

history's detergent

collected journal entries

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1) Conversation between Kris Kemp and Elizabeth McNelly

Kris: Love is the last frontier.

Elizabeth: What do you mean?

Kris: Love is the last frontier.

Elizabeth: I don't believe in love.

Kris: No. You don't believe in love's results.

Elizabeth: I believe in love. I just don't believe in eternal love.

Kris: Of course. We're mortal.

Elizabeth: A carbon shell.

Kris: A soul cage. Once we die, the soul is liberated from its captivity.

2) November 9, Saturday, 2002; Pictures of The Leftover Generation

This warehouse, the Unarmed Underground Art Centre, the Flamingo Arts Studio, the "area 51" of the local arts scene, is a hamster cage for the disenfranchised, a waiting room for the leftover generation, a giant catchers mitt that can only attract what it doesn't destroy, a pocket that collects the loose change found among the grass

that splits the sidewalk, a post milleniul orphanage for dreamers and misfits that introduce the world with a shrug. Sustained by rotting wooden trusses that resemble a ribcage, this quonset hut hides an indoor tent city pitched inside the belly of a whale. Entropy paralyzes this upside down ship, left abandoned to rust while the waves of time and responsibility lap against its barnacle ridden hull. Still, the sailors inside, a motley crew carefree drifters, idea pirates, forge ahead, keeping track with a broken compass and simple prayers.

3) December, 2002; Pictures of The Leftover Generation

We are history's detergent, diving beneath the waves, surfacing for gasps of air, returning to the caves, post-zero spelunkers groping the walls as we descend, dismissed by purveyors of health insurance but embraced by sidewalk prophets, ignored by this life, adopted by the one we have created.

4) Thursday afternoon, 3:38 p.m., November 21, 2002; Pictures of The Leftover Generation

Dad just left. He's like a ship without a rudder, a boat with no oars, a sailor without a compass. He gestures and grunts and groans, then motions for a pen to scribble out more advice. At the end of the day, he's a melancholy passenger on a bus without wheels, waiting from behind the window as the world rushes by, making comments, criticizing, and, in general, drowning in distractions (that neither motivate him or discourage him, but rather derail him from any intended course of action). I feel weary when I'm around him, then slightly sad and frustrated for him once he's left.

A person that refuses to take advice or move forward in a specific direction will eventually turn into a stone monument, gathering dust, the stares of onlookers, and the collected entropy of environment, both natural (soveiners from visiting birds) and manmade (trash). As Candice Murphy, a sculptor and artist, so aptly summed up: "When you look back, you turn into a pillar of salt." Dad, who's looked back one to many times, has become a salt lick, attracting wild horses of regret in a solemn feeding frenzy.

5) Advertisement to encourage Christians to witness

Cost of buying a plethora of Gospel tracts: \$350

Cost of buying care packages, so nursing home residents can receive Christmas gifts: \$80

Cost of printing one's own Christian tract to pass out downtown: \$50

Cost of winning one soul to The Lord Jesus Christ: Priceless.

There are some things money can't buy ... salvation.

For everything else, there's credit cards.

6) Saturday, November 23, 2002; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

I notice Jens nearby. He's an out there studio artist who's lived all over the world. Moodwise, he's either excited or very quiet. When he does talk, his words erupt in bursts, random depth charges in the sea of his psyche.

7) January 22, 10:24 pm, 2002; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Everyone's dying and we're all clinging to pieces of furniture, objects of desire that we mistake for bouys but instead are actually anchors, keeping us tethered to one place, holding us back, weighing us down. It's been said, 'You can't take it with you'. But it seems as if we all die trying.

8) October 9, 2002, 12:20 am; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

When dad visits, he lays a guilt trip on me. I listen patiently and try to discern for wisdom. His premise is the same--change your life, get a job/skill, move out of this warehouse, do something with your life.

"Don't you understand, dad? I'm trying to save the world? I'm trying to make sense of this world by assembling it into various and sundry projects--FLO (Flying Low On the radar) Film Fest, nutrition research, writing a musical/play, Refuge Coffeehouse, Cinema Refuse', Philosophy Night. Perhaps I will never help produce kids, but maybe I can leave behind the litter of my imagination. Talk to Carrie Cutlip. She understands me, probably better than anyone."

I'm trying to help my dad, who suffers from Lou Gerig's disease. He's losing the ability to speak. So, I research alternative cures for this disease, and then spend money ordering this or that product, trying to save him. Maybe his health will be restored, maybe not. But what's the price of hope? Dad appreciates me trying to help him, though, which is cool.

I'm beginning to think my reintroduction into the real world, society as we know it, will only be the result that follows a specific combination of pharmies (pharmaceuticals). Yes, maybe then I'll become a spoke in the wheel of humanity,

spinning in the circle of commerce, occupied by the presidents of large conglomerates, steered by palm pilot carrying serfs who answer to cowboys whose holdster has never met a gun, only a cell phone. Geronimo! Hello America. Gym memberships are the prisons you pay for.

9) Sunday, July 21, 2002; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Uncertainty surrounds me. Like a fuel, it keeps me moving, even if I'm just spinning in circles. When everything is a blur, the world seems kinder. When you are touch-and-go with the people you meet, there's little time to recognize the dark side of the universe, the seldom visited regions of latent human nature. Exposing the dark parts awakens the myriad of sleeping creatures in hibernation. They open their eyes to high volume voices of interrogation, their bellies rumbling, hungry, waiting to be fed. If you want to tame the animals, you better be prepared to feed them. Empty stomachs make for unruly behavior. Then again, some caves are better left unexplored.

10) Monday, August 4, 2002; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Eventually, my mind succumbed to the forces of gravity, and I nodded at this pep rally of politeness.

11) January 2, 2003; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Living is the prize when you face the things you fear.

Youth can be a prison that you never do outgrow.

(from dumpster diver ... the musical)

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2) Friday, 12:45 am, July 12, 2002; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

At the 300 block, at the southwest corner of Clematis and Olive, in front of Dax, Ann got into a conversation with a gentleman. I began talking to a guy, a Christian, who wanted to know why I was doing this. I explained Hell and the command to "go", but he didn't seem to interested. He had his beer, and referred me to the guy across from him saying, "That's the guy you oughtta talk to, he'll talk your ear off." I stood up,

took two steps over, crouched down, introduced myself, handed him a tract. He unbuckled his bag of grief, and slowly unloaded his observations, each carefully packaged in cynicism. His name was Phil. And he wanted to be convinced that there is a God. An admitted atheist, he mused about the general malaise of society, its current path, and the inevitable bag of lawn clippings at the end of the rainbow. Still, his subtext spoke volumes. "Look at those girls," he waved his hand at the skimpily clad youths, dolled up, ready to be absorbed by hungry eyes with ill intent. They were teenagers, wearing halter tops and tight jeans, roaming the sidewalk, ready for adventure. "They're dressed all provocatively, looking to be picked up by guys that don't care about them and then they end up pregnant, the mother of children they can't afford ..." he trailed off, his words noisedust among the music, car engines, and loud conversations nearby. "What's the point of it all," he sighed, small hot air balloons in search of a better view. "That's why I drink. I work. I drink. And I watch what goes on." Sitting there, I listened. And laughed. The guy was funny, unravelling the mystery of human behavior with methodical wit.

13) Thursday afternoon, August 7, 2002; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

People stop by. I listen to their stories. The common thread that runs through the fabric of their experience results in a patchwork quilt of false starts, elusive dreams, minor tragedy and a never ending supply of faith in human relationships. When all is said and done, I am a volcano of compliments, a fire breathing dragon of encouragement disguised as a modern day Gilligan, costumed in paint stained, cut off khaki shorts, a black t-shirt, and ankle high workboots with no socks, bicycling across the lost continent of forgotten dreams that links The Leftover Generation. Each valley becomes an easy ride, feet up and resting on the pedals, a destination fraught with adventure. Each slope beckons me to pedal with strength toward the summit of possibilites too big to fit the imagination. Life is beautiful.

14) Tuesday, 4:40 pm, November 26, 2002; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Moved today. Furniture and antiques. With Peter, my co-worker, for Callahan, this 81-year old millionaire. Moving antiques is a gilded nightmare. Imagine the heaviest piece of furniture you know. (Antiques are composed of quality materials--wood, marble, brass.) Now, picture that piece, add ornate decorations supported by fragile limbs. Then, add glass with beveled edges, and you have an idea of what you contend with when moving antiques. Often, I find myself lost in a Hegelian dialect when I'm walking down these narrow, stuffy corridors, holding one end of these beastly furnishings.

The house we were in this afternoon was typical, a second floor apartment, polished wooden floors with oriental rugs laid on them, antiseptic white walls offering a sterile glance (closing in on you like the walls of a dentists room). Conducting this orchestra of mediocrity is the owner, an elderly gentleman ballet dancing among handymen, electricians, and us--Peter and I (Kris Kemp), the movers. At the end of the day, furniture and furnishings, no matter how expensive, are nothing more than lawn ornaments left indoors--beautiful trash, expensive garbage. This stuff looks great in the store with its pleasant music, cold a/c, and agreeable, cologne scented sales clerk with their bleach whitened teeth. But the excitement fizzles once the purchase is made and its left to languish in the living room, occupying what little breathing room is left in the house, suffocating the desire and crowding the ability to reason. (Breathe.) Yes, moving is an endurance course of cramped elevators, dim, smelly hallways, narrow doorways, gigantic furniture, smashed fingers, pulled muscles, torn rotator cuffs (shoulder joints), sweat, sighs, grunts, groans, groomed antique store owners, and the occasional "crick" sound of a broken piece. It's an honest days work, but it is not easy. Then again, whoever said being honest was easy?

15) Wednesday, November 27, 2002; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

I'm floating out to sea. And nobody is even waving goodbye. I am adrift in the gulfstream of imagination. The waves of introspection lap against my makeshift liferaft--a scavenger hunt nest of poetry, music, notebook revelations, Bible verses memorized for peace and respite and hope, sunburned photographs. The wind is constant. Motivation alludes me, like a smell that triggers a memory whose details remain unclear, like a Polaroid that refuses to develop. Someone's laughing. Mere survival keeps me bearing onward. Perhaps I will fast.

16) late 1994, downtown WPB, FL; bicycle days

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

She wouldn't want it any other way.

"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 plunger.

"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 for the heroin to take effect. 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 and played Atari. The psuedo Jaws theme song served as appropriate background music when Liz walked into the room and sat down in front of the mirror behind the hallway door. And Liz is arranging her hair and gazing into the mirror and gargling her words. Sitting crosslegged, she's swaing to the music inside her.

17) 1994 or 1995; bicycle days

(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: "Heeeyyyyyy!!!" 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 wouldn'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 massivecardragon wakes and slowly retreats from the parking lot, then sputters as Brian shakes the reigns.

18) January 26, Sunday, 2003; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

I've got to get out of this suspended state of codependence known as the hut. Currently, I'm in the middle bay, beside a 50-gallon drum that collects water from an overhead leak. The east bay, which housed my studio/room, has been condemned by the city of West Palm Beach. Alan, the owner who restores antiques, writes poetry, draws sketches, and scatters fertilizer within this greenhouse of artists, will oversee its demolition in the next two weeks. Physically, this place is dangerous. Spiritually, it's draining. Mentally, it's consuming. Emotionally, it's constant, ankle deep frustration. Every bit of who I am becomes absorbed by this cave and its inhabitants. I'm dying from the inside out--a Gulliver tied down by the Lilliputians, crawled onto, stepped on, pulled in so many different directions. Who am I? An artist to some. A Jesus freak to others. A sage, a friend, a sensitive, insecure listener that attracts the leftovers of a generation both discarded and ignored. (People mistake my ears for hammocks.) Instead of identifying and shaping my own talents into something of value, I end up a vending machine of compliments for thirsty visitors who lack pocket change. I'm growin weary of trying to give mouth to mouth recessitation to people refusing (artificial) life support.

19) November 16, Saturday, 3:10 pm, 2002; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Karen looked somewhat sad, judging from her eyes. I attempted to initiate conversation, by pulling out shovelfuls of unthreatening questions, but each answer revealed little. At the end of five minutes, I was hitting pavement.

The coffeehouse bustled with a covey of waitresses--teengirls--that quickly visited tables and asked if everything was okay. The food reminds me of movie theatre food--ice cream sandwiches, french fries, nachos with cheese, but the menu is bigger. 10nth Avenue North, Mike D's band, composed of a bassist, two guitarists, and drummer played. They were terrific, kind of like a Christian Dave Matthews band. The crowd gathered around them and flamingo flock assemblies of girls pointed and gestured and smiled, their eyes sparkling like shiny pennies against a snowbank, hoping to be noticed among the drift.

20) 1995; bicycle days

California, San Diego in particular, is a refrigerator of epiphanies. Energy, thoughts, ideas and moods hide among Tupperware creamatoriums shelved throughout the active yogurt cultures of people animating the landscape with their mundane conversation. Out of a subconscious and peripatetic observation of God's holy terrain, denizens fall into the spoken word with absence of exxageration. 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 a thousand hail mary donuts into lukewarm coffees, from the security not unlike discarded childhood items of safety.

21) 1994; bicycle days

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 ashphalt. 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 thief 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 ...

22) January 2003; Booklet of Quotes

Progress has no conscience.

23) April 2002, Thursday; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Bob: "How can you be happy if you don't have any money? If you don't have any money, you can't do anything. I'd rather be dead."

Me (Kris), thinking: You already are, Bob. You already are. No wonder you are unhappy, Bob. Your gods are a collection of dead presidents. Your altar isn't open on Sundays. Your pew consists of computers manned by tellers, visited reverently by people waiting in line. In your eyes, your credit card is the conduit to god. Offerings are rare at this place of worship. Withdrawals are common. Your bank god has become your buffet, a plethora of choices that, to you, spells freedom. At the end of the day, you'll get your fill: a pot belly, a vacant stare, eyes with bulletproof pupils--blanks, devoid of gunpowder passion--and a mountain of experiences and things that you have accumulated. This eventually ends up in the trash or at Goodwill. That isn't living. That is collecting. And collecting without intent leaves potholes in the soul. How tragic.

24) 2002; Booklet of Quotes

Dirty shirts are the real calendars of this world. Stains remind you of great events. Each has a story to tell, a clue to your history, a flashcard from the past. The soiled garment becomes a wearable slide show, better than a photo album.

25) January 24, Thursday, 8:43, 2002

When the downtown scene, comprised of promising new stores that sold old merchandise (The Wormhole, Sound Splash, Blue Buddha, Underground Coffeeworks, Groove), and artists, musicians, and writers, evaporated under the steamroll of corporate pirates and real estate vultures, I became disillusioned with

producing the FLO (Flying Low On the radar), a small arts magazine. The interesting people, for the most part, went elsewhere. The number of namebrand stores in an area is inversely proportional to the number of visionaries.

Eventually, the dust settled and I retreated to the corner of a giant, washed up whale beached west of the tracks in Flamingo Park, an historic community in downtown West Palm Beach, Florida. (This place was, and is, called the hut, a trio of quonset huts at the end of Kanuga Drive.) Managing the building through his job as antique restorer was Alan Patrusevich. Still pursuing the elusive whale until he had gotten swallowed up by him, Alan, a benevolent drunk, quietly swallowed other lost children of the arts scene.

Over time, the whale's mouth became a revolving door for artists, poets, con artists, slackers, writers, musicians--all participants of The Leftover Generation. My job became the unofficial tour guide and helper for residents, showing them the cave, walking them through the belly of the whale, while its ribs, composed of delaminating, termite infested wood, groaned above us, sighing indifferently at the burden of another visitor, one more toy soldier AWOL (away without leave) from the game of real life. Like a carnival barker convinced by my own game, I helped construct studios and encouraged the residents to produce art--the gift inside they felt called to develop. My efforts created an unspoken system of barter involving rides, meals, glasses of red wine, between me and the eclectic tenants. Overall, I offered bits of myself and received a sense of purpose in return. That, and friendship, kept me going. At the end of the day, I had become adopted into a kind of surrogate family, both unpredictable and dysfunctional, but one that allowed me to be myself, roaming my way through an amusement park of mood swings: jungle gym outbursts of frustration, slides of laughter, tunnels of despair, forts of loneliness, merry-go-rounds of love.

26) 1999; Booklet of Quotes

Follow your dreams or you'll get caught in someone else's. Hunt it down. Tackle it, if you have to, but whatever you do, find your dreams. Follow them, hold onto them, and don't let them go.

27) April, 2002, Monday; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Finally, two seats to myself. Think I'll sleep for a while.

Somewhere, in Mobile, Alabama, perhaps, this cute girl with a nose ring boards the bus and sits behind me. All hopes of a potential date evaporate when she opens her mouth and makes her confession to the guy she's sitting beside. In a kind of redneck Mr. Rogers Neighborhood, this guy interrogates her with softballs like: "Are you happy? As long as your happy. You want to swim with whales? A whale might look at you and say: 'Boy, she looks tasty. I think I'd like a bite of her.'" His intention, to score or get some kind of play, fails. Like others before him, he's left empty handed, shrugging, watching her comet burn up in his gravity field.

28) February 20, 2003; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Music is my open road.

29) 1998; Booklet of Quotes

A person staying at home is like a match without a cover. The cover is the other people that are not being met. That's why it takes two to strike up a conversation.

30) April, 2003; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

These are the ones for me, the ones that hang out at the bus stops of this world--cheap rooming houses, small churches, libraries, hospital waiting rooms, coin laundries. I'll dive into their world and emerge from the depths, breathless, carrying a pearl to the surface. These are the ones for me ... misplaced, lost, spent, meant ... orphaned artists, emotional cripples, misfit musicians, paranoid poets, unapologetic slackers ... lighting candles inside the belly of the whale, sharing space within the walls of a giant magnet that can only attract what it does not destroy. These are the ones for me-- unacknowledged souls that fall into the cracks of civilizations sidewalk, the restless hearts writing poetry in empty rooms, the pilgrims without a compass, sensitive and scared, determined, nervous, insomniacs with a purpose, barely held by gravity, attention deficit disorders with naturally caffeinated minds. These are the ones for me ... genuine actors add libing their lines, dismissed by a culture that thinks too much and feels too little, sending prayers, playing music, diving dumpsters, lending an ear to the lonely or misunderstood, jumping trains with sidewalk prophets, accumulating stray kisses from mysterious strangers, playing hooky from the real world, connecting the dots to form a picture, becoming absorbed into a kind of surrogate

family, all of us participants in The Leftover Generation.

31) Tuesday, August 13, 2002, 8:48 am; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Still, the absence of a computer is a blessing, as I've been focusing more on God. Free time need not be absorbed by television or internet surfing, both, for the most part, accumulating excess information that only serves to burden the mind. Even casual glancers of electronic media can easily become information junkies, rubberneckers on the information superhighway. (The road to cable addiction is paved with good intentions.) Information, in abundance, is a bitter pill, absorbed initially with good intent, consumed later to satisfy an addiction.

32) Monday, March 24, 2003; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Denae is a beautifully, swept by the tender flowers of discarded holidays, complex and well travelled pilgrim, unknowing a member in the scrolling credits of the leftover generation. She's a cowboys dream, when he's away from home and experiences the vision of a gypsy, whose warmth affection reminds him of his youth, when his mother rubbed her strong fingers through his hair, parting the seas of confusion and uncertainty.

33) unsure of the date; Dreams are the flashlight; time is the battery

Both people can't be holding on to the football at the same time, not when it comes to resentment. Because there can only be one quarterback. The object that they're fighting for, the ball, is bound by the leather of bad memories, fastened together by the cords of bitterness. Only one person can possess it at any given time. That's why Andy and Maggie don't get along. Because they're both fighting over the ball. They're alike that way.

34) March 2003; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

At the end of the day, we trade innocence for experience, reluctantly swapping airbrushed hopes for harsh realities, the beauty of what can be for the horror of what is. Soon, even though we fail to admit it, we feel imprisoned by adulthood, barred in by expectations, cornered, caged. Outside, the warden dangles the keys to freedom, each wag sounding like a television jingle--one that entices us with a promise to return to innocence, a return visit to rebellion and naive definitions of immortality. If we drink this or that, the drawbridge to the past will drop before us and we'll cross over to the castle of yesterday ...

35) February 12, Wednesday, 4:05 pm; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

This time, he's moving within the same community--Century Village, an affordable, gated living space for some 24,000 residents. I've always imagined these places to be in Southern California or Arizona, a place where summers last the entire year, a place where doctors recommend their patients reside because the weather is more forgiving. This is the place to live when you're old, cannot afford anything better, and would like the safety of an area that is crime free. At the same time, this village is a pit stop away from the nursing home, a stone's throw away from the grave. Seeing the apartments in full sunlight made all the three and four story multiplexes look like a prison. In a way, Century Village is the projects for older adults. This small city is inhabited by slow walking people in wrinkle suits, who, like children, curiously wander from their crib to see who the new guy is, idling the engine of their mind, releasing the emergency brake of suspicion, slipping the clutch into first gear, slowly passing by, using walkers, riding in golf carts, navigating sunbeaten luxury cars. They shuffle to and fro, infants with elephant skin--pale, yellow, a roadmap of wrinkles routing their journey through life.

36) Amelia Earhardt, 2000; Poems and Songs

Amelia Earhardt, where did you go?
You disappeared too soon
The wings that moved beneath your smile

Your eyes the fullest moon

The kindest light that ever glows
Can't be diffused by darker foes
A dream, a sigh, you wave goodbye
Fearless, tender, pretty, shy

A short haired girl in uniform
A bird that took the world by storm
You took your dream and made it real
The reason for your wide appeal

37) August, 2002; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

(Dear LORD,

Tell me whether I should stay in this abandoned tin can (the warehouse at 502 Kanuga Drive, downtown West Palm Beach, FL) or not. Please let me know. I feel like I'm living inside the belly of a whale. Am I, LORD? Am I running from You? Is this my "Jonah experience"? If I am to stay, LORD JESUS, I ask YOU, The Creator of The Universe, King of Kings and LORD of LORDS, to destroy the evil works of darkness and workers of iniquity in JESUS' NAME.)

Here, there is no "moral benchmark", as David Knight so aptly concluded in a conversation earlier today. The level of entropy here, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically, is overwhelming. The second law of thermodynamics seems to be accelerated within the walls of this abandoned ship, left landlocked by the receding tides of the real world years ago.

(Thank YOU, LORD, in advance, for sending me where YOU want me to go. But please spare me from the despair of my surroundings, as the ground to which this place is anchored moves closer to the edge of nowhere day by day. Redeem me from myself, O LORD. With your help, LORD, we can turn the United States upside down for YOU. Help me to accomplish YOUR will. Cut my life in half, if need be, so that in the years I do have, you fill me with Yourself, rather than having excess years to chase my own will and collect transgressions. A short life lived for God, serving The LORD Jesus Christ, accomplishes more for The Kingdom of Heaven than a long life lived for self. May I forgo the ankle deep waters of tactful Christianity that avoid extremes and embrace tolerance, and plunge headlong into the depths of radically following The LORD JESUS CHRIST. Hallelujah to The Son of God, Who is worthy of ALL our praise! Hallelujah to The Risen Savior, The Lord of Lords, King of Kings. Hallelujah!)

38) Song to the lost, 2002; Poems and Songs

if every gesture could be a letter, i'd try to make each moment better
if every word meant what it said, i'd try to put your fears to bed
if every phrase could help you grow, i'd pray to make you only know
if every one would turn away, i'd help to show The Only Way

not all will come but still i'll try, so help me Lord to myself die
and put my sins and flesh behind, and strive to let the others find
The Hope in You, The Son of God, every other hope is flawed
in You, alone, Salvation rests; the name of Jesus Christ is blessed

(softly, quietly building)

i'll play for you in moments spent, with tears that fall, cries Heaven sent
a plea, an ask, that you will see, the two paths of eternity
though scoffers scoff and mockers mock, they hide behind their empty talk
Salvation is in Jesus found. Let's spread The Gospel all around

if you could see how much i care, i only want to see you There
the love of Jesus fills me up and overflows this broken cup
remember, one day, you will see, the two paths of eternity
this world, it all is fading fast; choose Jesus Christ, for He will last

(music interlude, then slow tempo, soft piano playing)

if you could join me in this path, to save the lost, from God's wrath
for other sould we could contend, where every stranger is a friend
1000 miles, it cannot keep, the love of The Sheperd from His sheep
1000 years will 'ere but be, a moment in eternity

39) Your Will (chorus), 2002; Poems and Songs

The Spirit is willing, but the body is weak
I'm shaking inside; LORD, help me to speak
The Truth, in love, spoken so meek
Your will, not my will be done.

The race, that's ahead, I will run ...

The depths of my sin are deep, I confess
 You separate them from the east to the west
 Forgive me; guide me; in You I am blessed
 Your will, not my will be done
 The race, that's ahead, I will run ...

The strength comes from You, Living Waters so deep
 Help me to find, and return the lost sheep
 If I, sow in tears, then in joy will I reap
 Your will, not my will be done
 The race, that's ahead, I will run ...

40) February, 2003; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

America,

You have struggled for so long, working overtime at a job you don't like, so you can buy things you don't need. Competing with actors in a sitcom, you mimic their behavior, taking mental notes, posing like they do, even copying their hairstyle. Because you labor in vain, your free time is absorbed by physical pleasures and self indulgence, justified but not enjoyed. Materialistically, you are bursting at the seams, a ship so overloaded that the sea spills over the stern. (You can't take it with you, but you'll die trying.) Spiritually, your cupboards remain empty. Mentally, you're malnourished as you languish in front of a television that lulls you into lethargy. Emotionally, you are crippled. Physically, you are spent--tired, exhausted, running on fumes, anxious with little direction. While you remain a captive to the computer or cable TV, the vultures gather, circling, while you turn to stone. In the meantime, you assumed you were in control, a mouse in one hand, a remote in the other. All along, you were in someone else's control, trading liberty for security, adventure for safety, freedom for incarceration, experience for comfort. No wonder you cannot sleep at night. Instead of praying to God, you worshipped the gods of music, idolizing them with your hands in the air, dressing like them, wearing t-shirts with their image, learning their lyrics and spending large sums of money to see them live and in person. Instead of acknowledging God, you've lifted the finger to Him, or waived him off, convincing yourself that science and evolution, in one giant handshake, developed this planet. Deep down inside, you know The Truth, displayed by God's marvelous creation and written on your hearts. But, judging from your actions, you dismiss it, exchanging currency that bears an eternal value for the temporary pleasure of the moment. At the end of the day, you'll earn a heart that is calloused, eyes of stone, and a soul that is lost. May you turn to Jesus Christ while there is still time.

41) March 23, 5am, Sunday, 2003; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Riding my bicycle home after work is such an experience. My starting point is the northeast corner of Clematis and Flagler, where America restaurant is located. From here, I pedal west from the 100 block south to the 500 block, west of the railroad tracks. The scene is usually the same, minus a few hundred people on less popular nights.

Maneuvering my old 12-speed among cars and pedestrians, I see gangs of kids, mostly high school and college students. In one way or another, everyone dresses the same. Guys wear tight collar shirts and clean khaki pants with polished dress shoes. They wear short hair that's usually gelled back. The tightness of their shirt is in direct proportion to the time spent at the gym. They wear supertight slacks of denim, high rise clogs, and tight tops, some with low cut cleavage for maximum attention. Hairwise, they sport a Jennifer Aniston cut, straightened and parted in the middle. Both the guys and girls carry cellphones and drive expensive vehicles, participating in a myth they cannot afford. Overall, it's a big, sad parade of human traffic. Slowly, they pass, honking horns for attention, windows down, music blasting, slowly rolling by like boxcars behind a train that's leaving the circus, carrying away the remaining animals.

Along the 100 block, I glide past Tommy Bahamas, an overpriced clothing store/restaurant with an island feel. The 200 block is home to Pescatore, a hip seafood bistro, a pizza place, a pricy cuban restaurant, Big City Tavern, Rooney's Pub, and Starbucks, the playground du jour for writers, artists or those that pretend to be. Closer to the corner lies Monkey Club, a dance club that has a line of people outside waiting to enter. The 300 block houses Roxy's Bar, and two dance clubs, Flow and Liquid. The 400 block is basically shut down except for a reggae/hip-hop club.

Crossing the railroad tracks into the 500 block, a more eclectic crowd can be seen roaming from club to pub. Respectable Street Cafe, the original progressive dance club that opened in 1987, when downtown was still in its infancy, the forgotten battery jumpstarted by the creative wunderkid and Joy Division fan Rodney Mayo, who's also a deejay and tornado cave architect, is on the south side. At Respect's, the outfit to wear is black, as the club attracts gothics, misfits, and disenfranchised members of the restless set, offering both anonymity and a collective sense of identity. Across the street is The Lounge, kind of like Respectables for people who have taken a bath, yuppies, those with better credit, or all three. If Respectable Street is college, then The Lounge is graduate school. The Lounge is a somewhat swanky, 60's styled batcave for well-dressed scenesters. Nearby is O'Sheas, an Irish pub that's

a second home to free spirited artists, writers, musicians and anyone looking for a pint o' Guinness.

At the intersection of Rosemary and Clematis, I veer south, then bike through City Place, a monstrosity of epic commercialism that is not even cool enough to be called boring. Central to this deco influenced shopping district is the promise of lifestyle and leisure, places to eat, shop, and be entertained. Restaurants, clothing stores, movie theatres, bars. Basically, a cornucopia of distractions that gingerly pickpocket the conscience of the unwary. My heart sinks as I ride past this namebrand amusement park. The amount of money spent to build this entire enterprise combined with the money people spend here could support a lot of good. If only this money could be used for missions work, to support the indigenous (native) Christian missionary, the hungry orphan or needy widow, an entire culture could be transformed. Inside, my stomach turns at this glut of mammoth porportion, seeing it as a carefully packaged tragedy.

42) April 12, Saturday night, 2003; Pictures from The Leftover Generation

Yes, like others before us, those currently, and the ones that will follow, we search for kicks, exchanging dead presidents for cups of primary colored liquid, unknowingly hoping for a ticket to re-experience the wonders of youth. (I think people drink so they can liberate themselves enough to act like children, and have an excuse to dismiss the responsibilities that accompany their actions.) Seemingly, this world is out of control, so we make it more manageable by softening it, or at least our perception of it. Our world is made more habitable when we narrow it down to a few friends. In the end, the yard may be small but there's less landscaping, less maintenance. Regarding people, a few trustworthy friendships far surpasses a plethora of strangely vague acquaintances--an army of substitute teachers, a forest of stand-ins. More than anything, people need to connect, thus the popularity of instant messaging, cell phones, music, clubs, bars. Given how so many people eye religion as an auspicious technique for control, multitudes cling to music instead, finding identity, belonging, friends according to the music they have in common. For many, music has become the new religion, one that promises freedom, yet reduces its fans to head bobbing, hand waving proselytes worshipping the musician as a deity of sorts. Unfortunately, this is conviction without responsibility, a childrens crusade into nihilism.

