I stood to one side of the oldcrackled bathroom door, gawking like a child watching his mother make passionate fuck with the milkman. Here was her scandalous groom, rigid in her flesh, a crucifixion against the silver halide lens of a toiletrie mirror. Kris helped her finish her peas, and the world tilted to our side, we all sought corrective footing as we circled the globe, circumferenced our brain, spilt milk within our lungs. She smiled, we smiled, and mothers secret was safe once again in her side.

"Hey, I feel so much better now, the world is once again revolving around my soles," she said. I nodded and grinned in a low-lying yield, "so this is christmas for you, eh?"

"You know, every time I have this gift in a gelatin capsule, santa brings his reindeer to perch on my forearm; look, see their tracks." She held out her stickly arm, paled as a bludgeoned moon who had been caught sleeping, along the dried canyons of her veins, tiny footprints that led to her inner elbow. I winced for her pride, I had seen it too many times before then to actually take back a breath.

"Hey, you guys want some spaghetti or somthin', I have some pasta and a couple tomatoes that I stole off of Ole man Grover", Kris offered.

Old man Grover had a veggie stand on the corner of Clematis and Dixie, which also stood for parsley dished sacks of marijuana that one only bought when you couldn't find any other drug on this side of the east coast. It usually took three bags just to make a man smile, and at a cost of \$10 a snatch, we used to joke that it was cheaper to get stoned off some Publix catnip tea. I myself would douse myself in cough suppressant tonic while friends argued over a simmering pot about how long the catnip should soak in boiling water. Anyways, at the point we arrive at now, Amy is sunk back against a lean-to, full-sized mirror that is on the bedroom carpet, and I am procrastinating any real occupancy of life by just holding the umbilical cord of Sherbert Shoot, my classic arcade game of shot or shoot or be shot or something like that, you know, a video game, a real life, two dimensional crisis where the only way to win is to unplug the cord or bash the fucker with your backhand and cause the screen to admonish you with vertical stripes and a flourescent scalding noise.

Kris is pandering over his college-ruled notebook. He's had the notebook for over a year now, and always writes little iotas to fully expand upon later in private moments. Illegible to the common reader, his scrambled fledgling letters take flight in the downy of his conscience, where they stretch across and feel at peace enough to actually reveal their full intent to his privy. He's a real master of marvel, his eyes always roaming for some dirt behind someones nails, for the chip on everyones shoulder, for the bird that sings in every

womans breast. He's a real lover of plunder, catching the spark that carries itself across conversations, and stealing the flame away secretly to later dissect and posture and unravel to make sense of the reality and peoples plights, whether myth, mystic, and mentor. He knows there are no mentors in this town, only the nots they left which have easily been stolen in the northern breezes, so he has picked up the textbooks hidden in the cracks of sidewalks, the lessons written on every lip, and writes his own reality out and into his own benediction named Flo. His 22-page hail mary was the religion that he had no real license for, only talent. As any real soul knows, you sighn yourself as something, you can take yourself off the list for the junk mail of feeble conversations. But Kris has no pledge to his work, only a real drive, a real push from the back so sharp he arcs his back and yells at the sun to hurry on down, or he'll hold his fingers to the moon and howl for it to justify the night and the stars and the tubulent afterglow of a drunken sauret at Respectables. Where he works, it's there, in an open room strewn with bodies which have been overcome and overindulged with harlotry, opiates, and personalities of hedonistic lechery.

Don't bother Kris.

He's got a new Sol-tec-matic answerphone.

Gary Greenwald (copyright, 1994)

Tears fell to the ground like homesick earthworms.

The bus turned the corner. Naomi shuddered and it was right then, right there, when she moved her head sideways and her eyelids half closed and she sighed, that I knew I loved her and felt sorry for her at the same time. And I knew I could never make her understand that and even so, she could never return my affection. Maybe it was best to keep that affection directionless like it had always been, and draw avenues for the leftover restlessness to find its way into one of the magnifying glasses that I so often held to burn my art. If you could call it art. And I guess I call art, something that is produced that leaves a person feeling tired. It doesn't even have to be a product, just that outputted energy that arrives at some, at some, I don't know ... and can sympathy coexist with love or is that called codependence? and if you love someone and need them to return that, isn't that just codependence?

Madness, madness, complete madness. I just arrived home. It's Sunday and Nick and Robert and I were talking outside on the street. A philosophical conversation about crime, punishment, among two jaded white people and a black panhandler, all of us males. And

Robert, the panhandler, crack addict more likely, was saying how it doesn't do too much good to return violence for violence, and Nick arguing that that is the only way to stop the violence. It's just that Nick's car was broken into and he's on his way to get a club, this car-protection device, and when he returns his car has been stolen. We're getting guns.

Gary told me earlier that Keith died of a heroin overdose. He said he heard it from Sunshine. I just called Sunshine and someone at her work used to work with him there and she told him that he OD'ed. I just got the paper for the obits section and relatives and friends will be received tonight between seven and nine. I'm gonna borrow the truck and go see him. There was a real friendly guy who used to go to Respect's, and say "hi" to me and give me hugs, and, unfortunately, I think this was Keith, but I'm not sure. So I go to the funeral, it's open casket, in the evening, at some funeral home. Keith, it turns out, is this guy that used to go to RSC often. Really nice guy. Gay. Ed, a regular at Respects, was there, with two pretty girls, and this guy comes up to me and says: "Hi, I'm _____ (forgot his name). How did you know him?" he asked. "Acquaintance. Came to the club I worked. Respectables. Really nice guy." He nodded his head. I asked: "How do you know him?" "Boyfriend," he replies. "Sorry to hear that," I offer. And I'm hoping he's not thinking I said that as if I said 'I'm sorry to hear that (you're gay).' And I wanted to give him a hug, but felt strange since he didn't look too upset, so I didn't.

Description of Lawrence Corning that I published in the FLO

He stood there, lost in his own world of descriptions. I could see his search in the restless movement of his pupils. Back and forth. Back and forth. Up and down. Contract. Expand. I guess quality pickles break before they bend. And the way his pupils resembled broken bits of glass like Amy's did when she had landed on Heroin's Island made me wonder if he had been stranded there, too. Or maybe he was just visiting. He's definitely on something. And standing there, listening to him like an attentive pupil trying to understand, he starts to glow and become flat like looking through a Viewmaster or perhaps even a virtual reality pop-up book. I try to put together these thoughts he's throwing out and end up with numbers, put together in any old way in a foreign-language puzzle with missing pieces. And his arm, rather the non-arm (it's a stump, got chopped off in a Jeep accident seven years ago) rotates on its own in a feeble attempt to concrete his intentions. I feel like hugging him. Slapping him and hugging him. By the end of the conversation, I know one of us must be out of our mind.

Everyone here is grasping for confirmation in one way or another. The search for self approval seems to be the underlying reason for doing anything. And nothing. The television tells people how to rebel and then people rebel by doing what the television tells them. Everyone's pointing fingers at themselves. And Kentucky Fried Chicken never tasted so delish with the gravy and the grease and the mixture of the Pepsi and the grease and the salt and the sugar. Makes me laugh and remember how, when I used to work at

McDonald's, these overweight patrons would order \$20-dollars worth of food and for the drink they'd add: "Do you have any diet Pepsi?" to which I'd say, "No, but we have diet Coke, though." Then they'd say: "I'll have a diet Coke with that, then" and whisper to their friend beside them like they're some Pop-like astronomer metering out what they should eat and stay away from, "You know the calories I can really do without to which their friend would nod in agreement. And isn't that what everyone's doing? Nodding in agreement. Saying yes without fully digesting the food, hearing the story, listening to the question. Butterflies are speaking to people who are blind. Collecting the dirt from under people's fingernails .. yet it's only certain fingers they hold up to show me. The rest have been discarded inbetween sofa cushions with wrinkled hand towels and used, forgotten coins. Bad memories only serve to help me feel the more nostalgic sometimes. It is actors who are the murderers of the world. Soft pillows and dry laundry that is still warm and reminds you of safety.

And it was downright. Brave. Beautiful. Lost. Starry-eyed as we sat there listening to our mystic whose words burned bright through the charcoal of his graveled accent. Cuban. South American. European? He had beene verywhere and snailed along everything with his turtle's face and misty eyes that moved slowly to each corner as if he had stretched the muscles to widen his own experience. You only know what something tastes like because of what someone says and this guy wasn't reading the labels. His soulish package had been ripped and torn open and frayed like giant magnets in the sky that can only attract what they don't destroy. These were the Americans who characterized great books to be read by people in countries who hungered for a piece of another culture. And there I was with two other timesoaked cronies, saving the dirt from beneath his fingernails that he so often dropped. A generous man with thick, reptile-like skin, and free with his stories. His hands were his campfire carrying across his words and becoming the point of interest for our eyes. A walking relic. The art gallery with a belly button, muscular with crudely drawn tattoos carved into his black hide. Marked for travel. How only these people are at the heart of what goes on in the world by not thinking, but doing, not leaving, but arriving, not dragging, but sweeping collectible bits of who they are by the absence of a conscious decision. Never arriving at the conclusion, just taking it with them. There are telephones and there are pens and there are candy apples that people discard at Halloween because they're afraid to eat them and there are club owners and there are restless young girls with brave appetites for foods they have not tried and there are men with better intentions and there are sorry, pitiful, stuffed to the brim ears of corn that only the farmer can recommend to people who drive four-doors. Giermo is his name. Pure. Shelved among the indescribable farmers of the here and now.

Terry Nottage just yelled from downstairs. He's my cousin, who I see every few years whenever he returns from his latest academic stint, college-level coursework, usually Philosophy, Religion, or Literature. Physically, Terry reminds me of the drummer of U2, that good-looking chap with the baby complexion and big blue eyes. His square-jawed, well-muscled build belies his intellectual nature. Most, from a distance, would write him

off as a street tough to be avoided. Mentally, though, Terry's well-read, an avid reader of thick books on philosophy that have reduced him to an empiricist. Still, though, he's likeable, witty, and optimistic, probably due his formative years of growing up poor, and developing a determined humor for survival.

I jump down the stairs and open the front door.

"Kristopher, my cousin," he smiles. "Would it be okay if I crashed here?"

"Yes," I quickly reply.

Immediately, I formulate a way to use Terry, to photographically-pin-him-down before he disappears into the wilderness of academia again. Maybe I could show him the Pennsylvania Hotel, a crumbling, beautiful eyesore on the southeast corner of Datura and Narcissus, in downtown West Palm Beach, before they destroy it. Showing him this wonderful example of urban decay, of course, with the intent to bait his interest in modeling for Tragedy & Fashion, a photo-shoot idea. The idea behind Tragedy & Fashion is to shoot photographs of ordinary models in locations that are symbols of tragedy--funerals, building demolitions, executions at the Animal Shelter, car accidents, crime scenes. Metaphorically, T&F serves to contrast the superficial with the inevitable--that fate happens to all of us, regardless of how beautiful or well-dressed.

Although Terry declined to participate, Tragedy & Fashion, the photo shoot, turned out to be fantastic and memorable.

Dancing at Club Boca - Kristen Morris, Brian Large, Rodney Mayo, Chris Sargent, Vanessa

Monday which is tomorrow. That is Monday of the New Year. And what year is it? It is 1995. Or perhaps. No, I will call Elana tonight and see if I can finish using her laptop tomorrow evening when she trudges off to the Wormhole after work. Yeah. The Wormhole is this underground thrift shop/music venue that plays host to local bands, a philosophy night, and other spoken word performances. As it's non-profit, an all volunteer staff comprised of Steve Rullman, Matt Reynolds, Elana, and Ann Gluxman run the space. It's located on the west side of Olive, below Lost Weekends, a pool hall.

Forget what I just wrote and what you just read. Not important in the big scope of things. Last night was a broken chapter in the feather slide. We landed on soft, downy pillows stuffed with warm and brave floods of Rolling Rock. Kristen, Vanessa, Brian, Rodney and I occupying a table along the sidewalk in front of O'Shea's. It is the day after New Years. 1995. It was after 1am and were all feeling exaggerated and hungering for something to do.

So we loaded into someone's car and head south to Club Boca, the lamest club in the

universe. Inside, the atmosphere was synthetic, a blizzard of feigned enthusiasm. A forest of guys, dressed in Macy's fashion-du-jour--faux grunge and Doc's, circled the groups of females. Most looked to be college students, probably from FAU (Florida Atlantic University), Lynn University, or PBC (Palm Beach Community College) south campus. They major in the lawn & garden department, specializing in truth hedgers and kiddie pools. Then, lonely, horny, desperate from the alcohol, they face each other off in kind-of-a-tribal-standoff. Their preparation was hardly noticed as they checked their visage in the reflection of already-discovered-but-unacknowledged-mirrors.

And the girls. These are the voyages of the criss-cross bike racers riding without roadmaps and checking their protective gear--casually glancing at the size of their breasts. Like the men but more discreet, they peer into the black hole of their purse in which sits a carefully placed mirror casting their reflection. Each girl knows what the other does even though she doesn't admit it. A small shame as it would probably draw this entire group together, stacking these fragmented, lonely Leggos. Assembled, these people become the planet that draws others to its orbit. Alone, they are stamped out, hurled into nervous smiles and slightly puzzled kisses.

As a group, we surveyed the scene. Most of us either worked for Rodney, or had worked for Rodney. Vanessa and Kristen Morris bartend at Lost Weekends, a pool hall that he built. Both Brian Large and Chris Sargent are bouncers at Respectable Street Cafe, the progressive-music club he opened in 1987. Because I worked as a busser at Rodney's club, Respectable's, I felt like an insider. Yeah, I'm in the biz. Because I was from West Palm Beach, I felt like a spy. Hah!

Rodney let's go when he's drunk. So analytical when he's sober. For Rodney, alcohol provides an escape hatch through which he can funnel his feelings, pour out his territorial longings. (Music is his other way of expressing himself, as he's a deejay.) Although this is interesting to watch, I feel sad to know that, for some people, alcohol is the only medium for their true character. Perhaps this category of person tends to become an alcoholic.

Kristen Morris is adorable, lovely, and talkative, her mouth lubricated by the alcohol. Physically, she has soft pale skin and beautiful teeth. She has a fantastic bellybutton. It's nearly invisible, a small flap of skin that covers the entrance to a cave that's begging to be explored. "Let me in. I don't need a welcome mat. I'll just take off my shoes, thank you. No, I'm not trying to sell you anything, just open the door. I just want to explore. Don't mind me, you can keep doing what you're doing. Thank you." When Kristen becomes concerned like she did in Key West, when Chris, Rodney, Trevor (another bartender/manager of Lost Weekends) and Brian, her cronies, turned up missing, her lower lip slightly disappears into her mouth and her eyes cloud like a vision of uncertainty, each pupil a windsock gaging the speed of an oncoming storm. At this moment, I feel compelled to sleep beside her, give her a hug and tell her that everything's alright. I'll become her teddy bear of affection with the circumstance, minus the protocol. The

comfort. I'm running out of words.

So there we are, Chris, Brian, Rodney, Vanessa, and Kristen, a flock of bystanders at club in Boca Raton, Florida. They coaxed me to have a beer, which I normally don't drink, but, hey, I'm with friends, right? So I downed a bottle, then giddily danced around like a marionette amidst the sea of well-tanned, well-toned collegiates. After drinking some more beer, I fell down clumsily, but decided to stay on the floor and breakdance, as if I had fallen on purpose. When you're drunk, the world is yours, or at least you think it is. Brian squatted on the floor and started breakdancing as well. He's pretty nimble for a guy that's 6'3 and probably weighs in at 200 pounds. Physically, Brian Large reminds me of the original Superman. He's good-looking, square-jawed, muscular, and the quiet. He's really bright, too. Girls dig this guy. Heck, I'm a guy and I kinda dig him. Word. At the bar, Kristen and Rodney teased each other mischevously. Vanessa stood there. She seemed to be thinking about something and had a certain wishlike quality in her eyes. She seemed sad but no one asked her why because we were having fun, or pretending to have fun, smudging our fingerprints on the hands of time for something to remember later, only to remember in a better way with more exaggeration and laughter to create envy from others who had not been around to witness the attempt to go and be and live and laugh and not realize how pathetic it all was.

At the club, we met Chris's girlfriend, Mary. She seems really nice. She's a dancer at Club Boca. No, not a nude dancer, she dances in these leotards and is made-up like a raver, you know, like future-robot-girl. While she did the electric donut--writhing around like a snake, Chris watched, lost in a hypnotized hammock stare. Even dripping water drops from a suspended ice cube above his head didn't stop his gaze. (Rodney gets mischevious when he has a beer; so does Brian.) I don't know if it was longing or curiosity that captivated his attention. Perhaps a mixture of both. She, the electric donut. He, the electric cop.

Later, we all met at Peter Pan, a 24-hour restaurant in Boca Raton. Only after rolling through dense fog that wrapped around the car, suffocating the headlights. Rodney lost his hat. Someone threw it out the window. I think it was Kristen, since she likes to tease him. I told them to stop the car, jumped out, and ran through the fog to retrieve it. Spotting it, I ran off to the side of the road as they drove around to meet me. Anyway, Peter Pan was pretty lame. The waitress handed us the check early since she was off her shift and the entire restaurant was pretty empty. I felt as if we were the last people on earth, ordering hash browns after the apocalypse. Out of nowhere, Rodney starts a food fight. In return, Kristen tosses a giant french fry (you know, the disgusting kind, the fat fries, they serve at those overpriced beef-eateries) into my water glass, which shatters. Ice and water slosh across the table. The manager approaches: "Bla, bla, bla ..." Feigning seriousness, we apologize for our behavior and carefully clean up our mess.

After leaving the restaurant, I notice that no one is around. Unnoccupied buildings, empty

strip malls, and wooded areas surround us.. Are we the only people on earth? Or the only people in Florida eating at a restaurant at 3am? Door number two. We pile into the four-door SUV (Sports Utility Vehicle) that Kristen drove back from California in, and cruise back to West Palm through the fog. Arrive home and crash. The removal of. One of the things I want to do is make out with Kristen before she leaves for California. She is a doll. I'll be fond to see her and know her when she finds her direction and passion and knows what she really wants to do and is doing what she really wants. I care about her. My problem. Kiss me.

8

Gary Greenwald, a computer whiz whose been blessed with mad writing skills, enough to complete a book of about five-or-ten thousand poems, all his own, shares the living room at the Clematis Street, 2nd-floor walkup apartment above O'Shea's. The apartment is occupied by Gary, myself (Kris Kemp), Phil Gilmoure (an avid reader and social butterfly), and Angel Lozada, who's hoping to start his own lawn business here. Although the apartment is considered a one-bedroom, we have four people living there, in order to reduce the cost of everyone's rent to about \$85-a-month.

When Dave Butler, an acquaintance/friend of mine died in a car wreck, a wake was held at Lost Weekends, a pool hall that he frequented in downtown West Palm Beach, Florida. Gary, Phil, and I attended the wake. Introspective and sober, I remained quiet while friends and family gathered around, told stories, mumbled soft compliments, and flipped through the pictures of David on the table by the jukebox.

"Is there any free food?" Gary chirps inquisitively. "Kris, can you get me some pretzels? I don't want people to think I'm just here for the food. You knew Dave better than I did."

That comment set me off. How indifferent and selfish for Gary to say such a thing.

and oh, Gary, how I wanted to make you to feel things you couldn't because your mind was at a cloth sale at Target or Wal-Mart or at any one of those stores that throw fishes for discount, reel them in and leave them with their tummies full and minds complacent, satisfied at having bought, stealing the ribbons of baby carrots. They make toothpaste for you to feel less alone. You know what I'm writing, or more specifically typing. What do they say about that toothpaste? Takes the fear out of being alone? What rids you of the fear? The toothpaste? Brushing twice a day? Seeing yourself in the mirror? Saxaphones singing scapethrown sheep sleeping silently so suferfluous sullen slaps stored sideways sought sinkholes. Breath. Breathing. Breathing deeper and drowning in the comfort of what you own. Or rather, what owns you. And what does it take to make a man possess everthing so that he knows himself? To have the toys and lose the thought? Make up for things that you can't possess emotionally. Discard those snails.

I'm trying to make sense of all the pictures I see in my head but I can't because they move too fast. Everything to you, Gary, represents a consumer product--packaged, shipped out, priced, discounted, purchased, unwrapped, put on, wore, wore out, resold to a thrift store or a friend because you only bought the best, didn't you? You are smart. And you do burn when you burn. Yeah you do. Motivated by weather. Strange how someone ignites with life once the temperature drops. That cold, consumer magic. You've even got me seeing, saying, doing it. But I can't anymore, Gary, because that's not where I want to put my steam.

My disappointment in you Gary stems from an observation I made at a Dave Butlers wake, held at Lost Weekends, the pool hall on Olive, just south of Clematis Street. You at a friends wake where pictures are strewn in a corner and arranged in a photo book. The same table is littered with complimentary platters of snacks, nervous food to nibble between conversation. Nearby, the birds of conversation pollenate the social boquets. Neglecting the temperament of the occasion, or deliberately ignoring it, you tell me to get you a beer, then tell me the beer is free. Immediately my introspection turns to astonishment as I'm angered by your indifference, and disappointed with your selfishness. All the saddest pilgrims couldn't make you a thanksgiving dinner that would fill your belly. Like everyone else, you're a mime with your hands on the clock. Like Teri Whetstone (poet) said, and how I would still like to kiss her: "You and I are a picture of time. The picture shows the hands of time slapping us in the face, trying to get us to feel ... " I care about you Gary, even though you annoy me. If you didn't annoy me, I would be apathetic. Isn't apathy the opposite of love?

It smells like someone farted in here. Not me, but someone else. But there is no one else in here. Ranky. Perhaps some goblin is floating air biscuits.

Outside the canned laughter, a spurious effect of alcohol, loneliness and after-work merriment, battles with the buzzing sound of a malfunctioning outdoor streetlight. The light is about ten feet from our living room window. The sound emanating from it continues to drone, annoying all of us. Not all the laughter is happy, though. The remaining puffs of breath sound tragic, wrought with tension and a sense of impending chaos. Nothing goes on like this forever. We are the cleeshay because there is nothing staring back at us when we exit the toll booth. You can turn away from it and open the can of beets thinking they are healthy, but with 580 milligrams of salt you are fooling yourself. This is the shallow end of the pool.

The streetlight outside is buzzing loudly. The light sits just outside your bedroom window. One more day is all you'll give them to fix the hum. As Gary points out: It sounds like the flatline sound of a hospital patient that died. Maybe one more hour. Maybe one more minute. Maybe one more second. When you don't have that much to ground you, the slightest things can set you off. Like a landmine, you stew in your own bag of broken dreams, undeveloped talents, harbored resentments, and remembered

criticisms, waiting for someone to come along, drop their foot on your trigger. KER-BLAM! Throw tokens into the arcade game of the senses. Me against you. Let's see who can last the longest.

The noise from the broken streetlamps continues, emanating in waves, ringing like an amplified bumblebee. Later on, when the street is nearly empty, I shimmy up the lightpole, am handed a stick by Angel Lozada, and smash the light. The plastic covering splits in half, then rests crookedly at the top. The buzzing stops. The bee is history.

Earlier this evening, I visited The Wormhole, a book/clothing/music/thrift store that serves light snacks and drinks and doubles as a live music/spoken word performance space. Run as a non-profit by Steve Rullman, vocalist and music promoter, Matt Reynolds, a music store owner and gentle hearted hippie, Ann Gluxman, a friendly Bahamian who's besieged by the symptoms of her own intelligence, and Elana, a computer programmer who operates the business end of things, The Wormhole serves as community space that benefits local artists, poets, musicians, writers, and the under-18 crowd that have no place to go. I admire these four who make it happen. They're creating a space that, otherwise, would not exist.

The Wormhole is comprised of one large room, which houses a stage that faces a collection of orphaned sofas and chairs. On one side is the counter, with a cash register and assorted stacks of fliers. Inside, the glass counter is littered with consignment jewelry, stickers, rings, and other decorative accessories. Adjoined to the large room are two smaller rooms, one for used clothing, shoes, and accessories, the other for music--records, tapes, CD's, even posters. For about two months, I made about ten-to-fifteen dollars a week by buying \$1-store items, then re-selling them at The Wormhole. I purchased knit hats and colored sunglasses, attached a 3x5 index card that read: "Hybrid - combining the familiarity of the past with the restlessness of the future", and placed them in a box at the counter. One night at Respectables, a progressive dance club on Clematis Street, west of the tracks, I spot a guy wearing a hat, then another guy wearing a pair of glasses. I smiled.

I saw Doug Corbit, a blonde-haired guy, playing bass. I started playing drums. While we played, five or six schoolgirls entered the store. They wore school uniforms and looked to be about twelve or thirteen years old. Steve Rullman looked at them, looked at me, looked at them, looked at me, then smiled. The origin of the smile was apparent. These girls were incredibly cute, in a way that supercedes feelings of lust and generates a warmth of responsibility, a genuine concern for their well-being.

I continued to play drums, swinging in the hammock of melancholy wistfulness. Some of us hold our breath underwater. Others capitulate to sofa desires. Glancing at the group of friends, I noticed their features. Their eyes were clear, bright, not clouded in worldly corruption, their mouths not pursed at the corners in jaded distrust, but rather open, birthing naive remarks, carefree, happy. Their smiles were big and real. Promising futures,

full of hope.

The justification of two hundred clouds couldn't bring him down.

Aaron and his girlfriend Michelle recline on a floor mattress and slide a video into the VCR.

About a week ago, Aaron's brother, Dave, died in a car wreck. After a night of playing pool at Lost Weekends, he drove Kate home in her Bronco. In an attempt to make a lane change, he accelerated too fast. The Bronco flipped. Dave, who wasn't seatbelted, flew out the window. He was hit by four cars. Kate's in serious condition at the hospital. Dave's dead Dave was a wondrous kid that refused to be tied down for any length of time. In his own way, he personified a kind of freedom. After short stints at various jobs, he'd split. Two months later, he'd return, with a genuine smile, a cautious gaze, broke, and sometimes with a girlfriend in tow. On the trip before his last, he'd returned with a blonde-haired chick. She was hippie, a free spirit, friendly, like him. His dad, an architect, writer, and self-described prophet, revealed to me that David "thought he was in love". When he wanted to be, Dave was one of the funniest guys I knew, unloading a sense of humor driven home by the nails of experience, and grounded with the laws of common sense.

Even though we parted ways, as he was interested in adventure outside of West Palm Beach (as I was interested in flashlighting the underground culture in West Palm Beach, Beach and bringing it to the surface with the FLO, an indie zine that I published), I still considered him a pretty good friend. Last year, following an all night at Spring Breakfast (a street party that I helped develop along with Rodney Mayo, maverick realtor Lawrence Corning, publisher/writer Michael Ross, and others), I drove with him and Gary Greenwald to Key West. We borrowed Lawrence Cornings van. (Lawrence is this maverick realtor who's putting together the Artist's Colony, converting a 2-story building into artists studios and living space lofts. He's smart and kind hearted, and I figured I'd reward myself for putting so much work into Spring Breakfast, this one night Street Festival that provided an alternative to the normal Spring Break fodder. He had let me use the van to breakdown and clean up the debri from Spring Breakfast. We worked from 4am 'til 6am, so I figured Lawrence wouldn't mind if I borrowed it for a quick roadtrip. Besides, he had another car. That morning, Gary, Dave, and I left for Key West. For most of the way, Dave drove. Behind the wheel, he came to life: wide-eyed, laughing, smoking, and talking like a banshee. Driving is a combination of travelling and control. Dave was in his element. He kept the van at at minimum speed of 75-80mph, grinning and yelling the whole way.

Once we arrived in Key West, we rented bicycles, then pedaled around Duval Street and

nearby neighborhoods. You'd think that someone might ride a bicycle, a rented one in a town that they're not familiar with, using caution. Dave acted like he owned the road. He was crazy. Repeatedly he rounded corners, the kind you can't see past because a building blocks the view of oncoming traffic, without looking, pedaling so fast that he was standing up. He was a maniac, running red lights with all the relish of a mad painter. His action were his medium. His attitude--energetic, fearless, foolish, wreckless--left gaping mouths and staring eyes in his wake. The world was his canvas. And his experience with it became the artwork. A mad, driven hurricane of open emotion.

But that was last year. And a lot can happen in a year.

Angel, my roommate, and Aaron Butler, my friend with enormous hands, warm smile, and talent for playing guitar, recline on the floor mattress and watch the television screen. Michelle, Aaron's girlfriend, sits beside him.

They're watching the video shot of Moonfest, a Clematis Street Halloween festival that features local bands. This year, their band Spice (a four piece ensemble with catchy, dancable music), was chosen to headline the festival.

Although Moonfest is in its second year, it drew nearly 10,000 weary bodies to the usually desolate Clematis Street. The event happened on the 500 block, a haven for the fledgling music & artists scene downtown, a section of town that is literally west of the RR tracks. Watching the video of their show at Moonfest, they comment and pat each other on the back.

"Man," says Aaron. "It was, like, the biggest event for this street, ever."

Michelle nods, glances at him, then returns her eyes to the screen. Where's the mother?

"See how crowded it is, the camera doesn't even show it all. It was, like, twice this crowded as it looks because ... the camera, it only shows a small part." At this point, I want to give Aaron a hug and tell him I love him, and that he doesn't have to try or anything and I'll still love him. Sure, he's flawed. But unlike the majority that disguise their need for encouragement, Aaron forgoes subtext and reveals his heart. I like that about him. Still, even he hungers for the stray compliment. I feel the hunger, too, but disguise my reasons. Everyone needs to be loved. It's the ones who hide the reasons who become all the more attractive to people who are enablers. Like me.

Angel throws out a few compliments, some toward himself, some toward Aaron. Their laughter subsides quickly, drowning in the waves of desparation that lap beneath the surface.

"Man, the guitar sounds so good."

"Whoa, look at all the people. Ha, ha, ha."

"Oh man, Jimmy. Those girls are crazy. Jeezus."

The video halts abruptly and that's the end. It's over.

After Aaron and Michelle leave, Sunshine arrives. Sunshine is Gary's girlfriend or gal pal. She's strange and very quiet. When she does speak, her words come slowly, delivered in carefully constructed paragraphs, with no words wasted.

Angel's talking with Sunshine. Gary's somewhere in the apartment. He's usually fixing something, painting, screwing, or hammering. He's build himself a freestanding wooden bunkbed with a desk underneath it. His entire space is enclosed in a stand-alone tent that zippers up, to prevent mosquitos from entering.

Gary Greenwald is peculiar, a brilliant guy, but very sedated and subdued. He's good at both logic, math, computers, and also a gifted writer and poet. He's always buying stuff, though. He handles his vice, shopping, by bargain hunting. He's always looking for the perfect deal. His favorite store is Wal-mart. There, he dodges grounded housewives glued to their carts and tethered by their wallet. They make just enough to buy what they think they need to become what they think they should become. Only then do they recognize the grumblings of the soul and realize they have no can opener for the cranberry sauce. Gary's looking for the ultimate fix in the corridors of the discount department store. There are no confessionals here, only return booths. And those who best paragraph the legitimate complaint do get their money back. The others only receive store credit. The bait that keeps them circling the hook, until their hunger overpowers them. And coming back he keeps doing. Because his fix is legal, taxed, and helps to lubricate the wheels of commerce, it is justified. But, like Liz, he longs to feel something.

Liz, where is she? She roams the labyrinth of avenues, carrying her rucksack of books, makeup, hypodermic needles, dime bags of heroin. She is hungry, desperate, wanting to be convinced that there is a God. Liz, swimming in the clouded pools of ghettospace, swandiving for the invisible audience. The diving board is still shaking and she's in mid-air, curled up in a cannonball, the world below her, the clouds about her, and no birds for miles because the birds are in her head. The birds are in her head. The birds are in her head. The birds are in her head. The birds are in her head. The birds are in her head. The birds are in her head.

Meanwhile, Gary roams from aisle to aisle, forging his memory on surveillance camera film remembered by no one except the occasional lonely teenager who watches in fascination as the supple, young beauty undresses and tries on new clothes. He fondly remembers that time alone, buries it in his brain for later appointment with handsoap and

hot water. It's the old artificial against the real. Which is better, which is worse? Ham or Spam? Veggie-meat or beef? Cocaine or caffeine? Brown heroin crystals or the trembling seeker of the special-to-end-all-specials, the deal, the real deal which lies around the corner?

Everyone's pushing something. One is advertised in newspapers, sandwiched in the clutter of ads within the jumbo-sized Christmas Holiday shopping issue. The other is limited to short-sentenced conversations, over the phone, in the bathroom of life--clubs, bars, cafes, grocery stores, shared among a close group of friends with an object for affliction. Inevitably, one has to give up everything in order to believe in anything. Superstition becomes the popular means to avoid moral responsibility. They, we, you remain desperate for something.

Another fuse just blew, a symptom of this apartments old electrical wiring. I bought the surge protector today, though, so I know it's the fuse.

Odd vacant footprints rely on the restless souls of this street for direction. They have no purpose, only energy. No real timepieces, only nervous laughter that indicates the need for silence. Only when they stop talking to themselves do they become fearful. So they conjure topics of conversation, ideas to talk and argue about. They dress in mad outfits, deciding their future in clear mirrors. Apply the smell, cut the shrubs, trim the hedges, treat the lawn. Lawn companies are the future plastic surgeons of this world.

"Where's Sean?"

"Don't ask me. He's down there, somewhere. Pshaw."

"I'll be back." Running off.

"Don't worry about it, Mark! He's just being an idiot, that's all. Don't waste your time. Geez."

It's afternoon now and I can't tell the difference from today and yesterday. I'll type later tonight, before I go to work.

Those who neglect to experience the world, with all its over-ripe fruits, bearing and ready to explode--the juices infecting us with their sweetness, must substitute it for something. One method is to approach it differently. Smile broadly, count from ten-to-one, then yell "Go!" and race toward the person, place, or thing. Then, sweating, with the adrenaline coursing through your body, observe the world, the horribly mundane and beautifully

routine moments, with exaggerated enthusiasm. Indifference is the byproduct of an underworked imagination.

Last night, I bussed at Respectable Street, a small, progressive dance club across from my apartment. Bussing means that I carry around a kitchen-sized wastebasket and collect empty beer bottles, cups, empty ashtrays, wipe counters, and make sure the floors and seats are kept dry. Also, I replenish bathroom supplies and sweep up broken glass from shattered bottles. Around 12:30 a.m., I see Tim, this chef who I used to work with at Ann King's catering company, at a warehouse off Georgia Avenue. His name is Tim. He's asking me where to get a hat. "Yeah, this girl took my hat from me and I can't find it. It was the coolest hat," he laments. I tell him that I was cleaning the upstairs storage area and found a Gilligan hat. "Now, na, na," Tim counters. "Like a baseball hat. Do you have a baseball hat or do you know someone who does?" Then he pauses. "Carrie has a hat that I can borrow. She's upstairs, isn't she?" I smile: "Yeah, I think so. I saw her earlier. Yeah." We head upstairs. Knock. Carrie answers the door. They talk. Then he walks in, takes a black hat off the shelf and places it on his head. "Nooooo," she whines. "It's sentimental. Mr. bla, bla, bla gave that to me. You know, that famous musician." Watching them argue, I become frustrated at Carrie for valuing the hat more than she values Tim's feelings. Disgusted with the way she refuses to understand his insecurity, I leave.

Half-an-hour later, Tim is nursing a bloody nose and puffed lip at the corner of the bar.

"What happened?" I ask him.

"I met these two guys and bought of them a drink," he answers. "One of them says he wants to talk with me about something in the bathroom. Then, when I go in there, he propositions me to buy drugs from him. I'm like, 'I'm not interested.' They leave the bathroom. When I'm walking out, one of them punches me in the face."

Astonished, I query, "Why'd they punch you?"

"I don't know. I didn't do anything. I just told them I didn't want to buy drugs 'cuz I don't do that, that's all."

"Where are they?"

"They went that way." He points toward the door.

Angry and pensive, I'm rushing through the crowd wondering what I've just witnessed. At the front door, I speak with a bouncer, relaying the story and describing the two assholes that punched him in the face, while looking around for the perps. Outside, I spot them at the corner. Rodney Mayo, the owner of Respects, and Brian Large, one of the bouncers,

point them out to a cop and tell him what happened. The cop returns to his car, does a u-turn and drives toward the pair of thugs. Perturbed, I return inside the club. Ten minutes later, I'm inside bussing tables and see the police car outside. Tim is talking to one cop, and the two black guys that punched him are talking to two other cops. The cops tell Tim that since they didn't see it, and it's only a misdemeanor anyway, there's nothing they can do. Carrie's pulling at Tim, telling him to quit talking about it. Tim, though, is justifiably upset, angry, injured, frustrated, slightly drunk.

"Tim, don't worry about it," Carrie argues. "There's nothing you can do. You're drunk. Let's just go back inside."

"Fuck off, Carrie." I butt in. "If you got hit, it'd be a different story."

"Kris, you don't know what you're talking about. I've known Tim for two years - "

"I've known him, too," I interrupt. "And why don't you just let him be. Sure, maybe there's nothing they can do about it, but why don't you just let him try. That's bullshit. Give him a chance to blow off some steam."

We argue some more and she storms off, finally. Takes her tale between her legs and discards the pile of fifteen-second Clematis Street fame she had been swallowing by the forkful.

It's Saturday now, and it's nearly time for me to become the actor in this same old weatherbeaten screenplay called Clematis Street, small town desperation through alcohol hypnosis at Respectable Street Cafe.

"Desperation Downtown"

by Darrell Higgins

(This is a commentary my friend Daryl Higgins wrote about Respectable Street Cafe. It was published in "the FLO".

I must admit that first and foremost that this article was written under an extremely emotional (and temporarily so) state. The preface is simple. I've been to Respectable's a number of times, often enough that I get in with a minimal of hassle. Maybe it's just known that I spend an obscene amount of money or maybe that guy who works the door is just exceptionally cool. What I do know is a couple dozen names, fifty to a hundred faces, and the rest is filler for my typical RSC experience.

While generally, I am amused to be there, I must confess that what once passed for mild amusement has turned into moderate distaste. As I seem to find this place in the most subjective sense to be a mirror of sorts, I must admit that what I find distasteful is more personal than observational. I shall continue nonetheless. It appears at times that I am observing the same old weather-beaten screenplay with a continually-changing cast. Keep in mind, some of the main characters don't change, but rather enter the starring roles in their own sad movie. I've come to the conclusion that the overriding theme of the environment is one of desperation, on varying levels and in varying degrees. There's the mildly desperate for something to do or someone to do, and the truly desperate who are sad for anything, and happy for nothing. This level of desperation makes itself apparent so often I'm overcome by sadness at the whole sorry affair. Sure, many are just visiting, just observing, just looking for a kick, but the underlying theme is still one, it seems, of hopelessness. Usually I think this goes unnoticed and effectively covered up by the mass drunken hypnosis which grips the throng around 2am. And when that peak fades, then the REAL desperation sets in. The vampires are always present, the true observers of this drama. The vultures are also omnipresent, feeding on the dead souls that inhabit this place just pre-closing. These birds of prey have lost all hope of heaven or even haven. To these souls, the call of the vultures are seductive and in their darkest hours they entertain invitations that they would have shunned a few hours earlier. It wears me sometimes to observe this thinly veiled charade. I don't mean to sound unduly gloomy, sure lasting friendships are surely forged here; some find those that become meaningful to them. I am not so dense as to see a top without a bottom, a light without a ray of darkness, but as I leave this place I am overcome with pity, whether appropriate or not for those that are unable to see the inexorable grindings of the cogs and gears of this particular machine. I guess in many ways it is not all that unique, but I would say the fake front is not the usual old western town but something bordering on being infinitely more subtle, infinitely more clever. But within, it remains the same.

If I am so negative about this club, I am forced to consider why I find myself here so often. Do I claim to be above all I observe? Certainly not! I am here so often because I share something in common with the lost souls that inhabit this place. The culprit? My own degree of desperation, which fuels this repetitive and increasingly dull saga. As months slip by, my perspective serves to continually educate me, and I feel the time is inevitable when I shall grow so weary of this race towards nothing. I have learned already that if you are unable to define what you are desperate for, you will inevitably find yourself caught up in the machinery of something, someplace, or someone.

(end)

Acting colder. Shuttling ahead. Not smiling. Putting on a face (a stoic, unemotional expression). A blank grill. ("Grill" is slang for face.) Don't let anybody in. Keep moving, above all. Keep moving. Getting there isn't as important as the energy of travel. Whether it's in your head or on your feet. Movement is growth. Movement is rhythm. And the shaking of the sinews, the rumbling of the wheels, the turning of the belts, the grinding of contradictions in thoughts only serve as the springboard for metamorphosis. Keep moving. Don't stop. When you do, you're usually disappointed because it doesn't look the same as it did when you were rushing by, developing that snapshot in the darkroom of your mind, submerging each moment in stop bath, fixer, developer, before hanging it up to dry. Pictures are doorstops for the imagination, allowing forgotten strangers to introduce themselves into the living room of your memory. Still, a small number of casualties end up in the dust bin, only to be picked through later by me, hungry to identify and introduce an entire generation of neglected wanderlings to an audience. Only then, following the unintended fingerprints, scribbled descriptions and animated visions, will the photograph capture the attention of passersby, having been packaged into a product that piques their curiosity.

Making a flier for Respectable Street Cafe

I spent the morning and part of the noon at Office Depot, on Okeechobee Boulevard. As the copy center has a table, several chairs, ample paper, paperclips, scissors, Liquid Paper, and stapler, it can be used as an office. I have spent hours there, reducing photos, cutting and pasting fliers. This time, I was drawing a flyer for New Years Eve at Respectable Street. For over an hour, I sat at a table beside the copier, sketching out two ideas. I'm hoping that Rodney will like one of them. Tonight, after work, I'll show him the fliers and see which one he likes.

While I was drawing the flier at Office Depot, I met Amiri Farris, a student from Savannah College of Art & Design (SCADD). He showed me his work, a collection of illustrations made with a black pen. We talked, while he made copies of hand-drawn Christmas cards that he intends to send out to relatives and friends. Cool idea. Before I left, I got his number and resume, which he had with him. He's gonna be in the area until January 1. I gotta give that guy a buzz.

Visiting Holly, Jill, Al, Doug

On the way back from Office Depot, riding my bike along Okeechobee, I decide to visit Holly and Jill, two girls that live in this two-story, ramshackle house on the southeast corner of Gardenia and Rosemary. They live upstairs. The house is beautiful and old, with lots of stories to tell. The yard is dotted with large, healthy mango trees whose limbs extend over the roof. During mango season, I climb on their roof, from the balcony ledge, and knock the mangos down with a PVC pipe. The ones that fall onto the roof, I try to catch. The mangos are hayden, the large flavorful ones that aren't stringy like the kidney variety. Usually, I eat several of them on the roof, as they're so delicious I cannot resist waiting, before climbing down with orange mouth and mango juice dripping down my face, my neck, onto whatever-abused-t-shirt-I-happen-to-be-wearing-that-day. Dirty shirts are the real calendars of this world.

Walking up the stairs, I cry out: "Hey Holly. Hey Jill. It's Kris."

Immediately, the dogs begin barking. They have two dogs. I always forget their names. Sorry.

"Hey Kris, c'mon up," Holly answers from inside.

I enter the living room, with its wood floors, and minimal furnishings. Against one wall sits a thrift-store couch that is in labor, birthing stuffing, groaning under the weight of each occupant. The other wall is relatively empty, except for a few paintings, a handwritten poem by Holly, and small stereo on a wooden table that neighbors a clumsily stacked pile of tapes, beads, ashtrays.

Holly's sitting crosslegged on the floor, making beads. Jill walks in. "Hey," she smiles. "Hey Jill," I smile back, giving her a hug. It's the middle of the afternoon and I feel like I'm playing hooky. Hey, why not, right? When you learn to live with less, the world is yours. You can do what you want, when you want, because you're not burdened by the anchors of materialism that litter the landscape, and leave others drowning in their wake. Understanding the source of my guilt--to compete for things which don't even interest me--I laugh. Humor is the truth wrapped in a blanket.

"Do you want some spaghetti?" Jill asks. "We have some already made." "Yeah, that'd be great. Thanks." A guy walks in the room, then greets me.

"Hi, my name is Albert. But call me Al."

"Hi Al. So, what's up? What do you do?" I ask, sitting carefully on the pregnant couch. Understanding that I'm not asking what he does, but what he likes doing, he answers the question forthright.

"I'm into skydiving. I skydive. I hope to teach it one day," he confesses. "There's nothing like it. It's the most incredible feeling."

"You don't get scared?" I asked.

"The first time," he answers. "But when you're falling, you get such a rush. Then you know you're hooked."

"I want to teach skydiving, though. That's my real goal." He pauses, leaving enough space in the conversation for a semi to drive through. Mounting my bicycle, I pedal into the cave of curiosity and emerge with the next question du jour.

"What do you have to do to teach? How do you qualify? Is there some sort of school ... ?

"I have to have five-hundred jumps." He pauses again.

"Hmm. How many more do you need?" I expect him to say, 'fifty' or maybe 'one-hundred'.

"Well," he pets the dog. "I've only done four jumps, so I need a lot."

I nod, smiling, but don't say anything. Once boiling, the conversational stew has now reached a simmer.

"The spaghetti's ready," Jill shouts from the kitchen. When I walk in the kitchen, she's bringing a pot of pasta to the table. "There's sauce in the bowl," she points out. "And if you want some parmesan cheese, it's in the fridge."

"Wow, Jill. This is great," I enthuse. "Thanks."

I open the fridge and see a small roach inside, wandering around without a care in the world, as if it's carrying it's own pocket Constitution. "There's a roach in the fridge," I state blankly.

"We have a roach problem," yawns Holly, from the living room. "The landlord's supposed to be doing something about it, but you know how that goes, right?"

"Yeah," I say. "Jerry, huh?" Jerry is the slumlord of downtown. Even though his apartments are shiny trophy examples of beautiful urban decay--usually roach infested and smelling like rotted wood--his rents are reasonable.

"Nice meeting you," Al quips, before leaving.

Sitting beside Holly, we chat about poetry and music.

"Have you heard of a group called 'Can'?" She asks.

"No." I tell her, between bitefuls of spaghetti. (I'm probably eating some roach eggs, too.)

"That's who we're listening to," she smiles.

"Wow, I like their drummer," I admit.

"Yeah. They have an awesome drummer."

Doug Corbitt, a local whose known as a bit of a nut, wanders in the living room from the inside stairwell. He lives in the hallway space, on the first floor. He has a pit bull with him, on the end of a leash.

"Yeah, this is the new dog I got," he says.

Jill walks into the living room and screams: "Ahhhh, a pit bull!"

Doug: "This thing hates cats."

Holly: "Well, we can't have him if he doesn't like cats."

"You want some salad?" Doug offers. "I make a big bowl of it at the beginning of the week, so I won't have to waste time cooking. Then, I eat some everyday." He pulls out a plastic container big enough to hide a bowling ball. Cool, I'm thinking to myself, this one has a sealable lid. No roach eggs.

Thanking him, I sit at the kitchen table, flipping through a newspaper, chowing the greens. Jill's sitting across from me, eating spaghetti. Doug leaves.

Holly lets out a high-pitched scream. She's wailing, crying, and yelling all at the same time. Jill and I rush into the living room and see an horrific site. The pit bull, that Doug brought up, has Holly's cat by the neck and is swinging it around. Back and forth, up and down, in circles. Water, then blood starts to surface from the neck area where the dog has the cat in a vice grip.

"Noooooo!!!! Nooooooo!!! Noooooo!!!" Holly's screaming in terror.

Holly pulls the dog out of the room and onto the upstairs patio. The dog holds the cat by the neck. Jill and I are both kicking the dog, but the dog doesn't move. We continue this

for at least a minute. Finally, the dog releases its grip on the poor cats neck. While Jill holds the dog with the leash, the cat scurries down the steps. I race after it. Holly's crying and following me. We both watch as the cat, injured, summersaults down the steps to the yard below. It sits there, shaking. I reach for it. Instinctively, it jerks a claw into the air and hisses at me. Then the cat runs underneath the house. For about a half-hour, Holly, Jill, Al, who returns from the store with a beer, and his friend Jennifer, peer under the house and call out for the cat. Since it's growing dark, I bike home to get a flashlight. When I return, the cat is still refusing to come out. Laying on my stomach, shining the flashlight ahead of me, I crawl underneath the house, navigating a trail through warm sand, assorted food wrappers, old wood. Even though I was a sweaty mess by the end of the excursion, the whole day was still fun. A few days later, driven by thirst, probably, the cat appeared meowing at the door.

I'm gonna try to get hold of a car tonight. Maybe Gary Greenwald can give me a ride. Holly needs to buy Christmas presents. Maybe Jill, Holly, Gary and I can see a dollar-fifty flick. That's all. They show second-run movies for a buck-fifty at Movies of Lake Worth, on Lake Worth Road west of Jog, in a plaza on the south side. Each theatre (there are eight of them) is small and cozy. The place is populated by senior citizens, which is cool with me, as there more respectful and quiet than young people. Movies are mini-vacations, a two-hour rest where you can park your burdens at the door.

Sabrina Barnes ... the adorable friend

She's horribly damaged, and beautiful and lost and you can understand why he sympathizes with her. Like me, he cannot tell the difference between sympathy and love. And you even feel sorry for the fact that he's going to try to trick her so he can go to this party with me and, um, he's so insecure and she's so insecure but he doesn't know it because he needs his mothers milk. Instead, he keeps on rambling and kissing names and scurrying out from under this doormat in order to attend parties. That's the only way he can participate. Still, I feel slightly guilty for taking him on this trip. It's a hiking trail.

It's Christmas day and I just got off the phone with Sabrina Barnes. She's a beautiful friend, quirky, a fan of Brit-pop (British music), and a cook. Guess what? I cook to. We should hang out. I like her. She said she's gonna go on a roadtrip to California, but she doesn't have any place to stay.

"I know of two places to stay," I tell her.

I would like to go to California with Sabrina. Two years ago, we used to go out. At least we talked on the phone a lot anyway. One night, after hanging out at Respectables, we made out in her car, a black, VW Golf, in the driveway of my mom's house, off Belvedere

Road. She dresses totally cool, wearing shorts, T-shirts, Doc Martens, and has curly black hair, blue eyes, and a cutealicious smile. She's really sweet.

Nearby, Angel Lozada, a roommate, is standing on top of a chair, looking at the shelves and rummaging around for something. During the day, he who operates a small lawn business. At night, he works at Miami Subs. When he's not working at night, he spends his evening practicing his English, by listening to Tony Robbins tapes via headphones, then repeating them out loud, in a robot-sounding voice that echoes off the walls of this slacker incubator. He's a nice guy, a good business person, and an excellent drummer. He plays with Spice, a local band that combines dance grooves with alternative rock.

Gary's a genius; he's also a madman, looking for Christ in Target or Wal-Mart. Looking for a piece of Heaven in the form of a \$250-dollar discount down the aisle for a convection oven. Throwing coffee beans, but he never uses them. He enjoys their smells, though. He acts like he's in third person half the time, analyzing himself to the point of paralysis. But he's still a genius and I love him. Looking for the perfect figure, the perfect memo in the form of a discount. Numbers, which to him are math figures, are just as good as visuals. Staring from his rocketship at Diehard car batteries, taking mental notes, comparing prices.

It's nighttime now, and everything's massive and juicy. Caterpillars crawl up the arms of the impoverished. Peanut butter is applied to the bland tasting cracker. A half can of Pepsi is retrieved from the fridge. And everything's okay.

"You should never ... "

"But I ... "

"Yeah, okay, like ... "

Close the shutters. Draw the blinds. Turn on the lights because it's nighttime now. It's mean and smoky and pockmarked by loud stabs of conversation. So loud you can't tell whether the intent is anger, humor, surprise, or fear.

Finally, I'm beginning to understand why Gary likes Sunshine, his girlfriend that he enjoys being away from. She is his pupil. He talks to her like a child. She provides him the ability to be the enabler, the wise father, someone to admire. He benefits from this relationship because he needs to be needed. He enjoys being appreciated for who he is, not what he does. Attentionwise, even though Gary feeds her crumbs, she still refuse to give up. She still talks to him when he doesn't bother to reply. She still leaves messages. She follows him around and helps him to feel justified, the reluctant owner of an orphan

that refuses to leave.

I can't type anymore? See?

Cowboys and astronauts. Stuntmen and teachers.

Donna Abatablo - Butt Ugly publisher

Our apartment, on Clematis Street, above O'Sheas, west of the tracks, has become a revolving door for artists, poets, club kids, students from the School of The Arts, musicians, hippies. One day, a beautiful young girl visited: seventeen-year old Donna Abatablo, publisher of the 'zine Butt Ugly, and student at School of The Arts. After being visited by her and her adorable friend, I wrote about the experience.

Sitting there, talking with them, I knew I would beat off after the conversation. She is beautiful. And I am consumed by both lust and poverty.

Her name is Donna. Thin eyebrows above a slightly tilted set of green eyes, just a dollop of Oriental flavor. A small, ski-slope nose resting above fat lips, overblown Goodyears waiting to deliver their ripe, fruity kisses. Her lips hide Chiklet teeth, white, even, curved at the corners. And that neck. Long. Arched forward. The way her head sits on it and moves around like a bird. Or is it a cat? No. A bird. Totally a bird. Birdlike in her movements. And she's talking and I'm listening but not hearing anything. Her words are clouded by my vision. She's a bird. A lovely bird. And she's talking, sitting on my bed, the way she withdraws her face and then extends it outward and gently closes her butterfly eyelids downcast to her hands, resting against her tight, faded denim, stretched across her thick, muscular legs. Plump, a little, but strong. And I'm falling in love. Or is it lust? And do I know the difference? Yes. It's not love. I don't know her well enough, which makes her all the more beautiful. She leaves. A hug goodbye and I return to my desk. Yet I cannot concentrate on writing.

I need to assemble the rest of the FLO, a small, 800-issues zine, free, that I circulate at area coffeehouses, clubs, food spots. I began doing it to keep myself busy after a breakup with Christina Murphy, former girlfriend, who, at one pint (point) or another, I really did love. Keep moving. That had been Tony's advice at work. He's right. I looked at my column. I looked out the window, unable to collect my thoughts. I can't collect my thoughts. Donna took them without even knowing it. I let that beautiful butterfly out without even, without even kissing her, when I really wanted to close my eyes and be swallowed up by her. I want to kiss her all over her face and eyes and neck. That neck.

Liz - heroin

"I've done it again." She looked at me soberly.

"Done what?"

"I got high."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"See." She points to a silver-dollar sized anthill on the inside of her arm, a mount built from protesting skin cells.

"Geez. Wow. I thought you said you weren't going to do it anymore."

"It was free."

"Who gave it to you free? Boyfriend?"

"No. We broke up. Jesse asked me if I wanted some and it was free."

"You said you weren't gonna do that anymore."

"I know. Can I use your phone?"

"Sure."

She's tall and thin. Attractive, except for her too-thin, nearly non-existent eyebrows. Blue eyes that at this moment are broken bits of glass in blue water. Rosy lips. Facial features that are rapidly deteriorating, morphing into a roadmap for junkies, a history lesson from a heroin addict. Long neck. Thin arms. And the same outfit she always wears: Black, denim cutoffs, worn sneaks, black half-top with pushup bra underneath, nice breasts. Lost.

"Yeah, yeah, well come over. I'm downtown, at Kris's house. You know, Kris. The FLO's apartment. Yeah, Clematis."

Liz turns to me. "So, what's up?"

"Not much. Just working on the next issue."

"Tell your friend, that if he's still interested in doing it, to call me. I don't want him using the needle. He can smoke it, though."

"Alright."

"Hey, where were you?" She returns to the phone.

"Your arm's really swollen," I say, noticing a fresh bruise.

" I just got high ten minutes ago."

"You mean, you just got high ten minutes ago?" I repeat. "Geez. What's it like?"

"I'm still high. I don't feel like anything. It doesn't feel like anything."

Forget the last diatribe purred and punched from my head into this Smith Corona.

Who am I and why do I continue to amuse myself with work that doesn't interest me?

Cowboys and angels. Stuntmen and chemists. That's what we are. The freeswing conversationalists for the people who don't listen. Have you ever decided to do something with what you have instead of letting the Lifesavers melt in your mouth? What about the caboose? Anyone with a mailbox and broken hands is welcome. Your brain is the filmstrip and the words don't come out fast enough and they haven't even made words for what you see. Maybe you haven't learned them.

I'm dancing with thrift store shoes on my feet. Someone else probably danced in these, too.

The rooftop of Flagler Court Hotel with Gary Greenwald

I'm listening to Catherine Wheel, the song "Texture". I understand what the singer means when he croons: "give me more texture." To me, it's the hope for the serrated edge of the natural world with all its aggravated beauty, as opposed to the chemically-sprayed and unripe-picked tomatoes that grow on the truck. They arrive in a pitiful state--dry, bland-tasting, hard--finding home in the produce sections of large grocery store chains. Farmers are the skydivers for unfinished resumes.

The important thing is that we were on the roof a while ago, Gary and I, above Flagler Court Hotel, a run-down collection of living spaces on the second and third floor, connected by a long hall and a common bathroom/shower area with stalls for private bathing. Rich in history and funk. When our hot water was defunct, Reverend Robert Wellborn, the caretaker for The Flagler Court Hotel, suggested I use the showers there. I did. Standing underneath the spray of hot water, in the shower stall, I felt hip, as if I were in poor section of Europe inhabited by struggling writers. The texture of living in gritty surroundings either pushes you away, in repulsion, or hugs you with its sunburned arms. Either way, it affects you. Experience is like food. It's only good when it's raw. When you cook it, dress it up, or accent it to death, you kill it.

When it comes down to it, the only difference between people is their perception of themselves. Writers, generally speaking, tend toward reclusiveness and introspection. Artists, on the other hand, tend toward flamboyant behavior, participating in their own myths forged by former iconoclasts.

Gary and I peered our heads over the rooftop and watched the small group below. They occupied a table, spilling out onto the sidewalk in front of O'Sheas. We gazed at them: street fossils below us, burning with their words and laughter, some true, some only available at five-and-dime stores along Dixie Boulevard. Their alcohol words danced among them, and their mannerisms spoke volumes. Auggie, impartial, oozed of longing. He's a local that works as a stagehand coordinator for Sutka Productions. Nice guy. From being around him in the past, I knew what was happening. His loneliness settled over the entire table. Caie Graham, the crazy artist from Scotland, alternatively admired for hiring local artists to assist him, then inevitably disdained for refusing to pay them, sat at the table. Across them, seated comfortably, was David Knight, a freeswing entrepreneur from Nassau, Bahamas, a local known to be both charming and somewhat mysterious. At the same table sat a girl with short, blonde hair and big brown eyes, with her boyfriend. Their names escape me. What I do recognize is that when I see them together (and not so together) in public, he always seems desperate because he's afraid to lose her. Seeing his reaction makes a great advertisement for being single.

For amusement, Gary began filling in their words. His dialogue was so clever, I had to move away from the roof, I was belly laughing so hard. Like the outsiders we were, we

watched the people below, parking, greeting each other, wandering among their groups.

Brian Conaway - AID's

Brian Conaway, a local that frequents Respectable Street, told me some disturbing news.

"On the same day that I found out Mike Alibu died, from a heroin overdose, I found out that I was HIV positive."

I didn't know how to react. I looked at him, a sadness sweeping over me, my eyes becoming misty.

"I'm not worried," Brian chirped. "I mean, everyone dies. Now I just know exactly when. It's quite liberating, actually. Now I don't have to worry about it anymore."

I hugged him and almost felt like crying then and there. Although I only know him as an acquaintance, he's still a kind soul, soon to shake off this mortal shell.

"You're very special, " he looked at me. "You are," he repeated. "You're a great person and I hope more people have the opportunity to meet you because they don't know how special you are."

"Thanks Brian," I said, still hugging him. I pulled away, then said: "I get so disappointed when I find out the shortcomings of other people. My friend told me I should get more into myself."

Brian agreed. And I know he's right, but it's hard when you enjoy helping other people more than yourself.

Jerome, my friend at work

I remember when Jerome, a co-worker of mine at Narcissus, a bistro on the southeast corner of Narcissus and Clematis, died last year from an AID's-related brain tumor. He washed dishes and would ask me for a salad, the same kind of salad I made for Glen, a manager. At the end of the request, Jerome would add: "Don't put too much lettuce in it, now. Now, you know I'm not a rabbit." During slow times at the restaurant, Jerome and I would go inside the walk-in cooler (food/beverage storage), jump up towards a sturdy pole that hung from the ceiling, and do pull-ups. When Jerome died, I felt a lot of regret, as he had invited me to play basketball with him near his house, west of Dixie, near Palm Beach Lakes. After he told me how he was beat up at the basketball courts by attackers who stole his gold necklaces, I was reluctant to meet him, and made excuses. Hearing that

he was sick and in the hospital, I visited him, expecting him to be recovering from the common flu. When I met the family, a sober group in a nearby waiting area, praying and weeping, reality hit me. The final blow came when we visited Jerome. His body lay curled into a fetile position, quiet. He was in a coma due to a brain tumor. After his girlfriend arrived, crying hysterically, supported by two men on either side, we (her, his family, his friends) joined hands and said The Lord's Prayer. That night, they turned off the life support, and Jerome went on to the next world. I remember bicycling home from Good Samaritan Hospital, reaching 529 Clematis, throwing the bike on my shoulder, unlocking the front door, running up the steps, setting the bike down, and walking inside the apartment. I felt spent and empty. I think two people were there but I did not notice them. I walked into the bathroom, locked the door, sat on the toilet, and put on headphones, listening to a tape of The Catherine Wheel. And cried. Gary knocked on the door. "You alright?" He asked. "Yeah," I said, then continued to cry some more.

Everythings blue and all I can say is that I'm looking forward to going to San Fransisco and soaking up the newness of something different.

Hanging out with Brian Large, Amy, and Bonnie

(Time of her time.) Brian Large called earlier and asked if I wanted to go to the movies. Him and Amy, his girlfriend, were going. I called Bonnie, this cute, short-haired poet that frequented the 500 block of Clematis and The Wormhole, if she wanted to go and she said yes. I called Brian to give him directions to her house, then called her back and told her to wait outside. She did. I did.

Sitting on the curb, I watch for Brian. I notice a massive, whale-of-a-car rolling over the hill that lies west of Rosemary. The whale is heading east. It's an enormous, slow-moving relic. A gas hog. A monstrosity. An indestructible monster. The living room on wheels sails into view. I feel like I'm getting smaller as it grows closer. Buildings are being swallowed by this mother ship. Godzilla car. The ship slows to a stop in front of me, then sets anchor.

"Hey Kris," Brian smiles, leaning out the window. "How do you like the car?"

"Awesome," I blurt, hopping in, greeting Bonnie, who's sitting in the back seat.

"Tim let me borrow his car. It's a 1950's Plymouth," Brian explains. "What it lacks in gas mileage it makes up for in style," Brian chuckles. I laugh. I like Brian. He's cool.

A 1950's Plymouth battleaxe. A scientist-mechanic at the helm, maneuvering this titanicmobile, with his girl, in the front seat. An adorable girl, sitting beside me, in the backseat. This is living.

Brian, the captain with one hand on the wheel, the other hand stretched across the front seat, steers the boat south on Dixie. The seas are calm, the wind to our backs. The ride is comfortable. Maybe the comfort of the ride is inversely porportional to the miles per gallon.

"It get's seven miles to the gallon," Brian laughs.

"Have you guys ever seen the downtown everglades?" I asked, looking at all of them one by one. The everglades I refer to is grassy area growing on the rooftop of a building behind (west) Lost Weekends. Andy Cotter, a fiesty Irish writer and obscure trivia buff who draws cartoons for the FLO, showed me this space. It's the same place where he, David Kokonis, and Stephanie Walczak roamed around sans clothes, pretending to be neaderthals.

Brian parks the behemouth beside the building, and I lead them towards the fire escape steps, which hang suspended above a small asphalt parking area. I jump up, grab the

bottom portion of the ladder with both hands and hang on while it descends slowly to the ground. We race up the steps and walk along the narrow, wooden plankway that snakes between the high grass, some of it four feet in places. But Brian Large is eyeing the building next door, a two story abandoned structure that formely housed an optical center.

"What about that building?" He giggles. Bonnie, Amy and I watch as Brian uses a two-by-four for leverage in trying to loosen the boarded entryway. Some gruff voice from below, sounding like Fat Albert in a cement mixer, yells: "Heeeyyyyyyyy!!!" At that, we scurry down to the stairs and spill onto the street below. Children blowing bubbles with our words. The owner of the voice stands in place, holding a hammer in one hand, glaring at us, as we run down the alley, laughing hysterically and eyeing the beached whale of freedom, Tim's car, in the nearby parking lot. As a group, we returned to our collective grins and walked a block away, round about, smiling, nourishing the moment with exaggerated prejudice. Everyone does this at one point or another: bury the remembered moment in emotional hyperbole, subconsciously hide the mundane to make events more memorable for later retrieval. Inside the car, we're safe once more. Brian steers the ship onto Dixie and heads south.

And Bonnie is the beautiful bird of a million tiny smiles that throw the food down with no apologies and say the word with no regret. She seems sweet and honest, a rare combination on a forgotten high school locker. Before the silence created the unbearable fence of weirdness between us, I pitched her a softball.

"What are you into?" I asked.

She hit the ball and made it to first plate, telling me that she liked writing poetry. "Ginsberg is my favorite poet," she confessed. "I like Howl," she says, referring to seminal poem by Ginsberg that's become the battlecry for disenfranchised poets & writers ever since. The beginning of Howl: "I saw the best minds of my generation ... "

The conversation lulled, then gained momentum as Bonnie expressed her feelings about poetry. Leaning back against the blue colored leather interior, one hand on the window, listening to Bonnie, I felt surreal, like I was having an out of body experience. Even though I didn't know it at the time, this woudn't be the first one. Her presence, her sweet-smily quietness, birthing carefully-chosen words and tender gestures ... digging the natural and expected in a fond and cushioned way. Approach to anything is so overlooked as to be the central means by which experience is to be remembered. I wanted to hold her hand, hug her, and maybe, with her permission, shower her face with kisses. The bubbles cannot suffocate whom they surround. They reflect light and cast glances at their creators who breathe life into them, kissing the hoop from which they grow before their release into a short and glorious lifespan.

With each confession uttered by this innocent girl, I felt myself drifting into outer space, losing contact with earth as I gazed at her big brown eyes, unable to look away, mesmerized by the stars in her eyes. Her presence left me stricken with insecurities, riddled with doubt, connected by proximity while hanging onto straw, hoping to find a working loom with which to spin gold. I need to make you understand that millions of guys are just like me, trapped in a silent room that suffocates what they really want to say ... a holding place of many souls, words thought but never said. Like them, I suffer, incarcerated in a purgatory which prevents me from expressing myself. Like them, I find other avenues with which to set these butterflies free ... poetry, music, writing, living.

After crossing Bunker, Brian navigates the battleaxe into the parking lot of a rundown Spanish-American grocery store on Dixie, across the street from Goodwill. Emptying out of the car, we roam the store, a labyrinth of soup cans, tortillas, flour products and imported soft drinks. We return to the gashog, Brian and Amy with bottled beer, Bonnie with cigarettes, and me with fifty-cent Duplex cookies. The massive cardragon wakes and slowly retreats from the parking lot, then sputters as Brian shakes the reins.

Brian's a good natured fellow, bright, sensitive, and overflowing with life, the kind of person you want to be around. "Kris Kemp," he quips. "You want some beer. I'm gonna get you drunk," he laughs. "Some," I answer, hesitating. Amy opens a bottle and hands one back, for Bonnie and I to share. Bonnie is soooooo cute, sitting there, smoking quietly, pale-skinned with bright red lips, looking like a porcelain doll that's come alive, thankful but cautious, whose torch of innocence has been reduced to a Bic lighter. I begin asking her questions, about her interests. "I've been writing a lot of poetry," she says flatly. Her eyes flicker to life when she talks about her poems. Her pupils resembled kiddie swimming pools which overflow everytime the father drops his daughter into the water. Hot sun baking the cold water against shivering skin. She smiled. I smiled. In the front, Officer Fife, Brian's altar ego--a police officer he impersonates when he prank calls friends and acquaintances--steers the ship and juggles the conversation, so everyone--Amy, Brian, Bonnie, and I--can be included. Soon enough, the topic narrowed to occupy the space between each couple.

Me: Do you still go to raves?

Bonnie: Well, not as much as I used to. It used to be cool. But now everyone does too much drugs.

Me: Really? Hard drugs, you mean?

Bonnie: Yeah. Like X, a lot of X, and worse stuff.

Me: Like heroin?

Bonnie: Yeah. You remember that guy I used to go out with, Maury?

Me: Yeah.

Bonnie: He had the goatee and real long hair.

Me: Oh, yeah. Now he cut it and dyed it blond?

Bonnie: Yeah. Well, he started doing heroin and a lot of X. And now he does a lot of heroin. It's really bad.

Me: Wow.

Bonnie: Yeah, that's one of the reasons I broke up with him.

Me: Hmm. Yeah. I know two people that've died of heroin overdose, and this one girl that's gonna die. She was upstairs in my bathroom doing it and she's pretty but she's really skinny now. She's totally deteriorating and she's not gonna live too long.

Bonnie nodded.

Me: Have you ever done heroin?

Bonnie: Yeah.

Me: You have?

Bonnie: Yeah, it felt, like, really good.

Me: I heard it makes you feel like your skin's this thick, like a foot thick.

Bonnie: Yeah. It does. It feels totally ... you're completely happy and nothing can bring you down. You feel totally good about yourself.

Me: Did you shoot it?

Bonnie: No.

Me: You smoked it?

Bonnie: Yeah. But I'd never do it again. I'm not that type. When I was on it I knew I wasn't gonna do it again even though it felt really good. I like know I didn't wanna get into it that much.

Me: Yeah.

We end up at the movie theatre, the Cinema & Cafe, in the northeast corner plaza of Congress and 10th Avenue. The Cinema & Cafe shows months-late films for discount prices, serves food, has a smoking section, and has tableside wait service. Inside, it's beat up and beautiful, like an old movie theatre should be. During the film, Bonnie had her hands up to her face for nearly half the movie. I don't know. How I want to take her hand and hold it affectionately, or put it down to her side and put my hand around the back of her neck, below her beautiful hair, resting on her warm, pale, downy pillow skin. But I do not because I think about it too much. Fear is the strongest lock. And, often, thinking reduces the human action into the unmovable pillar of salt. So I do not do anything.

After the movie, we return to Clematis, and I suggest we climb atop a roof behind my flat. We're about to, but Bonnie says she doesn't want to, so we don't. While we're talking in front of Respectable Street Cafe, Brian throws his keys at Rodney's upstairs office window. Rodney's boyish face appears, then his feet thumping down the stairs. "Hey, what are you guys doin?" Rodney asks, smiling, his head bobbing around. "We're exploring," one of us yells, then petitions his blessing to visit the roof. He concedes, and returns to his office.

From the laundry-room, at 518 Clematis Street, you can open the window and crawl out onto the rooftop of the adjacent building, Seawell's Hardware. For Respectable Street employees, this provides a hideout, hangout, and a place to make out in privacy. As the unofficial tour guide, I lead the way to the roof, assisting Bonnie in climbing over the outside ledge. I'd been up there with Gary Greenwald on other nights, and from the Seawell's roof, you can walk to The Downtown Group building roof, where Gary works. Above the Downtown Group building is a dilapidated wooden structure begging to be explored. I coax the group to peek inside. Unfortunately, it's boarded. So, we return to Rodney's office, talking, hitting bongos, testing Rodney's endurance levels by playing his harmonica. After a five or ten minutes, we decide to leave him to his work, and head downstairs to the street below. I thank Brian and Amy for the fun night, hug Bonnie and kiss her half on the mouth, half on the cheek and smile and say thanks goodbye

\ Introspection and headaches

I know that both sides of my brain are trying to speak to each other. The translator doesn't know the language. He takes stabs in the air, trying to read the words, the gestures, the body lingo, facial expressions. But what's being communicated is wrong. Even if the message was correct, it's not being sent. Judging from the headaches, the message is a strong one. They throb in the upper right portion of my head, small

hammers, steady heartbeats, subtracting plastic empty spots of reason for a forgettable empty space. Perhaps restlessness needs to be satiated. A boxing ring is in my head. And I still love her more than she'll ever know.

Can the existence of something mean anything if it is known by one person? That something does not exist until it is shared. Even emotions restrict themselves to this principle. The talent, the humor, the anger, the love ... doesn't exist until it is shared. Only then, too, can it truly be appreciated.

I'm tired and weary and spent from trying to keep everyone warm with my small, but glowing, hearth of ideas. Those who gather around the fire, exchanging stories, roasting marshmallows, warming themselves, will be better off leaving. Having warmed themselves, they can find their own clearing-in-their-head and light their own fire. My focus falls all around the city, suffocated longing, expectations, and blindsided looks back that keep me tripping. And I do want to kiss her.

California Trip with Brian Large, hanging with Myla, Kate, Karen, Kristen Morris

It's Thursday night, and Brian and I are at Kate's apartment. Kate, a very generous and kind and friendly country music fan. Here we are occupying her San Diego pad, a quaint upstairs apartment just a walk away from the beach. "Hank William's Junior," Kate smiles, scratching her nose. The CD is spinning with the complaints of a disenfranchised cowboy. Horseshoes and surf.

Brian's showering. Kate is talking with her friend, Karen. In a little while, we're heading out to a bar, probably a country bar since the girls like country, maybe a karaoke bar, too. Earlier this afternoon, Brian and I were at 'El Soliedad', the highest point in San Diego. A cross stands in the middle of this small mountain. Below, fingerprints of man--houses, roads, cars--litter the creation. So, here we are: Kate, Brian, Karen, and me.

1 A refrigerator or epiphanies

California, San Diego in particular, is a refrigerator of epiphanies. Energy, thoughts, ideas and moods hide among tupperware creamatoriums. And shelved throughout are the active yogurt cultures of people animating the landscape with their mundane conversation. Out of the subconscious and peripatetic observation of God's holy terrain, denizens fall into the spoken word with absence of exaggeration. Mystical geographical surroundings pick up and solidify the verbal exchange. Unlike Florida, everything is serrated by natural wonder that can turn even the most banal of whispers into the brightest and remembered sacrament to be repeated and held dear by generations to come who dunk one-thousand hail-mary donuts into lukewarm coffees, for the security not unlike discarded childhood

items of safety.

Repetitiveness and a fast approach becomes the ally of the person with no direction. How often should something be repeated before it turns sour? Should a different approach be the accepted means of experiencing the new vision? Maybe. If the object of that attention remains the same. If not, repeat.

Last night, Brian, Kate, Karen and I descended into the cave of big liquor. At the entrance of the cave stood the tallest door on earth, wood framed with glass in the middle (inset glass?). As the door closed behind us, Brian the scientist remarks: "Isn't that the biggest door you've seen in your life?" And I, submerged in the shallow end of worry, pull the blinds, turn and respond: "Wow. Oh my gosh. That is big." Sounding like Charlie Brown in the first book on the psychosexual homoerotic allegations of Charles Schultz and his 'Peanuts' characters. Can I bow a vowel?

Brian, tall, good looking, smart, and personable, perches on a chair and throws question and answer in a quick and laconic connect-the-dots, carrying the silence-is-dissapproval concept into real possibilities. The talk doesn't stop. Kate, meanwhile, returns answers with cautious, guarded laughter, to the dark haired creep that sits at the bar. He continues his interrogation, then pretends she's interviewing him (even though she's not) and begins a barrage of answers to explain his background, lies about computers, his life. He smiles, even when the feces start falling from his lips. Behind them, Karen sits, soaking herself in alcohol while she chews on about her surfing days when she belonged to a surf team and nearly drowned in twenty-two foot waves, the last time she surfed. I flash fireproof grins, swallow the humor and grow sadder and sadder as the conversational lawn mower that Karen's pushing dies. More alcohol is added and my questions (for I have nothing to give up about myself to this crew of unknowns, except for Brian) crank her tongue into a new recreation. This time, the topic is her children. "Well, my children ... " she starts. Smoke erupts from underneath the space shuttle. "I know it sounds like every mother says this ... " she continues. The announcer begins counting back from ten: T-minus ten seconds ... "My children are just the most special and greatest kids I've ever known." Five, four, three ... "And it's not just me saying it." Two, one ... "My friends even notice and are amazed that my children and I are best friends. They envy it. Keith is - " she wallows in the possessive efforts, the amazing contribution she has made to child rearing, hoping to throw the caramel on her own Red Delicious and make herself more attractive to me, the prospective trick-or-treater of listening ear. All the while she's talking, her eyes grow larger and larger, her focus blurred in memories and accomplishments shown in traits she's passed to her children. Her revelations prove somewhat erudite. She's begging and the loneliness is crawling into my pores. When the conversation ends, I feel tired, spent, and wanting to watch television so I won't have to think about the funeral I've just witnessed. The next time I listen to "All cats are grey" by The Cure, I'll remember her behavior with watered-down sympathy. Yet, it's not the kind of sympathy that allows room for love, only sadness; and this I cannot dismiss.

Brian's smiling and talking to his three friends, who he met during his six-month stay here when he visited a year-and-a-half-ago. He's great at so many things. A renaissance man of conversation and mechanics. As a hospital medic, he works in the trauma unit, assisting physicians, nurses, and reassuring patients. In his description of his work, his eyes twinkle with fond and vivid memories and his eyes fall naturally and gracefully, throwing beautiful colors about him. He loves his work. He used to be a mechanic and says similarities exist in both professions. "Neither is an exact science," he explains. "The medical profession is just a practice, it's not an exact science. And people need to realize that. It's the same with mechanics. At best, it's educated guesswork."

After the tragic but livable-through cave incident at Ritzzy's Bar & Weep, Brian, Kate, and Karen disappear into Moondoggies. As I don't have my I.D. with me, I wait outside, watching Karaoke through the open doors of a nearby bar, and sometimes glancing at passersby. Brian came around about a half-hour later and we went home and crashed.

In the midst of dreamland, I'm awakened by country music.

Kate's turned the karaoke machine on and thrown in Loretta Lynn or Conway Twitty or some other country singer superstar. Someone's straddling my back. I'm annoyed and tired and slightly amused at Kate's inebriated behavior. Karen's sitting on my back and saying something about rape or sex. Karen disappears at some point. I move from the convertible hid-a-bed couch to the couch across from me, then hide underneath a pile of blankets. Kate's still singing, so I tackle her after she follows me.

Brian and Myla are sleeping in and Kate and I jump on top of them. Kate's calling me Charlie, short for Charlie Manson because she thinks my hair makes me look crazy. I'm laughing with croaky confusion. At this point, I don't know whether Kate wants attention or affection. I give her attention but the rules of protocol prohibit me from hugging her or showing physical interest. During the five minute karaoke exhibit, I do my best to flashlight her crazy antics and then fall back asleep. In the morning, I figure, her theatrics will be remembered with a simile, exaggerated enough to make her feel special and creative.

7 Coffeehouse in San Diego, CA

I'm in a coffeehouse now. This afternoon, I rode Kate's bike around downtown San Diego, up and down Garnett Street, buying necessary toothbrush, paste, a Gillette razor, getting my hair cut short by a woman from Iran, imbibing hot chocolate, a chocolate chip cookie, a fish taco washed down with hibiscus flower flavored punch, and now finishing a hot chocolate that has too much cinammon. This coffeehouse is brave and affixiated with general restlessness of freeswing locals who seesaw conversation and local gossip. Alternative music. Wooden tables. Art and poetry and social bouquets of high-energy, young-thinking people. The girls are beautiful here, lots of them short hairs and dressed

with peculiar thoughtfulness. The pure is somewhere here. The air is cleaner, there is less litter. Creative loitering.

Los Angeles, California - Hanging out with Kristen on Hollywood Boulevard

Now we're at Kristen's flat on Hollywood Boulevard. This afternoon, we wandered the oceanfront of Venice Beach, admiring street performers and spending too much money, \$6.10 on two hot chocolates and one espresso. The hot chocolates were lame. As we stumbled from one end of the boardwalk to the other, I shot some black and white pictures. One of our stops was a bookstore, well-stocked with Jack Kerouac and Charles Bukowski, but their books were regularly priced, probably higher than average. \$13 bucks for Bukowski and \$10 for Kerouac. Kristen, who happens to be a Bukowski fan, flipped through one his books and suggested I read a poem of his. It was terrific, about shoelaces and people who go mad.

Brian's sleeping on the futon and Kristen's on the phone in the kitchen. The TV's off and the CD player is playing Bad Religion. Kristen's going to write a column for the FLO, a gossip column about Hollywood music and movies. Flipping through Huh, a California based music mag, I notice a 'Rumors has it' section. I'll steal that name for Kristen's column, then call her every month, before going to press, to get the story. Readers will identify with her candor, curiosity.

Kristen's a story. A very attractive girl, garrulous and affectionate, a good conversationalist. She's living in LA and sees bands as often as she can, but for free. She works at The Troubador, a live music and whiskey club that's only open for shows. She works the box office window. She loves the anonymity of living in a big city, she says. In her former hometown, West Palm Beach, she worked as a bartender at Lost Weekends, a pool hall that has a bunch of imported beers, video games. She was so well-known, she was approached by people she didn't even know. "It was aggravating," Kristen admits. "I could never escape it," she remembers. "Everywhere I went, people would come up to me and say, 'Don't you work at Lost Weekends?' and I'd be like, 'Yeah, so what?' And I could never be alone and at least now, I can be anonymous." Now she's invisible in a big city. She's submerged in the Hollywood scene and namedrops off the well stocked tree of namebrand heroes, both current and casualties. Kristen's sense of importance for trivial issues is underscored by her need to be important. Kristen, a lovely and beautifully-figured messenger of overheard soundbites, verbal fragments remembered, whispered, repeated and played over and over again in a vicarious role of her own.

Musical life score. Broken elevator with better music and an attractive short haired female. Cherrios and salt water kisses. Cigs and freshly painted stairwells.

Brian Large lies spread out over the couch, sleeping. After drinking four Heneikens earlier,

he asked me to show him how to dance. We wrestled, debated seeing "Dumb and Dumber" at Mann's Chinese Theatre. Kristen received some phone calls. Brian took one. Later, we plan to watch Saturday Night Live. Live is going to play. Kristen knows the bass player, Patrick, who actually dates Kristen's friend. They hang out when he's in the Hollywood area.

Returned with mistaken McDonald's food, cold fries, hot chicken fajitas and \$12 dollars less money. Brian threw in a Pixie's 'Doolittle' CD and we're doing the RSC Los Angeles thing. Kristen's on the phone sharing the latest dirt with Brian and Katrina Dulin, another WPB local who escaped to Georgia.

Throwing around invisible frisbees and making coin laundry food disappear into your mouth. Los Angeles is overwhelmingly expensive, dirty, unavailable, inaccessible, crime-ridden, suspicious, big, spread-out, and used. A massive car lot for the disenfranchised who've gathered at the end of the American landscape, the West where the sun sinks and people crayon themselves alive, filming their postures in tired mirrors before melting into the town's streets about them. Street theatre is non-existent here. Hollywood Boulevard, I'd always imagined, would be overflowing with jugglers, comedians, magicians, musicians, and the like. Haven't seen one, except for the multitudes at Venice Beach. There are street beggars here though. There always are.

My visions are clouded by a sense of disappointment. An honest hug is what I need, some kisses too, that would be nice.

11 Driving to San Francisco with Brian Large and Kristen Morris

Swallowed peanut brittle scraps of conversation and drank bottled milk. Brian, Kristen & I are on our way to San Francisco. Kristen offered me her remaining Cheetos. Brian devours pistachio nuts, throwing the shells into this little cup that the bag is sitting in.

Kristen's talking really fast, saying: "... there's the huddle couch, there's this, there's that," The Big Gulp sugar never passed her tongue. Kristen is so smily, like an angel with wings dipped in bottled beer and beautiful, just beautiful. "I get to see shows for free all the time," she says, a great advantage of working at The Troubadour, a live music venue on Santa Monica Boulevard, West Hollywood. "Bad thing is I miss a lot of other shows, bands that play at the same time I'm working." Are you allowed to see the bands that play in your club after everyone comes through? "Well, the last bands, I usually get to see them. I only have to wait for about ten minutes after the last show starts." Kristen keeps talking, fueled by sugar and excitement as we race towards Frisco. Brian Large, who also has the licence to drive the Plymouth battleax, races us into the future.

Eventually, after hours of driving down steep rainslick roads, San Francisco peeks out

from the fog across the Golden Gate bridge. Brian drove into the city and we end up in Chinatown. We parked so Kristen could go to the bathroom. First, she had to find one.

"Look, there's Jack Kerouac Street." She pointed to the alley directly across from the car. Sure enough, the sign spelled it out. Following Brian, we end up at City Lights Bookstore, an historic hangout and underground landmark of sorts that published the works of soon-to-be-famous poets (Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Alan Ginsberg). Across the street was a cozy bar with an upstairs dining area and lots of cool pictures. Occupants fit the bill for the coffeehouse-type crowd, creatures that've left the cages of convention, writers, artists, streetbeat philosophers, etc. Directly across from us, sitting on wall ... a picture of Jack Kerouac himself with his fave mixed drink recipe underneath. Kristen and Brian nursed beer while I drank water.

"Do you think any less of me 'cuz I drink beer?" asked Brian.

"No. For some people," I started, "it's the means for accomodating social needs to feel more secure. Others just drink it for the taste. I'm not really into it but maybe it's just a strong point for me not to have to drink it. I mean-" I realized I was rambling and then quit.

13

Kristen returns to the bar, lights a cig and talks to Brian while I look about. In the corner is this Woody Allen actress-looking type-o-girl scribbling in a notebook. She looks at me, then looks down, finishing her mental muffins.

Now we're at a hotel and I'm on the toilet and Kristen's connecting the dots with local people she knows. She's talking on the phone.

Peacocks of street strangers weaving straightforward lives. Progress for pineapples. Kristen Morris is adorable. Right now, Brian's sleeping and we're probably gonna walk around the city later, drink hot coffee, soak up the vibe, and eat.

(Kristen wrote this.) You are fabulous - Kris Kemp. You are a babe and any girl would be crazy not to want you - if you just let them know what you're about.

15

Brian's sleeping. Kristen's nursing half a beer that Brian saved for her. Jon Stewart is on TV. His guest is Courtney Cox, some madeup looking glam girl who's talking while he sifts through her answers for little pieces of humor. Right now, they're doing yoga. Kristen tried to do it. She's limber. The heat is on.

That evening, we ate at a restaurant in Chinatown. The food was great and Brian performed a new trick--eating while sleeping. The bathroom was downstairs, adjacent to the kitchen, an entire underground floor of yellow faced Asians running chatting in their foreign tongue. Only \$31.50 (for the three of us) for a terrific fillup. After eating, we wandered around, heads spinning to absorb the architecture like lost tourists looking for directional clues. Soon enough, we arrived at a bar, peeking inside to see a three piece Stray Cats kind of band with a drummer, acoustic standup bass player, acoustic guitarist/vocalist. The bar looks cozy and inviting. "Cool," I grin. The doorman asks for I.D.. Fishing through my pockets, I realize that I've left it back at the hotel. Erg. I'm the loser, sitting outside while Brian and Kristen disappear towards the bar. (Later, Brian says he didn't want to stay anyway because it was too loud.) When they resurface only ten minutes later, Brian mentions that it's too loud, and he wants a place where we can hang out together.

Down the street, we find, then file into a coffeehouse with high ceilings and an artsy looking collection of students from San Fransisco College of Art and Design. Brian and Kristen order coffee. I'm not fond of coffee, so I get hot chocolate, which is coffee on training wheels. The coffeehouse is cathedral like with the rumblings of conversation at a low roar. The patrons, whether real or by default, seem to be participating in their own myth--casualties of a media perpetuated stereotype that defines an entire generation by the way they dress. In actuality, the generation comes first, usually riding the wings of some passionate individual, the rebel artist, writer, or poet, and their image is quickly fine tuned, if not completely assembled from scratch ... black turtlenecks, khaki pants, comfortable black shoes, goatees, sideburns. Strays always gather around the fire to catch the warmth and make comments. As an outsider, for I feel like I've always been an outsider, I find it interesting that people who claim to be such nonconformists often dress like everyone else with whom they congregate.

Amped from the collective results of caffeine and sugar, we split. Outside, the neighborhood is dirty and hilly, a plethora of two-to-five story buildings, crowded like popsicles, cement soldiers fastened to the unsteady, rumpled carpet below. It is cold. The wind picks up and we shiver, shoving cold hands into our jackets. Halfway down the hill, we are approached by bums trying to sell us The Street Sheet, some newspaper so they can justify taking our money. The bums are aggressive, following us, yelling their pitch, trying their best to garner sympathy through their crackling voices while the anger rises in their throats. At this, Brian is laughing. Kristen Morris and I are a bit frightened, though. At least Brian's here, so if a scuffle erupts we have the Jolly Green Giant on our side. I'm sure I can scrap, too, when it comes down to it.

Continuing to walk, we play dodgeball with them, except the only ball we're dodging is their monthly-produced paper. I have little sympathy for bums, as most of them, somewhere along the line, have made a decision that put them in this place. "If a man does

not work, he does not eat ... " This line, paraphrased, is mentioned somewhere in Proverbs, I think. "Go to the ant, you sluggard ... " Granted, some of these street people are homeless, but most of them carry habits that they cannot escape. I refuse to sympathize with people who suffer from their own bad choices.

Back at the hotel, Jon Stewart is on TV. Kristen is so cute, a doll, cute and exuberant, angelic with an affection for beer and music. Brian falls asleep. I think he misses Amy, his sweetheart in Florida.

Terrified butterflys drown in hot coffee. Our fingers cradling the bowl. Kristen's fingers ... delicate, with nails just the right size. Brian's ... large and thick, moving (like mini acrobats) with the fragility of a surgeon, and the strength of a mechanic. Mine ... skinny, ugly, nails chewed to the base of the finger, twitching, trembling for caffeine of exaggeration, restless cannibals.

Kristen's reading a Bukowski book, Postman, which I bought at a discount bookstore in Chinatown. She eyes me cautiously, one finger in her mouth. I feel alive.

I rub Kristen's back. "I wonder how long it's gonna take before people don't have a tailbone anymore?" Kristen asks. As I don't believe in evolution, we debate the origins of the universe, then I tell her to ask Brian. She put his hand on his shoulder, the sleeping giant.

"Don't," I suggested. "He's sleeping."

"He's not sleeping. I'll wake him up. Brian," she shakes him. "What purpose does a tailbone serve?"

The giant shifts beneath the covers, then answers: "1n3jf7x136w42ed8r3243udjfh9h4wo ... " his words muffled by the blanket over his mouth. Even partway into dreamland, he speaks perfect paragraphs, using anatomical lingo common to a surgeon.

In the bathroom, shaving, looking at myself in the mirror, I begin to laugh hysterically. "What are you doing in there?" Kristen's yelling. Her concern makes me laugh even more. "Are you okay?" She asks, chuckling. Now, I'm laughing because I think Kristen thinks I just masturbated. Still giggling, I leave the bathroom. "Are you alright?" Kristen asks. "Why were you laughing?" "I don't know. I'm happy." I tell her. Brian, I notice, is still in bed, cutting logs (snoring steadily). Timberrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr

Last night, I dreamt of the future. A giant warehouse was the central focus. People lined up outside and once they got to the upstairs entrance via a ladder, a man stopped each person to give them an injection with a syringe. Each individual accepts the needle gracefully, silently, no wincing. Inside the warehouse, sit giant balls of white shag carpet

spread a foot across from each other. Outside the lines continue to grow as the people file into the warehouse. Something tells me they are receiving sterilization shots. An overwhelming feel of desperation fills the air. (Is this a future Respectable's?) I began warning everyone that these vaccinations are not what they seem, that they are being tested with an experimental drug that has dangerous side effects. The crowd listens. Chaos ensues. Everyone scatters. Angry, the man with the syringe approaches me.

Los Angeles, California

We arrived from San Francisco into Los Angeles at 2am this morning, woke up Tammy, Kristen's roommate, apologized, crawled into a guest room where Kristen laid pillows and blankets about, showered, fell asleep.

This morning, we shower, dress, then drive around looking for a place to eat. Ended up at Johnny Rockets, a fifties styled diner with lots of employees and strange patrons. We ordered cokes, talked about our trip so far, and watches as the cook pressed our burgers against the flat top grill. Ordinarily, I'm not much of a carnivore, but after witnessing him sear the meat, hearing the pop-sizzle-ffffp, smelling the grease and steam that emanated from the frying burgers, I couldn't help myself. The smells, the sounds, the sights triggered my hunger. By the time the burgers arrived, I felt as if I hadn't eaten in days. I devoured them.

After returning to Kristen's apartment, then getting our stuff, we kissed, hugged her, said our thank yous and goodbyes. Brian's driving while I scribble this journal and look for an exit causeway to take us to 405 to head back to San Diego.

Kraft could do alot with L.A.. There's so much cheese here. The map of the stars. Who cares where the stars live. As far as I'm concerned, they live in space. And the most beautiful stars are the ones that exist in the eyes of people with vision. Those stars set off the possibilities.

"It's nice having good radio stations, isn't it?" Brian asks.

"Yeah."

"Manhattan Beach," Brian chirps. "That's where Joe Noel used to surf. He's a longboarder."

"Oh."

Watching Brian and Kristen talk is like watching a tennis match. They volley the ball to each other in a friendly competition. The end of the conversation returns them to warm

pockets of familiarity--their time spent in the theme park of bars, pool halls, clubs in West Palm Beach, Florida. They talk like this ...

Brian: "La Santa Barbara, more specifically The Chowder Pitts, is where Barton Lynch surfed when he was a kid. He actually surfed in San Diego for two years and surfed at a lot of the same spots I used to surf."

Kristen: "I used to go out with Barton Lynch."

This is where Brian bails the conversational cliff and I jump in.

"Really?" I ask, sounding like a gravelly Jimmy Nolsen.

"Yeah. I met him while working at Swak, that surf shop in Palm Beach. Me and Tammy went with him to New Smyrna and travelled up the coast with him for a week. Then Tammy was going out with another surfer and was gonna go see him in San Diego, so I went with her to see Barton Lynch. We went out. We went out to eat at the Pablum's Poodle bla bla bla and we went to the Birdsnest Bar."

"Were you actually going out with him or just his friend?"

"We were actually going out. We kissed and stuff."

Brian's silent. Kristen keeps talking. I'm listening, digging for worms with which to bait the conversation.

conversation

Sunshine never wanted anything less than his attention.

"Just leave. Go." He didn't turn around or even move in the slightest. His body held court, fixed to his decision. As long as she kept groping for the slightest show of emotion, he knew he could control her. Still, his feelings remained hidden beneath his intellectually superior ego.

"You can't always be doing this. You don't have - you can't be - there's just no - "

He left the room, opened the fridge, pulled out a Pepsi. She watched him with red, wet eyes, pupils constricted in hopelessness. She headed for the door, turned to say something. Her keys escaped her hands. She picked them up and walked out, leaving the front door open. The phone rang.

The phone rang.

"Hello."

"Gary?"

"Hey Kris. How you doin, man?"

"Could be better, but, you know, alright."

"Yup, I know."

"Hey, uh, listen - "

"Yeah."

"I was, uh, wondering if you could help me out - "

"Sure, what - "

"I'm kind of in a rough spot, a, uh, sort of predicament you could say."

"Sure. What do ya need?"

"A jump, actually."

"Where are ya."

"Just west of Tamarind, on Banyan Street, the north side."

"Yeah, yeah, no prob - oh crap!"

"What?"

"Sunshine just left with the car. And I don't know when she's gonna be back."

"Do you think one of your neighbors might be able to give me a jump, if there on their way out or something?"

"Let me see. I'm looking out the window right now and it doesn't look like either one of them are home. Do you have triple A?"

"No. I don't even have my licence. Well, hmmm, I'll just keep asking. I'm not that far."

There's this gas station pretty close by anyway."

"Well, sorry I couldn't be of anymore help. If nothing pans out, call me."

"Yeah, yeah, definitely. Thanks anyway, uh, Gary."

"Yeah, sure."

"Bye."

"Bye."

Simon dropped more Pepsi into his mouth and walked out the open, front door."

The phone rang.

"Yep."

No one spoke on the other end.

"Hello?"

Still, silence.

"Hello? Hello? Bye." Gary squeezed the can and tossed it into the wastebasket. He opened the fridge and closed it. He walked into the living room. He walked back into the kitchen. He opened the fridge. He returned to the living room, fell into the couch, and looked at the ceiling. The phone rang.

Conversation between Stephanie Walczak and me (Kris Kemp)

Stephanie Walczak was a beautiful friend of mine that worked as a cocktail waitress at Respectable Street Cafe. I worked as a busser, wiping off tables, emptying ashtrays, collecting empty bottles, emptying trash. Stephanie lived at her mom's house off PGA Boulevard, or sometimes stayed downtown at Jonathon and his sisters house, south of Southern Boulevard, between Olive and Flagler. Stephanie and I rode bicycles a lot, talked about life. Her revelations about her own dreams interested me, as she struggled with a minor drug habit that involved major drugs, including cocaine and heroin. As usual in these situations, I tried my best to be a friend to her, a kind of big brother that had her best interests in mind. One day, I photographed Stephanie for a fashion pictorial for the FLO magazine, at her mom's house in Palm Beach Gardens. I shot about three rolls of film on an old, but very reliable, Canon AE1 (aluminum hardbody). Stephanie turned out to be

extremely photogenic. The pictures turned out beautiful, like her.

For nearly a week, after getting stoned and losing my keys to my apartment at #529 Clematis, I stayed at Jonathon's, sleeping on the couch. Stephanie was staying there, too. One night, I rubbed her back, then slept beside her. The next morning we bicycled down Flagler, visited Nature's Way at the bottom of Phillip's Point plaza, and talked.

Stephanie: "I've gotta get away from this shit. God, it's driving me crazy."

Kris: "What do you mean?"

Stephanie: "You know, just all this shit. I'm not doing anything. I'm just swirling around, not doing anything. It's like a toilet bowl. I swear. It is a toilet bowl." She's laughing. "I'm just hanging out. It's just ... "

Kris: "Do you think you'll be doing more somewhere else?"

Stephanie: "I don't know. I mean, probably, yeah. I will, yeah, I will. I'm not doing anything here; that's for sure. When I was up north, I used to paint all the time. I used to do all this art; my creative juices were overflowing. I was so creative and even when I wasn't doing art or painting, I'd be doing something else that was creative."

Kris: "Why can't you do creative stuff here?"

Stephanie: "There's no motivation here. No one does anything. It's just ... lots of talk. All people do is talk around here, and gossip. So much backstabbing that goes on here, I swear there is. It's just a bunch of shit."

Kris: "Well, if you hang around assholes, that's usually what you get."

Stephanie: "That's funny ... ha, ha. But it's really sad. It's more like you get shit on than anything else, I swear I'm so sick of this place, I am."

Kris: "What are you gonna do?"

Stephanie: "I'm gonna know. Probably back up north. Maybe to Maryland. My mom has a place there."

Kris: "Yeah?"

Stephanie: "It's nice and everything, but we don't get along too well."

Kris: "You're probably too much alike."

Stephanie: "Nooooooo way. Nooooooo - huh, huh, huh way. We're nothing alike. That's why we don't get along. I'm more like my dad. He lives in New York. You'd love him. He's an artist. He's the ... " She closes her eyes and smiles. He has so much energy."

Kris: "Why not stay with him, then? Sounds cool. What, does he live in Soho? That sounds super!"

Stephanie: "It would be except for his wife. She's such a bitch. Ughhh."

Kris: "Probably his inspiration, huh?"

Stephanie: "No, I doubt it. She's crafty and cold and very calculating. She never shows emotions, either. And she talks really quiet and fast. It's so annoying. And she's such a tightwad, too. She always acts so snobby around me. I swear I can't stand her."

Kris: "Why do you think she treats you that way?"

Stephanie: "I don't know. That's a good question, though."

Kris: "She probably feels threatened around you when your with your dad because you and him have so much in common."

Stephanie: "That's probably true, but still I don't know. I think he was lonely and maybe because she is so different from him, he was attracted to her."

Kris: "Well, could you stay with him? I mean, couldn't you just avoid her?"

Stephanie: "She's a teacher so she doesn't work during the summer and that's when I'd be going up there. But, they do have a basement where he paints and I'd probably be sleeping there at night and then during the day I wouldn't be there that much 'cuz I'd be hanging out and visiting old friends or stuff ... so you're probably right."

Kris: "Yeah, I mean, she probably woudn't annoy you so much if you didn't see her all the time and you're so independent. I mean, you wouldn't have to see her all the time and stuff, you know? You woudn't even have to see her."

Stephanie: "Yeah, yeah." She smiles.

Kris: "You should go. You'd have a great time."

Stephanie: "Yeah, I just ... a bunch of, I don't know. I'm just partying all the time. It's getting so old. It's not the partying that bugs me, it's just that I can't ge alone. I swear I

can't. I mean like Wednesday night I went across the street to get some candy and, I swear, it took me like fifteen minutes to get there and like another ten to get back. People kept on yelling my name, I felt like wearing a disguise or something."

Kris: "Couldn't you tell them you gotta get back to work or something?"

Stephanie: "Well, yeah, but most of 'em are my friends or good tippers at the club so - "

Kris: "You have to be with them a little bit, huh?"

Stephanie: "Yeah."

Kris: "Well, you're the waitress. You're the main waitress at the most popular club downtown, so what do you expect, you know?"

Stephanie: "Yeah, it just gets annoying."

Kris: "I know. It goes with the job I suppose."

Stephanie: "Yeah."

Kris: "Maybe you just need a vacation so you can come back and see things from a different perspective."

Stephanie: "You think Rodney'll let me off work?"

Kris: "I don't know. Proably."

Stephanie: "You and him are pretty good friends, right?"

Kris: "Yeah, we hang out. I don't really know him, though. He's pretty enigmatic."

Stephanie: "You think you could ask him if I could get two weeks off. Just tell him I'm gonna visit my mom, which I'm gonna do anyway when I see her in Maryland."

Kris: "Yeah, yeah, sure. I'll ask him."

Stephanie: "Yeah, don't make it seem like I asked you to ask him. Just make it seem like I mentioned it to you and you want to do it for me as a surprise. Don't tell him I told you to ask him."

Kris: "Okay. Your mom's up in Maryland?"

Stephanie: "Yeah, that's where her business is, the headquarters. But she works down here during season."

Kris: "Right."

Stephanie: "That would be cool if he let's me off. Oh, I'd really owe you one."

Kris: "I'm sure he'll let you off. He's cool."

Stephanie: "That would be great. I've just gotta get out of here."

Kris: "Stephanie."

Stephanie: "Yeah."

Kris: "Are you staying off, you know, that stuff?"

Stephanie: "Oh, what do you mean?"

Kris: "You know."

Stephanie: "Oh! You mean ... " She puts her finger to her nose and inhales."

Kris: "Yeah."

Stephanie: "Yeah. I've been getting really back into fitness, riding my bicycle everyday, swimming, working out. The last time I did that was two weeks ago."

Kris: "That's good, 'cuz you have a lot of potential, Steph, and I'd hate to see it go to waste. You can really go somewhere once you find out what it is you wanna do. I'm serious. I'm not just saying that. You have the spark."

Stephanie: "You think so?"

Kris: "Yeah Stephanie. It's not ... I just don't think so, I know so. That's why I have to photograph you, 'cuz when you're gone, you're gone. It's like the only way to kidnap you is through a photograph. You're like the butterfly that can't be pinned down and you have to get out that big net and sneak up behind it and like 'whoooooosh', you are, you just don't know and that's the great thing--you don't know it."

Stephanie: "Ahhhhh, you're funny."

Kris: "I'm serious, Stephanie."

Stephanie: "Well, thank you."

Kris: "It's just like ... that's why I wanna do the pictures so bad. It's a way of finding out who you are, stealing the moment."

Stephanie: "Well, when are we gonna do 'em?"

Kris: "Whenever you want. Whenever I call, you're not home, though. And if you ever called me back, then maybe we could arrange something."

Stephanie: "I know, I know, I know, I'm sorry. I just gotta get organized and prioritized."

Kris: "Yeah, me too. Are you working tomorrow night?"

Stephanie: "Yeah, are you?"

Kris: "Yeah, well, I'll see you then. Bye."

Stephanie: "Bye."

Bicycling with Stephanie Walczak

I just returned from bike riding with Stephanie. Said she was really happy about getting my letter yesterday. The main thrust of our talk, however, focused on her promise not to do any more partying, to leave the bad influences who continue to offer her drugs, and instead to focus on her art. Stephanie admitted that she was really depressed and lonely. But before we rode, I met Dodger, this guy that likes her, Steph said, but who she only likes as a friend. And it went like this ...

Dodger opens the door and Stephs all couched out like some beautiful, skinny cat that's recovering from an early morning nap. She grabs me. "Awwww, I'm so glad to see you," she purrs. "I've missed you so much." And me, surprised by her warmth, reply: "Awwwww ... " hugging her and sprinkling her cheek with several kisses. We unglue ourselves and I introduce myself to Dodger, a guy who looks like River Phoenix. "Hi, I'm Kris. Nice to meet you." He's like: "Yeah, I think I've met you before. I'm Dodger." Quietly, to Stephanie, I query: "Is this guy like your boyfriend or something?" In a gumdrop earsigh, she answers: "No, no. We're friends."

Before we start riding, I spot a leechi nut tree with ripe nuts and stop to grab a handful.

"Man, these things are great," I quipped. "My neighbor, Sean, used to have a tree. "You've got to try some of these." Stephanie, her lovely, all-Curious George blonde self, responds: "What are they?" She speaks slowly, sleepily, each word an orchestra of lawn mowers that don't start, but you finish the lemonade anyway, hah! And we nibble, consume, smile. "These are really good," she concludes. I steal a kiss, releasing my fondness for her in a quick peck. Her essence, I muse, reminds me of the mechanical butterfly in that short story *The Artist of The Beautiful*, a memorable shortcut of longing and love and all that.

Riding, the landscape unfolds like a sunburned orange, the sky peeling into eternity, the sun descending, darkness at the doorstep. Stephanie shares secret thoughts with me, as the oxygen reaches different parts of her body.

"You know, I'm just so depressed," she admits. "I'm so lonely. I don't know what to do."

"What about Dan? Have you talked with him recently?" (Dan's this guy that she likes.)

"Yeah. We talked last night, actually. All night. But, he's leaving tomorrow," her words trail off, absorbed into the cacaphony crescendo of passing cars.

"Hmmm. Well, they'll be another Dan," I offer optimistically. "It might take a while, though."

"Yeah, like months." She twists her mouth into a frown, then laughs. "I just gotta get away from this place, you know. I just gotta get away. I'm not doing any art or anything. I'm doing too much partying."

"Why don't you just stop?"

"People offer me stuff for free."

"You just have to say no. Don't be such a bargain hunter. If it's free, it's probably not worth taking anyway."

"I just haven't been doing any art. That's why I'm depressed."

And on and on she talks. I try to be a good listener. The felt curtains of sympathy blanket me. I care about her and try to help, but I don't know if I can. She needs to help herself. She needs discipline to do what she intends to do.

"I want to talk to Rodney," she concludes, referring to Rodney Mayo, the owner of Respectable Street Cafe, where she works. "Do you think he'll let me have a month off?"

"Why?"

"I just got to get away and think, you know what I mean?"

"I know," I tell her. "But in the end, you're gonna have to cut off the bad influences, trim the tree in your life, prune away the dead branches so the good ones can grow stronger."

"I know," she agrees. "I know."

"I feel like I'm in a toilet bowl and I can't get out," she adds. "Like I'm just swimming around and one day I'm gonna be flushed away. I feel just like, I don't know ... " the stars fade quickly.

Hitchhikers find a home on the tube socks of someone walking through the park, later to be picked off and thrown in the trash. I feel like hugging her, but we're on bikes! She's lost and beautiful, like so many others that fall into my orbit of friends and acquaintances that I long to save. Inevitably, they can only save themselves as they wander life's road, deciding which detours to explore and which bridges to cross. As usual, I'm not too careful with my affection. Perhaps that's the beautiful burden I have for the wanderlings--those forging their own path while avoiding the pitfalls common to a life of adventure.

"Sometimes," she commented, "when I look up at the sky, I just want to fly up into it. And grow wings and keep going and disappear into the clouds and get away from this place and everything."

Hanging out with Stephanie Walczak

As I didn't have the keys to get inside my apartment at #529 Clematis, I spent the night at Jonathon and Johanne's house. Their live in a nice area, between Olive and Flagler, a few blocks south of Belvedere. Stephanie Walczak's been crashing there as well.

I ended up listening to Johanne talk, while we drank Merlot, about her job as a massage therapist. Then Stephanie joined us in the living room.

"I know I have what it takes," she exhaled, stepping onto the treadmill of conversation. "I mean, you saw my stuff. Didn't you? You said you liked it."

"Yeah, it was terrific. Stephanie, you've got real talent, something you shouldn't discard."

"No, not to brag or anything, but people tell me that. And I know I do. It's just ... " the words tumble, unwinding like the hands of sister time scratching her back, itching the spot she can't reach, the sentences descend like felled trees. I want to kiss you, Steph. " ... and

I just wish, I just wish Kris, you know, I just wish ... " Her eyes roam about for the remaining words. After she inhales her cigarette, she has the answers. "I could have a special person to hang out with, someone that liked, who's smart and interesting and ... " I cut her off. "You mean a boyfriend?" And she replies: "Well yeah, someone special. You know. Well, you know. Don't you wish you ever had a special person, you know ... " that lovely search again, "like a special girl?"

"Yeah," I answer furtively.

"You know," Stephanie continues. "Instead of having a million faces and having to have a conversation with every single one of them. I can't even cross the street to come over to O'Shea's to get candy without being stopped by someone to have a conversaton. Even walking down Clematis, it takes me almost an hour 'cuz I run into so many people I know or that know me, do you know?"

"Yeah, I know. For me, it's almost the same way. I know what you have to put up with."

Later, Stephanie and I crashed in her bed.

"Can you rub my back?" She asked. I did, gazing at her bird blonde hair, short riffs of soft straw assembled into a feathered nest atop her head. "That feels good," she sighed softly, butterflies escaping her lips. Those eyebrows hide secrets that I can't even begin to imagine. I think of the band Hugo Largo, creating an ocean of lullabies that send you into the a holiday of whimsy. In you, Stephanie, I think to myself, I see youth in your potential and in your idealism. You need someone to listen more, letting you meet the ground and travel into your own answers.

Gary, Angel, room cleaned

We hugged and parted ways. I put on my helmet, mounted my bike and rode north. I pedaled steadily towards Clematis Street, riding along Olive Boulevard, on the right-hand-side of the road. The sky was slightly overcast and the air had a strange chill in it. By the time I reached the apartment at #529, I was warm, blood coursing through my veins to combat the brisk, frigid air. I unlocked the front door, climbed the stairs, and walked into the apartment.

Angel Lozada was lying in bed, reading out loud a book about financial success. He was fully dressed: long pants, tucked in shirt with belt, socks, shoes. Carefully, he repeated the words from the book, a Tony Robbins self-help text, enunciating every syllable with the seriousness of a pilgrim whispering a significant sacrament. Gary Greenwald sat balled up on the couch, like a cat. In one hand was his remote. The other hand held a tupperware

container from which he extracted forkfuls of food. His head pressed the phone against his shoulder, so he could maintain a conversation while eating and channel surfing.

I noticed that my things were gone.

"Wait a second?" I asked. "Where's my stuff?"

Gary looks up from the phone. "It's in the closet."

"What's it doing in there?" I ask.

"We were cleaning today and we organized it for you. Angel and I, we set up our desk for you in there. So it's like your own private office."

"What are you talking about, 'my own private office'?" I demand. "My own private office is in the living room, where I had it originally. The closet is for my clothes."

"Well, you know," Gary continues. "You just don't keep things in a neat pile. You have them laying all over the place."

"That's not true, Gary. I had them all by my desk."

"Exactly, all by your desk, not inside of it, like most of the stuff should have been."

"Who gives you the right to tell me where my stuff should have been?" I question indignantly. "I don't tell you where and where you can't put your stuff. And you can't tell me where to put my stuff. That's ridiculous."

Angel takes off the headphones and sits up from the bed.

"Is it?" Gary asks. "I think that you'd have the right to tell me where to put my stuff if I left it lying all over the place like you leave your stuff, but I don't, so you don't."

"Kris, Kris," Angel says tenderly. "It's just - "

"So in other words, just because you don't leave your stuff lying around, that means I can't. In other words, whatever you do, I have to do. In other words, you're an asshole."

"Kris, Kris," Angel repeats. "It's just - "

"It's just what? It's just what?" I parrot.

"It's just you can't - you leave your stuff lying everywhere," Angel explains. "And now

that there's three of us living here, there's not room for your stuff to be lying everywhere. Me and Gary want to keep it clean."

"So do I, but I don't go telling you what you can have lying around, Angel. Do I?"

"But he doesn't leave his stuff lying around everywhere," Gary says defensively.

"Oh yeah, okay," I sarcastically reply. "What about those porno mags that you had lying around the bathroom that day when my relatives stopped by and they had to use the bathroom, huh? What about that? And I'm not just talking about those regular ones, either. That one that Gary got had all those fat girls in it. And Gary, you weren't even there, were you?"

"No, no. I heard about it, though."

"So my aunt goes to use the bathroom and she's fat and she's been trying to lose weight forever and she has to see, you know, fat girls naked for a centerfold." I shook my head. "Man, that's freaking embarrassing, Angel. So, where do you and Gary get off putting my stuff in the back corner. It's not like porno mags or ... what about your pot, Gary? You leave that shit everywhere. It's like you're shedding or something."

"Angel and I kept your stuff totally neat and organized," said Gary. "You probably won't recognize it for that reason," he smirked.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Angel.

"And we arranged the house with nice furniture," Gary continues. "And I have lots of nice things that I don't want getting damaged and when you leave your stuff everywhere, it creates a mess."

"Sometimes you have to create a mess in order to get things done," I explain. "If you clean up as you go along, you'll never finish anything, especially when you have a deadline."

"Kris," starts Angel. "It's just, the office is - "

"Oh, but I forgot Gary. You wouldn't know about a deadline now, would you? You never accomplish anything."

"Huh, huh, huh."

"Yeah," I remark. "Laugh it off like you always do. That's a lot easier than trying to make up an excuse, isn't it."

"Kris," says Angel. "I need to study when I get home, and when everything's dirty, it's hard for me to focus on studying and improving the business. It's like the book I'm reading right now by Tom Peters called Getting Ahead. He says that organization saves time and that way, you can be more productive and take shortcuts and save more time and that way you - "

"What's the name of the book?" I interrupt.

"It's called Getting Ahead."

"Look, that's bull. You can read what you want so that you can always blame, when you fail, the books you read. It's called avoidance or labelling or something like that," I rambled. "That can be your excuse. Whatever. I'll try to keep it neater. But I'm not working in that closet. It's way too small," I concluded.

Trip to Inverness, Florida with Gary Greenwald, Arianna Bearce, Phillip Gilmoure, and me

Here's the story: Arianna Bearce, this curbie girl that works at The Downtown Group, needed to drop off her dog, Rocco, to her relatives in Inverness, a small town that hides among the swamps, wetlands, everglades and relatively untouched soil of northern Florida. Arianna didn't have time to take care of it. Inverness would be its new home. Arianna's mom would be his new owner.

Gary Greenwald, a poet, writer, and Phillip Gilmoure, a zeitgeist lifeball of energy fond of philosophy books and Thoreau, both roommates of mine, joined her. So did I - Kris Kemp, a hyper guy who documents these stories so I can justify my participation on this interstate of human traffic.

Florida laid out all its mysteries before us as we roared west from Jupiter. The car headed west while the earth outside blurred into a quick-passing puddle. Our pot of gold was Arianna's mothers new residence in a small town called Inverness, a tiny but strong community nestled in the low-lying hills and swamplands of what Florida used to be before most of it was ripped apart by green eyed developers with visions of tourists and new homeowners and the recent migration of gray haired retirees into the cookie pushed condominiums.

Arianna drove. Gary rode in the front, passenger side. Phil and I sat in the back. I think Arianna took I-70 north, racing past desolate orange groves and busy truck stops. On the way there, I spotted a sign for a Russel Stovers Factory - "Chocolate at wholesale prices". Yes! Phil and I convinced Arianna to take a five minute detour. Inside, Phil and I ran around like kids, emptying the bowl of complimentary chocolates, while Arianna and

Gary laughed at our antics. Before leaving, we purchased some semi-smashed boxes of chocolate. Once we returned to the car and hit the road again, Phil and I experienced the madness that only chocolate can bring once it passes the mouth. If you don't know, then you must try some. Unwinding before us like a beautiful yo-yo. Our fishbowl roared and steadied at one hundred miles per hour. Devouring chocolates. Accelerated heartbeats. The future.

"We're not spending the night there," Arianna insisted. "You're gonna take one look at the trailer and you're gonna laugh 'cuz it's so small."

We ended up meeting her family, a beautifully cool collection of friendly rednecks who fed us, exchanged stories, and provided a natural warmth and genuine openness among farmers of nostalgia. Her mom encouraged us to spend the night. How could we refuse? We spend the night on comfortable blankets, pillows, amped on the receding tide of sugar and kindness offered by these friendly strangers. The next morning, Arianna's mother's boyfriend gave us an airboat ride. Simply incredible. If you haven't met a friendly redneck, go to Inverness and hang out.

energy mailbox

"You need to be away from her for a certain period of time, Gary. I mean, sure, you're gonna be lonely for a while, but that's expected." I paced the kitchen, then returned to the living room. "I mean, it'll be worth it after you get over the initial heartbreak. Trust me. I know it's hard to give up something that's so comfortable but you're always complaining so how comfortable can it be? After the grieving period, you'll be a lot more confident with yourself, and you won't always have to have a girl to back up what you do. Know what I mean?"

Gary just shrugged and looked away. "Yeah, yeah. I guess. I know what you're saying. It's jus ... I don't know."

"You just need to get over her man 'cuz it's totally unhealthy for you," I pleaded. "I'm just trying to help you, but I don't think you want any."

"Ah, don't worry. I don't take your advice anyway."

"Okay," I shrugged. "Just stay in the same area of the pool. Keep closing your eyes, man. Then again, maybe you shouldn't listen to me anyway. Anyway, whatever."

Gary stepped into the kitchen and disappeared into the fridge. "Are these yours?" Holding up a bowl of broken Oreo-looking cookies, some milk in the bottom.

"I think it's Phillips. Yeah. Definitely Phillips."

"This is getting ridiculous. He never puts his stuff away."

29

It's the fifth day and I'm still struggling to accept the entropy of man. Not any man. This man. I don't consider myself a man even though I am a few years past the age of being a man. I am a young man. Then why am I attracted to sixteen-year-old girls? Why do I delinquent along with seventeen-year-olds, sometimes acting less mature? My braces guard me from getting any older. Maybe that's why I'm not hurrying to get them off. They've been on for seven years. Years. Seven years. Physically, I'm slender--the nice term for being skinny. I have a big nose and an enormous adam's apple. Is the 'a' in "adam's" capitilized? Where would I find that out? That girl is really pretty. My brain is like a speeding train without a track. It's headed somewhere fast, but it doesn't know where. In other words, I'll be likely to accomplish twice as much at a chore I was not assigned. Boy, isn't this fascinating. You bet. If it wasn't, you wouldn't be reading it, now, would you?

TYPEWRITER

strictly true stories for people who can feel

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30 Holly, Jill, Lawrence Corning, Steve Ellman, Niklas Jennings

Monday - an afternoon in my life

This morning fell into the noon before I woke. The phone rang while I half slept and I knew it was going to be Nancy Rinker, who I had arranged to call at noon because I expected to be up by then. But I went to Denny's before going to sleep, with Rodney Mayo (owner of Respects), Gino Baldoni (the barback at Respectables) and Chris Sargent (bouncer of Respects) after work, pushing up the hours when weariness was already upon my shoulders. The Denny's visit happens at least once a week, following a night of work at Respectable Street Cafe, following a near five a.m. close. The 50's had diners, and the 90's has Denny's, a purgatory of plastic seats, sticky carpets, trashed bathrooms, the before-going-home pit stop for bar hoppers and clubheads. Ironically, the food is their saving grace, a semi-consistent trough of grilled cheese sandwiches, fried chicken, pancakes, and scrambled egg delights. Enough to make any horny young person give in to sleep. A placebo for the cattle call of loneliness.

At 1 p.m., I rolled out of the couch and slipped into the bathroom, creating my first product of the day, then washed, brushing, showering and checking the messages. Nancy had left a message. I called her. "I'll be over in fifty minutes," she said. For the next ten minutes, I organize my room and desk, then wander downstairs and step out onto the sidewalk.

"Kris." A familiar voice beckons.

I turn to see Holly Schneider, the roommate of Jills, who lives in the second-floor apartment on the corner of Rosemary and Hibiscus, in a mammoth ramshackle house, a behemoth of old wood, chipped paint shaded by three old (and pregnant) mango trees. I really dig their place, a beautifully beat up loft, wood floored, lotsa old windows, undiscovered, made ... meant for the both of them, free spirits, minimalists, poets, inhabiting the vacation of everyday life.

Holly and Jill sit in front of O'Shea's, drinking iced teas, wearing dark sunglasses, looking movie-star-like in downtown's main vein, Clematis Street.

"Hey Holly," I smile, walking over to greet them. "Hey, what's up Kris?" Holly asks, approaching me with her glazed donut eyes, her arms out. I drown in her hug, her enormous breasts flattened in my squeeze.

"Holly, awwww ... " I sigh.

"What are you doing?" She asks.

"Oh, I'm waiting for someone."

"Who?"

"Hi Jill." I smile and wave.

"Hi Kris."

"This girl, Nancy. She 's gonna bring some photos she's taken and meet me."

"Greeeaattttttt." Holly exclaims.

"Yeah, I don't know if you know her," I sputter. "You probably do, Holly. She used to publish Index, this other publication. She was the editor. They had two issues."

"Oh really ... wow."

"Yeah. It should be cool."

A red car parks near Holly's vehicle. It belongs to Steve Ellman, a former columnist for the FLO. He's brilliant and skeptical and overflowing with great analogies, usually sarcastic in nature but witty nonetheless. As the FLO was inconsistently published, every three or four months, he began writing for Red Herring, a competing publication that came out on a more regular basis. A wise move. At least Red Herring pays him for his stories. And Steve is cool enough to contribute commentaries and reviews to the FLO, if need be. Initially, when Lawrence Corning, a renegade realtor and president of The Downtown Group, told me about Red Herring, I was jealous. Then I looked through the paper and was impressed by the thoughtful writing and uncluttered layout. At that point, my envy turned into disappointment, since Red Herring and I were fighting for the same advertisers, the kiddie pool of alternative books, coffeehouses, clubs and cafes that litter Palm Beach county. Soon after it was published, I met Gail Sheperd, the editor and we became acquaintance/friends.

Steve Ellman exits the car and visits The Blue Buddha, Kathy Jarosz's clothing, thrift, accessories, art boutique on the first floor of the building at the northeast corner of Clematis and Quadrille, west of the parking lot. Minutes later, he walks out and heads toward us. "Hey Steve, what's up?" I query. "Hey Kris," he laughs, extending his hand. We shake. "So listen man, when are you gonna do this photo story? Have you called Gail (the editor of Red Herring)?" His volley of words fire through his mouth like a machine gun. "I think it's a great idea. You could go along with the text of the whole issue or do something on your own." And me, the loser with the great bundle of energy replies: "Um, yeah, I still want to do it. I'm just having to concentrate on getting the FLO out."

"Did you call her?" Steve asks. "Yeah." I tell him. "What'd she say?" He asks. "She wasn't there." I explained. "Oh well. Look. I just think it would be great - ahem - just come up with an idea. I'm sure she'll like it."

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice a yellow Saab on the street. It's Nancy Rinker.

"Alright Steve, I'll talk to you. Sounds good. Yeah, I have to meet someone, though, right now."

"Alright, but call Gail and talk to her," he insisted. "I'm sure she'll love it."

"Alright, see ya." I jog over to Nancy's car before she steps out, hoping Steve won't follow me and hoping Nancy won't unload obvious camera equipment since Red Herring could use photographers and Nancy could use clips. We say our hellos, then trudge up the apartment steps and out onto the balcony terrace, that views the ghetto north of Banyan Street. Slowly, I file through her photos, a memorable collection of black and

whites, some high in contrast, others grainy, full of texture. My favorite ones are grainy, looking as if they'd been snapped forty years ago. The compliments surface and we chat about photography, art, and life. Then she leaves.

Back outside, on the street again, I run into Kathy Jarosz, owner of The Blue Buddha. We talk for a few minutes. Then I notice Gary Greenwald, outside the store, crouched down near the sidewalk. He's talking with these two hippies, who he introduces me to as Corrie and Keith. They find a street bench and continue talking and laughing, while Gary spoonfeeds conversation adding exaggerated bananas to the jello he feeds them. They gobble, smile, sigh, laugh.

"Hey, you guys wanna go get something to eat?" I ask the group. "Gary, have you eaten?"

"We're gonna go to Malsori's and get a slice. It's only a dollar and," turning to Corrie and Keith, "it's really good and totally fills you." Then to me, Gary offers: "You wanna come?"

"You don't want to go to Cafe du' Brasil? I've never been there and I want to try it out." I explain.

"Mmmm. No. We're gonna go to Malsori's, I think."

"Alright."

I jog over to The Downtown Group building, across the street from our apartment. Inside, it's a collection of doorways, hallways, computers, desks, phones, architectural plans stacked in roles, bookshelves sagging under the weight of heavy books dealing with real estate law. Amidst the air-conditioned suffocation and cushy, light brown carpeting sit office workers, a secretary, and other gophers attending to ... something. Running this small circus is Lawrence Corning, an enigmatic crusader for downtown development, on a mission to turn anything built before 1965 into an historic landmark, a maverick that speaks in riddles--the real estate riddler, using cryptic similes and metaphors that remain both perplexing and humorous. In a way, he's a lost superhero, adding value to the American landscape. Kryptonite, anyone?

Walking through the front doors, I spot Harold, the receptionist. "Hey Harold, is Larry upstairs?" I ask.

"Yeah Kris, go on up." He says.

I run up the stairs, two at a time, turn the corner and face the man, Lawrence Corning. He sits at a large table, inside his office, his tepee. "Hi Larry." He smiles at me curiously.

"Hey Kris, what's going on?" I answer his question with another question. "Have you eaten? You want to go to Cafe du Brasil with me and get something to eat? I've never been." He shuffles papers and puts his hand to the receiver. "Sure, hang on." Twenty seconds later, phone in cradle, down the steps, out the door, we wander east on street, wrapped by two-story buildings on this sunny, cloudless afternoon. We reach Cafe du Brasil, take a seat outside, and order coffee. The cafe, a recent addition to downtown, sits on the northeast corner of Clematis and Olive, has counter or tableside service and a pricey menu -- help. The coffee arrives and we look at it silently. Then, as if on cue, we pick up the espresso and gulp it sparingly, waiting for the caffeine to take effect. Like two junkies, we tie ourselves off and find the vein, pressing the plunger slowly downward, witnessing the drug as it takes the subway beneath the city of our skin, destined to find its way to points north, south, east, west. If destiny proves correct, we are all manufacturers of our consent. In spite of ourselves, we recognize the symptoms.

Slowly, the sugar and caffeine work loosen our bearings. Trembling like a slow moving train before it gains momentum, the conversation shifts gears, shakes loudly, and advances forward. Toy soldiers on percaset.

Niklas Jennings walks across the street from us. He looks lost. As usual, he's dressed in black from head to toe, with the pointy shoes that are duct-taped at the end. His head lowers between his shoulders, like a turtle that's shy, as he looks to cross the street. Although he is somewhat shy, Niklas is a local fashion model and performance artist, whose favorite holiday, Halloween, permits him to paint his body in silver and stick his hair up with white clay. Niklas, though, doesn't need permission. He used to live in the church, the abandoned church on the southeast corner of Gardenia and Rosemary, along with artist Pedro, a few others, and the eccentric caretaker Mike Monet. In a way, the church was the resident Belvue for local waywards, a kind of unintentional community.

"Hey Niklas!" I wave him over. He spots us, grins, then runs across the street, a windmill of limbs and arms, looking like the lead character in Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. He sits a bag on the table.

"Get something to eat." Lawrence suggests.

"I can't," he announces. "I'm on my way to drop this Chinese food to Ann." (Ann Gluxman, Bahamian expatriate that's going to massage school and volunteers to work the cash register at *The Wormhole*, a bohemian fishbowl below *Lost Weekends*, a pool hall.

Niklas sits down and shrugs. "Okay," he drawls. "But only for a second."

Famous last words.

Innocently, Lawrence asks Niklas what he does, or wants to do. Niklas takes the bait,

then pulls the line, the rod and Lawrence into the ocean, dragging him below into the murky depths of his imagination. Watching them talk, I felt like I was high. (And I've only gotten high twice, but I think it was laced with PCP. Everything was blinking. I found myself in my underwear walking barefoot down Trinity Street, a one-way street north of Okeechobee, between Olive and Dixie, in downtown West Palm Beach. Everything looked artificial, as if I had stepped into a pop-up book.) Him and Larry hit it off right away, both dreamers in a pathetic crusade, or crusaders in a pathetic dream. Each sketch their lives among indifferent platform shoes, goldfish, earrings, cigarettes and hairgel. Eagerly, Niklas spouts the plans for his restaurant/bar, one in which the walls, both inside and outside, are comprised of giant fish tanks. "The walls would be glass, rectangular fishbowls with actual live fish in them. I'm not talking about any fish, huh-huh-huh, I mean sharks, barracudas, manta rays. It would have to be a salt water tank, huh-huh-huh," his hands carry his words, great and beautiful hands that pass the football to anyone who will listen. Fascinated, like a psychic that refuses to interrupt, Larry listens. Inside, I'm thinking it's all useless--empty words that lack the action to turn them into reality. All he does is talk, sharing his dreams to receive compliments, reactions, attention, anything. "Mmmph." Larry nods bravely. Niklas continues, a broken water fountain with gum stuck to the nozzle. " ... Richard Burton to direct the movie and the movie would even cost more than the bar, twelve million." He clenches his teeth and sucks. "Ssstttthhhhhhh." I listen, spacing bites of a sandwich, the 'Amazon' in the available potholes of hyperbole which encompass me. The sandwich is delicious. It should be for seven bucks. Absorbing the dialog, I smile genuinely. This is fun. This is real.

32

rocket

you're a rocket
fueled
by your dreams
lost
by your tears
trapped
by your smiles
i think
that's why
i like you

rust anatomy

you always love

what you can't have;
you always have
what you can't love.
and me,
i continue to fall for
the forts that need
to be repaired
hammered secure with
the nails of experience
reinforced with common sense
and
tethered by lines of humor
yet
all that i try to fit
doesn't and most
of the time the only
things i change
belong to me.
This experience i keep
weathering;
it's the nature of
the trick.
and i remain the
jester to deaf ears

hands

my mom
has the coolest hands
weathered, strong, cut,
bruised, calloused,
muscular, firm, stung
beautiful by bees of wisdom
kissed by God
moved by angels
remembered fondly for
the way she moved her
fingers softly through
my hair,
relaxing the strands,
releasing the fears
from a kid who felt

too much and thought
too little
and sometimes
still does

horriby alive

treeforts
mudballs
rocks hurled
yelling
David Gasklins
used to war
shirts like these,
the ones that i sell
to wide-eyed ravers
that blender
their feet to
140 beats per minute,
the same young ones
hold butterflies
in their head,
grab the future with
soft fingers and
idle in the drive-thru's
of America,
smile and tremble
and submerge themselves,
looking ahead, not seeing
the treadmill to which
they are glued ...
the nose, the spare
oh's and ex's and
pastors spinning earfuls,
the sermons remembered and
repeated and spilled out
from lips loosened by
corn syrup
sugar
endorphins
alcohol
grass

ecstasy
acid
speed
cocaine
heroin
ice
etc etc etc.
they dress like
David Gasklins
and like him,
chew up the landscape with
a ferocious smile

34 Respectable Street, arguement with Melissa Choat

Respectables has been really busy, more so than usual as it is Spring Break, when students have time to kill and money to spend. Also, those that attend college in other states often return here to visit their family, soak up the rays, and return to their former haunts downtown. As Respectable's opened in 1987 as the first new wave, progressive music club in the southeast United States, it's a second-home pit stop for these young adults.

Last night, I got in a blow out with Melissa Choat, the cocktail waitress, an attractive chick that pollenates the downtown scene, charming strangers and friends alike with her practiced smile and warm personality. Fashionwise, Melissa dresses sets trends, as what she wears usually becomes trendy several months later. Working at Respect's, I have seen this firsthand, especially when she wore jeans that rode so low on her butt that you could see the beginning of thong underwear. Weeks later, girl patrons of the club started to do the same. I suppose we're all sheep. Some of us just wear black.

Anyway, the arguement was about money. As the club had been standing room ony for the better part of the night, Melissa had gotten lots of drink orders and made plenty of money, a good bank. Throughout the night and early morning, the customers left clues to their presence--a veritable minefield of littered bottles, spilled beverages, broken glass, abandoned cups containing pools of lukewarm alcohol and cigarette butts. My job was to tidy up the evidence, which I did well. The end of the night arrives, Melissa approaches me and hands me a lousy ten spot. "Thanks Kris," she smile, turns, and walks back toward the bar. I open it up and stare at it. The indignation rises in my throat.

"Melissa," I launched soberly. "Don't hold out on mye. I know you think you can, just because you're pretty. But I busted my ass tonight and ten dollars is way too little."

"How much do you think you should get?" Rodney Mayo, the owner/deejay, asks.

"About thirty."

"Melissa did do well tonight." Rodney concludes.

"C'mon Melissa," I pleaded, hoping to sway her conscience. "I get paid more by Jill on slow nights than I do from you on busy nights. This is bullshit." Melissa remained silent while I fumed. "Melissa, pay me more than this, at least twenty. Give me another ten. If you don't pay me more, I'm quitting right now." Then I started getting personal with her. "I know you don't care about anyone but yourself, but this is your job and I'm your help, so it's required."

Silence followed.

"Fuck this." I headed for the door.

"What about Denny's?" Chris Sargent, the main bouncer, asked.

Earlier, we made plans to visit that cattle stall. Now though, I wasn't in the mood. Also, a bunch of people were going and I like small groups. When Chris and I go, along with Rodney Mayo, the three of us talk about life, death, and human nature, analyzing the follies and triumphs of mankind. The conversation brings us to the ledge, a point of no turning back, when tiredness hits as the consumed food expands in our bellies.

Friday night will be my last night working at Respectable Street Cafe. I'm sick of being treated like a freaking cartoon character.

35 Liz at Respectable Street Cafe

My eyes were griddles today, my pupils, burning eggs sizzling in the butter that was quickly turning brown. I do think the California trip changed my life. I don't see things in the same way anymore. Everything seems flat. Half the time, walking around Clematis Street, the street on which I live, I feel like I'm a paper doll stumbling about a pop-up book. Perhaps that's why I write. I feel like I'm in control. Writing helps me make sense of the world. The typewriter's the only person to talk to as it doesn't talk back. Sitting there, without sentiment or criticism, it digests everything you say. Its silence doesn't instill that feeling of disapproval you get when you talk to the person who's not answering. No one gives a crap. That's just the way it is. Everyone still talks. And I must get my own place. Some people feel that, if they're not getting a reaction from someone, they're not alive. How sad. Then again, that's why I type. This is probably why I find the bathroom so sacred. And the kitchen. Eating is a holy act treasured by the lonely. I'm

lonely. Driven to do, not to think. When I think, I become sad. Everything's sad. At least this typewriter remembers where the tab and margins are. The latest one demanded resetting every time. That one's going back to Target before the ninety day warranty is up. No one's here right now, only me in the closet, type, type, type, type, waiting for the natural rythm to unlock what's deep inside.

Last night, I maneuvered through the vociferous crowd of swaying bodies, bottles in both hands, heading toward the industrial sized garbage container beside the bar.

"Kris, Kris ... " a ghostly voice emanates from the small mountain of torsos, tatoood arms and cigarette butts that glow to reveal pale faced vampires. I drop the bottles into the trash and follow the voice.

"Kris, hey what's up?" Liz, my lovely, lost junkie friend emerges from the dark, buried in her drugs and loud music. Her eyes are large, round dinner plates ... the blue plate special. Her eyelids remain partially closed, like window blinds that have been pulled halfway down, denying sunlight, reminding me of the weary cynical expression that the comic book cat Garfield wears after he's played a trick on his owner. Like a bumper car, she pivots off the bodies, unnoticed by the loud collegiates who eye the room furtively for a bedtime snack. Even though the drugs are getting the best of her, or the worst of her, she's still beautiful, an orphaned angel whose habit has corrupted her view of God. With each shot to the arm, her world grows smaller as she barricades herself against reality. For her, the bruises remain the calendar, a series of tracks, a train schedule, tapping viens from station to station as she travels to the promised land in her mind, a place where no one can hurt her. One day, I hope she gets off. What promises her peace has put her in bondage, imprisoning her mind and diminishing her hopes. Still, there's hope for her, even with a broken wing and a cracked halo that's lost its neon. There's always hope. One day, I hope she gets off this train.

She came closer. Her eyes floated loosely in pockets of reddened water. As she talked to me, yards of silly string words landed across my face, her eyes looked as if they were going to fall out and roll down her sunken-in jaws and into the space between her gums.

"Kris, Kris. Can you get me something to drink?" She begged. "I don't feel good, man. Pleeaasssee."

"Yeah, sure. Hang on," I gathered more bottles from a nearby table. "What do you want? I can't get you anything alcoholic, though. Do you want some cranberry juice or orange juice or water or something?"

"Just water. Thanks."

"Sure. Are you gonna stay right here?"

"Yeah. I'll be right here."

I dodged my way through the crowd, leaned over the bar where the cocktail waitress usually waits for her drinks from the bartender nearby, waited until one got in earshot, then asked for two waters. Taking them, I acrobatically headed towards Liz. She was on the outskirts of the dancefloor, dancing. My fingers tapped her bony shoulderballs and she turned around. "Oh hey! Thanks." She took the waters and moved closer to give me an awkward hug, the affection of a skeleton, the heroin in her veins, the music in her head, the broken, glass butterflies caged in her eyes, wanting to escape. "You're welcome."

Guilt swept over me for I knew that offering her respite from her drug hangover wasn't helping. Then I remembered the last time she had used my bathroom ... my hand, the plunger, the blood squirting into the heroin-water solution, the veins--empty riverbeds--crying out for more, the descending rains, the dam broke and the rushing torrent arrived, overflowing the rivers and sweeping along the nearest passersby before subsiding to release the kidnapped stray. That's me: floating in her wake. After the needle was extracted--the rocketship ascended from its unearthly visit--her pupils disappear into yo-yos, growing smaller as they descend their string. Then, a quietness surfaced, enclosing the room with anticipation. Liz began muttering to herself, positioning herself crosslegged in front of the mirror, this old tarnished, wood framed looking glass that laid against the wall. Like a collapsible beach chair, her legs folded into a bonepile of right angles, the only movement came from her arm, as it slowly brushed her hair, sifting the crops of split ends, a tangle of withered, aged, strawlike hair. "It's my twenty-first birthday today," Liz announces wearily. The porcelain shattered. Sadness came over me as I watched her, partly fascinated but mostly in despair. Liz, a pretty twenty-one year old with the tired eyes of a beaten-down fifty year old, the trembling bonefingers, yellowbrown, stained-burned fingertips of an asphalt wanderer, an accidental whore that cannot bear the thought of releasing the crackpipe, the itching breasts of a junkie, and a mad laugh of one that's given themselves over to death.

Those burning images seared my soul, my conscience, but overwhelmingly spawned an interest in all those who I thought I could help, even though they refuse to change. Witnessing this conveyor belt of humanity propels me to capture it all, collect it, keeping track with photographs and stories. Documenting this, if nothing else, gives me a sense of accomplishment. Writing it down helps me to remember. People don't change. But, perhaps, I can succeed in having others view them differently. In one way or another, we're all drug addicts--suffering from addictions that we cannot overcome, tricking ourselves out for the forbidden fruit, sacrificing the immediate on the altar of the eternal.

Even butterflies wear camouflage.

Yesterday at The Wormhole, this daybeat music, book, clothing closet beneath Lost Weekends, a pool hall, I got the worst headache. What began as a slow throb grew into a steady hammering that really hurt. I was sitting in the closet, behind the counter, using Elana's computer to finish editing some FLO stories. Leaving the closet, I braced myself with one hand as the store tilted to one side and blue dots materialized in front of me.

"What's wrong?" Elana asked tenderly.

"My head hurts and I'm hallucinating. I think I'm hallucinating."

"You are what you eat." She stated robotically. "If you put garbage into your body, you're going to be suffering side effects. You probably don't get enough fruits and vegetables in your diet."

"I eat a lot of brocolli," I countered. "I had potatoes today, and water. I drink lots of water."

"Do you ever eat any vegetables, besides brocolli?" Elana asks. "You probably don't get enough vitamins. Talk to Ann. She has vitamins. I'm sure she'd give you or tell you which ones to buy."

"Talk to Ann, huh?" I repeat.

"Yeah, I mean Kris, uhhh - " Elana starts.

"When I do pushups, sometimes my headaches go away. So maybe I'm not getting enough blood to the brain." I offer.

"Oxygen to the brain. Not blood, but what it carries."

"Well, yeah. Ann, I'll talk to her."

Elana returned to what she was doing at the counter, unwrapping a new shipment of granola bars or candles or rolling paper or arranging files. I bought one of the natural sodas, strawberry-kiwi, sucked down the bottle, garbaged it, and returned to the closet to finish working. After experiencing difficulty formatting the text, I left early.

Another day when I was at The Wormhole, tagging some clothes I was going to sell, two girls visited. I complimented one on her fashion, then began talking to her, recommending some of my consignment clothing that would suit her look. She was dressed like a raver. She looked like a model, with a smile like a Lite-Brite, blue eyes, fresh red lips bursting

with life in French-Canadian whispers, small nose and the short hair, a presence that reminds you of Canada--big, clean, pure. Leaving on my bike, my wheels sank into the clouds. Closing my eyes, I disappeared into melancholy and was never the same again for the rest of my life.

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37 Revive meeting at The Wormhole

Revive, a group of downtown business owners that want to enhance the area with community events that promote local culture, met at The Wormhole for its first meeting. Who was there? Matt Reynolds, owner of Sound Splash, an independent record, tape, CD, zine, T-shirt, sticker, poster store. Lawrence Corning, the maverick realtor bent on designating current properties to historic status, and his girlfriend, Wendy. Rodney Mayo, owner/deejay of Respectable Street Cafe and Lost Weekends. Carrie Webb, a bright photographers assistant involved in the organization of Moonfest, downtown's Halloween street party. Steve Ellman, writer/investigative journalist for the FLO and Red Herring. Donnie, a dreadlocked deejay who spins records in front of The Blue Buddha. Sally, who I don't really know. Me, Kris Kemp, the guy who publishes the FLO, a small zine that documents downtown West Palm Beach.

"That was the thing," Matt rustled, his face peeking from his scruffy beard, eyes twinkling behind cool bifocals, leaning forward in anticipation.

"That should be a slam dunk," Lawrence concludes. "The rumor's been confirmed, then?" Lawrence asks, putting one foot on the ladder that leads up to the diving board. "That's what I've heard. So it's true." Lawrence climbs the ladder, keeping his eyes straight ahead. "All the mayors from nearby cities will converge in downtown West Palm Beach this week." Lawrence mounts the diving board. It sways beneath him. "Then she should call off the dogs, paperchase ... " He eyes the pool below, bouncing the board carefully. "There coming up and standing on the cash register if they don't like the business."

Elana's rubbing her eyes. Sally's looking at Andy Cotters cartoon. Matt sits quietly, thinking about something. Rodney's talking with Lawrence. Wendy's head moves back and forth, as if she's watching a tennis match. Donnie, a deejay, brings up a strong case against the cop who told him to quit spinning records in front of The Blue Buddha. Larry listens attentively. Steve sits, taking notes, running through windmills. Conclusion: Get out of West Palm Beach.

Donnie says that the police harassment on kids who hang out front of The Blue Buddha is not justified. "We're just having a good time," he defends. "We're not responsible for what goes on in the parking lot." The parking lots west of the railroad tracks, across from Badcock Furniture, is the asphalt playground for underage drinkers, drug dealers, a kind of apocalyptic corner store for roaming youths to gather.

"People who are creating problems, breaking bottles, going to the bathroom in public, using drugs, they can be replaced," quips Lawrence. "Maybe they have to be older and more mature, and they need a place to exchange their creative ideas."

"It's a multi-headed beast," Lawrence rolls. "They have to be responsible. There's not enough places to accommodate the demand of sitting outside on the sidewalks, soaking some suds. Let's get our permits in order and then see what happens. The problem is, in the creative business, they need creative permits because they're doing five million different things. We have to get the permits now, and then we can argue about pricing later."

Spring Breakfast - immediate release

Downtown Madness erupts at Spring Breakfast

Lost children wandered about the "sad American paradise" embracing strangers with alcohol soaked 'hellos', laughter that doesn't reach the belly, and deadfish handshakes. A mad circus it was, the streetlights flashlit the moving figures and often caught their wide, desperate saucer eyes whose pupils hadn't even been filled with milk, yet. (They had to pay the milkman or even put a smollared bill into his jukebox.) Vendors lined their pockets and others lined their faces in worry, the hands reassuring each other beneath uncovered tables whose surfaces mounted with junk, literature stirred by prophets of poor conviction, candles, music, hats, denim. Stuntmen and chemists manned the booths and exchanged smiles for rides. But their tired eyes became more honest as the night wore on. No one played Twister.

"Where'd you get that?"

"Blessing's." She smiled, a cigarette upheld in one hand, a 32-ounce Bull Ice malt liquor-- just opened--in the other.

"Cool," she replies to one of her friends. "Thanks, oh yeah, wait for me."

Beth found a comfortable place on the sidewalk, sat down, brought the alcohol to her mouth, and kissed the bottle. Minutes later, her friend returned.

"Wow, they don't card anybody in there."

"I know. Isn't that cool?"

"Yeah. Hey, well let's get out of her before mom finds us."

The duo melted into the unconscious throng.

Waves of music swept through the milling crowd. The volume increased. The meter quickened. The chemists worked their magic, casting hypnotic nets of sound onto the hungry eyed hybrids below. Alchemy met restlessness met frustration met loneliness met the beautiful behind a girls neck met the pure and clean smiles of a million tumblers iced tea and Mello Yello mixed with Yoo-hoo. Photographers are the thieves of this world. Humor is cruel. Losing something is cathartic. They make toothpaste for you to feel less alone. Hide the spoons and laugh out loud.

"It's like we're not in West Palm Beach anymore," whispered Bonnie, her hands in her pockets, open eyed atonishment, her mouth gaping in amazement.

For Bonnie and upwards of 6,000 others, West Palm Beach seemed distant from the real life storybook carnival whose pages they had stepped into, and it was.

For the hardworking crew at Revive, the well received event symbolized blood, sweat and tears. The same group had organized Moonfest only months before, and that events' response had been nearly twice as many as expected (10,000 people attended).

"With Moonfest under our belts," explained Gilligan, the dollar signs flashing in his pupils, "I knew I was on to something."

Jokes aside, Revive worked very hard, bla, bla, bla, success. Some infighting bla, bla, bla, not much though, bla, bla, bla. Kris needs a 486, bla, bla, bla. Mainly, Rodney Mayo and Carrie Webb did most of the work after Kris chickened out bla, bla, bla. Kris isn't going to do it again, not worth the time and effort because, bla, bla, bla, Kris needs money bla, bla, bla. Downtown Development Authority bla, bla, bla. It's like two-something a.m. and I'm lonely bla, bla, bla. Who cares? Bla, bla, bla, exaggeration is completely necessary for a society that can't feel bla, bla, bla, bla, bla, bla, whatever right? bla, bla, bla, bla.

Spring Breakfast - immediate release

Vanilla and the Search for Spock

"It's like we're not in West Palm Beach anymore," whispered Bonnie, her hands in her pockets, eyes wide as saucers, her mouth gaping in wonder.

For Bonnie and 6,000 others, WPB seemed distant from the real life, pop-up book carnival whose pages they had entered moments earlier. And it was, for Bonnie had crossed the tracks and followed her friends into Spring Breakfast, a giant street dance festival happening on the 400 block of Clematis.

Music assaulted them from all sides. Giant cereal boxes loomed overhead. Wide eyed hybrids chewing up the street with ferocious smiles. Alternative clothing, music, literature and accessory vendors lined the street. Even Niklas Jennings, a performance artist with his body in silver paint and hair caked in white clay, didn't stand out in this crowd. A mad circus it was!

But what was the crowd participating in? And how did it come about?

Almost two years earlier, a group of business owners, artists, and residents of downtown WPB met beneath Lost Weekends to discuss ways to bring people downtown, while raising money for charities. The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) hosted monthly events that were poorly attended and had bad music. The group, which named itself Revive (for reviving downtown), thought it could do better, or at least help.

Under the supervision of Rodney Mayo, who owns two popular, alternative hotspots downtown, Carrie Webb, whose organizational skills were pure genius and whose connections in local government proved invaluable, local artist Kent Walton with his construction skills, downtown preservationist and neo-traditionalist, renegade visionary Lawrence Corning, President of The Downtown Group, with his knowledge of building codes and city laws, Reg, his lawyer, Barbara Socher and AJ Ferguson of The Last Resort, an "urban streetwear" clothing store on Clematis, Michael Ross, editor of iCE magazine, Jack Daniels, an ex-demolitions expert and brave graphic artist, and myself, Kris Kemp, a half-rate cook and giggling magazine editor, Revive aimed to provide an option for the DDA street fodder, and give people a real reason to return downtown, aside from dope buys.

"Basically, we wanted to take it to the vanilla," explained urban maverick Lawrence Corning. "When they raised the white flag, we knew all we had to do was tie up the ponies and give it the greenhouse effect."

With Moonfest behind us and Spring Break fast approaching, members of Revive conferenced once more to discuss and opportunity for another street event, something involving less preparation than Moonfest. They came up with Spring Breakfast, an alternative to wet bikini contests and banana eating competitions. At the same time, Revive would use this event to raise money for charity and introduce people to the new downtown.

Originally, Michael Monet, an actor and caretaker of the abandoned church on Rosemary

and Hibiscus, came up with the idea. "We could serve breakfast, maybe have a toast toss, a costume contest, a cereal eating contest," he mused, a big, clownlike grin on his face.

Personally, I liked the idea enough to develop it even further with ideas of my own. How about a pajama fashion contest, a cereal eating contest, a giant Twister game, an Atari 2600 set out for people to play Asteroids and great and brave and loud music. Initially, these ideas were received with a blank stare, but after they finished the spiked Kool-Aid I passed around, everyone loved the idea!

Saturday, March 26, 1994, after 10 p.m., curious residents spilled over into the 400 block of Clematis to see what was happening. By midnight, thousands were engaged in the street festivities--dancing, playing Twister, participating in the cereal eating contest, and pajama fashion show. Throughout the five hour event, not one fight, just smiling, sweaty faces, positive collective energy, and a nice amount of money raised for charity.

Spring Breakfast proved that, if organized and advertised correctly, downtown can host events of any size, as good as, if not better than, cities like Miami or Fort Lauderdale. The Downtown Development Authority should realize this opportunity to showcase this great city of ours, Orchid City, and do everything it can to make it easier for groups like Revive to exist and operate.

End of press release

Later that morning, Rodney Mayo, Michael Ross, Carrie Webb and some others end up at Denny's and Michael Ross almost got us suspended for life by dancing on top of the booths.

Twelve hours after the event, I ended up in Key West, driving a stolen van, carrying under twenty bucks in my pocket, and keeping a cautious eye on two hooligans, Gary Greenwald and Dave Butler, drinking beer in the back. (Lawrence Corning lent me the van to use for Spring Breakfast duties, so I figured I needed a spring break of my own.)

February 13, 1995 - Meeting Michelle at RSC, Phillip Gilmoure

This evening, I roamed the aisles of Pharmour, a discount store, looking for shaving supplies, toilet paper, and 35mm film. "Hey," someone calls softly. I turn to see Michelle, this adorable, petite girl that I met one night at Respectables. My mind flashed back to the time when I first met her, and the experience that followed.

At Respectables, I notice a small group of girls sitting in a booth. Bussing their table, they asked me questions and we got into a conversation. The friendly one is named Michelle.

Throughout the night, I visited her table, meeting her friends, chatting, offering them waters. Usually, I feel protective when I meet new people, watching out for them, doing the big brother bit without being obvious about it.

After work, I'm outside the club and I spot Michelle. We talk some more and I invited her to my apartment, across the street, to hang out. As I invite strangers to my apartment on a frequent basis, usually punk rock kids that I chat with while making chocolate ice cream shakes in a blender and grilled cheeses for, I didn't think anything of it. The invite was innocuous enough.

Even though it was after 3am, Phillip Gilmoure, my roommate was wide awake. (Generally, he stays up til 6am, running around making friends, talking to people excitedly, glomming drinks or cigarettes. As he's blessed with a terrific sense of humor, he's welcomed into the most social circles, including the goths, seemingly the most difficult clique to break.) There, Phil, Michelle, and I sit on the floor, atop our mattresses and talk. After a half hour of chatting, I was spent. Michelle spent the night, sleeping beside me. Gingerly, I placed my arm over her shoulder and fell asleep, too. I start kissing her and we end up making out. Then I look over her shoulder, behind her, and see Phil, wide awake, watching us soberly. My heart went out to him, as I felt immediate sympathy as he watched our antics. Then we fell asleep. The next morning, I cooked everyone breakfast, a basic grease pile of eggs and toast, then excused myself to take a shower. In the bathroom, I got an idea. Peeking my head from the door, I look at Michelle and ask: "You wanna take a shower?" Phil utters a quick chuckle. Michelle looks at me and says: "Okay." I glance at Phil. His mouth falls open and his eyes grow wide. He smiles mischeviously. Michelle walks into the bathroom and we both start taking off our clothes. We step into the shower. I turn it on, stand under it, apply soap, and let her take a turn. I kiss her softly while she giggled cutely. A combination of morality and unfamiliarity with this new friend prevented me from going any further. My body fought with my conscience, though. Standing there, I stole glances while the lower portion of my body went into overdrive, my rod swaying like a small baseball bat looking for an owner. Underneath the water, she looked like an elf, with short hair, large ears, large brown eyes, a ski slope nose, thin lips--pronounced features. Dripping wet, a petite curbilicious doll with hair dampened, glued to her forehead, she even looked more fragile, like an orphaned cat that clawed its way out of a swimming pool. After showering and dressing, I grabbed a pillow and ran downstairs with my bicycle.

"You wanna go to an art gallery?" I asked Michelle.

"Sure," she agreed.

"Hop on," I offered, placing the pillow on top of the handlebars. then pedaled south on Dixie while Michelle sat atop the makeshift seat. We rode to the Norton Art Gallery, on the east side of Dixie, south of Okeechobee Boulevard. The weather was beautiful--above

us, a cloudless blue sky; around us, the gentle breeze that signaled the coming of Spring.

Since it is Sunday, The Norton Art Gallery is closed. That doesn't stop us from visiting nature's art gallery, though. We end up climbing the massive banyan tree that lies on the west side of the gallery, pulling ourselves to the cradle section, where the trunk juts out into midsized limbs. Finding a comfortable spot, we sit, enjoying the view of sunlight dance through the rustling leaves, and talk. She lights up a cigarette. I shoot some pictures of her. That's it. Then we ride back to the apartment, and she calls her friend Chris for a ride home.

That's how we met, and now I'm here at this superstore, the dangerously cute girl nearby. She's wearing tight, weathered jeans and a tight Budweiser t-shirt. Her petite body aches to climb through the fabric. (Why do girls dress like this? This only drives guys crazy. As long as they confuse attention with self worth, they'll continue to. But the real byproduct of dressing in such a revealing manner only brings attention. And attention and self worth remain two different entities. Attention imprisons you. Self worth liberates you.)

"This is my friend Joe," she says, directing her attention to a guy beside her.

"Hi Joe. I'm Kris," I extend a hand.

"Wusup." He burps sleepily.

"I'm selling my car." She announces. "If you're still looking for a car. For five hundred dollars."

She leads me outside to her car, a two door Dodge colt hatchback, green.

"Cool. It looks like it'd be good on gas." I offer.

"It is." She confirms.

"I plan to sell it in a few months for five hundred." She explains. "Let me know if you want to buy it."

"Alright, sounds good. Give me a call when you're ready to sell it. I'm interested."

We part ways. She loads into the colt and zips off. I mount my bike and pedal east on Okeechobee, in the bike lane, while traffic races by in a kalediscopic blur.

By the time I get home, I'm amped. The bicycle ride from Pharmour, on Okeechobee west of I-95, to the apartment, on Clematis Street east of I-95, stirs my adrenaline, causing me to grin like a sweaty track runner that's just won sixth place but is happy to have placed

at all. Unlocking the green door, I lift the bike to my shoulder and run upstairs. Inside, I shower, then open the fridge for something to munch.

Amy just called and asked, if maybe later, I'd be interested in going to Lost Weekends with her and some friends. Immediately, I said yes. How could I refuse? Amy's dating Brian Large, the Jolly Blonde Giant who I went to California with, an acquaintance that turned into a friendship. Amy's a bubbly girl, freckled, with blue eyes and sandy blond hair. She's petite and hyper.

"What are you doing?" She asked.

"I'm in the middle of thawing chicken."

"I had chicken earlier," she informs. "We won't be leaving for a while, maybe another hour-and-a-half."

"That's cool. Just give me a call before you come."

I returned to the chicken, a rock of frozen flesh embedded in ice, running hot water over it while my fingers threaded themselves between the frozen hunks, ungluing them, separating two for myself, puzzling the rest in the bag, tossing it in the fridge. Eventually, the chicken went limp. I found an available plate and put it in the microwave. Figuring out how to use the microwave proved difficult, as it also works as an oven and broiler. The front side sported buttons with strange heiroglyphics--obtuse images that lacked numbers or letters. I think it needed a user name or password to operate. I'm serious. Gary Greenwald made a big hullabaloo when he bought it several months ago. "It also works as a broiler and oven," he snorted. "It does a lot of things." After some guesswork finger pressing, the microwave started humming, the light flashed on, and I watched curiously as the chicken cooked. Minutes later, the product of my thawing--dry and semi burned--found a home in the garbage. No matter the options, technology will never be a match for a campfire or a wood burning oven.

Then I remembered my recent experience at Lost Weekends, the billiards bunker on Olive just south of Clematis. Todd Gent, the chef from Narcissus, arrives with fellow employees. His wife, Shelley, is bartending. I began to worry that Todd would be angry with me for receiving unemployment, since I work, under the table, at Respectables. At the end of season, Narcissus gave me a week off the schedule. Assuming I was laid off, I failed to show up the following week. Todd thought I quit. I thought I was fired. My fear is that Todd will show up at unemployment, explaining that I was not fired. If that happens, the meager checks will evaporate. That would suck royally. Then again, he's probably too busy to concern himself over such things. To me, it's big, a giant pothole on my road to financial survival. To him, it's probably a tiny fracture in the asphalt.

Gary and Angel sit in the living room, their attention captured by television, the phosphorous black hole that absorbs time. I'm bored. I hate being bored. It makes me hate myself, to be bored.

Okay, I know what I'll do. I'll climb onto the roof of the one story building behind The Blue Buddha, bring water with me, and exercise using this arm-pully thing I bought at Goodwill for two bucks. I'll bring my walkman with me, exercising until my arms feel like their going to fall off, burning limbs, in an act of perdition to alleviate the feelings of guilt that I suffer for refusing to join the human race. Inhaling big gulps of air while my body negotiates a hostage release of sweat, I'll exercise until I'm nearing the verge of collapse, then slowly recline my bare back onto the pebbled roof and gaze at the night sky, out of breath, weary, spent. My last act of penance will come later, enduring a cold shower before laying down to read *The Subterraneans*, by Jack Kerouac. Sad, isn't it? Not really. Everyone maneuvers their way through their own stations of the cross in order to receive the redemption of self.

As Darrell Higgins, my friend, aptly summed up: Some people pour their lives into molded pieces of plastic, revealing themselves verbally in a torrent of revelation. Others exert themselves physically, propelling themselves to supercede the boundaries of their own strength. Then there are the dimestore historians, like me--jotting notes, taking photos, keeping track--documenting a space in time, mulling through the clotheslines of our culture. Each of us becomes a casualty of our passion, swept away by the receding shoreline of destiny.

February 13, 1995 Mood swings

I'm undergoing such mood swings. I feel constipated, as if my art is my dodo and it's not being let out. Symptoms include headaches, hallucinations, and strange vibes. I don't even have a close friend that I can confide in, talk, or with whom I can share hidden desires. When you feel the need to produce, an outlet becomes paramount. This is the reason so many people write poetry and compose songs. Producing the FLO and writing music, from which I can sort out my emotions, allows room for the constant flow from my heart to my hands. The byproduct creates a well from which others can drink. All they need is a bucket--available space. Now, however, I feel blocked for some reason. Ideas percolate somewhere from my psyche, but stay in my head and cloud my vision, leaving me restless for something that I cannot quite identify.

Outside my window, storm clouds roll ominously. As an army of thunderclouds prepare for battle, the sky grows from gray to black. "Crickle-t-therrick!!!" Thunder cracks. Rain descends from the sky in a slow discharge, like homesick earthworms. "Crickle-t-therrick!!!" Thunder echoes like the amplified sound of a piece of fabric that's being torn. The clouds roll together, restless, anxious. Within minutes, the sky turns from gray to charcoal. Rain descends faster, billowing sheets in torrents, kidnapped by the strong

winds, delivered in a massive hostage release.

Physically, I feel my stomach yearning for sugar. Or is it my mind? Am I addicted to sugar? Is it mental or physical? Is it both? Oh, a candy bar would be really great right now! A decent candy bar--something like Whitman's or Cadbury or another obscure English-sounding bit o' treat, a Turkish delight, a sumptuous morsel to feed the fishes and leave this kid flat on his back, gasping for air, eyes open, mouth slightly curved at each end to form the awkward, the beautiful, the pure smile. Yes, I'll find that rainbow that follows this rain and I'll follow it to the end, anticipating a pot of gold, inside a small mountain of chocolate treats, each with its own story to tell. Perhaps the lightning will strike and find its target after several bites of chocolate have hit the bloodstream. In that case, I just might die with a smile on my face after all.

This morning and afternoon contained fantastic periwinkles so abundant I nearly choked on them. At 8 a.m., I grinded into motion, bicycling to Palm Beach Lakes--Clematis west to Tamarind Avenue, Tamarind north to Banyan Street, Banyan west to Australian Avenue, Australian north to Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard, Palm Beach Lakes west to the Palm Beach mall. At First Union bank, located in the parking lot of the Palm Beach mall, I cash the checks from the last FLO issue. When I return home, I open an official looking letter that extended my appointment date with the department of Labor and Employment Security. Shouldn't it be employment insecurity?

Recently, my roommate Gary Greenwald turned me on to welfare. Then he suggested I apply for unemployment, since my current job as a busser at Respectables pays about ninety bucks a week under the table, enough to cover rent and food. The idea proved to be a clever one as I've already received about four hundred dollars worth of food stamps. All it meant doing, for me, is visiting some state facility in a bad area of Lake Worth and feigning helplessness. Gary and I drove there to apply for welfare. Basically, I made myself out to look like a bum, which isn't that hard because I usually dress poorly anyway, in shabby thrift store garb that's been dirtied and stained, looking junkie-like, keeping eyes wide with despair, claiming that I could not find a job for a long period of time. But I do have a job. Across the street at Respectable Street Cafe (RSC). Been working there nearly six months, too. Don't get paid a lot. About six bucks an hour. Ninety rocks a week. If I do get unemployment, some two grand will arrive, little by little, in the mail, compliments of the United States government. With the money, I plan to buy a new computer, on which I can layout the FLO, or purchase Michelle's green Dodge colt. All this time publishing a small zine and I don't have a computer. Maybe I'll take the money, buy the Dodge colt, and buy a mountain bike so I can roll from state to state doing a mountain bike tour. There's an area in north Florida called Gran Canyon that's supposed to have good hills for biking.

This afternoon, Larry Corning, a nice guy who advertises in the FLO, allowed me to use a computer for most of the day. I learned how to use the 'place' function in Pagemaker, a

tool which makes it easy to layout pages. I'm throwing everything I can into doing this publication because, frankly, I don't have anything else to throw it into. Sometimes I wish I did.

February 14, 1995, Tuesday

I saw the butterfly doing swan dives into Nestea yesterday evening and remembered how she turned her head, smiled, laughed, sighed, the imaginary whispers floated in my ears. I smiled and dropped the can of beans I was holding and opened my broken umbrella, following her into the ocean of people outside. The cars morphed into Matchbox memories, her pants and t-shirt and the vague way she behaved told me she would always be the one with the power to do what she wanted because she can get away with things as long as there are people like me who vision her this way.

POINTY SHOES

One afternoon when I
looked around at the
hills of fantastic fabric
with lovely buttons and honest
craftsmanship, Niklas knitted his
brows, put one hand to his lips,
cleared his throat, snorted, and
with eyes clouded by a picture
of words in different languages,
questioned: "Have you ever seen
pointy shoes? They have to be
black, heh, heh. If you ever see
any pointy shoes at a thrift store-
Do you remember the ones I wore
almost a year ago to Kitchen Club,
the ones with the wide buckles,
actually, one of the buckles was
broken, heh, heh?"

His words continued to tumble
from those pursed lips that
twisted with every vowel.
A midget emerged from his
favorite black trunk, the
old battered one below the
window, and screamed: "Shuttup

Niklas! You're a complete fruitcake!" Niklas looked at the midget and Niklas asked: "You drank the Pepsi I left on the windowsill?" "Wasn't that mine?" I asked. "Uh, heh, heh, that was mine. And I put acid in it, double coated, heh, ummm . . . " "Hmnnn." "Did you just see a midget?" Niklas queried. "Yeah." I never found those pointy shoes.

45 a visit to the printer

... the printers, some big ass warehouse industrial looking get up in Lake Worth. I park my bike and walk inside. The clerk, a blonde lady with a heavy New Jersey accent leans over the counter while her breasts try to peek from behind her low cut top. Either, she wants a reaction from me or her actions are purely accidental. In any case, my ego surfaces a bit. Perhaps she thinks I'm cute. When I ask a question about printing costs, she finds a salesman. She returns with this some starchified-buttonhole-tied-up-in-strings-looking-back-of-analytical-refuse and he begins with a series of questions.

Him: "How many issues to you plan to do?"
Me: "5,000 to begin with. Maybe more if the price is right."
Him: "That's four over four?"

At this question, I feel like smacking him, as I told him only minutes ago that this was spot color on black and white.

Me: "Spot color on black and white. One color. Like red. On every other page."
Him: "Well, we wouldn't be using this type of paper." He touches the magazine I've brought in with me, a promotions put together by DKNY. "Our paper is a higher grade. Thicker and better made."
Me: Like a heavier gloss."
Him: "Yeah. There's other things that go to it as well, but I don't know if you'd understand them."
Me: "Basically, it's a 24-page, 70-weight throughout, saddle-stitched, black-and-white, spot color, eight-and-a-half by eleven, monthly magazine."
Him: "Well, I um, can tell, by looking at you," he starts in a half whisper. The pompous

buffoons too weak to say what's on his mind. Silently, I urged him to spit it out, his perception of reality, his intention. " ... that you probably wouldn't be able to afford to have it done with as many issues as you like."

The blonde girl could tell from my eyes that the words remained on the ground. Instead of picking them up and defending myself, I remained silent. I stared. He talked. Bla, bla, bla and we exchanged our shallow goodbyes and I walked out the door.

The Downtown Group - deciding on an ad

A few hours later, I'm inside the bowels of The Downtown Group building, across from my apartment. Gary Greenwald, their graphic designer, Lawrence Corning, the company president, and myself sit in the plush sofas, swarmed in air conditioned coolness. We're having a meeting about an ad for The Artist's Colony, a collection of artists studios and apartments that Lawrence created on the southeast corner of Fern and Dixie. The ad will appear on the back page of the FLO.

Larry's sifting through pictures that Nancy Rinker, the photographer-friend, had snapped last week. (Incidentally, Nancy left to Aspen, Colorado soon afterward and almost fell off a one thousand foot cliff, avoiding the edge by several feet.) With slow and deliberate gestures, Lawrence eyes each image before passing on to the next one. He doesn't seem happy. Crap. His comments, a combination of strange metaphors and obscure similes, go unanswered. He shines the dull trophies, succulent meals, the fatted calf ... this guy has patience.

"What are we gonna use for a slogan?" He wonders aloud.

"I'm not sure. I can come up with something," I swing.

Some of the photos contain images of bums that sleep and beg downtown. The irony in those photos is this: the bums look confident, a trait that a pictures does not disguise.

Money smothers creativity, I'm beginning to believe. Usually, people who do with less, will continue to do, while those who pander the golden dust of options suffer from too many choices. Then, they blame their inaction to do anything on the inability to decide which road to take, as the roads number in the thousands.

Later that night, Ashleigh drops by. She's a student at School of the Arts. She's with her friend Krista, a cute girl with braces. We tumble into O'Shea's, the Irish pub below my flat and order food. I hold them at bay with inane questions like: "If someone gave you a million dollars, but you could never return to the United States, or you had to give it back,

would you accept it?" And them, blushing, smiling, squeezing their lips together so the food won't fall out, answering with a trailer of explanations that reveal their values. After eating, we return upstairs to the apartment. Gary, Phil, and their friend Jenni are packing backs and talking. They're going to Tallahassee in an hour.

"Little Genni is here," Gary whispers to me. "She's in the bathroom. She fell down after she got high in there. Kris, you shouldn't be letting her do that," he cautions. "She was shooting junk. She almost died. Phil and I banged on the door and when she finally opened we went in and she was on the floor, all strung out. She was in there for, like, an hour. What if she did die?"

Then, Gary promised me that he was going to write about this, in the same style that he had written about Liz's visit to heroin's island, her mirage vacation in our bathroom, after she got high. Once Liz had floated off into the ether, she began doing impressions of Catherine Hepburn, while sitting crosslegged in front of the mirror, combing her hair, slurring her words, a plethora of secrets that were revealed underwater. Genni, a fledgling poet and rapper, got creative after she had tied off and shot up the junk. She wanted to rap. I pulled bongos off the shelf and began pounding steadily. She began to rap. "Some say beauty's in the eye of the beholder, but I say booty's in the eye of the beholder ... everything, everything, you know what I mean?" Then she showed us her battlescars from her bathroom fallout, the cut on her lip, the scraped elbow, the buck-fifites (slang for scars) marking a fading calendar across her pale skin. "I almost overdosed if it hadn'ta been for Phil and Gary coming in the bathroom. Seriously, I mean it you guys," she explained, garnering sympathy from the small crowd in our apartment. "Check out my tattoos," she offers, holding our her arm. We move in closer. She's talented. I hope she moves past this stage in her life.

Someone's yelling from downstairs. I go to the window. It's Corrie, my cousin, with some other beautiful girl. I hop downstairs and let them inside, where we sit and chat for a half hour. Seeing the audience expand, Genni raps again, while I play bongos. Gary DAT records everything, the whole sad but interestingly engaging event. Phillip Gilmoure makes moves on Corrie's friend, but is given token answers and polite smiles in return.

47

Saturday evening, 1995

Roaming downtown, looking to connect the dots in some form or fashion, collecting evidence and throwing my butterfly net, the FLO, onto the strays of this world, encouraging them to find their place in this world, I bicycled to The Wormhole, the underground thrift store on Olive. Behind the counter sat Matt Reynolds, glancing up from a worn paperback and smiling through his scruffy beard. "Hi Kris," he grinned, his

eyes twinkling. "Hey Matt," I smiled, walking to the back music section. Inside, The Wormhole is a beautiful disaster of used books, clothes, musical instruments, CD's, tapes, records. Brian Large, the Jolly Blonde Giant, is with me.

I spot Bonnie in the back, looking through CD's.

"Hey," she mutters blankly.

This girl is so cute I feel like I'm dying inside. I'm such a wuss, I know. Her hair, this time, is dyed red. Her face is lovely, soft, pale, angelic with eyes of brilliant soft puddles reflecting green blue brown. The only reflections you want to see in them is your smile. Captivated by her presence, caught in the orbit of her proximity, I begin asking questions, trying to box my way out of this infatuation bubble.

"Are you still at the same phone number?" I ask.

"Yeah."

"I'm going to do a photo shoot on Monday that I totally need you for, if you can make it." I pitch gently. "Monday."

Her eyes roll into the future. "Yeah, I'm not doing anything. Just call."

"I gotta get back to work," Brian announces. "So I'm gonna take off. It's good to see you again, Bonnie. Let's all go out again." Smiling, looking back at her, then at me, he evaporates through the front door.

Bonnie and I continue talking as we leave The Wormhole. She asks if I know of a bathroom and I tell her she can use mine, if she wants. We head west on Clematis, talking about her poetry, school, upcoming shows, then get to my apartment. Before she leaves, she makes a vague promise to be home on Monday, seeming eager about the photoshoot.

Sunday night, February 1995 - skateboarding with Amy

... glided among the slick, rain stained walkway along Flagler, the cement poured aisle that snakes the rim of the Intracoastal Waterway ... glided among the recent ruin of The Pennsylvania Hotel, an old hotel whose foundations were obliterated in a carefully orchestrated detonation on New Year's Eve, 1995. What was once an historic landmark has now become a cemetery of rubble and twisted rebar.

"If it's going to deco," declare developers with their hands on the steamroller, "then it must be faux deco." The result is a fascade, a town that's littered with stores that look like

a stage set. In the world of developers, progress has no conscience.

Amy, my friend and Brian Large's girlfriend, is rollerskating beside me. Her skates were oversized so she had to stuff the ends with paper towels. I'm skateboarding beside her, jerking my hip and releasing my weight to make the board slide on the rain soaked sidewalk. Jerk. Slide. Jerk. Slide.

49 Brian, Harold, Chris at The Downtown Group

... curling through frisbees of electric monkeys who crawl about a giant hamster cage across the street firefighters grasping regulation books, papers, chaffed mouths, settling the gathering of men not unlike the negroes who circle themselves north of here beneath the trees to talk about life, wiping sweaty brows, the summer heat bears down heavily, prickly, thick.

And this morning, Brian, Harold, and Chris joked in Harold's office, a terrifically terrible and mundane conversation. The vultures circled as they spoke, reciting last night's sitcom-the sermon from the electronic pulpit. Like TV audiences, their laughter sounded canned, too. But I'm worse, worrying about them when I should learn to be selfish, like everyone else. Instead, I get sucked up into the tornado of others, only to be left behind, bobbing in their wake once they're through with me. In one way or another, we're all prostitutes, whored out by our own desires, weaknesses, codependencies, or all three. In one way or another, we're all drug addicts.

Put your handprint on everything, I keep coaxing myself. Fingerprint what you collect and borrow. Breathe on it. Whatever you do, don't leave it the same. Understand that in order to make sense of this world you have to change it in some way, make it more understandable. Naturally, the object of my attraction turns into a giant swimming pool. I sit in the shallow end, continuing to lift my legs and dog paddle. My codependence tricked me into believing that I was doing this for myself. Everything's a waste of time, I'm beginning to believe. When the door closes, less light can enter. When they open their mouths, they drown out the best part of the music. All you can really own, in the end, is your mind. So you might as well pack lightly. Surrounding me is a cacaphony of friends that race from one point to the other, trying to find meaning, searching for significance, attempting to make sense of it all. They exhale, a collective sigh floats off into the atmosphere. A carnival barker pitches roasted peanuts to the sunburned fairgoers.

It's so sad when I think about myself this way. At least I'm letting it out. Cleaning inner space is cathartic.

Visions of Jerome

I'm listening to PM Dawn. I used to listen to this group when I worked pantry (salads, sandwiches, grill sometimes) at Narcissus, a bistro on the southwest corner of Narcissus and Clematis. This music triggers memories of a coworker, the dishwasher/prep guy, Jerome. The pictures of him float to the shore of my mind, left half buried in the sand, sunburned, water damaged. Slowly, I crouch down and dig them out, studying each one carefully.

At work, Jerome would stroll by, turn his head, flash a big grin, his eyes twinkling, and say: "You gotta get with it, Kris. When are we gonna get with it?" The "it" he referred to was a plan for us to hang out near his apartment, west of Dixie, near Palm Beach Lakes, and workout. Since that was a bad area for crime, I never went. We never "got with it". He even asked me if the reason I didn't meet him was because of the area he lived in, a perimeter where white men fear to tread. I lied and told him no.

I should've went. Too late. Too late for everything.

The last time I saw him, his pitch black, athletic frame lay curled in a fetile position like a baby in its return trip to the womb, in a bright, white room at Good Samaritan Hospital. Emotionally, a wave descended over me, rising in magnitude while I stood helpless in its path. What happened? How did he get sick so quick? How did he end up here--at the hospital, hooked up to life support?

His family told me that it was a brain tumor. The bigger questions, though, went unanswered, innocuous against the disease of fate.

(The last time I saw him, at work, we visited the walk-in cooler, jumped to the bar suspended from the ceiling, and did pull ups. Jerome always had the biggest, whitest smile--a genuine grin. He was nice. Sometimes I feel that people aren't nice anymore unless there's strings attached to their stupid grin, pulling up the edge of their lips. For some, there's always strings attached, even if they refuse to admit it because they're not aware of it.)

In the waiting room, people gathered, a solemn assembly of reticent, well dressed family members. The reverend, a big black man with a presence so large as to have it's own gravity field, joined them. Silently, I sat nearby, puddles welling up into my eyes from the shock, surprise, sadness.

The doctor poked his head into the window, then motioned to talk with the father. They left the room. The doctor placed his hand on the father's shoulder. The father, his voice rising with intense, gravelly fervor, asked if there was anything the doctor could do to prolong Jerome's life. The doctor replied that he had been in a coma for four days. The

father repeated his request. Isn't there anything that can be done?! He persisted. Keeping him hooked up any longer won't do any good, explained the doctor. It will only make the hospital bills more expensive than the insurance can afford to cover. At this, the father shrugged, giving up the fight, retreating to his corner of the ring, falling into a world of silence. Sadly, he returned to the room, speaking softly the news from the doctor. Then, he leaned back, rubbed his hands across his face, closed his eyes and rested his head against his right hand. Gently, Jerome's mother placed her arm around his shoulder, and began to cry. So did I.

From outside the hallway, we heard wailing. From around the corner appears a young black girl, flanked by two guys on either side. She's a river of tears, sobbing hysterically, a body of Jello as her legs collapse beneath her. The two men guide her into Jerome's room. "Nooooooooooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!" She wails loudly. "Nooooooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!" Her friends try to calm her but it's no use. Like a broken fire hydrant, she soaks us in her grief. Once she settles down somewhat, we're introduced. She's Jerome's girlfriend of two years.

The doctor arrived into the waiting room and suggested that we visit Jerome once more. Slowly, the family shuffled into his room. Standing around him, his shirtless body huddled into a ball of arms and legs, the family and I joined hands and recited The Lord's Prayer. The doctor whispered some comments of encouragement to the father and mother as we left the room. That night, the doctors pulled the plug, and Jerome took the boarded the bus on the journey to the next world. I hope he knew Jesus. Judging from the conviction in the family's voice as they recited The Lord's Prayer, I'm sure he did.

"What's the use in floating? All it does is tell you someones under you?" - PM Dawn

Bonnie - Tragedy & Fashion

Bonnie called, the beautiful blonde curbie(s), (cool, urban, restless, boyish, independent, eclectic, shorthair). The conversation rolled out of her juicy fruit lips with all natural sugar--holy baboons screaming through the forest. She confessed that she was quitting drugs, "everything" ... one step for man, one giant leap for womankind! I asked her about her writing. "Yeah, I wanna go back to school," she admitted. "I really want to start writing more ... " And, oh yeah, Bonnie how I lush you. I want to hug you gently, watching as butterflies erupt whenever you bat your eyes--the big, wondrous Alice in Wonderland eyes, sad and happy and clouded with cautious anticipation ... the abracadabra, the cool blue big aching sky restless for Hey Kool-Aid! the riddled and glittery submarine members crawling through the rubble, construction worker's glances, smiles, grubby, stubby callouses with fingers on them, downing their sunglasses for a better view of Stephanie, Bonnie, Kathy, Moses, Cody, Nancy, delightful legochildren full of independence, blossoming flowers, smokestack cigs making their mark on the landscape strewn with glitter and dust, rusting the memory, and the laughter tumblers for

mouths, smiles, sighs, more glitter, then later, wine, laughter out and out and out and out. Thanks Nancy. Say hello to the future. We are the future. We are the half-breeds. Laugh out loud. Hide the spoons. Television makes you fearful.

The last paragraph will be the text description for Tragedy & Fashion. Thanks Nancy Rinker, the photographer that assisted me in shooting Tragedy & Fashion, a photo essay in the FLO, wherein Stephanie Walczak, Bonnie, Kathy Jarosz, Nancy, Moses roamed through the carcass remnants of The Pennsylvania Hotel--it's demolition a tragedy--with fashions from The Blue Buddha thrift store, Kathy Jarosz's bohemian dream-vintage-clothing-and-future-music cave.

Every phone is a pay phone. Openmindedness is merely an absence of better judgement. People are stupid. I'm still waiting. Oh well. I won't set myself up. If you don't call, that's okay. Hi Bonnie. One day, you'll be reading this and transfer the salted written word from my hands into your mouth, down eyes up, breath, baby, breath. Bla, bla, bla. People talk so they can hear themselves talking. People talk to know they're alive. They talk in such a fashion that others have to answer.

50 Buying a bike from BJ

After the photo shoot at The Pennsylvania Hotel, Nancy Rinker invited me to to Roxy's, a pub on the 300 block of Clematis Street, for a glass of wine. I agreed, then felt weird as we drank white wine, sitting outside on patio chairs, in the late afternoon during the middle of the week. As we drank and watched passersby, we chatted about the days events, and planned to do another Tragedy & Fashion, maybe at a wake. That would be wild. After dropping me off at the apartment, we said our goodbyes, and she left.

Now, drunk, I'm trying to get a ride to Magic Image, a photo lab west of I-95, on Forest Hill Boulevard. They have a two day turnaround for black and white developing. I'm anxious to see these photos. I have a good feeling about them. I'm on the street, talking to BJ, Bob Johnson, the resident homeless man that roams Clematis, spanging (asking for spare change), but for the most part living on the money he earns from cleaning Respectable's and Lost Weekends, after they're close for the night.

"Kemp," he mutters through a thicket of beard. "You wanna buy a bike. I'll give it to you for fifteen dollars."

Silently, I look it over. With BJ, I know not to appear to needy, or I won't get that discount price. Then, with the skillfulness of a car salesman, pitching pre-owned beamers (BMW's) to insecure trust fund kids hoping to find their identity, he lists the features.

"It's nice, brand new. The breaks work perfect. Look at the tires. Touch them. They're brand new. The tread isn't even worn down. Feel the seat. It's comfortable. Sit on it," he coaxes. "Take it for a ride. You'll see. Try it," he insists, his eyes twinkling like buzzing neon lights, broken, but still fighting for life.

At this moment, right now, he's in the zone. The pitch is all he has. Like an unpracticed baseball player up to bat, I swing clumsily, missing his curve balls as they fly past. Strike one. Strike two. He's good, I'm thinking. I should get him to sell ads for the FLO. I'd be making enough bank to go 2-spot color. Strike three. Sold! I run upstairs and retrieve three, five dollar bills for my new purchase.

"Now you know you're getting a great deal," BJ reiterates.

"Yes," I smile, taking the bike by the handlebars. "Thanks BJ."

Again, I'm a cog in the wheel of downtown West Palm Beach, Florida, buying an orphaned bike from a street vendor, who always seems to have a new bike every few days. Again, I justify my actions, watching the flashcards fall into place--I'm saving money, I'm helping the homeless, I'm living consciously by forgoing the pleasure of, and the pollution from, a car. Again, I'm putting a bicycle to good use.

A shock of blonde hair appears across the street. There's a body attached to it, wearing a white, buttoned down shirt with navy suspenders. It's Lawrence Corning, renegade realtor and President of The Downtown Group. He waves me over. I cross the street and tell him my predicament.

"Magic Image, this photo lab, closes at six. I needa get the negatives there before they close. Nancy's picking them up tonight, probably from work. She has a darkroom. The thing is, riding my bike, I won't make it there before they close."

"I'm going to a meeting for The Downtown Neighborhood Group at 5:30," Larry offers. "You want to go?"

"I gotta get these negs developed," I explain.

"Borrow my van."

I thank him, but decline. Minutes later, across the street, I admit to him that I'm drunk, well, slightly drunk. "That's why I was gonna ask you for a ride."

"Oh well," he sighs. "Why, you wanna got to the meeting with me, as long as you don't act up?"

"Sure."

Later, I'm at the meeting, remembering fondly about this afternoon--snapping pictures and dragging laughter.

Thursday afternoon, 1995

So it's Thursday afternoon, 3-something. I'm benched at the 500 block of Clematis. The sun's out. The breeze is smiling. I'm waiting for Stephanie Walczak, my beautiful friend who works as a cocktail waitress at Respectable Street, to show up so I can shoot more pictures for the Tragedy & Fashion pictorial. Across the street, Buddy, a gray haired gentleman that lives in The Flagler Court Hotel, smokes a cigarette, sitting at a bench.

The Flagler Court hotel, a collection of second and third floor apartments, run down and dripping with character, is run by Reverend Robert Wellborn, who is known as The Rev. The second floor laundry room is where I wash/dry my clothes. A lounge area with tattered couches and abused chairs is adjacent to the laundry room, a place where I've sat and perused through the collection of old magazines and books while waiting for my clothes to dry. If you want to climb onto the roof of The Flagler Court hotel, go to the laundry room, then open the window. Carefully, crawl outside and hang onto the ladder. Then climb the ladder to the roof. Another way to get onto the roof, that's easier, is the back method. Behind the hotel is a stairwell that leads to the third floor. From there, you'll see a ladder that leads to the roof. Recently, though, The Rev's been hanging a lock so you can't get on the roof. Gary Greenwald, Phillip Gilmoure, even Angel Lozada, has been up there with me. I've taken my friend Maria, a hairstylist and former-girlfriend-now-friend Donna Abatablo, former publisher of Butt Ugly zine, there too. It's a great place to people watch. Also, you can crawl from roof to roof, from The Flagler Court hotel east to The Blue Buddha. You have to try it sometime.

A green Mazda slows to a stop in front of me. The window slides down.

"Hey Kris, how ya doing?" A blonde asks me. I'm thinking it's Jan, who used to manage Banyan Street, the restaurant on the northeast corner of Banyan and Dixie, where I used to work making salads. "Are you living out north?" She asks.

Then I recognize that it's the woman Larry Corning introduced me to two months ago, when I saw him in Palm Beach. At the time, he was living in one section of a grand, big old mansion on the Intracoastal, cornered at the west end of Palm Beach's Worth Avenue. There, he introduced me to this woman, who mentioned that she was an artist.

"No, who told you I was living out north?" I queried, and then immediately hoped she wouldn't fall into the clothes of a silent angel and continue to sleepwalk remembered trails

of past kisses and misses and hits, slapping the hands of time in the face. "I'm living right here," I told her. "Right above Bill's Tuxedo's," I pointed to my flat.

"Oh," she started. "I thought the last time you spoke to me, you said something about living north in Stuart."

"No, uh, I don't think so." Sunlight. "So how have you been doing? What have you been up to?" I gestured, picking up this strange conversation and trying to find the owner.

"I got out of Real Estate."

"Really, why?"

"Well, I'm getting more into my art. Real estate is too much stress. Life is too short - "

"Yeah it is."

" - so I decided I'd just rather do what I love, which is my art."

"That's cool."

"Yeah."

"That's really great, really. I've just been working on the FLO, and Larry Corning's been great," I explain. "I mean, he's letting me use his computer and his office. He's been great. I love him. I mean, he's really nice."

"Oh well," she muses. "That's great." Behind her sunglasses, her eyes suspended her assessment. She thinks I'm gay.

"Well, do you have a phone number," I throw out.

"I think I gave it to you."

"Yeah, probably, I uh ... "

"Well, here." She fishes into her purse and produces a card.

Eyeing the name on the card, "alright Suzette, thanks."

"It's good to see you, Kris." I don't know why it's good to see me.

"It's good to see you, Suzette. Take care." I don't even know her. On the inside, I'm

puzzled. Outside, the sky is an enormous blue expanse, the sun bearing down relentlessly. The street is empty, a quaint board game that you might find among the mothballs in some storage facility one-hundred years from now.

Bicycling to Congress Avenue, Lake Worth

Bicycling for fifteen miles in thirty minutes ... two minutes a mile. Not bad. Sometimes I have to document my experiences. Otherwise, I forget what I'm capable of doing. I'll put this to paper, rewarding myself for this useless accomplishment. Most accomplishments are useless--forgotten, tossed coins in dried out wishing wells, superstitious bread parts for already dead pigeons. Not bad. I made my destination with eight minutes to spare.

I'm in Lake Worth, inside the Department of Unemployment and Labor Security. The big classroom style Sunbeam reads: 1:22. I walk to the water fountain and splash cold water in my face. In another half-hour, I know whether I'll be getting food stamps. Months ago, I was here with Gary Greenwald, who convinced me to apply for them. Guess what? I received two months worth of food stamps, \$150 dollars each month. It's not money, but it's nearly as good as money. The five, ten, twenty dollar note slips can buy food (not toothpaste, toilet paper, deli food, alcohol, or cigarettes). Initially, I saw black people using food stamps for beer at Blessing's Market, a convenience store on the southeast corner of Rosemary and Clematis. They'd leave, a bag of groceries in their hands, collared greens hanging out ... "participating in their own myth", a phrase Aaron Butler used once, referring to Asian people with cameras hanging from their necks. I thought, man, I want to write, shoot, photograph, record the lost moments of occupants who keep hands in their pockets, warming broken timepieces, collect and record the loss. And chew up the corn, the thoughts, and leave my fingerprints on it and burn. If the government pays for my food, the fuel for this art, then fine with me. I need a taperecorder to write this as fast as I can. The words arrive to slowly from this ink dropper. It turns out that people on unemployment cannot get food stamps. I'd rather have unemployment, \$2,000 cash as opposed to \$300 in food stamps. Put your hands on your hips. You stick your right foot in, you stick your right foot out ... Yeah.

52 Brian Conaway

Last night at Respectable's, I noticed Brian Conaway. He's a gay acquaintance/friend of mine that visits the haunts--Respectable Street Cafe, O'Shea's Pub--along the 500 block of Clematis Street, west of the railroad tracks. Although he's grown a thin beard and thin mustache, they do little to hide his sunken-in cheeks. I had seen him a month ago, and he looks skinnier. Approaching him, I didn't know what to say.

"Hey Brian," I hugged him, then withdrew, clasping his shoulder. "You look great." I lied enthusiastically.

"I'm sorry for being so abrupt with what I told you about me the last time I was here - "

He started.

"Awwwww, Brian - " I interrupted.

" - I mean, I know a club--this atmosphere--isn't where you want to hear something like that, me spilling my guts to you, telling you all my personal problems."

"Brian, don't worry about it." I countered.

"That was just rude and tactless. I'm sorry, Kris." He explained.

"Brian," I defended. "Don't worry about it. I mean, I'm glad you told me and you feel that you can be honest with me."

"It's just such a downer thing to say to someone. I mean, I shouldn't have told you it here. I probably brought your whole night down. I mean, telling somebody that at work."

"Brian," I implored. "Don't say that. It's not true. I feel special. It makes me feel special that you're my friend enough to be that candid with me, about something that's on your mind. I'd rather", I took his hands, "have you tell me when it's on your mind than tell me later. I'm serious."

By this point, I didn't know whether I was convincing myself or him. Reliving what he had told me a month ago, the curious stares from people who wondered if I was gay, as he stood there, teary-eyed, hugging me, me hugging him, loud music enveloped us, the thunderous beats overwhelming everything, beer clouds, cigarette smoke wrapping the anxiety of pleasure seekers who ran from something or someone towards something or someone, I couldn't help but think of his declaration, made a month ago in this club-- Respectable Street, a broken phone booth with better music--and the sober thoughts that followed.

He had told me he was HIV positive. "I'm living at my sisters," he reassured. "Here's my phone number, but don't call me after nine."

53 riding and writing fast and furious, Lake Worth street painting festival

The sweat ran, making rivers, thin lines into my lips and drops into my mouth. The

pedals pushed, spinning indians threw curveballs, catching my breath, trying to remember to inhale through my nose, exhale through my mouth. Heat waves of warmth abbreviated the cool pockets, pick pockets of my youth, the age in my hands, gripping the handlebars, maintaining the straight ahead course so often neglected in other areas of my life. The music movement Catherine Wheel's turned, feelings, moods, images, buttery notes, jelly swirls donuts captivated by overweight men who watch too much television with the phone on channel nothing.

I found myself in Lake Worth's central artery, the main vein tracked by artists with their collectible junk littered wide expanse, sidewalks, streets, trees the only casualty beneath this landscaped asphalt. Dodging common glances from neo-hippies, television watchers, art-hanger-on'ers, neglected cameras strangling their owners, telling them to take something that isn't theirs--steal the soul, the indians say, beautiful teenage girls with fresh smiles who have not yet been robbed by the theft of experience, paint, lemonade, a low rumble of voices vibrating between the concrete buildings. A skinny giant walks by, eleven feet tall, fake beard, bigass hat, the Abe Lincoln hat from the sixties. There, I saw Jennifer Esser and Kevin James, both artists, as they wandered hand-in-hand. Met some girls that were eager to perfect their artwork against the uncaring sidewalk that crackled under the soaring temperature. Hey, it's all cheap tea with plenty of sugar. And I have plans, oh boy, I do. Too many, probably. At least I'm trying ...

Lake Avenue, the main street of Lake Worth's downtown, is inundated by artists, bent over their eggs of borrowed afterthoughts--most of the paintings were copies, crouched in, holding the world while struggling to maintain a sense of time, the time is up, the sun bears down relentlessly, warranting new modes of behaviour. People stand in line for lemonade, overpriced sugar-lemon-water, and pretzels chewy dough chunks sprinkled with tiny salt boulders, making small talk and reeling listlessly. At home, honesty tends to be more prevalent, a storybook of gestures made into the mirror that reveal the intricacies of human nature, a lost polemic, dancing alone in front of the mirror to see if your dick stands out enough in those jeans to be attractive to the female bird in a pre-emptive mating ritual, the restless reflections, gazing at the breasts in the reflection, wondering if the headlights will attract the attention of male. Importance is, sometimes, measured in useless volume of canned laughter as we participate in our own myth. Keep moving. At all costs, keep moving. Those who are left to collect dust will, eventually, collapse under the weight of stagnation.

I remember Johanna, the first black girl I kissed, after I drove her home from Respectable's one night, to her house near Australian and Palm Beach Lakes. Her brother, Charley, was a regular at the club. Recently, he had left overseas, shipped out with the Navy.

I remember Sabrina Barnes, beautiful soft angel with broken, crooked fingers and slurring vocals. Both the hands and vocals were the results of a car accident. Her beauty, though, shone through, like a lighthouse piercing the fog of mediocrity that drowns the common

man. She told me that she was back from Athens, Georgia. "I'm leaving to San Francisco," she announced. Winsome, I looked at her bright blue eyes, freckles, and red lips, caught spellbound by her adorableness. Then I confessed that I wasn't as nice as I used to be. "If you focus the sunlight somewhere without a magnifying glass," I began cryptically, "people will place their own magnifying glass in the way to steer the heat onto their own anthill dreams, revealing creative secrets, glass eyes, broken penciled out thoughts once garbaged, but now retrieved, because it's someone else's energy, and you're not paying the electric bill."

54 Sabrina Barnes

Last night, I saw Sabrina Barnes, my beautiful friend with dark springs of tightly curled hair and a cute smile. She was with this guy, Dave. Outside, in the back patio of Respectables, inbetween cleaning up bottles, I talked with him. A recent graduate with a degree in Biology, he's testing out the water levels near Pratt & Whitney, a manufacturing firm for airplane engines. Sabrina joined us and told me she's still working as a cook. She held out her hands for proof. "See," she illustrated, opening her hands, palms facing up. "You can see the lines. My hands are so rough."

"Wow, whoa," I stammered. "Hard worker, huh?"

"Yeah," she agreed.

Sabrina held her hands out crookedly as I traced my fingers over the lines, rogue rock tumblers, an elementary science school project, shag carpeted static electricity shocks to the touch. Years earlier, she was involved in an auto accident and her hands have been crooked ever since. To me, they're beautiful hands. Later in the night, after the alcohol took effect, Sabrina became more affectionate. I couldn't tell whether her affection came from sympathy or attraction. Nearly everytime I walked by the booth where she sat, beers squeezed between my waist and elbow, cups in my hands carrying Tidy Bowl man cigarettes bobbing in warm beer, she'd grab me and pull me towards her. When I passed by without the tinselstrips of yeast and barley dreams, and she grabbed my hand, I fell in the booth and hugged her greatly. She kissed me softly against my cheek. My needy cheek. The kisses warm. I returned to kiss her sidewalks on her cheek, looking at her, her eyes bobbing in Bud, vacant, digging the picture.

Sabrina invited me over to dinner.

"I invited my friend, Dave, to come too," she explained. "My dad's gonna cook shrimp. Do you like fish?"

"Yeah, I love fish."

" - and fry fish, with some vegetables, and put it over rice. How's that sound?"

"Great. Cool. I've been waiting for someone to invite me over to dinner," I confess.

We say our goodbyes.

This hopeless afternoon, thunderclouds behind the temples--the place where men walk without shoes in my head, only this time swinging wiffle ball bats against the inside of my skull. The computer speaking in rhythms light flicker as annoying--only secretly, ripe for the subconscious--as the light outside whose humming drove me to hallucinate. Phil Gilmore, Gary Greenwald, Angel Lozada, and I put a stop to that constant drone by the broken street light outside our window. We smashed it, leaving shards of glass and a broken filament. The humming stopped. After returning inside the apartment, #529 Clematis Street, we heard sirens. Fearing the police, we fled, bounding out through the hallway as we raced toward the backdoor. Pushing it open, we tumbled down the steps, ducking beneath the windows in Angel's van, the one that is now 12,000 cans of Pepsi, the fuel for avoiders, flex the muscle, yo-yo sugar meat.

All this to say, I was looking forward to being invited over for dinner, Sabrina, and you don't even call to let me know what time. Then again, was I supposed to call you? In my mind, an idealistic moment would have happened ... me and you, terribly happy, a half bottle of wine, halfway through our food, your dad watching television, us roaming around outside, perhaps a kiss, a hug, that'll be fine, that'll do. The reality was harsher ... me checking messages throughout the day, reeling in the line of empty wordspeak, left again baited by my own hopes, only to be lured in by my own fears. I'm listening to the singer Seal, who's playing on the boom box. "Life is hard in a circle, especially when you think you're going insane, and all you get for love is lots of pain. I should've known better."

When you don't have the opportunity to love one particular person, as is the case with me, you tend to open yourself up to the first character that comes your way. You find yourself sharing the deepest secrets with the nearest strangers, converting their ears to wishing wells as you toss in casual revelations, answering questions that they haven't even asked.

58 Introspection

You kind of look back on things and only remember the good, blaming where you are now on your surroundings. Your environment does contribute to who you are. Then again, sometimes you cannot afford material items that you need to characterize yourself. Move. You can't trust anyone. You're tired grin can fool only the most superficial of your

acquaintances. It's better to be something, even if you're loathed for it, than to be nothing in order to be accepted. Some trade their personalities for acceptance and wonder why they remain so empty. It's thrown in my face here. Time to split.

What am I doing? What am I doing here, right now? Nothing. Sitting here typing. Not experiencing, not tasting, not touching, not feeling, not hitting, not spilling, not talking, not listening, not laughing. Perhaps it's my own nihilistic behaviour that's eating me from the inside out. Rusty anatomy. Soul erosion. If I can only stop this erosion from spreading.

I'm dying and will be dead soon. If life is short, why do anything? Why not run 'til you puke? Embrace girls you like for no other reason than to hug them? Consume smiles? Accept kisses? Throw your eyes about like a frantic butterfly catcher, netting everything? You can sift through what you don't like later, right? Yes. Keep moving. You are a part of time when you move. To become static allows the opportunity to be smothered in bad jokes that you've heard once too many times before. You wrinkle quicker in one place.

I'm sitting on my hands waiting for unemployment to go through. Once it does, if it does, I'm looking forward to working again, at least forty hours a week as a cook. I miss the creativity of that--spitting out tasty dishes, creating specials, cleaning, the whole rhythm of it all, the momentum, the pragmatic group effort of bees in the kitchen, harvesting the larve from the queen bee, manning the engine room. I'll probably fall in love with a girl chef one day. So, c'mon check. Hurry up. I'm going crazy with all this time on my hands. Once I start working, I'll probably get my own place. You can't be yourself when you live with other people. Besides, I don't want the influences, dodging hello's and trivial courtesies that accompany roommates.

I've been reading *The Subterraneans* by Kerouac. Interesting read. The guy flies with his words. The way he embraces everything is something I can relate to. He feels a lot, which is kind of a lost art in today's world that seems to think too much and feel too little. People that feel can see sadness in incidents and accidents that, to others, go unnoticed.

Fame, on the small Clematis Street level, is shutting me off from what inspired me in the first place. In the meantime, my bicycle keeps me grounded, allowing me to kiss the smiles that others miss as they--angry, overweight, stressed--roar by in their cars at obscene speeds. Adults should ride a swingset once a week. Everyone should ride a bicycle, at least once a week. If people were forced to ride bicycles for an entire month, they would see the beauty in it. Not only would they lose weight, the need for shrinks would diminish. The world looks better from a bicycle.

59 Mountain biking with Scotty and Doug

... chewing on the bone, I suppose you can say, sharing the same conversation I'd shared so many times before, never really reaching a conclusion, just word-jumping to nowhere specific, I hear someone yell my name from down below. Walking to the window, I peek my head out. Below stands Scotty Mack and Doug Corbitt, two adventuresome locals that share a love for music.

"Hey Scotty. Hey Doug Corbitt. What's up? What are you guys doing?"

"You wanna go trail riding with us?" Scotty Mack asks.

"Yeah, cool. Hang on," I reply.

I slip on my Simples, the most comfortable Airwalk sneakers that I've ever wore. A week ago, Corbitt visited, and spotted my french climbing shoes that I had purchased at Goodwill for only \$2.59. Then he offered to trade me his recent \$50 purchase, the Simples, for the Goodwill find. I was stoked. He left happy, too. These are the most expensive pair of coolshoes I've ever owned. After throwing my mountain bike over my shoulder, I walk down the steps to the street below.

"Hey, get your camera," Scotty suggests. "You got a flash?"

"I'll get it. It doesn't have a flash, though. I have 400 speed film."

"That'll work. Go get it."

"We're gonna eat something," Scott announces, walking into Malsori's. "Then we'll go."

"I'll be upstairs," I point to the Flagler Court Hotel. "Checking my laundry."

I head upstairs inside the Flagler Court, the ramshackle hotel adjacent to O'Shea's pub. O'Brien, the caretaker, a gaunt man with saucer eyes behind thick glasses, stands over the washer. Seeing me, he mutters a joke which he always does and I ask him to repeat it, as I always do because the words are incomprehensible. He mumbles it again, laughing to himself while I, faking it, join in the canned approval. I still have no clue what he said.

"Yeah," he begins. "I gotta get this washer looked at tomorrow. No one's working today. Gonna get the guy to look at it tomorrow."

"What about my clothes?" I ask. "Should I leave 'em. Do you think you can get it to work for this load?"

"I can try. Hu, ha, hu, ha," he grins, amused.

When I return downstairs, Scotty eyes my bike. "We needa get you a tube, man."

"I only have a slow leak. The tire lasts two days once it's pumped up. Long enough. I don't need a tube. That's not necessary."

"We got 'em at the house," says Corbitt.

"Man, I'll just let you borrow one of the old bikes," Scotty suggests.

"Yeah, just borrow one of Scotty's bikes," Corbitt agrees.

"Cool, okay, cool, thanks," I bucket the compliments, then return inside #529 to dock the bike inside our small, two room apartment.

Returning outside, I hop in the back of this rustbucket pickup truck, sitting between three mountain bikes. The truck, an abused, scratched, rusting vehicle that's missing a drivers side door, reminds me of an old woman with a roadmap of wrinkles, each line a journey to a story that waits to be told. You know the kind of person I'm talking about, whose eyes contain the glowing coals of life so brightly that they keep those in her vicinity warm with comfort. When an individual refuses to be suffer the blows wrought by the cynicism of experience, their eyes remain warm with openness. Scotty lights up a swisher sweet cigarillo and roars the truck to life, then heads south on Rosemary Avenue towards Holly & Jills, on the corner of Hibiscus and Rosemary. Around us, the bombed out, blighted desert, sad urban neglect of downtown/uptown--a big dodo failure from some developers bad gas idea, passes by in a slow motion blur. Developers run this place. Sometimes, they run it into the ground, failing to capture the common sense as they aren't grounded by inspiration from a common folks perspective. Meanwhile, the working class stand in line to pay for a second run, dollar movie. Among the urban neglect stand patches of dead, sunburned grass spread too far apart for any consolation. I sit in the back and take it all in ... the cloudless late afternoon, sunkissed Florida, desolate and wary, strange offbeats, identifying the clouds suspended carefully as they form abstract images of animals or faces. Everything becomes a part of my storybook myth.

Scotty stops the rustbucket in front of Holly and Jill's apartment.

"Hey, we're gonna go trail riding," he states. "Wanna come?"

"I don't know," stammers Holly. "I've never been."

"C'mon. It's a lot of fun," Corbitt starts. "You guys should go. You'll like it. We went earlier today."

"I've only been once, Holly, and it's a lot of fun," I add. "It'll be a lot of fun if you guys

come. C'mon."

"Oh, alright," Holly agrees.

I load their bicycles into the truckbed. Then, Holly, Jill and I navigate a small area to park ourselves, leaning our backs against the back window. Scotty cruises his rumblerusty pickup west on Belvedere, hitting 441, then heading south towards the bike trail, a crudely carved path that snakes its way through a small patch of woods behind K-mart, on the northwestern corner of 441 and Southern Boulevard. We ride bikes through the woody trail for about half an hour, until the sun descends. Afterwards, we visit TGI Friday's.

There, Scotty reveals his and Corbitts plans to bicycle from here to California. "I was thinking, maybe, you'd be interested in helping us get sponsors," explains Scotty. "Hotels, fast food restaurants, charities. You see, they would give us food or lodging along the way, and we would promote their business by wearing their logo on our clothing, backpacks, gear. You know? By them supporting us," Scotty adds, "they would be supporting the charities as well, so it would be a real win-win package for everyone involved. But I need your help, Kris. You know about getting sponsors from putting together the FLO. Would you be interested in helping us?"

Scotty continues his plans while I listen. This kid is really smart, I think. What a clever idea. And listening to him, I begin to understand his dream, engaging in adventure with a purpose.

Then I begin to think about sleep, consigning yourself to a horizontal position when you could be at your peak, enduring the natural highs--the honesty of being tired--while you witness the world around you. Given the chance, we all have the ability to document our lives, write it down on paper, whisper, react. If we turn off the television, we'll find the time to run towards something, blazing a trail that's sustained by the insatiable appetite to live with passion, blurring the lines between what could be and what is, making every day a holiday.

Holly and Jill's place

This morning, at Holly & Jill's 2nd floor apartment, the second story of an old house, I open my sleepy eyes. My legs, too long for the antique, green velvet couch, squirrel out onto two milk crates nearby. Beside me, the floor fan absorbs the humid, mango-smelling air from outside, sucks it in, then spits it onto my sweaty body. Above me, the ceiling fan spins slowly, continuing to fight the heat in a battle that it has already lost. I feel like I'm inside a dryer. My head's spinning.

Some guy is yelling from downstairs. I hear Holly padding around, little footsteps against the hard wooden floors. The dogs bark. "Who is that?" Jill asks earnestly, her curious pale face emerging from a tangle of curled red hair as it peeks into the living room. Someone is running down the outside stairs, that run from the first floor yard to the second floor door that leads outside.. Puzzled by the commotion, I crawl from the downy pillow of unconscious - I saw a bird! - roll off the victorian era couch, and walk briskly toward the second-story balcony.

On the street below, on the opposite side of the fence, a guy is standing beside his Jeep.

"Hey!" He calls out.

"Hey, what's up?" I ask.

By this time, Jill is on the roof, having crept from her bedroom window. So are the dogs, Shady and Bo, running about and yelping, grinning dog smiles, enjoying the view.

"Hey," the guy answers. "You want to buy some coke? I got forty bucks worth and am willing to let it go for \$30. You know anyone who'll buy it?"

I'm partly astonished by his question, partly asleep. I look over at Jill. She's french toast, eyes half closed. She probably thinks she's having a dream. I glance at Holly, who's downstairs and notice her expression, a mixture of surprise and disgust--raised eyebrows and open mouthed frown. Who is this clown, I'm thinking.

"Do you know Chris Bishof?" I ask, referring to a local who might be able to help out.

"No. I'm not from around here," the guy answers.

"Hmmm."

"I'm from LA," he announces. "I'm only down here for two more days. I wanted to get heroin. The lady said she was, she said she'd get heroin and then she comes back with this and she already has my money so I'm, like, stuck with this stuff. I don't want coke. I just want to get rid of it and get enough for a cap."

"Well," I began, not sure what to say, "I know some people who do it around here--coke, that is--and some people that use heroin. But it's like this," I caution. "I edit a local 'zine and it wouldn't be cool if I led you to some acquaintances that use dope. They don't even know you. I don't even know you."

"I just need to get rid of it," he persisted. "Do you know anyone?"

"Well, I do, but I don't know you. I don't really know you. You could be a cop or something."

"Dude," he insists, exasperated. "I'm no cop. I'm a heroin addict. I've got the track marks to prove it. Wanna see?" Before I can answer, he's extending the bottom side of his arm and pointing to the needle marks that follow his veins. I'm not close enough to see where the eagle has landed on this poor souls arm, laying those silver-brown-white eggs.

"Yeah, I know people that use," I sigh.

"Yeah."

"You know Respectables, that progressive club on Clematis?"

"Yeah I know. I've been there a few times."

"All I can say to you is that there are people who do coke there. I know because I work there. Not the employees, the regulars," I explain. "You could get rid of it there."

"But I need the money now," he persists. "I'll sell it for twenty dollars. I'll sell it to you for twenty dollars. You want to take it off my hands for twenty dollars?" He parrots. "That's half price. That way, I can go back and get a cap."

"I can't. Sorry man. Good luck, though."

He turned and closed the gate behind him, climbed in his Jeep and sped off. I went into the kitchen. By this time, Holly and Jill were sifting around for breakfast food, after they had gotten bored of his whining.

"I hope you guys didn't want coke for breakfast," I chirped.

"Is that what that guy wanted?" Holly asks.

"He was trying to get rid of it."

"He said he knew Mark," adds Jill.

"Mark doesn't do coke. He only smokes pot," corrects Holly.

"Hmm. He said he was from LA and that he was a junkie, but I don't know the guy and -"

"Yeah," cautions Holly. "Stay away from that."

This incident happened on the last day of my stay at Holly and Jill's house, crashing on their vintage, olive green couch, walking barefooted on the wooden floor, dancing to the Cocteau Twins, and having philosophical talks with Holly Schneider while she listened to Vic Chestnut, the singer/songwriter the brave artist Andy Cotter listens to as well. For his FLO cartoons, Andy Cotter goes by the pseudonym Andy Conejito. Little rabbit is what conejito means, explained my roommate Angel Lozada, who recently moved here from Puerto Rico. Andy Cotter is also a history buff and toy soldier, the kind that curls electric frisbees, sandy claus of hairy incident, uncomfortable conversations, a real animal lover! Me, the pickpocket of other people's conversation, digging the dirt from everyones fingernails but my own.

Holly, talking about her ex-boyfriend who "neglected her" and "neglected to tell me he was married when we were going out, and has two kids." She pauses, downcast eyes, reeling in the memories. "He introduced me to some really good music," she sighs. This is her answer when I ask her how she heard of Vic Chestnut. "Yeah," she adds. "That was when I lived in New York." I tell her that Andy Cotter is from New York, too. I suppose Vic's better known up there.

Later, Judah arrives, wearing white, long cutoffs, sporting his usual mop of crap-black unwashed hair, test driven sneakers, denim-sandal self. By this time, Jill, Holly, and I are in the kitchen. Holly's brewing some tea from India. "It's sooooo good," she exhales all bright eyed. The night before, I had some. It is good, even more flavorful than green tea. Judah collapses, a giant grin on his face, into a kitchen chair and starts talking.

"You know Aaron Accord is getting out of jail on the twelfth," he starts.

Aaron is this infamous, or locally famous for questionable reasons, downtown character who had a promising future as a baseball player until his involvement in a car wreck with local celebrity A.J. Ferguson. A.J.'s now in a wheelchair and runs The Last Resort, an 'urban threads' clothing store downtown. Aaron didn't have a chance to live out his baseball dreams because his arms and legs were so damaged from the accident. Frustrated and bitter, Aaron started using junk. After the addiction took hold, he got stranded on heroin's island, a castaway with a dope habit. Then he was arrested for buying or selling it. "Gilligan! Are you using again, little buddy?" "Awwww, man, Skipper. You're soooooo demanding. Lower your tone, baby. Everyone's gotta suffer for something, right? You see, Skippy. You have your hamburgers. Me? I got my dope. Yeah "

"Really? That's when my birthday is," Jill announces.

"Happy Birthday," says Judah.

"Yeah, really. Ha, ha, ha," laughs Holly. "Is Josh still in jail?"

"Yeah," mumbles Judah. "He'll be out in two weeks, though."

"What's Josh in jail for?" I ask.

"He was getting out of rehab and he had to take a piss test and he was using and they found out and he had to go back to jail," explains Judah.

"Wow. I didn't know he was still using."

"Yeah he is."

Hot in the upstairs kitchen, we decide to go to the beach. First, we go to Epic Surf & Swim so Jill can buy a bikini. (Costs sixty bucks, too much.) After loading back into Holly's car, Judah starts complaining. "Man, it's too hot. I gotta get some weed." The rest of us aren't down with the idea. "Then I don't wanna go. Just drop me off here," he concludes, sounding like a grumpy kid. "That's what he just got out of jail for. I'm not gonna take him there. I'm not going to take that risk, not with my car." As Judah unfolds out the car into the prickly afternoon heat, he leaves a parting shot. "See you later, wus." Holly, Jill and I had a great time at the beach. Living in Florida, sometimes you tend to forget that the beach is in your backyard. However, if you can pretend you're on vacation here, at least once a week, and imagine yourself as a Canadian who only has a week to experience Florida, then you'll remember to take a swim. Salt water is salubrious, and swimming into the ocean is cathartic.

First Baptist Church concert with Eric

Last night, Eric and I were at First Baptist Church. Eric, a Christian, invited me to see the Christian rap group One Way perform at 7:30. As we watched the concert, I was really moved. I cried. When the pastor asked if anyone wanted to make a public profession of faith, I maneuvered my way through the warm bodies, found the aisle, and strolled toward the front. There I was, tears running down my face, my birdsnest hair, my backpack heavy with notepads, journals, gospel literature, and a gallon of water, a windmill of arms and legs in a slow motion gravity pull. At the front, I met Rich. In a torrent of jumbled words, I expressed my frustration over my own inability to reach the fencesitters--those that claimed to know Christ yet lived like the world. Besides, I stammered, my life is such a bad example that I feel burdened by guilt whenever I do mention God and His hope for their life. He told me to get closer to God by reading The Bible daily, and hanging out with believers. He's right. Then he gave me, and later Eric, some pamphlets and two free meal tickets for a church get-together the next night. I thanked him and Eric, then bicycled to Havana Restaurant, on Clematis Street, for some food. There, I have a tab with the owner, as I gave him a discounted full page ad. The food is hot and plentiful, but the prices somewhat prohibitive.

Planning to go to Boston, MA with Heidi

My friend Heidi is leaving for Boston, Massachusetts. I want to go with her.

"I want to go to Boston, but I don't want to leave Rodney or Gino in a bind," I confessed to Holly Schneider one evening. "They're training me to barback at Respectable's."

"Ask my brother, Eric, if he'll barback for you," exclaims Holly. "He used to barback there. Yeah, ask him. I'm sure Rodney will let you off if he can, if Eric can do it for you."

If this works, I'm hoping to go to Boston and remove myself from the scene I'm in--one that involves drinking and drugs and sadness and no hope. I'm trying to get closer to the Lord Jesus Christ and see what he wants for me in my life.