

Shelters are Melting

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the true story about the disintegration
of my preconceived notions of reality
confirmed by a journey to the American West

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Introduction

for three days, we've persisted,
chasing the night to find the dawn.
dissenters we have been listed,
shelters are melting, safety is gone,

but we're alive and free,
the grass for a blanket, bathing in the sea,
and we're, alive and aware
wanting to believe, sending a prayer ...

from: "3 days ... the journey"
p. 13 (Songs for musicals)
c. 2003 kris kemp

Background

I used to start, then organize events in downtown West Palm Beach, Florida. Initially, my foray into downtown resulted from curiosity. By putting events into motion, I was able to establish connections, then friendships, with the inhabitants of the downtown area. The spark that kindled the drive to create and connect was one born out of loneliness.

In 1992, or was it 1993, I broke up with long term girlfriend Christina Murphy. She was a tough, independent redheaded Irish girl that I met in downtown West Palm Beach.

Following the breakup, I moved into a small, second-floor walkup apartment on the northeast corner of Kennelworth and Dixie. After enduring a week of nearly unbearable suffering and loneliness, I applied for two restaurant jobs. Both of them hired me.

The occupational therapy worked. Keeping my mind off myself and being consumed by the fast paced, physical world of the kitchen helped remedy my self-induced slump. Two weeks passed. Then, the clouds parts and the sunlight fell through once more. I woke up a new person, and didn't miss Christina anymore. Everything would be okay. Life would welcome me back with kid gloves.

Like a bear shaking off its winter slumber, unfolding himself to stand, I emerged from my hibernation, stumbling from my cave of isolation and backward glancing. Creative ideas surged through me, electrifying my hands, energizing my head. The sleep had recharged me. I probably had an energy field that left nearby power plants envious. With a fresh perspective, I began to put things together.

the FLO

I started the FLO 'zine, a hand-drawn, 5x7", black & white stapled minizine that covered the art/music/club scene in downtown West Palm Beach. The zine became my ticket to a world inhabited by artists, addicts, con artists, club kids, poets, musicians, and renegades that roamed the haunts and streets of downtown. The FLO grew in popularity and size. Eventually, I published 10,000 issues a month. Financially, at that point, I broke even. While I worked on the FLO, I supported myself by working in restaurants--usually working pantry (salads, sandwiches, cold soups, prep), sometimes working on the line (broiler, saute, grill).

Downtown develops into an arts scene

Other magazines were published to keep up with the emerging music/art movement that was incubating downtown.

Gail Sheperd, a cute European appeared on the scene and published Red Herring,

a tabloid sized monthly known for it's minimal layout and terrific writing.

Before her magazine appeared, I had heard about Gail Shepard from Lawrence Corning, a creative Real Estate developer who had a soft spot for artists.

Downtown West Palm Beach, Florida, at this point, was poised to become a community that valued it's artists. Rents were cheap, but going up, and a small variety of interesting poets, musicians and artisans congregated at local hangouts like O'Shea's pub, and Respectable Street, a progressive music club that opened in 1987, and served to jumpstart interest in the dead battery known as Clematis Street.

Renegade realtor Lawrence Corning

Even a realtor carried the torch for an artists community.

Maverick Real Estate developer Lawrence Corning, a renegade known for his strange use of metaphors that bordered on being cryptic and funny, drew up conceptual plans for an artists living spaces in an historic, two-story building on the southeast corner of Evernia and Dixie.

"You haven't heard about Red Herring?" He asked me in a quiet whisper, one eyebrow raised.

"Uh, no. What is it?"

"There printing 10,000 issues. It's a newspaper. It's gonna cover politics, art, culture. Apparently, they've already got an advertising budget and some pretty serious writers. Looks like you're gonna have some competition."

"Hmm. Well, they'll be more political. That's not my focus."

"That's where the root of conflict lies. In politics. You artists think that politics don't matter, but that's at the core. Unless you're willing to take your ponys to another place, you'll have to find water here. Otherwise, you might as well raise a white flag and walk away."

"Hmm. Okay."

Red Herring and Gail Sheppard

Red Herring surfaced for air and was a suprisingly well-done effort for a free monthly.

The paper featured political commentary, interviews, and coverage of the area artists and musicians.

Red Herring introduced a serious tone with terrific writers such as Steve Ellman, Gail Sheperd, Gabriel Lazlo, and the unique illustrations of talented artist Peggy Jean. The design of the paper--minimal layout, well placed ads, lots of white space that drew your eye to content--made it easy to read, something newspapers should remember as they're often read in low-lit dance clubs, bars, restaurants.

Gail Sheppard's cover stories were downright memorable. She wrote a piece on heroin addiction that nearly made me cry. Her article on prozac was on par with national publications.

The Red Herring crew of writers and illustrators seemed to make their second home at O'Shea's, a local Irish pub that served as a watering hole for emerging bohemians.

On weekends, usually Sunday nights, I'd spot them at at one of the outside tables, talking, laughing, smoking, sharing cheese-covered fries and engaging in a joi di vivre (joy of living) all their own.

Their appearance--a melange of thrift store grunge, black T-shirts, abused jeans, spiky hair, goatees, and attitude--somewhat dismissive of the mainstream, yet hopeful that the greater good will eventually win out--put them in a category that defied stereotype. In a way, this ragtag crew participated in a myth all their own.

As an outsider myself, I, too felt the urge to introduce the world with a shrug. Expect nothing, I say, and you'll be happy with crumbs. Maybe the key to happiness is

lowering your expectations. Perhaps that's the antidote to finding a near-constant state of bliss.

Michael Ross Koretzsky and iCE magazine

Another monthly newspaper emerged around this time as well.

Michael Ross Koretzsky published and wrote for iCE magazine. His paper, iCE magazine, was bought by the Sun Sentinel, who helped him publish a monthly, tabloid size version. This staff had their own office, a decent sized space at 115 Olive Avenue, below Lost Weekends, on the west side of Olive between Datura and Clematis Street.

Pulp, Raw Substance, Butt Ugly, 3a.m., Rage

Another tabloid size magazine, Pulp, started appearing at clubs. It covered the music scene from Fort Lauderdale to Palm Beach Gardens. Local writer Steve Ellman commented: "Reading Pulp is like drunken channel surfing."

Of all these tabloid papers, Red Herring (an intentional irrelevant) lasted the longest--four years.

Other zines--small magazines--put together by kids whose interests weren't being represented, began surfacing at clubs, coffeehouses and Sound Splash, the independent record store in West Palm Beach, the brainchild of groovy peacenik Matt Reynolds.

the 'zine scene

Raw Substance was an 8.5 x 11, black & white copied music fanzine by writer/editor Mike Grover, a musician and music lover. Raw Substance covered up-and-coming bands years before they made it big, bands like Green Day and Nine Inch Nails and Marilyn Manson.

Butt Ugly, a small black & white stapled zine, offering social commentary and humor from 17-year old arts school student Donna Abatablo, who frequented downtown West Palm Beach in the mid-nineties. Following graduation, she moved to New York City where she still resides.

The Ant Hill contained hilarious journal entries.

Three A.M., a beautifully-done full color 'zine with incredible poetry, quotes, interviews--assembled in a crashand-burn style similar to the nationally published Raygun. 3 A.M. was put together by Jon Eagle, a quiet, well dressed art school student that visited downtown via the bus. Tragically, he died of a heroin overdose.

My 'zine, the FLO, featured commentary, maps of area thrift stores, club reviews, journal entries, interviews with local celebrities, black & white photography, and the local celebrity lightswitch where I placed someones picture with a coupon-like frame, instructing them to clip it and glue it to their lightswitch. For me, the FLO was a confessional, a chance to share my daily adventures with hundreds of anonymous readers. I remember seeing someone at Respectable Street Cafe, sitting in the booth, reading the FLO. As I watched him read, I felt a smile spread across my face, a sense of accomplishment.

Initially, I printed a few-hundred FLO's, leaving them at hangouts like Sound Splash, The Underground Coffeeworks, Respectable Street, and O'Shea's pub. Suprisingly, I received letters encouraging me to continue publishing it.

"If I could one day publish a thousand issues," I mused with a smile. A year later, with the help of Lawrence Corning's middle-page advertising insert revenue, I printed 10,000 issues. For me, this was an achievement. the FLO was more than a medium of self expression, it was ticket into a world of artists, poets, musicians, writers--outsiders like myself. Among them, in a peculiar way, I felt at home.

As a Christian that tried to maintain conservative values

based on a Biblical worldview, I struggled in trying to reconcile art, my creative gifts, with my beliefs. Often, I waffled between the two. Although I enjoyed the music, the lights, the energy, the crowds that roamed the streets of downtown West Palm Beach, I longed to reach them with the message of The Gospel, to let them know that The LORD Jesus Christ died on The Cross for their sins, and that, if they would repent (turn) from their sins and accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour, they would be saved and be able to go to Heaven after death. They needed to know. And I had a mini-'zine. So, I included a commentary in the FLO called "soulfood", articles written by my mom that tackled controversial subjects from a Christian perspective. That commentary drew more letters than anything else.

(Sometimes the easiest path becomes the most difficult once you're too far down the road to return. I knew my life downtown was fleeting. Stay in one place too long, and your sense of safety prevents you from moving.)

Of all the zines, Rage magazine, published by Danny Valencia, was the most professional and well written. Rage covered the music scene, both local and national, as well as offering interesting, philosophical commentary about a number of issues. Rage had terrific photography, too.

Hangouts downtown ...

The Wormhole, The Blue Bhudda, O'Shea's, Respectable Street, The Underground Coffeeworks, Sound Splash, Groove Music

Around 1994, an interesting array of shops opened downtown.

The Blue Bhudda

The Blue Buddha opened its doors on the 500 block of Clematis, west of the RR tracks, known for its cheaper rent and bohemian clientele. This thrift store offered cool fashions, handmade jewelry, free magazines, deco-discovered accessories found at local thrift stores and sold here for a few dollars more. The owner, Kathy Jarosz, an artist, deejay, clothing designer, would spin records inbetween showing customers around. Whenever you entered the Bhudda, you would be greeted by the

sweet smell of incense, and the groovy beats of trance music. Kathy's idea--to make a cool environment with hip one-of-a-kind clothing--was a welcome respite from the nearest mall. Whatever you bought there, you were pretty much guaranteed not to see it on anyone else. If you're a nonconformist, that's a good thing. This store, though, belonged in a gritty area of New York City.

On weekend nights, Kathy would move her turntables to the front sidewalk and local deejays would spin for hours. This usually drew punks, curbies (cool, urban, restless, boyish, independent, eclectic, shorthairs), ravers, and fashionistas to camp on the sidewalk and listen outside. Unfortunately, the under-18 crowd that that gathered drew the attention from bored cops, who used noise complaints as an excuse to harass Kathy and her friends. Eventually, they harassed her to the point that she closed.

The Wormhole

The Wormhole was like the Blue Bhudda, but organized a series of live events to draw people who had different interests. At a tiny stage, there was an open-mike night, poetry readings, concerts, music jams, and even Philosophy Night, a live talk show that featured a roundtable discussion on topics such as 'What happens after death?' helped make this store popular. My mom, Grace Kemp, a Bible teacher, and I came up with the Philosophy Night idea after Aaron Butler, a local musician and friend, died in a car accident.

In essence, The Wormhole was a combination thrift store, consignment shop that also sold cold drinks and offbeat magazines and 'zines (smaller, self-published zines).

A series of different rooms made the Wormhole live up to its name as an interesting place to navigate. The main room had clothing, books, couches, a countertop that held handmade jewelry. A smaller room, just off the main room, had vintage clothing and accessories. Most of this stuff was being sold on consignment. For a while, I even sold clothes there. Using what I'd learned from Kathy Jarosz, I bought interesting "ringer" T-shirts, the 80's-styled

T-shirts that have rings around the sleeves and the collar, for a buck and change at Goodwill, then resold them at The Wormhole for five dollars. I purchased sunglasses at the dollar store and sold them there for \$5, too. One night I saw Tenin, an Asian acquaintance at Respectable Street, wearing sunglasses that looked familiar.

"Where you get those?" I asked.

"The Wormhole." He said.

"Those are my sunglasses," I told him. "I sell those there."

"There cool. I like 'em." He said.

I made my own labels for the shirts on index card material, attaching them to the article of clothing with a stapler. Using a typewriter, I typed these words: Hybrid - combining the familiarity of the past with the restlessness of the future.

O'Shea's

O'Shea's became the favorite watering hole for writers, poets, artists, and musicians. Their intimate atmosphere and friendly Irish bartenders and waitresses still keeps the place popular today. For a while, it was home to reporters at The Palm Beach Post, who'd frequent it on weekend nights, holding fort at a patio table or two, after putting the paper to bed.

Respectable Street

Respectable Street Cafe, the tornado cave birthed from the mysterious wunderkid Rodney Mayo, is known as as the club that made Clematis Street more respectable. When Respectable's opened in 1987, downtown was synonymous with car vandalism, robberies, and drug sales. This smoky, progressive dance club served as the battery to help jumpstart the broken-down car known as downtown West Palm Beach. Perhaps it was more of a joke than anything else--Rodney naming his club Respectable

Street. But a few years later, investors descended on this area to buy up, clean up, raise rents, and lure businesses their way. Eventually, the Clematis Street and the surrounding area did become more respectable.

The Underground Coffeeworks

This coffeehouse lived up to its name. Underneath Narcisus, a fancy bistro on the southeast corner of Clematis and Narcisus, a coffeehouse was developed. The creators and owners, Deborah Magano and Shiela Volpe, lined the floor with old burlap coffeebags in lieu of carpet, set up a small stage and converted the three-room space into a library, art gallery, and dining area with live music. This was the place to be seen when you didn't look like you were looking to be seen, if you know what I mean. The menu offered tasty pita pizzas, salads, rich desserts, strong coffee, tea, and hot chocolate.

Reverse Suburban White Flight

The shops, the clubs, the restaurants, the stores, and the people that connected the dots of this burgeoning scene all served to create a kind of renaissance in downtown West Palm Beach. Quick to notice a trend, art magazines and newspapers put a magnifying glass on the developing anthill, creating a larger-than-life feeling for those that happened to fall under its focus.

During this time, grunge was becoming the norm. Being unkept was done intentionally. Kids of all ages sought a vibrant, urban aesthetic that they couldn't find in the suburbs with its certain future of mortgages, car payments, and television-scheduled sessions of canned laughter that led to comfortable hypnosis and a wakeup call fifty years later as they awoke from their life.

Air-conditioning was so late 80's. The mall was where the boring set went to shop for gear that promised them

a chance at hipness. This was the nineties and people were looking for something a bit more textural. A kind of gritty, urban aesthetic, the uncertain feeling that anything can happen, the near addictive smell of risk that inhabits the dark areas behind abandoned buildings. Downtown, littered with the loose change of America in search of kicks, promised them something different. Even if it didn't deliver, the visiting hordes that roamed the clubs, bars, and sidewalks, had to find out. Curiosity, like every other drug, may not cure the user but it will provide some interesting side effects.

In a kind of reverse suburban white flight, white kids from the suburbs, bored by the malls, and restless from hours of watching TV and playing video games, descended into downtown. Like everyone else, they were looking to belong, searching for excitement, connection, attention, and identity. They knew that at any given moment, anything could happen. The atmosphere shifted to adjust the incoming crowd. As the white folk sniffed around, the blacks headed west of I-95, making malls their new hangout du' jour.

The weight of the air in downtown had changed.

Developers discover downtown

Developers, who had dismissed downtown as a questionable area, saw potential. Crowds from the suburbs arrived to visit the exhibits of this urban zoo--black clad gothics, multicolored haired punks, sidewalk deejays, curbies (short-haired girls), poets, writers, hippies, the homeless, fast talking spangers (people asking for spare change) with their well rehearsed lines.

Mayor Nancy Graham, flew Starbucks executives to Clematis to lure them into bringing a Starbucks downtown. Sadly, the duo that opened The Underground Coffeeworks, a funky downlow coffee crib that was literally underground, received no help from the city whatsoever. How sad that a city won't help the locals establish a business, but will beg a corporate coffeehouse chain to bite.

Once downtown was discovered by namebrand stores, the interesting people, moved away in search for cheaper digs. As more of them

left the area, for one reason for another, I became less enchanted.

That group, a disjointed assembly of misfits that I felt drawn to, was one of my main reasons for publishing the FLO. They served as both a muse and an audience. And they were leaving.

That became one of the reasons for me to quit publishing the FLO, my monthly 'zine that focused on people downtown. Another major reason I quit publishing and writing the FLO came from the deaths of two brothers who were friends of mine--Aaron and David Butler. As they both frequented downtown, and partied there, and the FLO hyped the downtown area, I felt like an accomplice in their deaths. Aaron died in a freak accident truck surfing, pretending to surf on the top of a 24-foot box truck. He fell off and was run over. Earlier that morning, his dad had given him acid which he was on when the accident occurred. His brother, David, died six months earlier. After drinking at Lost Weekends, a pool hall, and driving his friend Michelle home, he flipped her SUV and was killed instantly. Michelle was in the hospital for months. He was drunk at the time.

West Palm Beach Independent Film Festival

Following the FLO's euthenasia, I started the West Palm Beach Independent Film Festival. Maverick realtor and historic preservationist Lawrence Corning helped incorporate this film festival.

He believed in it. He believed in me. Using his management skills, he assembled a board of directors--President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary. As the board members had different ideas for the direction of the festival, and I was the loose cannon (who solicited films, created a website, then secured sponsors, a venue, and a projector), it eventually collapsed under its own weight.

FLO (Flying Low On the radar) Film Fest

Deciding to fly solo, I started FLO (Flying Low On the radar) Film Fest, after the namesake of the FLO 'zine.

Like anything else, producing a film festival takes work and a plan. Anyone can put on a film festival if they want. All it takes

is a plan, lots of promotion, a website, securing sponsors, finding films/videos and finding a place to show them. By the third year, FLO Film Fest vacuumed 350 people through the tunnel of The Carefree Theatre to munch on warm Pop Tarts and watch films from all over the United States.

Judging from the crowd and their compliments, this was my most successful event, so far. Watching my friend Krissy Iverson as she sat behind a table of festival programs, I felt isolated.

Even though the film festival made me locally famous as I was surrounded by groups of acquaintances and strangers who recognized me from The Palm Beach Post story and shook my hand and told me "thanks" for bringing something cool to West Palm Beach, I felt a little lonely. Even though I was recognized by the crowd, it was a lonely crowd, and I felt like a collapsed star here to absorb their energy.

At the time, I had a crush on my hippie friend Krissy. Krissy and I would have gladly exchanged being intimate (rubbing shoulders, exchanging smiles and waves) with 350 strangers for a relationship with one person. How ironic. Of course, Krissy and I were friends and she had expressed that she regarded me as a friend, nothing more.

An ocean of whispers

At the film festival, among the shuffling crowd that roared in an ocean of whispers around me, I fought with melancholy. A week later, I found myself at the altar of Rock Church in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, crying softly in repentance to God, while Pastor Mike Toby gently placed his hand on my shoulder. Being a Christian, my involvement creating FLO Film Fest led to a moral dilemma as some of the films, the interesting ones, had R-rated content. Some of the most entertaining films, no matter how much we try to justify watching them, lower our moral standards. And once the roar of the crowd died down, I was left to deal with my own conscience. Being popular among non-Christians usually means you're not doing something right anyway.

"Friendship with the world is enmity with God ... "
That's somewhere in The Bible.

Other projects

Along the way, I helped create Spring Breakfast, an dance party alternative to Spring Break, Cinema Refuse, a weekly screening of short, independent videos, and Philosophy Night, an all ages talk show with audience participation that featured speakers Grace Kemp (Bible scholar, teacher, writer), Simon Glynn (philosophy teacher at Florida Atlantic University), and Lee Butler (architect, artist, visionary).

Why am I telling you this? So you'll understand where I'm at now. Generally speaking, everyone longs for the same things-- something to do, someone to love, basic shelter, food, a feeling of significance, being needed. Despite similar desires, however, we all travel different roads to get there.

Conquering inner space

All this time before, I was trying to conquer outer space--making sense of the world by creating and assembling projects through which to view it. In one way or another, we all do this, try to fit the pictures of the outside world into some pattern that we can understand. Some make telescopes. Some make magnifying glasses. Some make binoculars. Some make kaleidiscopes.

At this point, however, I'm trying to conquer inner space, understanding myself and what God wants for me, though reading The Bible, writing songs, poetry, plays, and journals. In journaling, I hope to document my life, with all of it's pitfalls and triumphs, vices and virtues, and to understand where I've been and where I'm headed.

Perhaps this journal will also entertain, or better yet, inspire others to lead a life that they can call their own. Because of a head injury I had years ago during a Halloween party, or perhaps in spite of it, my memory is pretty faulty. At least I can return to this journal, once it's finished, and remember what happened.

Life is to be lived. Life is not an apology. Vacation isn't a destination. Vacation is a state of mind.

Everything I used to believe has been blown to bits, smashed by the bulldozer of reality.

Medical Disestablishment

Take the medical establishment. Did you know that the third leading cause of death is hospital error, due to misprescriptions or from operating table mistakes.

About 250,000 people die every year, from mistakes and misdiagnosis made at hospitals. Yet, not a peep from the mainstream media, a conglomerate that is run by ads funded, in a large part, from pharmaceutical companies. Truth is the backseat driver to commerce. Whoa.

It's ironic that marijuana is illegal. Why not medical procedures, well intended but often not needed, and hospital blunders that cause suffering and death? Why is alcohol legal? Alcohol is attributed to over 400,000 deaths a year, from drunken driving to alcohol related crimes. 400,000. That's nearly half-a-million. The health disestablishment. The medical disestablishment.

The FBI

Then there's the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the FBI. They keep records of stolen cars, but they don't keep track of stolen children. That's because, according to former FBI director Ted Gunderson, the FBI kidnaps them.

The FBI, according to Gunderson, kidnaps children and sells to a large base of clients, many top government officials. According to Gunderson, a child slavery ring is in effect between the western states of Nevada and California and the eastern states of Virginia (District of Columbia) and New York.

Lots of the kids are the same ones that disappear every year. Many are turned over to Satanic cults and used in ritual sex, torture,

and sacrifice.

Over half-a-million kids disappear every year.

Where do they go? If you doubt the veracity of what you're reading, go to www.google.com and type in "Ted Gunderson FBI". If you look hard enough, you'll find the truth. Then, maybe your world will crumble around you as the foundations of what you thought was true collapse under the weight of the lies that they uphold.

Before you do any research, though, keep this in mind-the more you know, the more responsible you become. Omniscience is the zenith of responsibility. When you see people willing to get arrested for what they believe, don't ask yourself why they're in jail, ask yourself why you are not in jail. Are you willing to suffer for what you believe? If not, do you really believe it?

It's easy to take the low-road, that's why it's so crowded. The high road is littered with the decaying souls of prisoners of conscience that spend their days in solitary confinement in facilities that lie outside the view of mainstream society.

The Persecuted Church

What about the persecuted church? According the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, 165,000 Christians were murdered for their faith in Jesus Christ in the year 2,000 alone. In the year 2003, it was estimated that 150,000 died. 165,000. 150,000. Does anyone care?? Is anyone, especially Christians, willing to show that they care by doing something about it? Like living cheaper and sending the excess to support the families and relatives of martyred missionaries, or supporting these missionaries themselves that face persecution daily?

Hello!! Anybody out there? How about forgoing that Martha Stewart kitchenware and skipping on the nambebrand boxer shorts, then sending the money you save to Christian Aid, Voice of the Martyrs, Gospel for Asia, Open Doors, International Christian Concern, Strategic World Impact, Samaritan's Purse?

Christianity is a verb, not a noun. Christianity is a conflict sport. As Christians, let's do something for the next world.

If you're not a Christian, repent (turn) from your sins, then ask Jesus Christ to be The Lord and Savior of your life, and to come into your life.

Make sure your next World is Heaven

Make sure that the next world is Heaven, because if you don't go to Heaven, you're going to Hell. Live for Jesus Christ. If you ignore Jesus in this life, you're going to have Hell to pay in the next one. This life is just training wheels for the next one. Jesus died for us. Can't we live for Him? I'm not talking guilt, I'm talking about conviction. And the way I see it, conviction is when you take those guilty feelings and do something positive with them. Conviction is guilt with a purpose.

At the end of the day, man, it's all frustration on a deaf ear. From cradles to classrooms to cars to cubicles to coffins, we spend our whole lives in boxes, only to end up in one. But, if you're willing to step outside the box and live for Jesus Christ, you will live a fulfilled life.

It may not be the easiest life, but it will be the best life you can live. By living for Jesus Christ, you are storing up treasures in Heaven, where they will have eternal value.

If you haven't yet turned your life over to Jesus, I urge you to do it. Don't wait. He'll save you from Hell, give you a place in Heaven, and He will always be there. Trust me. Jesus gives life more abundantly. Don't waste your time working for gold, because that's just Heaven's asphalt.

Consider eternity when you reach for your wallet. Don't spend all your money accumulating earthly treasures that rot, spend your money on eternal things.

We can't take it with us, but it seems as if we all die trying.
Ever seen a coffin attached to a U-haul? How about a hearse
stacked with luggage and furniture on top? Neither have I.
You get the picture.

Discover the talents that God has given you, then use them to
glorify Him. Use your time, talents, money to glorify God. This
life is short, eternity is long. Live for the next world.
Make sure it's Heaven.

God Bless You,

kris kemp
May 2003

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Suspended adolescence

Here I am in a state of suspended adolescence, a restless 34-
year old guy roaming the forgotten tomorrows, dropping hints,
retrieving clues.

This time, however, I will throw the hat over the fence.
This time, I am leaving. I am leaving Florida,
particularly downtown West Palm Beach,
an area I've called home for 10 years, from 1993 to 2003.

Downtown, once a magnet for poets, writers, musicians, artists, has
become over run by suits with cell phones, bankers and developers.
In a pursuit of a bigger dollar, they've turned a unique area into an outdoor
shopping mall, a waking, credit-card nightmare, a Disneyland without
the cool rides and exhibits. Call it progress, if you want. But
progress has no conscience. This area has become sedate. And sedation
leaves little room for growth. It's not even cool enough to be
called boring.

In a few days, I am leaving to camp the dry and rocky wilderness of Utah with my friend Faith Maria Nelson, a Christian and a former Jehovah's Witness.

About a week ago, Faith asked me if I wanted to go with there with her. As work is slowing down since we're approaching summer, and I have not been out West, I told her yes. If nothing else, this is an opportunity to travel and live somewhere new. My plans are to go to Utah, then Truckee, California with Faith, then get a restaurant job while I'm out there.

"You don't need a place to live," Faith explained. "We can camp. The weather's great there and we'll be near a fresh water lake."

The idea sounds promising. I've always wanted to camp, although I've never really gone. I've never had anyone to go with, either. Faith's like an orphaned sister to me. This should be interesting.

Once I arrive and get a job, I plan to part ways with Faith. She's weird, laconic, and a bit of a sociopath. This trip should be interesting.

Faith has traveled across the United States five times. She is industrious, clever, and capable. And she's very, very quiet.

Besides a duffel bag of clothes, I'm bringing my journals, notebooks of songs and poems, and my keyboard. Along the way, we'll camp. Once we arrive into Utah, Faith says there's a resort to work at where we can camp at the base of a mountain. Shelters are melting.

Time is the culprit

Two weeks ago, I was standing in line at Subway. Noticing the nametag stickers on the women beside me, I queried: "Are you on jury duty."

One replies: "We're on break."

"Me too." I reply.

"You have an appointment?" One asks.

"Yeah," I nod, smiling. "I'm running from death. Time is the culprit. It's pursuing me."

Her face turns to stone, then she glances away to her friends.

Silence.

What's with Floridians? Why are they always so sketched out? Maybe they've eaten too much carbs or something.

Dumpster Diving

The following is what Faith typed on my computer.

"Come read what I wrote about you," she says. Here it is.

"Kris Kemp was once an important writer for the south Florida film festival, but was bumped down to being a dumpster diver by the evil witch Alan. His positivity for the love of dumpster diving inspired him to write the screenplay "Dumpster Diver - The Musical." Hopefully, this musical will inspire him to kill the evil witch Alan and conserve the earth while there's still life on it."

The Alan she is referring to is Alan Patrusевич, an artist, writer, and antique restoration expert that allowed Faith to live at the warehouse that he rents out to artists, writers, and musicians. After some incidents between her, Alan, and other tenants, Faith was kicked out.

Saturday, 2am, May, 2003

I'm breaking down the line at America Restaurant when I hear, "Kris, Kris!" and see Faith peeking her adorbalicious head--a beautifully messy mop of short blond hair, large green eyes, and mischevious smile--into the kitchen from the dining area. With her somewhat exaggerated features, she almost looks like a cartoon rat, the

cute kind you might see in a Disney movie. After making her announcement, she cautiously scampers a few feet into the kitchen.

"I'm not allowed back here," she giggles. "What time do you get off work?" She asks.

"We're open 'til 3, Faith. I'm sorry," I explain. "I forgot."

"That's okay. I'll sit at the bar. I'll get a glass of wine."

"Are you sure?" I ask. "Yeah," she says.

"Thanks Faith."

At 3:15 am, I hear someone whisper my name. I glance over the line and see Faith standing in the kitchen.

"Hey Faith," I smile. "I'll be ready to go in 5-to-7 minutes."

"Okay," she replies, then slinks out to the front.

After work, I saunter up to the bar where Faith sits perched, drinking a glass of red wine. "Let's go to to Respectables," she suggests. "I want you to sneak me in. I'm soooo drunk," she stammers.

"You want me to finish that wine?" I gesture to the glass of merlot. By now, we're walking out the door and she still has the glass of wine in her hand. She even said goodbye to the bartender, Michelle, who is in full view.

"I don't know if I should drink it," I cautioned.

"Why not?" She chirped.

"Because I'll wanna make out with you," I said hesitantly.

"Slam it," she commands.

I throw it back in one fast gulp. Then, I set the glass atop a potted plant outside Tommy Bahamas restaurant. She takes the glass and, without even looking behind her, tosses it to her left. A loud tinkling is heard as it shatters into many pieces.

"I love the sound of breaking glass," Faith says, a broad grin erupting on her face, giggling. Then she leaps into my arms and I catch her petite frame and kiss her on the cheek multiple times. She's like a kid when she's drunk. She giggles, wiggles herself free, then skips away, walking backwards and looking at me with a big smile on her face. She returns beside me and we continue up the street, walking from the 100 block of Clematis to the 500 block, west of the railroad tracks, to the parking lot east of Badcocks Furniture where the car is parked.

"I wanna go to Respectables," she blurts. "Can you sneak me in the back?"

How can I say no to this drunk butterfly, this poster child for, and member by default of, the Leftover Generation? Five minutes later, we're climbing the back fence that leads into the open air storage area for Respectable Street Cafe. The fence is used to this kind of abuse, bent at the top, nearly broken over the years by people avoiding the door charge or refusing to sit outside because they're underage. I've scaled the fence multiple times, but this time it's different.

Last week, Faith was banned for life from Respectable Street Café, a progressive dance club and bar. Her crime? Punching some dude in the face that was crowding her on the dance floor. He punched her in the temple, in return. But since she drew blood, Faith explains, she was punished.

I climb over the fence and wait for her to scale it from the other side. Carefully, she crawls up the other side, then straddles it in the middle while it wobbles precariously.

"Just drop Faith, I have you," I reassure her, holding my hands at her waist. She releases herself while I gently lower her to the ground.

"Hang on, lemme see if Chris the bouncer is back here," I caution, as I peek into the entrance to the back patio. I don't see him. "Alright, follow me."

I walk into the back patio while she follows close behind. Once we enter the club, she skips onto the dance floor and disappears into the swaying, sweaty forest of bodies clad in black. "Lust for Life", by Iggy Pop, is playing, an appropriate anthem for this excursion. Tired from working an 8-hour shift, I sink into a couch and try to spot her, watching to make sure she doesn't start a fight. I feel a hand on my shoulder and turn. It's her ... Faith. She comes closer to me.

"I'm trying to watch for Chris (Sargent) the bouncer. I saw him come in," she says. I pull her close. "I'll watch for him," I reassure her.

Minutes later, Chris taps her on the shoulder and waves her over. Then, he turns and walks toward the door. I hug her, saying, "I'll got out the back way, so walk around. I'll meet you." She leaves. I stroll out back, climb the fence, hop over it, and walk through the alley toward my car. It's a 1995 blue Suzuki Swift hatchback. As I'm turning around to exit the parking lot, I see Faith walk up. I let her in and drive to my apartment. She's sleeping now.

Sunday morning, May, 2003

Today, or this afternoon rather, I work from 4pm to 11pm. Tomorrow, Faith and I head west. Our plan is to sleep in the car while driving out there, then camp once we get to Utah. She said there are resorts that stay open, during the summer, for parties and banquets. Some of the resorts feature employee housing--condos--for as cheap as \$125 a month, if you share a room. Faith said she will teach me how to snowboard.

"I'm a good snowboarder," she says flatly. "I'll teach you how

to snowboard. You'll like it. You know how to skate and surf, so it'll be easy for you."

We'll see what happens when we arrive. Even if she is using me for a ride to Utah, she's still agreeing to pay for half the gas, showing me some cool locations and campsites, and helping me to leave Florida.

I feel like this area, South Florida, straightjackets me with its complacency. It's nearly suffocating. There's so much wealth here, without conscience. Watching the large number of war protestors in New York City and San Francisco and Oregon encouraged me that there is hope for America, that people do care. Seeing them suffer for something they believe in, endure rubber bullets, tear gas and the blow of batons by overzealous cops angered me. Watching their persistence, though, makes me long to join them. Those three cities, however, remain cost prohibitive at this point. Maybe I'm being romantic, but I've always wanted to find people like that-people willing to suffer for their beliefs-and join them. Perhaps Utah or Colorado will be a good halfway point.

Dear LORD JESUS,
Please be with me on this trip. Connect me to others that I can reach for YOU. Help Faith to become nicer. Thanks in advance. You know what to do.

Help me to live for YOU alone, die for YOU alone and produce these songs to encourage Christians to live radically for YOU alone. Thanks. Amen.

The adventure in living is inversely proportional to the level of uncertainty involved.

Sunday night, May, 2003

I called Faith tonight from work, America restaurant where I'm a cook. The female cook that was scheduled to relieve me walked in sobbing, shaking, and fighting back tears. When I finally got her to talk, she told me that an old friend of hers had died in a car wreck the night before, and she had just heard about it from another friend.

Chef Bruce asked me if I could work for her.

"I can stay for a little while longer, but I can't work her shift, because I have a commitment," I told him, referring to my departure with Faith. "Can I make a phone call?" I asked him.

"Go ahead."

I walk into the tiny office, close the door, and call my apartment.

"Faith, I'm gonna have to work a little later," I said. "This girl showed up at work and she's all upset because her friend just died, so I just wanted to let you know."

"Okay. That's cool," she answered in a stale, nasaly monotone. A moment later, her tone changed. "You know, Kemp. You keep pulling the same shit. I wanted to leave three days ago. I could've left last week on the Greyhound, but you wanted to go. I would've been gone by now."

"Listen, Faith. I'll talk to the chef and see if I can leave sooner. Then, I'll call you back in ten minutes."

I told Chef Bruce the situation and he said that the cook was settled down and that I didn't need to stay late.

Then, about ten minutes later, I called Faith. There was no answer, so I left a message. After waiting, I called again. Still, no answer. Growing more worried as time passed, I paced the sidewalk in front of the restaurant, beside the valet parkers, hoping Faith would show up to give me a ride home,

as she said she would when she dropped me off earlier.

After a half hour passed, I decided to walk home. Usually, I ride my bike from America restaurant, pedaling fast along the street and heading west on Clematis to Tamarind, then south on Tamarind until it crosses Okeechobee and becomes Parker. At Parker, I ride the sidewalk through Howard Park (on the southeast corner of Parker and Okeechobee). But this was different. This time, I walked.

When you walk at night, you become aware of how vulnerable you really are, a slow moving target for shouts, tossed garbage, or a candidate for a potential street buy. After years of riding a bike, I feel safer on two wheels than on four. Walking though, is an entirely different experience, especially when you're walking in Florida at night. You feel like you're the last person on earth. Everyone's riding in cars and you're left out in the cold, pretending not to notice the stares from people sitting at red lights. Almost an hour after beginning my trek, I arrived home.

The car is gone. The apartment is locked. The TV is blaring. The lights are on. My mind is reeling. Where is she? She left! Unbelievable!

I sit outside on the front porch, head in my hands, trying to keep my skull from splitting open as panic and frustration approach from each hemisphere like boxers in a ring. A large truck parks in front of me and Ryan Cedar gets out. He strolls toward me slowly, with a smile. Ryan's a laid back guy, a 26-year old truck driver and music fan that lives at his parents house out in Wellington. I first met him when I lived at the warehouse, the hut, at 502 Kanuga Street a few blocks north. He had sought me out after some kids downtown told them that another street witnesser lived in this arts center, the hangar. He had known about this place from other occasions, and showed up to find me.

Every so often, we hang out downtown to do one of three things-- skateboard, pass out Gospel tracts and talk to people about Jesus Christ, or dance at Respectable Street Cafe.

"What's goin on?" He drawls slowly in his signature low voice.

I explain my dilemma. He listens carefully. Since the door is locked the only way into the apartment is through the outside, second-story window.

Beside the window is the roof for the front porch, which has its own window. As I've broken into the apartment before, the drill is common. After prying off the screen, I slip through the window and onto the porch roof. Ryan stands inside with his hand holding my left hand as I lean off the roof's edge and stretch my right hand to break through the screen to the apartment. Throwing my body off the roof, I land at the window ledge, then hoist my body over, descending into the living room on all fours.

I begin surveying the scene. The TV is on and the volume is blaring. Cautiously, I walk to the TV and turn it off. Then I turn on all the lights and look for clues.

No note. No scrawled explanation discovered in a crumpled wad of paper. Nothing. I can't believe this is happening. Everything I valued--my journals, lyrics and chords to songs, the treatment, step outline, and beginning first draft of a musical that I'm writing--is in that car. And that car is with Faith. And Faith is ... where?

Ryan reassures me that perhaps she went to a friend's house tonight and I'll hear from her tomorrow. I hope that is true. He leaves. I sit there, angry and puzzled, then go to bed, hoping I'll wake up from this uncertain dream.

Monday morning, May 17, 2003

I wake up and stare at the empty ceiling. The apartment is so quiet it's deafening. The walls close in on me. I can hear my entire apartment roaring in laughter as it shrinks to the size of a tomb.

God, help me. Please. Are you listening?

I see sparks of light, tiny balls of glowing, white light flash before my eyes. What's going on? Where is she? Where's the car and my belongings? Where?

Why? Everything I owned of value, both monetarily and otherwise, was in the car, my keyboard, songs, poems, journals, clothes, shoes. Why'd she hafta leave?!

Where is she? I need to know. Forget the car. I value the stuff in the car, especially journals and music notes and songs. They are virtually irreplaceable. The entire day, I sat in the apartment and stewed, pacing restlessly, waiting, hoping she'd call, hoping for something.

Slowly, I was losing my mind: talking to myself, crying, laughing, giggling, cursing, apologizing, reasoning, praying. As the hours passed, I felt helpless, frantic, alone, restless, full of energy yet paralyzed, drowning in doubt. To ameliorate my energy levels, I did a few hundred pushups, in sets of fifty or one-hundred. That did little to calm the gnawing uncertainty that coursed through my veins.

ARGGGGG

Now I'm thinking back to some other incidents, other journal entries that involved Faith. For an understanding of her behaviour, and our relationship, they are included here.

May, 2003

My friend, Ann Powell, a Christian poet and writer that lives in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, invited me to a passion play at her church. The performance is a musical about the life, death, and resurrection of The Lord Jesus Christ. I call five or six people but, as it's last minute, no one can go with me. Then I call Faith. Her phone is disconnected.

Deciding to go alone, I shower, dress, jump in my car and head north. On the way there, I decide to invite Faith. She's living in a second-floor apartment between Olive and Flagler, in the backyard of a larger house that backs up to a narrow one-way street. The fence surrounding the house is locked, preventing access to the stairway, so I toss rocks up at her window. No one appears. As I return to the car, the front door opens.

"Kemp," she says, sounding like the air from a deflating bike tire.

"You wanna go see a play with me? It's free. It's a passion play about the life of Christ." I explain.

She pauses, then says: "Sure."

She gets dressed, then we drive to the church--Covenant Community International--off Northlake, in Palm Beach Gardens. On the way there, she shares this crazy story of how she got banned for life from Respectable Street, a dance club on Clematis.

"I was being pushed and shoved," she said. "So I hit him in the face. And these people aren't even regulars there," she whined. "I've been going there for ten years. He punched me in the temple." She pauses. "But he drew blood, so I was the one who got in trouble. Chris Sargent is the worst bouncer in the whole world. That's Rodney's (the owners) problem. He got too big and now he has all these employees that aren't good. Look at America. The wait staff there is horrible."

For the most part, I listened.

"I burned all my artwork," she said.

"Why?"

"I was upset. Now, I'm happy. But I'm still upset, if you know what I mean."

"Yeah."

"I tried to commit suicide last night."

"What?!" I stammered.

"I don't want to talk about it." She says flatly.

"Of course you do. That's why you brought it up."

"I don't want to talk about it," she repeated.

By now, we were at the church. We exited the car and smiled for the greeters, then found a place to sit in the audience. I looked over the program while Faith stared ahead, remaining laconic and robot-like. Neither of us spoke for a while. My curiosity to her last revelation got the best of me.

"Why'd you try to commit suicide last night?" I asked Faith.

"I don't want to talk about it," Faith answered abruptly.

"I'm in a church for Christ's sake."

May 14, 2003

I'm at the Lake Worth Trail Drive inn, sitting in the car watching "X-Men" on a blank white screen. Because it's not dark enough, no picture can be seen, only blurs and shapes. Still, lotsa cars have arrived in order to get a good spot for the next feature, The Matrix Reloaded. It's the movie of the summer, propelled by an avalanche of hype. The movie starts at 10pm.

Faith, to put it bluntly, is weird. Before I became part of her orbit as a friend, I used to think she was faking paranoia in order to justify her selfish and manipulative behavior. But now, I'm not so sure.

"Kris," she says softly but firmly. "You're a pimp and you're trying to get me to turn into a hooker. Did you

tell Rodney I'm going with you?"

"No."

"Then I guess we shouldn't go."

"Most people," I explain, "don't like you, Faith. That's why I haven't told them you're going with me."

"Most people," she defends, "don't even know me. That's cuz these people are all about power, and control. And if they can't control you, then they have no use for you."

I have the feeling that if I'm not crazy yet, I may be halfway there by the time this trip is over.

"You gotta go to Utah now," Faith concludes. "Now that you've pawned all your stuff."

"Yeah, good point," I remark, trying to encourage the tiny crumbs of sanity that fall from her mouth.

"This country keeps getting smaller and smaller," she says.

"Why?" I ask.

"Because I've travelled it five times."

"Does it make you want to settle down?"

"It makes me want to travel more, because I know it better. Plus I saved six hours travelling from Michigan to Mexico."

Monday afternoon

At this point, I'm still not sure what to do. Perhaps she will call, and apologize. Okay, maybe I'm reaching. Maybe, as Ryan suggested, she got antsy and jumped. I'll wait for two days before calling the police. Unaware of anything at this point, I'll still

give her the benefit of a doubt. After all, her name is Faith.
Her name, though, belies her. Doubt would be more appropriate.

special connection

he said: you shouldn't trust her
i said: we got a special connection
she's evil and i'm codependent
she's the object of my affection

i'm a junkie; she's the drug that's in
control corrupted from the inside out,
infected to my soul she's a habit that
I still want to believe
a quiet bunny rabbit, you find hard to leave

my descents begun
i should run away, but i don't
it's happened before, it'll happen again
i should end it, but i don't

i feel like i'm dying in slow motion
holding out for air while sinking in the ocean
you were the anchor i trusted
the warning signs you left have rusted

Monday afternoon, May 2003
What can you do?

1. Wait for phone call
2. Call police
3. Pray & Praise God

What's the worst that can happen?

1. Have to ride a bike. Done that.
Get a job in WPB, FL. Done that.

What are you gonna do?
Pray, praise God, wait for phone call.

Dear LORD JESUS CHRIST,
Help Faith to feel the weight of a guilty conscience to the point
of unbearable pain until she calls me and returns with the car.
Thanks.
In JESUS' Name,
Amen :-)

name: Faith Maria Nelson
D.O.B.: February 25, 1972 car tag #: H76 EAR
vin #: 2S2AB21H056609051
desc: 1995 Blue Suzuki Swift, 2-door hatchback

Local police: 653-3400

Eric's advise: Call police and explain that "her & vehicle
are missing, wondering if she's okay", then "see what they
say."

Guesswork ... Faith's journey

Sunday midnight - Monday midnight: 24, drive 14 hours
Monday midnight - Tuesday midnight: 24, drive 14 hours
Tuesday midnight - Wednesday midnight: 24, drive 14 hours

Driving time to Salt Lake City, Utah: 45 hours

Barring any unforeseen circumstances, Faith, if she's driving
west, should be arriving in Salt Lake City, Utah on Wednesday,
between midnight and 10am.

Dear LORD JESUS, Please have her call me when she arrives.
Please have her leave the car with the contents at a place
where I can get it.
Thank YOU, LORD.
Amen.
Love, Kris.

I made a website, parked at: www.angelfire.com/alt/faithnelson
username: faith nelson / password: y2ky2k

I purchased www.faihtnelson.com for \$15 a year at directnic.com, then redirected this domain name to the URL at [angelfire](http://angelfire.com). The site is a one pager with pix of Faith, the car make, model and tag #, and police report case #. Yes. I called the police. My only choice was to file for Grand Theft Auto. According to Officer Scott Utech, missing persons reports get lost in the shuffle of more serious crimes.

Monday morning, May 18, 2003

I wanted to believe that kindness, offered unconditionally, would smother the fires of evil. But in the end, I learned that you cannot change people, only your proximity to them.

My closeness with Faith, an evil and manipulative girl, got me burned. She has my car. And I don't know where she is. In the car is my keyboard and musical notes which, to me, are worth more than the car. They are irreplaceable. She's somewhere out west, probably Salt Lake City, Utah, the Four Corners, or maybe Reno, Nevada. Who knows.

Initially, she wanted to go to Utah. One afternoon, she asked: "You wanna go to Utah with me. I think you'd like it. There's a lot of athletes out there. It's really beautiful."

Because I've wanted to leave Florida for a few years, and the promise of adventure piqued my interest, I told her yes.

"Yeah. I think I would like to go to Utah with you."

"I want to leave as soon as possible." She said.

"Hmm. Okay. It'll take about a week."

"Can you leave any sooner?" She asks.

"No. A week."

Then ...

She leaves without me the night we were planning to split. Gets antsy and jumps. Now, the car and everything that I value as far as material acquisitions are gone. My keyboard, musical compositions for Dumpster Diver ... the musical, over fifty songs and poems, duffel bag of clothes, all my CD's.

I'll file a police report, and when she's caught, she'll face jail time. She leaves me no options. By deciding to go with her, I provided her an opportunity. Going into this, I knew there were risks. But the fact that she did have experience camping and travelling convinced me that the risks would be outweighed by the sheer adventure. Now, another kind of adventure will unfold. If, as I wrote earlier in this journal, the adventure in living is inversely proportional to the level of uncertainty involved, then this experience may prove to be an extraordinary tale. Time will tell.

If you read Pictures from the Leftover Generation, my journal that documents life among artists and slack happy campers that ride out the millenium within the aluminum cave of a quonet hut, you'll read about Faith Nelson. Her meek and quiet behaviour drew me to her. Eventually, I saw the destruction that she left in her wake, as she moved from job to job, always blaming her employer for some transgression, and from living one place to another, faulting her roommates for "trying to turn me into a hooker". Still, I saw her as both a friend, albeit an interesting and slightly paranoid one, and girl that was running scared-- someone I could save.

For someone as codependent as me, the hut as it's affectionately known, also known as the warehouse, the Unarmed Underground Art Centre, Flamingo Arts Studio, the "area 51 of the arts scene" as Hap Erstein concluded in

The Palm Beach Post, provided the perfect experience as it was a revolving door of emotional cripples and self-absorbed castaways that have, more often than not, chosen to go AWOL (away without leave) from civilization.

The warehouse was a big magnet for the loose change of America--the drifters, petty con artists, chemically dependent artists, trauma victims, dropouts, urban campers, hippies, and outsiders (like me). Living there was an artistic experience. While others painted, I chose to write about what I saw. I documented this human traffic, sorted it out in my head, allowed it to distill, then pushed out the results through through the tip of this pen--a Pilot Precise V7 Rolling Ball. I'm lost without a good pen.

For me, writing is a way to connect with the world. My mom, a gifted writer and Bible scholar/teacher, remarked that she literally breaks out into a cold sweat when she's missing a pen. Without one, how can you cross your t's, dot your i's and put a period at the end of every day?

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! Hah, hah, hah, hah, hah. You thought you knew me, but not many people do, although they assume a lot.

That's fine with me. They can draw their own conclusions, then return to their suburban zoos behind their gated communities, and slowly fossilize into the sofa as they channel surf among the hundreds of shows that peddle entertainment vociferously while gingerly pickpocketing the conscience. The remote control is popular for the same reason the mouse (computer) is popular. They both allow you to be in control, or feel like it anyway. Still, is anyone in control?

I believe we are in control, even though many, myself included, remain in self destructive patterns because we are familiar with them. And familiarity, no matter how much we suffer for it, is a hard friend to leave.

My familiar pattern involves helping people, leaving reason at the door and hoping against hope that kindness, given unconditionally and in large doses, will overwhelm the darker persons motives.

Now, I'm beginning to understand the importance of consequence and punishment. A minority of events and circumstances happen purely by chance. People reap the consequences of their own decisions, no more, no less.

Despite their finger-pointing, they've laid their own track, charted their own course. When the train passes, beckoning me like a carnie using trigger-worded hypnosis, I usually run alongside it and jump on, seeing where it will eventually end up. My curiosity strongarms my sense of reason, then laughs when I'm left in the dust. This time, it happened again. On the road of life, human nature has no warning signs.

Still, I wanted to believe, so much that I ignored all the signs. The glimmer of kindness that I saw in Faith remained the burning embers that I continued to blow on, waiting for the fire to catch.

Ironically, her name is Faith. And foolishly, I put too much faith in her, wanting to believe, despite her bitter, antagonistic attitude, that a geographical change would reveal a kinder spirit. In the end, I was robbed by my own faith in people, carelessly rolled by a quiet girl without a gun. She has my car, my keyboard, my music journals, and is heading west across the United States.

Disappointed is how I feel more than anything else. This was going to be the great American road trip, my vacation, exploring the West with my strange, laconic friend. Instead, it's become a nightmare of uncertainty and a waiting game. Shelters are melting.

If Faith heads straight to Salt Lake City, Utah, she'll arrive Wednesday morning. If she continues to Reno, Nevada, she'll arrive Thursday morning or afternoon, depending on how much sleep time she needs.

What she has done, unless she offers cash retribution for gas and the contents of the car, constitutes auto theft and possession of stolen property. This is a felony, as the stolen items are worth more than several hundred dollars. She'll sit in a jail until being sentenced by a judge.

Frustrated by the current circumstances, I can see that naivety got the worst of me. Her indifference, her criminal behaviour, will come to haunt her.

Faith, if you can hear me, I know you're scared, driving west, the mountains suffocating you inside my car, the music loud to drown out your heartbeat. You're accelerating into the darkness, naked, like a snail without a shell. Outside, you are quiet, hard, tough. Inside, you've a room without windows, aching from doubt, dying from isolation and self inflicted games of solitaire as you've pushed everyone away. Call me. Tell me where I can pickup my car and belongings. And I will forgive you for the stressful situation you've put me in. Please. There is still hope. Your name alone proves that. All you have to do is call, Faith. Let me know where you are. Leave the car, the key, and my stuff inside. That's it.

Instead, I have to resort to investigation. Why? Why? Why?

I used to think the human race was worth saving. That's why I liked the book *The Catcher in the Rye* much, by J.D. Salinger. In the book, Holden Caulfield, the main character through which the story is told, imagines himself as a catcher in a field of rye, catching children and adolescents in order to save them from growing up and becoming adults. I feel like I have to save people. I guess it's easier to try and save others than saving yourself. Another writer I relate to is Jack Kerouac, the French Canadian word junkie that became the bard of the beat generation. All around him, Kerouac saw

diamonds in the rough, bottom feeders who remained reticent despite their circumstances. To Kerouac, these people exhibited "beatific" qualities--similar to the beatitudes of Jesus Christ. On the margins of society, an entire subculture, a generation existed that was beat. The beat generation. Hounding Kerouac was deep seeded guilt that had taken root from his early years in the Catholic church. Sustaining him was the unconditional love of his mother which, over the years, became the embrace that smothers. Still, Kerouac followed his wanderlust, travelling, meeting the disenfranchised urban pioneers that congregate the busstops of America--bars, rundown restaurants, curbs and crashpads--and writing about his experiences. Like him, I feel like an outsider. (Perhaps this stemmed from my inability to relate to peers during my high school years. I'm not sure.) Like him, I feel the urge to write about my experience and document the adventures of those in my orbit. Like him, I see diamonds in the rough, people whose visions burn beyond this world and disappear into the next, people hungry to live, joyful, expressive, and barely held down by gravity. To me, those people are campfires--a source of heat and light--which draw audiences both small and large for conversation, reflection, hotdog roasting, and marshmallow warming. Without them, the world would be a colder, more darker place. Move to close to these falling stars, though, and you're likely to get burned.

Yes, I used to think the world was worth saving. But now, I'm beginning to have my doubts. Of course, the human race is worth saving. However, if they neglect the liferaft of salvation, they will drown. Sadly, so many people ignore The Gift of God--The Lord Jesus Christ--Who shed his blood on The Cross, died, then resurrected three days later and now sits at the right hand of The Throne of God. Foolishly, they choose temporary earthly pleasures over eternal Heavenly ones. I can't save anyone. I can only point them in the direction of The One that saved me. After that, it's their decision.

How foolish I was to think I could be a martyr for someone who wasn't even asking for my help. I've got to quit being so codependent with selfish people. Such action results, usually, in my kindness being abused and unappreciated. Even Beatta, a Polish girl that lived at the hut recognized this trait. "Kris," she admonished. "Your problem is that you care too much. My problem is that I don't care at all."

LORD,

Help me to retrieve the car, keyboard & music so i can wander west ... Frisco, Seattle, Portland, Eugene, then visit Lawrence, Kansas, Minneapolis & St. Paul, Minnesota, onto Athens, Georgia, then Williamsburg and Bushwick, Brooklyn, as well as Buffalo, New York.

Amen :-)

Tuesday, May 12, 2003

Everything collapses around me ...

1992 or 1993 - Jumped, knocked in the head by a group of thugs. Aaron and David Butler were with me. Aaron was sick with inflammation in his glands that led to a swollen neck. He was too weary to fight back. David retreated. One of the thugs approaches me, looks me square in the face, then swings his fist around, hitting me in the side of the head. My ears were ringing. They were teens who appeared to be Puerto Ricans. They referred to each other as "my niggaz".

1995 - Carjacked at gunpoint at the intersection of Quadrille & Hibiscus, while waiting for the train to pass. The perpetrator was a black guy with a gun.

1995 - Robbed in South Beach, Miami, when Jonathon the Britt

brought some girls home one night. The next morning, he awoke to find them gone. Also gone was my computer and CD collection--- a myriad of obscure imports, stuff like Lush and The Verve, that had taken a year to collect.

1996 - Robbed when I lived at 307 South Sapodilla, just south of Evernia, on the east side of the street. Amy Burst, this beautiful junkie that I wanted to save, sold my mountain bike to buy money for heroin. The alcoholic roommate, Paul, stole \$200 cash that had been given to me as a gift. When I asked him about it, he became belligerent, acting guilty as charged.

1997 - Bikejacked while pedaling over the Williamsburg Bridge, leaving Manhattan and returning to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, after a night of work. A large black man slams me and the bike up against the railing. I look over my shoulder at the water a few hundred feet below. He's 6'3, heavysset, with a brick in one hand, a knife in the other. He rode off with my bike, then returned because he wanted my backpack. I yelled for help at the people ascending the bridge from the Manhattan side. Then the thief slowly rides off into the darkness towards Brooklyn.

2003 - Car vandalized in May. All four tires slashed and deflated. Antenna broken. Drivers side mirror knocked off, including the hood, covering the mirror. Front engine hood dented. Shards of broken beer bottles on roof. Cost of replacing tires with used ones: nearly \$200 dollars. Thankfully, mechanic/friend Mike Smith gave me a \$40 dollar discount, not charging me for the valve stems.

2003 - Car stolen by friend Faith Nelson. She's heading to Utah, Nevada, or Truckee, California. I hope she calls. I need this car, especially what's inside of it.

What's the point in owning anything? It all gets stolen anyway. Why bother buying anything? Why bother accumulating material acquisitions? From my experiences, I feel like owning anything just leaves me a target. When it comes down to it, if it costs money, it's not worth buying.

Finding Faith

I'm gonna try and contact Faith Nelson's mom, in Michigan, to see if she's heard from her. I suspect that Faith will call her mom in order to get some money, or at least to contact her. Using the internet, I'll get a list of Nelsons in the Michigan area and leave messages with them. It's a start.

Maybe this whole experience is a beautiful thing--getting my car stolen, along with my keyboard and music journals. Perhaps this is my Job experience. (Read Job in The Bible.) In the story of Job, Satan is given freedom to wreak havoc in Job's life in order to see Job's reaction towards God. Will he praise God or curse Him? Will I still praise God and worship Him alone? You bet.

Outwardly, this folly is the result of my own stupidity. People warned me about Faith. Her past actions and misdemeanors I didn't take seriously. But stubbornly, I wanted to believe that the few crumbs of kindness

she baited me with would lead to greater things, a breakthrough, a metamorphosis of sorts, in which she would shed her skin, crawl from her cocoon of abusive behaviour, and emerge a butterfly. (Okay, so I'm prone to fantasy. Throw me a few bucks will you? I'm an artist. There's a few thousand horses in my head that are running in different directions, crying out for attention, hoping to be captured--ideas that are wild and untamed. I am besieged. Ideas are abundant. The people that bridle those ideas and turn them into something useful, those are the ones that end up millionaires.)

Sometimes Faith reminded me of Christina Murphy, a feisty, independent redhead that I dated in 1989 or 1990.

Somewhere in The Bible, it says: "Wisdom is found in the counsel of many". I should have listened to the warnings about Faith from my friends and acquaintances. Instead, I placed my entire deck of cards in the hands of someone that refused to play by the rules.

In the end, I lost it all.

Thank You, Jesus, for being there for me even when I'm not there for you. Help me to learn from this. Help me to get the car back, or at least retrieve the contents. Amen.

Wednesday, May 20, 2003

I called Scott Utecht today, and asked him his advice. He suggested that I file it as a stolen vehicle report. "If you call in a missing persons, they're not gonna take that seriously." Utecht, by the way, is a police officer that I've known for years. He's an incredibly cool person--patient, understanding, helpful. I told him the entire story. Faith and I planned to drive to Utah. She flips out and leaves by herself, in my car, with my stuff inside the car. She's disappeared.

"I'm not interested in putting her in jail for any length of time, I just want my car back," I expressed.

"Well," Scott answered. "When she is caught, and she will be--it's just a matter of time--and arrested, she'll serve jail time. At that point, you could drop charges and say 'Well, I just wanted to get my vehicle back.'"

This afternoon, I put together a website at www.faithnelson.com. The website sits at www.angelfire.com, a free hosting provider which provides easy website-building options. The one page site has a picture of Faith, the car, the police report number, a brief story about what happened, and asks that if anyone has seen her and the car to call the police and me. After posting the site, I called Charles Paul, friend and web designer, and Lynelle Forrest, an artist and computer techie, to let them know about the site, and ask them for their advice on getting in seen in Utah, Nevada, or California. I spent a good part of the day and evening e-mailing the police departments in Utah and Nevada, with information about the stolen vehicle and a description of Faith. Ironically, I quit my job so I could travel with Faith, but now that she's taken my car, I sit in my apartment planning ways to find it.

I've gotta spend my time doing something, otherwise I'll lose it. This entire incident springs from

my naivety. So now I play the role of detective so I can put together my life again. I'm sheepish about the whole scenario so I haven't told anyone, except Ryan Cedar, who appeared at my apartment the night the car was stolen.

It's Wednesday afternoon, evening actually. Faith disappeared on Sunday night, 11pm-something. My guess is that she's in Utah, or driving to Nevada. Maybe she's heading to Truckee, California, the last place she got her driver's license.

Today I filed a police report. "Grand Theft Auto". I called Scott Utecht. He drove over and we spent a half-hour talking and filling it out. Then I called Alan Patrusevich, gallery director of the Unarmed Underground Art Centre, an artists co-operative where I used to live. I asked him if he had any information on Faith.

"I don't have any phone numbers," he started. "But I know her mom's name. It's Stephanie."

Stephanie Nelson. I knew that Faith's mom lived somewhere in Michigan. Now I had a starting point. Calling 411, I asked for phone numbers for a Stephanie Nelson in the state of Michigan.

The operator found eight listings. I asked for all eight numbers. Then, I proceeded to call them, leaving a similar message with each one.

"Hi. My name is Kris Kemp. I live in Florida. I'm a friend of Faith Nelson and she's in trouble. I would like to know if you are a relative of hers, or know her in any way. She's in trouble and I'm trying to get in contact with her family. I understand her mom lives in Michigan, but I don't know which town or city. Please call me."

Dear LORD,
Help me to find my car.
Amen. Kris.

Thank YOU, LORD, for helping me to understand how to publish the

website so fast (with pictures of Faith & the car on it). Amen!
Hallelujah.

Note to self: switch telephone to Bell South answering machine
before you head to Salt Lake City, Utah. This way, you can check
the messages from
the road.

ballet of broken dolls

a ballet of broken dolls
as they wander through the darkness, hands against the walls
coming up for air, from this world of tears
will you reach for them, despite your fears

they grasp for air, while bobbing in the
water
a strange girl to the world is still
someone's daughter are they worth saving?
will you take the chance?
of risking your life, trade safety for circumstance

perhaps you think, you're one person in the world
but you may be, the world to someone
a sister, a brother, a daughter, a son
take a look around, they're waiting to be found

and he hitchhiked west ... hoping to find his car and praying for
his friend who took it ...

where are you
going
what are you
running from
where are you
going

what are
you running
to

does your
view
include the
promise of
solitude or
is there
room for
more than
one

experience
you share
is it truth or dare
following the setting sun

I felt like her caseworker, staying in close proximity, watching her, protecting her, while acting aloof. Even though she stole my car, I still do care about her. Getting my keyboard and my musical compositions back-20 pages of which I have no backup copies--remains a priority. The car's secondary.

So many battles ...

so many battles to fight
i don't know which ones to choose
windmills they surround me; voices, they hound me
will you help, or will you refuse?

so many people in need
i don't know which ones to choose
i'm empty-handed, left
here stranded one
volunteer for a thousand

pews

you cannot ignore your
conscience
a quiet voice inside
don't justify your
idleness
'til action you have
tried

and i cannot say, i
won't turn away despite
the truth of what they
say so, take it all and
run away
take it all and run away

Wednesday night, May 20, 2003

Mike Toby called. He used to pastor this incredible church, Rock Church, that I attended a few years ago. Basically, it was a big youth group. In its earlier stages, the church had been known as Faith Bible Chapel. Then Mike got this vision for a church that was focused on youth, primarily teens and early-twenty-somethings. A number of changes were made, including the name. Thus the birth of Rock Church, popular for its casual style, and the authentic friendliness of the congregation, most of them teenagers or in their early twenties.

Carrie Cutlip, my girlfriend at the time, visited and urged me to come with her the following Sunday. I did. And I was hooked.

What really set Rock Church apart from the other churches I'd drifted in and out of over the years was the realness of the people. They were genuinely friendly. Also, they were down to earth.

Mike Toby had been saved in the late 1970's, in the latter years of The Jesus Movement, in which thousands of hippies had come to know Jesus Christ. (Interestingly

enough, the catalyst for the Jesus Movement was the result of one man—Chuck Smith, the pastor of a California church, who felt led to minister to local hippies.) In a way, Mike Toby seemed to want to do the same thing that Chuck Smith had done: Offer a friendly, accepting environment in order to bring people into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

So the church, under Mike Toby's leadership, became a gathering place for young people. Essentially, it was run by kids. Joe, a tanned kid in flip-flops that had his own yacht maintenance business, ran the sound and arrived early for every service, to open the doors and set up chairs. A combination of practical preaching, terrific music, and friendly people made this church a place where I felt like home. I have yet to find another church like it.

A number of kids were into street ministry. If you want more information about this church, go to www.kriskemp.com and read the journal, *Dreams are the flashlight; time is the battery*.

Mike Toby

Listening to Mike, I felt strange. I have not spoken with him for over a year. It's been a few years since I've attended Rock Church, or what's left of it.

Between now and then, a lot has changed. Mike is no longer pastor. He was asked, by the board members, to step down as pastor from Rock Church after he began hanging out and dating my cousin, Jana, following her separation from her husband, Byron.

Two months after they started to hang out with each other, Jana straightened things out with Byron and they got back together. That was two years ago. I'm not sure what Mike Toby has been doing in the meantime. I let him talk while I listened intently.

He revealed his sad situation. He's homeless. He's sleeping in his car.

What is it with me? Do I look like an animal shelter for the wounded wanderers of the world. Okay, don't answer that question.

Of course I have to help him. I'm obligated. This is the guy who inspired me to go out and witness to people, pass out tracts, and let the world know about Jesus Christ so they wouldn't have to spend eternity in Hell when they die. Despite his faults, Mike Toby encouraged me to keep my eyes on eternal things. Sure, he may not have been the best role model, but he made an impression that encouraged me to take action. After his confession, I offered him my place to stay.

"You can live here," I said.

"I need to," he quipped.

Maybe it's a good thing. Maybe Ryan Cedar, a skater friend of mine that hits the streets with me to pass out Gospel tracts, and Pastor, I mean the former pastor, Mike Toby, can rent my apartment at 815 Upland, #7, once I split to go look for my car. Mike said he'll drop by later.

Charles Paul

I called Charles Paul, a friend who designs websites, to see if he had any suggestions for getting the website, www.faithnelson.com, noticed in Nevada. He suggested that I clean up the site, list the specifics in bullets and make it more to the point. I thanked him. He's right.

Before, the website told a story. Now, it'll give the facts. Once I clean it up, I'll e-mail the URL (uniform resource locator, the website name) to websites for restaurants and chatrooms in Nevada, Utah, and California.

Denae the artist's model nomadic writer

Denae dropped by. She's this attractive hippie friend who models

at The Armory Art Center, about five blocks away from my apartment. She travels a lot, hitchhiking, camping, drifting around the United States. I told her to keep a journal. Then, one night when I'm at her house, she shows me a cardboard box full of her journals. I flipped through one, read it out loud, and we both had a good laugh. She's a good writer. Her style is sparse, witty. She writes in the moment, with a clarity that's hilariously real.

When I told her what happened about my car, she listened carefully. Then she offered really good advice such as getting the phone records to see who Faith called. When I told her that I planned to take a Greyhound to the Western United States to look for the car and Faith, Deane laughed.

Before leaving, she parted with a funny comment.

"So you had blind faith," she smiled, "and now you're gonna take a leap of faith."

I laughed.

"Nice."

home
i can feel you
running
scared
looking over your shoulder
the world grows
colder
eventually, we
all get older

still
i can feel you
suffering
alone
will someone

take you home
i'll always
take you home
i'll always
take you home
i'll always
take you home

Thursday, May
21, 2003

he stood there, stoic beneath the downpour ...

Basically, now that I've lost my car, my keyboard, all the music notes for the musical that I've been writing, I spend my days locked inside trying to track the whereabouts of the car. Most of my time is consumed with broadcasting this website, www.faiethnelson.com, by sending out e-mails to restaurants and other places in Utah, Nevada, northern California.

Like I wrote earlier, the website contains pictures of Faith, the car, a blue, 1995 Suzuki Swift hatchback, and include a short description of what happened. I haven't been working, since I put in my week notice in order to leave for this trip.

All of my friends think I'm already gone, except for Ryan who visited me the night I found out the car and Faith had left sans me. I'm embarrassed about the whole incident, to be honest. So, I spend time praying, pacing, reading The Bible, and doing webwork. Also, God's been giving me some poetry, perhaps some songs if I can find chords for them.

unless a seed is buried ...

verse:

Lord, You know, i love you so
take my life; don't let go
i don't need it back
it's no good in my hands

bridge:

use me to do your will
may i die to myself still
so this whole world
understands

verse 2:

unless a seed is buried
it cannot grow
unless i die to myself
your glory will not show

chorus:

make me an instrument
so the whole world can know
the music and the melody of You, JESUS
the music and the melody of You

You are holy
and Your Word is true
the music and the melody of You, Jesus
the music and the melody of You

Friday, May 22, 2003

why did you leave?

why did you leave
where did you go
will you come back
does anybody know

something's going on
inside your head

you said you don't plan to return
but did you have the right to earn
my trust, when you left
in your midnight theft

arriving home, the door is locked
the TV's loud, i've just been clocked
Ryan helps me climb through the screen
i'm in the room, surveying the scene

the lights are on; no one's home
all you ever do is roam
noone knows where you've gone
i slowly lose my mind 'til dawn

the morning comes, but no one's called
you've left and all my stuff you've hauled
still, i hope; still, i pray
you'll return by the end of the day

i wanted so bad to trust,
unconditional love it must
eventually, break down the walls you're in

i wanted so bad to believe,
kindness was a card up your sleeve
something beautiful would emerge from your skin

but human nature has no warning signs
emotions can't be kept within the lines
expectations are false starts
ending in reality for carjacked hearts

Saturday, May 23, 2003

Even though my troubles seem large (stolen car, keyboard, handwritten music journal), they are merely a crack in the sidewalk on the highway of life, a burp, a hiccup in the big scheme of things. I'll praise God anyway, regardless of what happens.

Hallelujah to The King of Kings, The Lord of Lord's! Hallelujah!

Sunday, May 26, 2003

Received a call from Deputy Nate Black, of the Eureka (Nevada) County Sheriff's Department. He found the car. Faith Maria Nelson is in jail. She was pulled over for going 41 in a 25 mph (mile per hour) zone. He's calling from Elko, Nevada, south of I-80. Nevada. That's nearly in California.

"She didn't seem to happy," he explained. "She looks pretty rough," he added. "So what exactly happened? This car is listed as stolen. But she said that you said she could borrow it."

I paused, letting his words digest.

"No. Not at all," I countered. "Faith and I were planning to head west and camp along the way. Then, maybe look for work in Utah or California. The night we were to leave, I had to work late so we got into an argument. I spoke with my chef and managed to get out of working late, then called her back and there was no answer. By the time I got home, she was gone. So was my car with all my stuff in it."

"Alright. Yeah, she says that you let her borrow the car."

"No. Not at all."

"She's your girlfriend?" He asked.

"No. We're just friends."

"Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?" He drawled.

"No." I said, somewhat puzzled. "Not at all."

"Did you and her ever have intimate relations?"

"No. In fact, she used to sleep beside me in bed sometimes. We, more or less, had a brother and sister type relationship. But she's kinda weird."

"Ya think?" He asked sarcastically.

At that point, I nearly laughed because I could picture her in the glare of a mag flashlight held by the Nevada cop--a dishevelled wreck, dusty, sunburned, with her mop of dirty-blond hair scattered like rebellious fields of wheat, those enormous green-blue eyes, staring into the flashlight like an space alien that has just been captured crossing into Area 51.

"Yeah. She's slightly paranoid."

"Yeah," he agreed. "She's been talking to herself."

"Yeah. She does that sometimes. She's a bit paranoid. I wanted to help her, but this is what I get for it."

That, more or less, was the jest of our conversation. He said to call tomorrow if I needed any more information. I told him that I would call her mom to let her know that she was in jail. I thanked him profusely for finding her, making the arrest, and calling me.

God answered my prayers. My car has been found. Faith has been found. I have found Faith.

Monday, May 27, 2003

Planning to head West

Greyhound does not even travel to Eureka, Nevada. Their closest destination is Elko, Nevada, some 100-to-150 miles away.

Similarly, flights do not land in Eureka, either. The nearest point is Elko. So, whether I ride the bus or fly, I have to figure out how I'm going to get from Elko, Nevada to Eureka, Nevada, some 150 miles away. I spent time looking for Elko chat rooms to post my request, but couldn't find any. If nothing else, I'll hitch a ride to Elko. This should be interesting. This is going to be some trip, a cornucopia of uncertainties leading to a number of possibilities. In the soil of uncertainty, faith is sure to bloom.

Our horizontal problems can be solved with a vertical focus.

I'm leaving 12:45 am, taking Greyhound. Airlines are charging over \$400 dollars for a one-way trip to Las Vegas. Even standby flights to the same destination are expensive. The bus ride is a long one--2 days, 20 hours. But I can handle that. I've ridden Greyhound from Las Vegas, Nevada to West Palm Beach, Florida, before.

If you're interested in reading that account, visit www.kriskemp.com, and read "The Nevada Trip" in Pictures of the Leftover Generation. It's an 11-12 page account of my trip delivering Bob, a nervous, chatty hairdresser, along with his oversized furniture to Las Vegas, Nevada, while pulling a car in tow. The trip was horrible, and after a few hours with Bob-the-evil-clown I felt like I was stuck in an elevator. Basically, Bob was bitter and self-absorbed. In retrospect, I'm glad I journaled that account because afterward, I tried to forget about it.

Greyhound, though, is an ordeal, albeit an interesting one. Still, a bus ride is bearable as I don't like flying. If I could exit the plane with a parachute, if something were to go wrong, I believe that flying would prove less frightening. But, this isn't an option. And I'm not fond of putting myself into a giant steel straw with wings that I can't exit if something happens. Call me paranoid, but I like an exit strategy. So does Andy Cotter.

When Nate Black called last night, Ann Powell and Mike Toby were over. The phone rang after I played "Can you hear?", this

song that God gave me about the persecuted church. The LORD Jesus Christ answered my prayer, about finding the car! Praise God! He truly does inhabit the praises of his people! Hallelujah! :-)
The three of us had a good worship service. Mike Toby strummed acoustic guitar while all of us sang. Then Ann sang while I played keyboard to some of her songs and poems.

I'm stoked about the car. Today, I'm packing lightly for the west, and printing a report of what happened regarding the car that I'll fax to Nate Black in Eureka, Nevada.

Dear Lord Jesus,
Thanks for your hands in all this & allowing me to get the car & keyboard & music notes back. Please protect Faith Maria Nelson with lots of angels, from herself and from others. Please help her to seek You first, and put her in the car of someone who can help. Please help her not to have a long jail sentence, and please heal her mind. Please bring restoration to her spirit, her soul, her mind, her emotions, her body. Thank you, Lord, for listening to me. I beseech You to show Your glory in her life. In Christ's name I pray, amen.

Right now, Faith Nelson is in the Eureka County Jail, Main Street, Eureka, Nevada, 89316, (775) 237-5701. The deputy in charge is Nate Black, (775) 237-5330. State Attorney's office for State of Florida (561) 355-7100.

Codependent for castaways

I made a plethora of phone calls today and ran errands, besieged by the notion that I can save everyone--Faith, her mom Stephanie, my keyboard & music journals. Once feelings develop between me and someone, regardless of what transpires, I feel compelled to help them. Against my best interests, or theirs for that matter, I will save them. In that way, I'm like a junkie--a hardcore drug addict. Give me your emotional cripples, orphans, the castaways of this world. I will save them all.

When you're as codependent as I am, helping people is the best fix of all. Even if they kill you in the end, you just might die with a smile on your face, knowing you tried.

Like an addict, being sucked into the orbit of someone who will use you is all about procedure, the technique.

Gently, I open the cap and spill the brown crystals onto the spoon. Carefully, I place the lighter beneath the spoon, while the flame quickly cooks the ingredients--I am the spoon chef, hah! After the heroin liquifies, I witness the wedding ceremony of the syringe and the brown crystals, and watch the veins clamor for attention beneath the tied-off portion of my left elbow.

Skillfully, I take aim, find a track, then visit the station, puncturing the skin and pushing the plunger with my thumb as the firework trails split across the underside my skin. It's feeding time for the monster of codependency that growls within this guilt-ridden birdcage, this body of sin and curiosity.

Whether it's heroin or attention, in one way or another, everyone's a drug addict. I'm a junkie for saving people. Even when they resent it. The first step to solving a problem is admitting it. Okay.

Saving Faith

Yes, today, i typed a letter to Deputy Nathan Black, the cop who pulled over Faith for speeding in Eureka, Nevada. He asked for a letter explaining the circumstances of what happened between Faith and myself. So I wrote one. In it, I requested that all charges be dropped.

Does she deserve jail time? Yes. Is she a selfish? Yes. Is she manipulative? No doubt. Why would I drop charges, then?

Here's why. If something happens to her in jail, or if she commits suicide, which she's mentioned before, I would feel guilty. My priority was, and is, getting the car back. Now that it's been found, my mind's more at ease.

Eventually, if Faith continues her irresponsible behaviour, she'll end up physically hurt or in jail for a long period of time. I don't want to be the one meting out the punishment. Personally, I think she's 50/50. Half of her is a manipulative con artist. The other half of her is a victim, a bipolar, paranoid skitzophrenic whose mind is gone. My problem is that I like to save people, and then fall in love with the people I'm trying to save. Not in love for my own physical pleasures, but in love with the potential of who people are and what they can become. In this way, I'm a talent agent for the disenfranchised.

Errands

1. typed letter to Deputy Nathan Black, save to disk
2. biked to Alan's to print letter
3. biked to \$1 store, bought phone cards
4. faxed letter to Eureka, Nevada to Deputy Nathan Black
5. left message with Faith's mom, Stephanie Nelson, in Boyne City, Michigan
6. called Deputy Nathan Black; he confirmed that he received fax
7. received call from Faith in jail. She's upset. She was crying. She asked me to drop the charges. "If you pay for the expense incurred in getting my car back, I'll drop the charges," I told her. She agreed to do that. I told her I would drop the charges.

Here's the letter that I sent to WPB State Attorney. ATTN: Darren Shull,

State Attorney - WPB, Florida

Dear Mr. Shull,

The entire incident regarding case #: 03-12632 arose out of a misunderstanding between myself, Kris Kemp, and my friend, Faith Maria Nelson. Faith and I planned to travel to California and camp along the way. The night we were

to leave, we got in an argument because I was scheduled to work late. Angry because she had a deadline to meet in California, she left without me.

Fearing that something bad had happened to Faith Nelson after not hearing from her, I decided to file a police report. Initially, I intended to file a missing persons alert, but Officer Scott Utecht informed me that these reports are not considered priority. Reluctantly, I filed the report for grand theft auto. My reasoning behind this, more than anything else, was to make sure Faith was okay. Fortunately, Faith was found, and the car was recovered. As we are friends, and this entire incident arose from a misunderstanding, I would like to drop all charges against Faith Maria Nelson.

On May 24, I faxed a letter to Deputy Nate Black, the policeman that arrested Faith Maria Nelson in Nevada, after pulling her over for speeding. The letter requested that all charges be dropped. Her charge is now listed as possession of a stolen vehicle. Currently, she is in jail in Nevada.

Thanks for your consideration in my request to drop charges against Faith Maria Nelson.

Sincerely,

Kris Kemp 815 Upland Road, #7
West Palm Beach, Florida 33401
(561) 804-9393

Her explanation

So, I receive a call from Faith. She's in jail. She's crying. I told her that I'm upset, too.

"Why didn't you call me?" I asked in frustration. "All you had to do is call me, Faith."

"I was going to call you, when I got to Truckee (California)." She expressed. "That way, you could've just taken the bus here."

"But, why'd you have to leave. We were supposed to go together. Faith, I called you back ten minutes after we spoke. I got off work. You really made a mistake." I explained.

"Well," she began. "There was this guy I was seeing who lived in Flamingo Park. And the day we were going to leave, he freaked out on me, and it scared me. So when you told me that you had to work late, I mean, I freaked out and left."

"So you got antsy and jumped," I concluded.

"Yeah."

"Okay."

"You have to get me out of here," she said. "You have to call the local police department to drop charges, then have them call Eureka, Nevada and let them know the charges were dropped."

"All right," I sighed. "I'll do that right after this phone call. Call me back in a half hour."

"I'll call you back a little later," she said.

Tomorrow, I'll visit the State Attorney's office, fill out the paperwork to drop the charges, then schedule a Greyhound trip to Elko, Nevada. Once I arrive, I'll hitchhike to Eureka, Nevada to pick up my car. This should be interesting.

Stephanie Nelson, Faith's mom, just called. She said that Faith called and they had a long conversation. In it, Faith told her mom: "I'm being set up, because I'm a good snowboarder and they want to eliminate the competition."

Dear Lord Jesus,
Help Faith to seek You with all her heart. Please restore her mind

and help her to find her talent and use it to glorify You. Protect her, Lord.
In Jesus' Name,
Amen :-)

A misunderstanding?

Faith called from jail. She wants to know if I'll let her drive the car to Truckee, California once she's released.

"There's a Greyhound station there," she said. "I'll pick you up."

"You expect me to trust you after this?" I asked.

"I'll meet you at the Greyhound station," she reiterated calmly.
"What we had before was a misunderstanding." Her last word, "misunderstanding", echoed in my head. She was parroting my deceptively worded letter to the State Attorney. Misunderstanding. Sure.

What should I do? I'll probably choose to ride Greyhound to Elko, Nevada, then hitch to Eureka, Nevada.

"Faith ... "

"Yeah."

"They're not gonna let you take the car after you stole it." "Tell 'em it's okay for me to use it," she persisted.

"Faith, even if I did, they're not gonna let you take it."

"Yeah. You're probably right."

Plans for Tuesday

Here's the plans for tomorrow, Tuesday.

1. Go to State Attorney's Office. Drop charges.

2. Convince State Attorney to contact Nevada State Attorney.
3. Call Police Officer Scott Utetch. Drop charges. Have him contact Nevada (Eureka) Sheriff's Dept. to drop charges & let them know that I've dropped charges.
4. Allow Faith to drive car to Truckee, California.
5. Schedule Greyhound to Truckee, California.
6. Call Faith, let her know when you'll arrive.
7. Meet her in Truckee, California at Amtrak Station.
8. If she isn't let out of jail, go to Elko, Nevada, then hitch 100 miles to Eureka, Nevada and look for Main Street police station. Retrieve car. Convince Faith to post the impound fee. Then head to Truckee, California.

Tuesday, May 28, 2003

Ann Powell, my dear friend, sister in Christ, a poet & writer, helped me out today running errands all over town. Ann is one of the coolest, nicest girls that I know. I heard that she has a crush on me, but I'm not sure. Still, we're friends and that's cool with me.

This morning, I called her at 6am and asked her if she could help me run some errands. Sounding groggy, she mumbled: "I'll get dressed and head over."

Around 7'ish am, she arrives, then drives me over to my mom's house. I called my mom the night before and asked her to leave me a copy of my birth certificate somewhere on the porch. She did. I retrieved it. Then we headed to the Department of Motor Vehicles, where we stood in line among others under the hot morning sun waiting for the doors to open, so I could get a new license.

Our next stop was the Clematis library, so we parked at Banyan Parking Garage and I instructed Ann to get the parking ticket stamped at the library (free parking) while I visited America restaurant, my former employer, to pick up a check. (Coincidentally, Chef Bruce paid me in a personal check, \$683, which was kind of him. I didn't expect that much. :-)) After meeting Ann at the library,

we drove to Suntrust bank. They refused to cash my tax return-- a whopping \$730 dollars that the brilliant and beautiful Carrie Cutlip helped me receive when she did my tax return for me :-)- yeah!!!--but cashed my work check. From there, Ann drove us to my mom's where I signed the tax return over to her. As I have a credit card in my mom's name, the money will be charged against any surplus. Mom, in a way, is my bank. Banks are built on a house of cards anyway. Then Ann, Mom, and I had an impromptu prayer meeting. It was cool.

Locked out, again

On returning home, I was upset to find the door locked, and the key missing. You see, Mike Toby's been staying at my house, and he doesn't have a key. Yet. So we share the same key that sits under the welcome mat. I guess he left it in his pocket. I don't know. As I've broken in my place before, I climbed out the window in the hallway, onto the porch roof, then stretched my hand toward the living room window, while Ann held my other hand. After tumbling inside and opening the front door for Ann, I heard footsteps growing louder. They sounded heavy. Someone was walking up the stairs.

"Hey!" I heard a stern voice. Jim Wilson, the landlord, poked his head in my room. "What are you doing?" He asked angrily.

I explained the situation, but he didn't seem to care. Carefully, he examined the screen and hallway window. "This is going to have to be fixed," he stated.

"No problem," I replied flatly. "I'll fix it right now."

"How?! How are you going to fix it?" He bellows, his eyes bulging, his nerves rising beneath the surface of his skin, blue rivers running along his temple. Normally, Jim Wilson looks like the guy on the Quaker Oat's ads from the early nineties. Angry, he looked like the Quaker Oat guy who had just discovered someone eating his last bowl of porridge.

"I'll get some wood glue and piece it together," I assured him.

Then I almost laughed, thinking: This is something Gilligan might say to The Skipper on an episode of "Gilligan's Island". Maybe I am a modern day Bob Denver.

"Well," he grumbled, sounding like Clint Eastwood in one of his Dirty Harry flicks, "I'll be back this afternoon. And I'd like it fixed by then."

Abruptly, without any hint of understanding in the burned out embers of his eyes, he exited the room. Soberly, I listened as he clumped down the stairs, slowly but loudly, all 200 pounds of him, while the wooden floorboards creaked in protest.

I glanced at Ann, gazing into her big, brown eyes. Her eyes are so big in fact, that she looks kind of like a Muppet, or a Sesame Street character. Not that that's a bad thing. She is cute.

Arggg ...

"Is it alright if we fix this, Ann, and then go to lunch?"

"Yeah. That's okay."

We drove to Sunset, the next street over, borrowed wood glue, a flathead screwdriver and a hammer, returned to the apartment, and re-inserted the screen. Actually, Ann fixed it. Praise the Lord!

After the fallout from the landlord, then reassembling the screen window and patching the frame together with wood glue, Ann and I headed over to Wendy's for lunch. "Get whatever you want," I sighed, with a wave of my hand. Then I gave her \$10 bucks for gas and we returned to my apartment, where I typed a letter to the State Attorney's office. In the letter, I requested the charges to be dropped. That evening, Mike Toby arrived. Ann and Mike chatted while I read the latest underground news at www.rense.com.

Spaghetti with Mike Toby and Ann Powell
Evening set in and I figured I should play a good host. Ann and Mike Toby were talking in the living room.

"You guys want some spaghetti?" I asked them.

"Sure," they chorused.

Ann and I made a trek to Winn Dixie, the ghetto superstore to grab a a 99-cent can of Hunt's spaghetti sauce, mozzarella cheese, gallon distilled water, and two Pepperidge Farm cakes (1 chocolate, 1 carrot cake) as they were two for \$3.19. At the apartment, I boiled spaghetti, heated the sauce, then dished out the meal. Adding grated mozzarella cheese to the steaming plate of pasta and sauce really does the trick. We feasted. A great, cheap meal.

Even before we finished eating, Mike pulls out his guitar and leans his face toward us, raising his eyebrows and asking: "You guys wanna hear some music?" looking like a 10-year old kid offering to play a song on his little-kid-guitar.

"Sure," we smiled.

He launches into some praise and worship songs on the guitar. Ann sang while I continued eating, destroying the Pepperidge Farm cake and slipping into a food coma that nearly put me in paralysis.

Mike Toby and The Six-Million Dollar Man

Mike Toby is a memorable guy. He's chatty and charming, good looking, with salt and pepper hair, blue eyes that twinkle when he smiles, and a football players body. Remember Lee Majors from "The Six Million Dollar Man"? Feed him donuts and cheeseburgers for a week, so he has the

early stages of a spare tire, and you've got Mike Toby. But what makes Mike memorable is his ability to make you feel special. Sometimes though, it does not seem genuine. Still, I give him the benefit of a doubt. I think he means well. Seriously.

As he's been living with me, I can see he's a slacker. When I leave for work, he's laying on the sleeping bag in the kitchen, beneath the a/c. When I return from work, if he's home, he's usually in the same position-stretched out, a washcloth across his eyes, a Bible under his arm across his chest.

"Kris," he says to me eagerly like a child wanting approval, "I've been praying all day. When you see me laying down with my eyes closed, I'm not sleeping. I'm praying."

At that point, I shoot him a look of serious doubt.

"I'm serious." He says earnestly.

And I think to myself: Hmmmm. Okaaaaaaay.

Camping in my kitchen

He's a recovering pastor, a recovering husband, in a two year hiatus from having lost his church, his house, his job, and his sense of identity. He nearly lost his kids as well. He's set up a makeshift living spot in the small, wood-floored space beside my dining room. Normally, the space would be home to a dining room table, but I'm not into furniture, so I left it empty. Mike has his single-bed air mattress and a small sleeping bag on top for a bed, that's below the a/c. Besides that, he has a Bible, and a duffle bag of clothes.

When he's not sleeping, he watches a lot of TV, flipping around the channels and making comments like: "I can't believe they're showing this on TV. Can you believe it, Kris? Man, this is bad!"

Like a suffering animal, he sits in the corner licking his wounds. From the sleeping bag nest he's assembled in the dining room, I hear him moaning: "I miss my kids." A sad sigh that seems to disappear into the cold air blowing around him. Hearing him, it makes me feel like I'm in a sick ward.

I told him he needs occupational therapy, to get busy physically in order to get his mind off of what is troubling him. Often, if you find yourself emotionally troubled, you can change your mindset by doing some type of physical activity. That's why so many people exercise. Even Henry Rollins, the songwriter/writer said that if he didn't work out he'd probably lose his mind. Anthony Robbins, the self-help speaker and author refers to this procedure as "changing states".

This method worked for soldiers returning home after World War II. They were put to work doing things that they enjoyed--be it photography, gardening, cooking, auto repair. Not only did this help them to not dwell on the horrors of war, but it made them feel needed, knowing that they were contributing something.

Everyone needs to feel needed. The problem is that so little people do feel needed, especially in this culture when it is thought of as weak to need anyone. When you think about it, it's difficult to even get a hug these days. How tragic. That the simplest of gestures can remedy the darkest of moods. Yet, so often in our self-absorbed race to the finish, we reach for the nearest electronic drug to quell our sense of isolation.

Dear LORD Jesus,

Help me to never get in a situation like that. If it comes to marriage with the potential for divorce and the devastating repercussions, I would rather be single. Better to be solo and a bit lonely, than in a bad relationship with a woman that consumes all your time and gives little in return. I've heard it said that often married people are terribly lonely, as they feel misunderstood, or not listened to by their spouses. As long as I keep moving, mentally, spiritually, physically, emotionally, I will be fine. Never allow time for the dust to settle. Always keep them guessing, one handspace out of reach. Never follow. Amen.

Ryan Cedar and the Animal Planet in my apartment
I thunder down the stairs to take out the trash and see Ryan sitting in his car. "C'mon up," I invite him.

"Hey Kris," Mike says when I return into the living room. "There's a friend in the kitchen."

I glance into the dining room and see a cockroach crawling along the wall. I hate roaches. Running toward it, I smash it with my hand in a swift chop, bouncing my hand back as soon as it hits the creature, so I won't get roachguts on my palm.

The roach falls to the ground. Somehow, I guess I missed it.

Instead of landing on the ground, though, it lands in a spiders web in the corner. Immediately, the roach begs kicking and strugglig to escape. A tiny spider runs toward it. For the next fifteen minutes, Ryan and I watch as the small arachnid bundles its dinner with sticky filament. The spider works in stages. First, it wraps one the legs. Next, the wing is tied down. Then the antenna is bundled. Man, this was interesting to watch.

"If only we had a camera," I mused.

"Yeah," Ryan agreed.

"This would be like Animal Planet, on a small scale, inside someone's house. When you think about it, every house contains a planet of creatures, most we don't even see."

Wednesday, May 29, 2003

Today-

1. saved one page request to drop charges or disk
2. biked to Allan's; he was still sleeping
3. biked to the library, waited seven minutes for it to open
4. printed request
5. biked around downtown looking for a notary ... Fidelity Federal Bank (have to be a member); Halsey & Griffith (not in today); Courthouse (have to work there); Clematis Post Office ("try police station across the street"); Police station (no); Sir Speedy Printers (The clerk tells me: "Type this one page affidavit, then come back." I bicycle to the library, type the affidavit, return to the printers and pay the notary \$2.12. She looked very unhappy. Perhaps it was the suffocating a/c and the miserableness of her unsatisfying position of working a copy machine for a living. Without a word,

she counted the money into the the till and returned to her cubicle to finish her sentence.

6. bike to State Attorney's office and hand the secretary my notarized letter which suggests dropping all charges against Faith "Should I call the State Attorney?" I query. "No. He'll call you if he has any questions."

7. I bike home furiously, a mess of sweatiness and conflicting thoughts--why am I helping this person who has shown no appreciation for help in the past? Because I care about her, and the story, this story, is not finished.

A troubling discovery

This morning I received a disturbing call from Sargent Perry, of the Hernando, Mississippi police department. He recovered some items that belonged to me. Here's what he found.

1. duffel bag - containing my clothes
2. journals - this one that I continued writing in two other notebooks, and 14 pages of original music & lyrics for "Dumpster Diver - the musical
3. snorkeling gear
4. cans of beef stew
5. TV/radio

He found this at an abandoned house in Hernando, Mississippi. Since I had scrawled my name and contact information all over the notebook of journals and songs, he had a way to find me. It turns out Faith must have been near this house, or perhaps spent the night there, then dumped my belongings there.

What a jerk.

Sargent Perry & Sargent Thomas - Police Department
475 West Commerce Street
Hernando, Mississippi 38632
(662) 429-9096

"What would be a good time to call you back, to try to have some of it placed into a box, so UPS could ship it to me?" I asked, after thanking him a bajillion times.

"Call tomorrow, after 8am," he drawled politely.

Unbelievable. How inconsiderate can someone be?

She knew that I valued that journal and music notes. Still, she did not give it any thought. No wonder she doesn't value anything material that is not hers--because she hasn't had to work for it. People like her are dangerous because they have nothing to lose so, by default, they have nothing at stake. If I treated friendships like a business, I wouldn't get burned so often.

Fourteen pages of original music and lyrics, with no copies or backups. These songs were written from the heart, birthed out of experience, born of frustration, delivered from the depths of emotion and memories both fond and tragic.

This journal ... my life has been reduced to a scavenger hunt, me roaming the country, hunting for eggs left by the evil bunny, Faith Nelson. Ironically, she does look like a bunny--big ears, large eyes that are blue-green, big feet, big hands, with a nose that shivers like a bunny rabbit. I'm hunting a manipulative rabbit.

Later in the afternoon ...

I called Lieutenant Ellis of the Hernando, Mississippi police department and convinced him to place my belongings in a box, so they could be shipped back to me. He was kind and obliged my request.

Then, I called UPS to schedule an early morning pickup and return via next-day air. The UPS clerk had a sultry, Southern accent.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"North Carolina," she answered.

"North Carolina?" I repeated, parroting her voice.

"Are you making fun of me?" She jested.

"No, I like your accent," I persisted. "It's sexy."

She laughed. "Aw, thank you," she replied.

During the conversation with Lt. Ellis, I had him describe the contents of what he had found. He described the backpack.

"It has writing on it. It says, 'Marital law is coming', whatever that means. Hmph."

I started laughing to myself. Months before I had planned to leave for Utah, I had scrawled "Martial Law is coming" on the back of my backpack using a thick, black magic marker. I'm a big fan of underground news and conspiracy websites, and do believe that martial law will, one day, come to the United States. There's also a plethora of underground cities all around the country, especially below the states like Utah, Colorado, and California.

My belongings arrive tomorrow. After getting them, I'm scheduling a bus for Elko, Nevada, then taking off.

Thursday, May 30, 2003

I waited for the box to arrive all day. Finally, I call the Hernando, Mississippi police department, around evening, to see if the package was picked up. It hadn't been. Angry, I called UPS and complained, then scheduled the package to be delivered air to Eureka, Nevada, the police department where I'm getting my car.

By now you might think I've lost my mind, but it's too late for that. My mind is gone, but I've learned to sublimate and subjugate my feelings and enter a quiet cubby hole in my imagination where it is safe and no one can hurt me. I'm not kidding. The secret garden is inbetween my ears.

God, in His enduring mercy and everlasting grace, sustains me despite my foolishness and faulty logic. I'm serious. If God is good to me, in spite of my intentional folly and expected inconsistency, then how good will He be to those that exercise better judgement? I don't seek wrecklessness, but for some reason situations come at me that seem to evade others.

Since the package didn't arrive, I'll confirm that it will leave tomorrow--wait, I already did that, cool! So, tonight, I'll see if any jobs are available in Truckee, California. I figure that after the busride, hitchhiking and pickup of the car in Eureka, Nevada, I'll head to Truckee, CA and see if I can find a job.

If Faith gets out of jail when I'm in Eureka, I'll give her a ride to Truckee. I know, I know. Why don't I forget about her, leave her in jail, and drive to Truckee myself. She's wrecked my life enough, why would I want to take her to Truckee with me?

Two reasons. One, she used to live in Truckee and knows her way around. Two, it's good to travel with someone, even if that someone is going to be a wrecking ball for your life. At the end of the day, it comes down to finishing the story. They'll find my body in the woods somewhere, half eaten by raccoons and birds. But at least they'll have a good story--the dead body of an aspiring writer and his journal called "Shelters are melting". If you're not taking a risk, how can you call it living?

Sure, Faith is paranoid, manipulative, and prone to be a vanilla train wreck, but nonetheless, she's someone to go with, even if she did steal my car. Think about it. Who else is gonna travel with me?

Everyone here seems to be tied down by jobs they loathe to buy things they don't need to compete with people they don't even like. Then, at the end of the day, they wonder

why they feel so distant from their own dreams.

Well, that's where shrinks and pharmaceuticals come into the picture. And no, I won't let her borrow my car. Tomorrow or tonight, I'll schedule a bus for tomorrow evening. I've been afraid to leave the comfort and relative safety of West Palm Beach, Florida, but now I have a real reason to go. I'm on a mission--to retrieve my stuff.

Carrie Cutlip once said: "Throw the hat over the fence." Make the decision and commitment to do something, then take the steps to reach that goal.

Basically, I did throw the hat over the fence, by trusting Faith with my car and possessions. But, she stole the hat. Now I'm climbing over the fence to get it. Thankfully, clues to this scavenger hunt are emerging. No turning back.

"maybe i'll work at Truckee River Raft company for the summer season at Lake Tahoe, California, and attend Lake Tahoe Calvary Chapel"

"i'll hide out in the mountains of Utah, maybe Northern California, find a quiet room somewhere, lose myself in the melee of the service industry as a cook, hide out in the anonymity of kitchen work, suffer in the belly of the whale, then retreat to a small shared bungalow and quietly write the story of my life--the adventures of a high strung 80's reject with ADD who is burdened with ideas ... "

Eureka, Nevada to Truckee, California

1. Soth on Diamond Mine/G203A toward US-50 - 6 miles
2. Turn right onto US-50 - 180 miles
3. Turn slight right onto US-50 Alt. E / RENO HWY. Continue to follow US - 50 Alt. E - 17 miles
4. Turn sharp right onto NV-343 - 1 mile

5. Merge onto I-80 W, via the ramp on the left - 66 miles
6. Take CA-89 N. exit toward Sieraville/Loyton/Truckee/etc - 1 mile
7. Turn left onto CA-89/CA-267, follow CA-267 - 1 mile

Stranded in Salt Lake City, Utah? 1-800-847-5810

Ruby Ridge Hotel: (775) 237-5339
phone booth: (775) 237-9986

Eureka County Sheriff's Office
411 North Main Street
Eureka, Nevada 89316

Sargent Kenny Sanders: 7am - 2pm

important phone numbers:

Stephanie Nelson (Faith's mom): (231) 582-5058
Eureka, Nevada Sheriff's Dept.
(775) 237-5330 Towtruck Driver - David
"Eddie" Groth: (775) 237-5797

Faith visiting/call in days:

Tues: 6pm - 7pm

Fri: 6pm - 7pm

Sun: 1pm - 4pm

case #: 03-12632

Friday, May 30, 2003 - 7pm

Sitting here in the Greyhound station of downtown West Palm Beach, Friday, I'm thinking of how I arrived here, how my best intentions allowed my naivety to consume me. My intention was to help my friend, Faith Maria Nelson, a 31 year old artist, a laconic, enigmatic girl who had travelled across the United States several times and ended up in West Palm Beach, Florida. My hope--to help

Faith exit Florida while simulataneously having an experienced travel partner to camp with while heading west--clouded my judgement. Despite the evidence of who Faith was, I wanted to believe. Now, however, I merely feel sick, spent, empty, kicked in the stomach, reeling in frustration.

And I'm reminded of that verse in The Scriptures, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick". Even before we left, people warned me. Tom Drennan, a bicycling enthusiast, Lynelle's fiance, and fellow studio mate at the hut, the Unarmed Underground Art Centre, warned me in an e-mail: "Sounds fishy."

Loyal friend, trivia junkie, and self loathing cartoonist Andy Cotter admonished, in a prophetic mumble: "Geez, Kris. Make sure she doesn't steal your car."

Still, I wanted to believe, that the good inside Faith would blossom, given enough time. Still, I wanted to trust. And, like before, my trust offset my better judgement.

Benched, within the walls of this cavernous bus terminal, I feel foolish, a clown whose makeup has begun to run, after he's forgotten his next comedy routine. Around me, I hear laughter. Even the laughter sounds canned.

(God, help me not to be so stupid. Please forgive me for my ignorance, for wanting to believe. People are so unreliable. And I am so naive. Thanks LORD, for finding the car and the contents. Amen.)

Waiting to board the bus
This bus station lobby is air conditioned, except for three or four adults and a child wiggling the joystick of a videogame and smashing the game with his restless fingers.

I wish I was in the 1930's or 1950's,
living in a black and white television show like the nostalgic vision of "The Twilight Zone", the episode called "Next Stop, Willoby" wherein the lead character returns to the town of his

youth. Ironically, the story ends where a train employee or the conductor admits to a cop that the passenger jumped off the train while it was moving at full speed. Apparently, for the lead character, the vision of youth and returning to innocence was merely a fugue, a fantasy that, in his head, was real. His delusions overrode his reality. The only exit was the one that promised no return--death. Perhaps the inability to deal with progress, no matter how noble the reasons, leads to a kind of death. Unlike human nature, progress has no conscience. Thus the inevitable conflict is birthed when progress and conscience collide, illustrated in real life by the march of technology.

This is depressing. It's all my fault. Because I feel as I have been saved, and I have been saved by The Blood of Jesus, I suppose that I feel compelled to save others, and suffer for them. Then again, this condition that I act out may have little to do with my beliefs. Maybe it's as simple as Rodney Mayo (the tornado cave architect who created such peopletraps as Respectable Street Cafe, Lost Weekends, Blue, and Dada) summed it up when he said: "Kris, you're punishing yourself."

He's right. I am punishing myself. Guilty as charged. Instead of reciting 50 "hail Mary's" or doing community service work for a local convent or church, I find someone, usually a friend or acquaintance, sometimes a stranger, to help. Then I suffer for them, accumulating abuse and defending their behaviour with elaborate excuses while I walk the stations of their cross. At the end of the journey, bruised and weary, I'm nailed to a cross for their sins, becoming a martyr that's crucified in place of Barabas.

My sister Kim, in her wisdom and insight, concluded: "You have a messiah complex." Instead of pointing the way to Christ, making disciples of Christ, and preparing for His arrival, I try to be Christ. No wonder I'm burdened. The Bible says: "Come unto me all you who are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest." That's it.

This journal is turning into a confessional. If you don't keep a journal, you should think about starting one. Writing ones thoughts is cathartic. Mentally, it's like going to the bathroom. It's therapeutic and helps to lighten the load, the mental baggage.

I wish i could say i had a good feeling about this trip. I'm not sure, though. At 34, i feel pretty immature. Last night, Mike Toby, my roommate, called me impetuous.

"That's when you have the ability to make decisions on the spur of a moment," he explained. "It's a good thing. It's different from being spontaneous."

The definition of impetuous
Mike's been at my apartment for about a week now. He's nice and friendly enough, but I get annoyed when he wallows in his self pity. He's separated from his wife, misses her and his kids, and tends to moan about it. Listening to him, I try to be patient, but grow tired of his whining.

"Kris, you know how much I miss my kids," he asks rhetorically. "You don't even know."

Today, he worked though, a good thing, as this'll bring his motivation levels up. Arriving home, he sounded like a ten year old kid returning from his first job of mowing the neighbors lawn.

"Kris," he proclaimed with a loud sigh. "I am so tired! I must've mowed about 20 lawns, man. I tell ya, whew! But I made \$80 dollars. Praise The Lord. God is good."

Dear Jesus, Allow me to be used on this trip for your glory. Amen.

9pm, 9:30'ish pm?, Friday, May 30

I'm at Fort Pierce for a 1/2 hour meal break. The guy beside me is sleeping, or was sleeping. I just glanced at him. He's idly staring out the window. The girl across from me, with her clean outfit and soft expression, bears the telltale signs of the naive, optimistic college student. She asks, "Could you keep an eye on my bags for me?" when she rises from her seat. "Sure," I agree.

When I boarded the bus in West Palm Beach, I noticed her reading The Bible, James. "Are you a Christian?" I ask her.

"Yes. Are you?"

"Yes," I answered. I told her about the persecuted church and that I passed out Gospel tracts. "This life is short."

She nodded and remarked: "I'm glad that there's Heaven."

I'm not sure whether to leave the bus and buy food. Naw, I'll fast. Maybe I'll fast, just drinking water all the way to Nevada. We'll see. You know what's cool about this whole fiasco? God gave me a song today.

Two days ago, Ann Powell, my dear friend who I met at Rock Church two years ago who likes to do street ministry, was driving me around in her recently purchased Kia SUV. We started talking about people that are forgotten or left out of society, and their desire for a place to call home.

Then, while driving, her eyes light up and she blurts out: "Grab a pen and a piece of paper, quick!"

I shuffle through her glove box, fish out a pen and the back of an old flyer for a coupon or something.

"Okay, write this down," she instructs, pouring open her mouth as the poetry rolls forth like the swarm of a thousand monarchs taking flight. Like a monk taking the dictation of a prophet, I scribbled out her words, documenting the release.

Inspired, I, too, wrote a poem. Then later, fighting the anxiety of some last minute complications that aren't worth worrying about, I sat down at the keyboard. God gave me chords for the poem about the leftout people. The song/poem is called "Orphaned". Here it is.

orphaned ...

v.1 orphaned from society, left from the pack
alone now, you're searching for the family you lack
invisible since high school, trying to fit in
but acceptance never found you, so you stayed hidden

v.2 life's not an apology for those who sympathize
a wonderful acknowledgement, open up your eyes
a better understanding will come to those who see
Jesus Christ will welcome you to His family

chorus:

you're one person in the world, but you may be the world to someone
a sister, a brother, a daughter, a son
look beyond the surface, pray to recognize
you might help, an angel in disguise

bridge:

ever since those early years, you've never been the same
a wild horse that runs alone, nobody can tame
let go of your past so the future you can claim
you're comfortable as long as you're the same

May 31, 5am, 2003, Saturday

It's 5am in the morning. I haven't slept yet, but that's okay. For the last several months, I've been an insomniac anyway. I might get a few hours sleep at night, maybe at the most five.

About once every ten days, I'll get 8 or 9 hours, but that's rere. Strangely enough, I'm not tired. My body becomes weary but my mind is a race horse that continues to run. There's so many ideas bouncing around up there that refuse to go to bed, unless I seduce them to sleep with \$10 dollars worth of Taco Bell food, minus the soda, and the hypnotic glare of the TV screen that lulls into a state of slumber. Television, the modern electronic fireplace that no one tells stories around.

Moo

Right now, I'm between buses, at the Greyhound station waiting for a transfer. My perch is a steel mesh bench while I wait for the transfer bus at door #4, which leaves at 5:40 am. This bus terminal is overflowing with zombies, poorly dressed sardines with half-closed eyes--Garfield eyes. Nearly every seat in this place is occupied. Each by weary passengers waiting for their bus to arrive. Ten or twelve doors face the parking lot where the buses arrive and park. Each door marks a number that signifies a different destination. In front of each door stands a long line of people with their luggage beside them, hoping for a window seat, a seat to share with their travelling companion, or to choose a place away from the crazy. Who can blame them? At nearly every busstop I've been to, there's a crazy guy that talks to himself or belligerently threatens others. Usually the crazy roams the bus terminal, talking loudly to nobody and drawing stares, until he's swallowed up a departing bus. Before his bus arrives, everyone watches quietly, silently praying that he doesn't end up on their bus, praying harder that he won't end up in the seat next to theirs. Call this the NIMBS principle, Not In My Bus Seat.

Going Greyhound is always an experience. More than this, riding Greyhound is always an ordeal. Standing in line while waiting for a transfer, I'm one with this cattle call, lost in the shuffle of the herd waiting for slaughter.

Greyhound truly sucks. When will this poorly managed company, that constantly loses luggage, go out of business?

A slow motion obstacle course

I wish Sam Walton, the creator of Wal-Mart, owned a bus company. He'd know how to make it work. I'm serious. You're probably wondering why I did not fly. A few reasons: the expense and my fear of flying. Greyhound, in spite of the fact that their employees are often rude, their busdrivers inconsistent in their behaviour, and the entire trip a mess, remains an experience. That's the only thing riding Greyhound has going for it. It's an experience.

Going Greyhound is kind of like being lost in a beta version of the Matrix. The number of transfers and the boarding of various buses would weary the most experienced of travellers. I feel like I'm in a giant crossword puzzle, having to remember obscure numbers indicating even more obscure cities.

Taking the bus is a slow motion obstacle course for poor people. Sometimes, when I'm on the bus, I have the same feeling that creeps over me when I eat scrambled eggs--a feeling of greasiness that conjures visions of an overweight kid in the midwest that's won the dubious honor for having (won the annual contest for having) eaten the most boiled eggs in a minute, a feeling that compels me to take a long, hot shower, using a scrub brush and half-a-bar of Dove.

I hope I learn something from this trip. This entire fiasco is proving to be quite a burden.

Whatever doesn't kill you, makes you older.

May 30, 2003, Saturday

You don't ride Greyhound, it rides you
Riding the bus, doing time in the terminals, taking
transfers, making deposits in filthy, graffiti-scrawled
bathrooms--suffocating stalls so humid
that you can feel the moisture bombard your skin, you
exit dripping with sweat--enduring greasemeat patties
between stale, yellow buns, it's easy to lose track of
time. At the last station, I switched buses. I'm always
hoping that a cool, eclectic group of travellers will

seat near, or next to me. Or, better yet, a quirky, cute girl. Sometimes that happens. For the most part, busriders fall into three categories: black, non-English speaking Guatemalans, or rednecks. The kind of people you might see at the fleamarket at the fair

Riding Greyhound is an ordeal. The entire operation is a circus without a ringleader. To give you specifics, this is what happened at the Mobile, Alabama Greyhound station.

A crowd of about 200 people mill inside the walls of a rundown bus station, lined with videogames, overpriced vending machines, wire and plastic chairs, and a small restaurant serving drymeatpatty meals and sides of pre-made slop for \$6 or \$7 dollars. The grub is a step below, far below, carnival food. Suddenly, a loudspeaker crackles to life. A voice erupts among the roar of static, stuttering the itinerary for the approaching buses. But all you can hear is: "Baton Rouge, Houston, Dallas, schrrchhhh, door number five, schrrchhh, pop!, the bus for, schrhh, shrechhhch, pop!"

Passengers line up in front of doors that are numbered for corresponding destinations. Whenever a bus arrives, lumbering into the dock like a submarine on wheels, the crowd becomes chaotic, their voices growing in a low roar as they swarm the door, like a sea of panhandlers swarming a well-dressed couple after they valet park their Bentley and stroll towards a nearby restaurant. Behold the mess. Behold Greyhound.

People who haven't been standing in line try to slip into the empty spots unnoticed. Arguments ensue, Spanish, Spanglish, ghettoease, ebonics. It's a zoo. And the zookeeper at the front of the line, a weary ticket taker, shouts out commands that disappear into the forest of noise.

(As long as I look crazy, no one bothers me or cuts in front of me. Maybe that's the key to riding Greyhound--feign

insanity. I'm reaching the point where I don't have to fake it anymore, though. By the time you reach your destination, you're usually halfway crazy anyway.)

Indian corn

Blur your eyes and it's all Indian corn, the decorative corn that's laid out at Thanksgiving, multicolored humans.

A boiling pot of ethnicities, cultures.

Most are candidates for the TV show "Fashion Emergency", sportin fanny packs nearly hidden beneath sagging pot bellies and overflowing folds of flesh that ripple forth from the top of their pants. A clothing designer would be appaled by this garish nightmare.

Two words: fanny packs. To err is human; to forgive, divine; to wear fanny packs ...

As they wait for their transfer buses, they wander with tired, lost expressions, clutching sodas and digging their fingers into foil bags of corn chips--they might as well be digging their grave eating that crap--modelling tight, lycra shorts (inevitably worn by overweight people), sport jerseys, baseball caps, jewelry, and overpriced trainers (sneakers). It's a real vanilla train wreck.

But back to the story.

When the bus arrives, everyone crowds the doors with their hands stretched out, waving their reboarding ticket at the busdriver.

"This is what happens when you don't get in a single line," he complains loudly.

His frustration falls on deaf ears as the ticket holders fight for his attention. Greyhound should have roped off standing areas so that lines could form. But they don't.

I'm not sure why Greyhound is such an inept operation, but as long as I'm weary enough not to care it doesn't make much of a difference. Still, as I've ridden this way before, I know what to expect--a bus ride that is as frustrating as it is memorable. Knowing that I save a few hundred dollars also remains a consolation for me. Besides, this trip provides a plethora of visuals--sights, smells, sounds, and a myriad of interesting characters ideal for journal entries. Riding the dog, you unknowingly assume the position of a character in your own reality show, minus the models with bleached teeth.

Steve Buscemi would fit in here.

3 hours to Baton Rouge

The next stop is Baton Rouge, Louisiana, at 3:20 pm, about three hours away. Baton Rouge - sounds like a color for blush.

The guy ahead of me sits beside his kid, who's intentionally making noises. Stupidly, the dad whispers "shhhhhh", bargaining with his child who appears to be younger than two, and expecting results. You might wanna try spanking him, I feel like suggesting. His efforts prove fruitless.

Note to self or to anyone riding the bus, or any bus for that matter. Bring industrial strength earplugs. Bring a CD walkman, tapeplayer, or digital music player with comfy, noiseblocking headphones. That would be a good product Sony to market - "noiseblockers": the headphones for that Greyhound trip you wanna forget. "Noiseblockers", ask for them by name.

Earlier, I noticed a guy across from me with a portable DVD player, headphones on, watching a movie. Sounds like a good way to go when they come down in price.

Dear God,
Help this California journey to work out. Provide Faith a

way of escape and help her to be convicted for her sins.
In Jesus' Name,
Amen :-)

Fortunately, I purchased a tiny AM/FM radio for \$5 bucks, so I have music for this trip. I'm listening to terrific, original station. The music is a combination of ambient and techno, sounding like the score to a foreign film. The radio website is www.echoes.org.

underneath the sky
looking out the window
watching cars go by
living rooms on wheels
underneath the sky

cramped into a Greyhound
trying to understand
everything you worked for
does not turn out as planned

situation have a way
of trying to close you in
reacting to decisions
that press against my skin

slowly we are walled in
by choices that we make
learn to accept consequence
stubborn people break

choices, they encircle us
ships, they run aground
voices cry for help
while vultures fly around

looking out the window
watching cars go by
we're born and then we live

and inbetween we try

May 31, 2003, Saturday

Lucky

Back at the Mobile, Alabama bus station I met this guy named Lucky. He approached me inside the terminal with a big smile, as I sat a bench scribbling away in this journal. He was tall and wiry, with light brown skin, appearing to be a mix of Spanish and Black. He was dressed in baggy, athletic pants, a loose, sleeveless T-shirt, and carried a scuffed-up skateboard with his carry on luggage. When he first began talking, I didn't trust him because he was so friendly. I thought that he was setting me up to ask for money or con me into committing a petty crime with him. But that didn't happen. He spoke quickly, as if he had a limited amount of time in which he had to make confession, revealing the secrets of his universe. I tend to gravitate toward fast talkers, as I'm one myself. Slow talkers are tolerable as long as I pretend I'm on sedatives. I'm not kidding. Okay.

"Have you ever heard of extreme sports? The X Games?" He asks.

"Yeah."

"That's what I do. That's what me and my friends do. We travel all over the place and do extreme sports and make videos."

"Are you serious?" I ask.

"Yeah. I'm sponsored by 88 Comet Boards for skateboarding, and Luck and Split." He explains.

"Wow."

"We're heading to Mexico where my friend, he's real rich, has a big house. We plan to live there for a couple years, surf and just

party, since the U.S. dollar is worth so much."

"Right on." I pause. "What do your parents think about this?"

"At first, my dad hated it, but now that I'm getting paid to do it, he doesn't bother me anymore. So, he's cool with it now. Before he wasn't though. He'd always be getting on my case and shit."

"How'd you get the name Lucky?" I queried.

"I've been pronounced dead three times, too many near death counts, so my friends call me Lucky."

I told him I was into writing, playing piano, and raising awareness of the persecuted Christian church, and that I was a Christian.

"Oh, that's cool. Right on, if it works for you. I believe that as long as you have respect for everyone, then that's cool. That's what it's all about, bro. Respect. Everyone has their own belief so you gotta respect that."

"Right on," I reply, thinking that a defense of The Gospel would not be listened to by Lucky. So, I talk some about God and Jesus, and Lucky kind of looks off into space, then scans the bus for a cute girl. By the time I finish my soliloquy, he's saying: "I think I'm gonna go sit in the back, but it was nice talking to you."

"You too," I smile, shaking his hand. That's one way to end a conversation with someone who's not interested in God--talk about God. All I can is plant seeds. I wish I could do more.

Hopping Buses

We're on I-10, somewhere in Alabama, stuck in traffic. This landsub navigates slowly through this backed-up school of fish. Cool, we're gaining speed. Thank God! :-)

We just crossed a bridge into Louisiana, New Orleans, then slowed into a rest stop for a five minute break. Once we got out to stretch, Lucky and I spotted another bus that was nearly empty

and headed in the same direction.

"Look at that bus," Lucky frowned. "It's almost empty. There's no one in it and it's headed to the same place. We should get on that bus."

I approached the driver, standing outside.

"Can we ride their bus," I pointed towards it, "since both of the buses are going to the same place, Baton Rouge, Louisiana?"

He eyed us skeptically. "Why?"

"The other bus is too crowded. No leg room," I answered.

"Sure," the driver said. "Get your stuff. Make it quick. We're only here five minutes."

Lucky and I jogged back to the packed Greyhound with grins so enormous that they barely fit on our faces. He lugged his bags and backpack. All I had was a thin briefcase for journals and books, and a plastic Winn Dixie bag stuffed with Gospel tracts and a shave kit. Praise the LORD! :-)

May 31, 2003

It's 4pm, May 31, or June 1. I'm at Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Next stops include ...

Lake Charles, Louisiana

Houston, Texas

Bufallo, Texas

Dallas, Texas

Fort Worth, Texas

Wichita Falls, Texas

Amarillo, Texas

RS

Lamar, Colorado

Denver, Colorado

Evanston, Wyoming

Salt Lake City,
Utah
Wendover, Nevada
Elko, Nevada

Now that I've jumped buses at the rest stop in Louisiana, I have a window seat. And the seat next to me is empty, Praise God! Ahhh ... the small joys that surface unexpectedly when you travel.

perspective

For me it's all about the little things--noticing the beautiful bugs that trek fearlessly across the sidewalk, their Sahara, from one patch of grass to the other, or witnessing the magnificent ballet of a spider as it dances across its web, an overwhelming lattice of filament silver that occupies the corner walls of my apartment back in West Palm Beach, Florida. It's all about the little things. Even in relationships, the little things, the minor annoyances that are swept under the rug eventually become the lump in the carpet that trips even the greatest of giants.

It's the beauty of the ordinary, the silver found in the overlooked rock, the flowers that emerge from poop, spreading their petals in a triumphant yawn, face to the sun, declaring: "There's crap in my past, but I no longer have the doo-doo touch."

The beauty in the ordinary. The complicated in the simple.
The memory of dreams. The roots of coincidence.

The little things. In my teenage years, when I worked at McDonalds, I remember what fellow employee Chris asked me, with a face so earnest that it left an indelible snapshot in the filing cabinet between my ears. I had been in a bad mood at work that night when he looked at me and asked: "What's wrong?"

For a long time, those had been the kindest two words that I had ever known. What's wrong. Even now, I still remember his earnestness in asking the question, and still use them to express sympathy. What's wrong? Those two words, as a verbal can opener, have the power to unlid worlds of latent emotional

wounds, whether real or perceived.

Faith. I'm not sure what to say to Faith if I visit her. No doubt she wants to get out of jail. Despite what I have been through and am going through to get my car, it would still be nice to share the journey with someone. It's always nice to share the journey with someone.

After I retrieve the car in Eureka, Nevada, I plan to drive to Truckee, California to see if they're hiring at the Truckee River Raft Company for raft handlers. Maybe I'll give her a ride to Truckee with me. Then again, sometimes the safest company is your journal. At least it cannot rob you.

Dear LORD JESUS,
Thanks for your kindness in putting up with my folly. You know what to do, and what I should do in this situation. Help me to find your will.
Thanks.
Amen. :-)

I'm reclined across two seats, looking out the window, as the cattle car heads West towards Lake Charles, Louisiana. Outside, telephone pole crosses march past, connected by cables that, from here, look like dental floss. The landscape is flat, consisting of large, empty tracts of land scattered in a sparse assembly of houses and barns, horses, and cows that idly eat the grass. The houses are giant, the yards and farms surrounding them five to ten to twenty acres, some larger.

So far, I've eaten five bananas and drank a litre of spring water. I'm getting hungry. I've been reading Psalms. Awesome word! Originally, I planned to fast, but when I do fast, I have lots of energy and can't sleep. So, as I'm on a bus, I might as well eat a lot. The consumption produces a lethargy that will usher me into a sleep

coma. Otherwise, I'll be bouncing on the seat, watching the world pas by from this cattle car as it herds this carnival onward.

7:30, 7:40 pm, May 31, Saturday, 2003

The bus is 60% full, a blessing as I have two seats to myself. We're cruising at an altitude of about a foot, at seventy miles per hour. The a/c's on ... a refridgerated cattle car for the livestock that forgoes air transport.

The geography of nowhere
We're in Beaumont, Texas, a place of wide open landscape and fields that stretch to the horizon only to be interrupted by small towns with a few stoplights, a gas station, a sundries store and feed shop. As you approach areas with a denser population, the recognizable landmarks come into view as you draw closer--restaurants, hotels, motels, storage warehouses, gas stations, used car lots.

From my limited experience travelling (delivering antique furniture, riding the bus, and driving), it's evident that progress has no conscience. Superstores bulldoze the past, erasing historical landmarks, leaving little evidence for history and less room for nostalgia. What remains is a romantic notion, a memory of what used to be.

General stores, even in the tiny towns, are bought out and replaced with chain stores like CVJ Pharmacy, Eckerd's, Walgreens, or Rite-Aid. Privately owned discount stores lose their customers when Wal-Mart opens. It's kind of sad. The evolution of the behemoth discount superstore has left mom and pop retailers all but extinct. Like a bounty hunter, the big retailers will find the consumers, even in the remote areas. Let any residue of individualism be forgotten in the wake of progress and discount prices. Let the privately-owned businesses dogpaddle, then drown in their wake. The result is a geography of nowhere, where, sans geography, there is no distinction from one town to the next, a town whose sense of identity--the rough, serrated edges--have been worn smooth.

Witnessing this funeral of progress--the myriad of tombstones whose epithet consist of superstore slogans--is slightly depressing.

Texas. Big. Sad. Pirated by developers and turned into a giant, asphalt parking lot. Patches of concrete surrounded by oceans of sand, connected by interstate peninsulas.

At the edge of the horizon, the sun descends in the western sky, a huge orange light bulb creeping beneath the covers of nightfall. Outside the window, on the other side of the bus, sits a massive industrial facility, probably a combination power plant and water treatment plant. Highly depressing, the industrial plant, as it pushes my mood from the diving board of hope into the cold, chlorinated waters below. Geronimoooooooo!!!! Yeah, I'll be in the pool soon enough with the rest of you, swimming around, yelling, hanging off the side. Sea monkeys, all of us, lemmings plummeting toward a common world.

One day, I hope to share this journal with the world. So far, I've typed several journals into my computer.

1. bicycle days
2. dreams are the flashlight; time is the battery
3. dumpster earth
4. booklet of quotes
5. songs & poems
6. Christian commentaries
7. history's detergent (collected journal entries)

The remaining journals include ...

1. Pictures from the Leftover Generation
2. Shelters are melting (this one, currently in progress)

Once I have time, I'll launch the website www.kriskemp.com that will house the collection of stories and commentaries. Basically, they tell the story of my adventures.

"time is the culprit, we're being pursued"

from "3 days", a song from "Dumpster Diver ... the Musical"

Perhaps the way to overcome insanity is not to worry about it. Maybe I can fast tomorrow, or through tomorrow. I'll pray that God will use me, despite my own shortcomings. I'll pray for the persecuted Christian church. I'll pray that God will use Faith for His glory, according to His will, despite her obstinance. The best cure for depression is to help someone else. So many people who claim to be miserable tend to live in the corner, licking their wounds and airing complaints to the nearest passerby. Judging from their pattern, they're not looking for help as much as they're seeking company.

Outside, it is dark. As we approach Houston, Texas, the lights outside multiply, neon and fluorescent advertisements for pawn shops, restaurants, hotels, warehouses, car lots, gas stations, grocery stores, discount chains. If the number of businesses are any indication, Texas is like Florida to the tenth power.

Houston, Texas, around 10:15 pm, May 31, Saturday

Arrived at the terminal around 9:15'ish pm. Walked briskly to a McDonald's across the street, eyeing flamingo flocks of black men along the way. Hungry, I ordered two double cheeseburgers, one Big & Tasty, a ten-piece McNugget meal which includes a large drink and large fry. The price was reasonable, \$7.78 for a meal that could feed an artist for a week. For a drink, I chose Dr. Pepper.

As I waited at the front of the counter, on the right hand side, for my food to arrive, a tall black man, probably in his thirties, approached me from behind.

"Yo man, lookee here," he started. "I don't got no money and I'm trying to get somethin to eat, so how's about lettin me borrow two bucks."

I couldn't believe the nerve of this guy!
How rude. Panhandling, begging, inside
a restaurant. This was unbelievable.

"No," I said flatly.

Angry at my response, he launched into a verbal barrage, using the F-word a few times and making physical threats loudly enough to be heard by others. I couldn't believe this was happening inside a McDonald's. Steaming with anger, I take a deep breath, turn my back to him, and ignore him. The store manager, standing behind the counter, asks him to settle down.

Instead of complying with his request, the prick complains to the store manager about me. " ... and it's my birthday," he whines in a thuglike baritone, "and I want three burgers for a dollar and that fuckin guy doesn't want to help a brother out."

I feel like turning around, saying, "I'm not your brother," then punching him in the face so hard that his nose enters his brain, resulting in brain damage. But, as this bum would probably like that as he could suffer victim status, earn disability, and get free burgers for life, I decline. Besides, since I'm caucasian the whole melee would be turned into a hate crime, with me as the perpetrator and him as the victim. You know how it is. Since we live in a very politically-correct society, our entire system of justice has been flipped on its head. Today, people are punished more for the intent, the thought behind the crime, than the actual crime itself. The central focus is class struggle, the difference between races, and victims rights--a tricycle built by guilt-ridden, liberal lawyers influenced by watered down principles of Marxism and Communism. Even though I am tempted to sucker punch this piece of trash, grab his neck into a headlock and jerk it sideways, snapping his neck and killing him, reason rises to the surface, a liferaft bobbing in this ocean of anger

(and I swim towards it, hold on, and ride out the storm).

Furious, I begin to shout: "That guy," pointing to the asshole, "threatened me! Can you please call the police? He's bothering me, and he threatened to beat me up unless I offered him money!"

And he did threaten to beat me up, saying: "How'd ya like it if I beat ya up once ya get outside the store?" when I refused to give him money.

The manager, like a kindergarten teacher talking to a convict, warns the panhandler to calm down or he'll be thrown out. The clerk, a young girl behind the counter, retreats from him as he orders, refusing to serve him.

"I'm not gonna help someone that cusses me out," she argues.

Rightly so.

Then the manager, a guy, in an act that demonstrates his spinelessness, caves in to the panhandlers ability to orchestrate chaos and stress, and hands him a bag.

"There's two burgers in there for you," the manager.
"Thanks my man," the bum mutters, then strolls out the door.

Right after I yelled at the guy, Lucky, the 21 year old extreme sports and X-games enthusiast, entered the store.

His arrival was perfect timing, because if the bum would've retaliated to my response, he would have had to deal with both Lucky and me. Lucky is tall, slim and muscular from years of riding skateboards and surfing. I'm skinny, but stronger than I look, muscles earned from years of working at a local moving company. Another bonus to Lucky's entrance is his skin color-a light shade of brown. Maybe Puerto Rican, Spanish, or an Islander. That, coupled with his nappy hair, lent street credibility to his appearance. Even though a physical altercation didn't erupt between me and the beggar, I was

glad, or lucky, to see Lucky show up.

Lucky walked in right after the yelling had subsided. We began talking and I chatted about his interests, fueling his engine with questions about extreme sports. His eyes lit up and starts to tell me a story that involved him and a friend riding their skateboards down a bridge in California.

"The cops nearly arrested us," he told, wide-eyed.
"But we hid inside the back of a moving truck."

I wasn't sure whether to believe the story but figured I'd enjoy the moment with him, even if it was hyperbole, and smiled, nodding.

Cautiously, I returned to the bus terminal, ignoring the calls of nearby panhandlers. My crumpled sack of fastfooddeath bulged restlessly against the bag, threatening to escape its paper tomb.

Parting the doors into the Greyhound station, I found the line for my next arrival, took my place at the back, and collapsed to the floor. Sitting crosslegged, and using my flat, thin briefcase as a tray, I devoured the meal ruthlessly, like a small animal that hasn't eaten in days.

Wait a second, like a small animal? No, I am a small animal that hasn't eaten in days. While eating, I perused one of the Gospel tracts from the Winn Dixie bag beside me, which held about a hundred assorted booklets. Along the way, I've placed a few here and there, in bathrooms or telephone booths, but have shied away from one-on-one conversations. From what I have been through, I don't feel strong enough to evangelize or minister to anyone else. Another part of me feels that if a person has not made a choice to repent of his sins, and accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour, after living in the United States where The Gospel message can be heard on radio, television, the internet, billboards, pamphlets, music,

and evangelists galore, then they have already made their decision and their fate is sealed. My decision, though, is not a permanent one. With God's help, I'll return to the streets again. On my next sojourn, though, I hope to evangelize on the streets of another country, where the needs are greater and the thirst to know God more significant. My friend Ryan Johnson, a former Palm Beach Atlantic University (PBAU) student, who volunteered with me at Refuge Coffeehouse and joined me in evangelizing downtown West Palm Beach, said that I would love Mexico.

"If you pass out tracts there, Kris," he explained with a smile, "they surround you." He laughed. "They do. It's not like here in The States. You'd love it, Kris."

Another part of me wants to work a lot, then use whatever money I have, after rent and food, to support Voice of the Martyrs and Christian Aid. The cost of supporting a missionary at Christian Aid is only \$50 dollars a month. The cost of supporting a missionary through Voice of the Martyrs is \$25 dollars a month. Imagine how many people could be effected for The Gospel?! I've always liked being in the background anyway, so I could just disappear in the bowels of a kitchen somewhere and work while supporting missionaries. How cool is that, huh? :-)

Homeless is a better word for bums
Experiencing bums and panhandlers firsthand, I've come to understand that, for the most part, they are where they are because of the choices they made. And, contrary to popular belief, most are ingrates. When they do express gestures of appreciation, they're merely smiling for the camera and taking advantage of well-meaning churchgoers who, afraid to spread The Gospel, resort to social work instead. As Christians, our role model needs to be Jesus Christ, not Mother Theresa. Jesus Christ said: "Follow me." So we should be telling people

to follow Jesus. He also said: "Repent, for The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Perhaps we should be saying the same thing. Change begins on the inside.

Confusing missionary work with social work
Before leaving for this trip, my mom called. In a parade of well-placed adjectives, she told me about The Dream Center, an LA, California based church that operates a massive street ministry, using social programs as a method to spread The Gospel of The Lord Jesus Christ.

Good intentions notwithstanding, are these Christians really doing the work of Christ? Correct me if I'm wrong, but Jesus didn't go around starting homeless ministries.

The irony lies in the fact that Jesus was homeless himself.
Matthew 8:20 (King James Version): And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

While the number of people that come to salvation may be worth the effort and expense that is undertaken, this church, like so many others, neglects The Scriptures message "to seek and save the lost". The lost souls include people of every tongue, tribe, and nation, not merely the down and out that live in the United States. A church that limits soul winning to reaching "street people" often confuses social justice work, a modern day form of good works, with evangelism. At best, they reach a few souls with the saving message of repentance of sins, and the saving Blood of The Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and was resurrected three days later. At worst, they ignore the repentance aspect of The Gospel, perhaps even The Gospel itself, bulldozing it beneath an avalanche of promises, including, but not limited to "come to Jesus and you'll have a better life".

Is this what Jesus promised when you follow Him? Hardly. He said that all who followed him would be "hated of all men for my name's sake" (Matthew 10:22) and "hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matthew 24:9) (Matthew 10:22). He suffered as an example so we could suffer also (1 Peter 2:21).

Money that's allocated for homeless ministries would be better used to support native missionaries in the 10/40 window, a section of Asia where a billion or so people wait to hear about The Lord Jesus Christ. Read Galatians 6:10

Street people live on the streets because of the choices they have made, and continue to make. Somewhere along the line, they made a bad choice.

As the choice becomes a habit, then a pattern, then a lifestyle, then a destiny, they find themselves a slave, having traded their identity for an addiction. Still, they need to be preached The Gospel of repentance, not The Gospel of "I'll help you no matter what you do, because you're not responsible to your own choices, rather you're addiction is a chemical shortcoming that you're prone to succumb to anyway".

Showering drug addicts, alcoholics, gamblers, con artists, and slackers with compliments, free clothing, and food is inane. Why reward people for irresponsible behaviour? Most homeless people I've encountered need a wake up call, in the form of jail time or a hungry stomach, more than anything else. These feeding programs, offered with the best of intentions while dismissing better judgement, merely encourage them to live in their lifestyle.

Homeless people, for whatever reason, don't need courses in self esteem, they need brokenness and conviction, an understanding that unless they repent of their sins and turn to Jesus Christ, they're destined to spend eternity in Hell.

If you ignore Jesus Christ in this life, you're going to have Hell to pay in the next one. Change that lasts is accomplished from the inside out. Enduring change begins at the heart. Everything else is merely cosmetic.

12:50 am, June 1, Sunday, 2003

The landsub is parked at a Tigermart in Houston, Texas. It's chilly, about 60 degrees. Earlier, while the bus was in motion, I visited the bathroom.

The bus bathroom

Ever been to the bathroom on a passenger bus while it's in motion? Everything becomes an ordeal when you're riding the bus. To make the ordeal manageable, you break it down into steps.

To begin with, the john is located in the back of the bus. In order to get there, you unlodge yourself from your seat, unfolding your body to a standing position, shuffle around your neighbor, and land in the aisle. From here, you maneuver through the narrow passageway (valley) between the seats, placing your hand on the seatbacks or on the luggage compartment to steady yourself. Scattered at your feet lie makeshift hurdles--outstretched legs attached to sleeping bodies, dangling arms, pregnant duffel bags that threaten to go into labor any minute, and the general detritus of potato chip bags and plastic soda pop containers rolling side to side (artifacts that will be excavated a thousand years from now by archeologists who need empirical evidence for our short lifespans and numerous diseases). Once you complete the obstacle course of weary bodies and bags, you find yourself at the bathroom door, a narrow, silver colored panel that's no more than 18 inches in width. Due to the limited space, the door opens inward. You enter.

Surprisingly, the bathroom is relatively clean.

The toilet, though, is a black hole. The water within appears to be about three feet below the seat. It looks like you're about to poo into a bottomless pit.

Literally, you're dropping bombs, raining lemonade, or both. Using the bathroom, actually, is where things get interesting. Imagine walking into a telephone booth that's sitting on the end of a diving board. Now, make

that diving board fifty feet long (length of a bus?) and add periodic gusts of wind that burst through the air vent in the wall. You're beginning to get the idea. While you stand there, or sit there doing your business, you're bouncing. (Imagine placing a portable toilet in the center of a giant bounce house filled with caffeinated pre-teens ...) Then you understand the reason for the amount of space between the toilet rim and the water beneath, and say a prayer of thanks.

If that doesn't give you a mental picture, try putting a toilet in the middle of a trampoline, then attend to business while another person jumps up and down on the trampoline. While you drain your lizard or negotiate the hostage release, your mind roams. What would happen if the bus hit a really big pothole, or worse, flipped, or jack-knifed, swinging the end toward the front like the tail end of a whip that's cracked. Shiii ...!!

A lot of different ethnicities and social styles ride the bus. All of them dress in their own style--hip-hop, cowboy, grunge, gothic, punk, raver, hippie, prep collegiate. Bus rides make for great photo opportunities. Bring a video, or digital camera while you're at it. Board a bus, or any form of public transport, and you'll find a kalidescope of colors, an array of Indian corn--wild colors crammed within a giant above-ground submarine. Picture, if you can, a convention of carnies, and you'll get the idea. My choice of travels has given me the carnie status as well, one I am prepared to assume with ease, for I usually feel like an outsider. Here, everyone is an outsider. Buses, and cheap transportation in general, level the playing field.

The bus is rolling again. We've been in Texas since around 7pm, May 31, and won't be leaving this neon nightmare until about 2 or 3pm, June 2. Texas is mammoth. The intrastate highways are here like a never ending conveyer belt of asphalt that keeps feeding beneath the wheels, tricking you into believing that you're actually moving, laughing capriciously as you watch roadsigns from the window.

From east to west, I believe, Texas takes 12-to-16 hours to drive through. That time is for I-10. This bus is on I-20 or I-40, which may take longer. I don't know.

Now that the passengers are quiet, and it's about 1:15 am, the lights are off, except for mine, which I'll turn off at the end of this sentence. From different parts of the bus, crunching can be heard, then the crinkling of foil bags as fingers dig for more chips. I turn off my light and continue writing, using the ambient light outside as it spreads across my notebook in vertical shafts. The crunching continues. This is like being in a sound studio for a Doritos commercial, with the lights turned off. Hah! :-)

June 1, Sunday, 4pm, 2003

One word: zoo. Greyhound deals with the scraps of humanity--the poor, the crazies, the refugees of society. Going Greyhound is like riding in a cattlecar, being herded around like livestock to various transfer points before the inevitable slaughter. Generally speaking, from my own observations, the mood of the bus driver is proportional to the rudeness of the people at the station, or on board the bus. Working at a bus station should qualify you for employment at the correctional facility.

Dallas sucks. So does Houston. At least the area where the bus terminals appears to be squalid. Both are dirty cities, giant graveyards of filthy cement buildings and rundown plazas, a concrete nightmare. In the early morning hours, drifters roam the streets and scurry for cover from curious cops, fading into the camouflage of nearby alleys, these skinny, wild-eyed men with fading tattoos and greasy lips that hide nicotine stained teeth.

America, when you see it up close, is not a melting pot. The slow boil of its various cultures, while reducing the plethora of backgrounds to a distilled stew,

turns out to be a poor tasting soup du jour. The finished product is hard to swallow, even harder to keep down, no matter what the media says otherwise. America is not a melting pot. America is a boiling pot.

June 1, Sunday, 4:30 pm, 2003
underground America

Sitting here, at the terminal in Dallas, I feel like this scene is underground America. While America, the rest of America sleeps, an entire subculture, their belongings in their overstuffed totebags, backpacks and suitcases, waits for the next bus to arrive. The people, like their belongings, find available resting spots wherever they happen to be. Some lounge in plastic chairs, or steel mesh benches; others sit crosslegged on the floor, while a few crouch down, their butts close to but not touching in the floor. The crouchers, like me, keep our territory off limits to trespassers. Like a crab, we hold the fort, and scan the crowd with the soberness of a fresh seabee looking through the lens of a periscope. A great vantage point for the crabs is near the bank of telephones with their backs against the wall, while they eavesdrop on nearby conversations in an inexpensive attempt to quell their doubts about their arrival times. Usually, this crowd is reticent, used to the treatment they've come to expect that's common to the underground.

A part of me loves this ... the beauty of not knowing what's going to happen next, the silver lining in my cloud of doubt, losing myself in the anonymity of the lost. My expectations have plummeted. As long as I expect nothing, I'll be happy with crumbs.

Another part of me thinks I deserve better. Maybe I do. My problem, though, is this: I am not interested in rising to the occasion. I don't care enough about the so-called good life to even work for it. In fact, I kind of loathe it, especially the accumulation of material goods that double as both an anchor, to keep people in one

place and drown them in debt, and pickpocket, as repairs, upgrades, and insurance demand greater quantities of cash. Both of these consequences, anchor and pickpocket, tether the human race to staying where they're at and working jobs to maintain that perimeter. I don't want any part of that. Working at a moving company for three-and-a-half years only served to cement my opinion. Trudging through elaborately decorated apartments over imported carpets, while carrying heavy, wooden wardrobe closets, I saw firsthand how the abundance of overpriced furniture provides false expectation and empty hope. Even seeing the wealth up close bothered me. Instead of motivating me to work for what they have, the opposite effect was set into motion. I don't want to own anything, maybe this pen ...

Sunday, 5am, June 1, 2003

We're at Fort Worth, Texas. This bus station is empty. It's nice to be at an empty bus station, the bus station at the edge of the world. It's like finding a community swimming pool all to yourself, ripe for exploration by you and a few friends. Here, several people leave the bus. About six people board.

Fashionwise, the outfit favored by female busriders is an assembly of long, denim shorts, tanktops, jackets, fannybacks, sandals, sneakers. The women are usually overweight smokers (sounds like a band name), a confederacy of rednecks waddling their way to the vending machines, answering the call of the wild--their bellies (the untamed animal known as appetite).

7:30 am, Sunday, June 1, 2003

The bus rolls into a station somewhere in Texas. I jog over to a McDonald's across the street for a hotcakes and sausage meal with a biscuit. (Cost \$3.35 or something.) Returning to the bus station, I parked myself on a bench, snatched a Gospel tract from a

tray at the station, and read it while wolfing down the steaming pancakes. I was encouraged to see someone cared enough to set up a Gospel tract display in the tiny waiting area. I wish more Christians were like that.

This town, from my limited view, appears to be a nice, quiet place. I'm hoping that after our Texas stops the number of passengers will thin out. So far, this trip has been interesting. This ride, a conveyer belt buffet of unruly passengers, crowded terminals, non-English speaking people, and quiet loners, makes for a picturesque story.

8am, Quinah?, Texas (Texaco Gas Station), June 1, 2003

This bus is full of people, a lot of Mexicans. We unloaded for a ten minute stop at the Texaco station. While we milled about, someone dials 9-11 three times on the payphone. A cop arrived, walked up and down the bus, then talked to the bus driver. Annoyed, the bus driver warned us in the loudspeaker.

"Somebody called 9-11 and I know you're not gonna admit it, but I want you to know that that's a serious offense. Do not call 9-11 unless you have an emergency. Understand?"

Silence. The bus begins to roll. The dry, white dirt and rocks can be heard crunching beneath the wheels.

Around 10am, June 1, 2003, Sunday

The bus lumbers west, an aluminum boxcar on wheels. All around us, for miles, as far as the eye can see: fields, an ocean of fields that go on forever, stretching in all directions to the horizon.

The last time I travelled through here, I spoke with a farmer. He explained crop rotation to me, how he

planted different varieties of grain on the same plot of land, in order to sustain the life of the soil. It yeilds a better harvest. This time, though, all I see is wheat, a vast carpet billowing in the wind. Every now and then, I see horses and cows standing in small groups, grazing. The sky, a huge blue translucent sheet, appears neverending although you pretend it's sown up, stitched at the horizon, meeting the wheat fields edge in a perfect horezontal line. The clouds look painted against the roof of the sky.

Here, the clouds are very high, not like the low hanging clouds you see in Florida. Perhaps the cloats float at a lower altitude in Florida to remind us of the beauty of nature, the handiwork of God, in contrast with what developers have accomplished, converting most of South Florida into a parking lot of condos and shopping malls. God gave us dominion over the earth, not tyranny.

12:13 pm, Sunday, June 1, 2003

Somewhere at a Greyhound station in Texas, I ordered a bottled juice for a whopping buck-75. Longing to hear some music, I fed the jukeboax that sat at one-end-of-the-nameless-burger-joint a dollar, queing three Lauren Hill songs and the Elton John song "Candle in the Wind".

I remember hearing this Lauren Hill CD at the Villa parties, hosted by the incredible Jennings sister and their interesting array of friends. Their house, inhabited by anywhere from 6-to-15 people at a time, served as a waystation for activists from around the United States and Canada. The Jennings sisters, consisting of Aimee, Cara, Colleen, Elizabeth, and one other whose name escapes me, sorry!, started The Radical Cheerleaders, a loosely organized group of coed performers protesting against societal abuses and advancing social justice and reform. If you ever get a chance to see them, go! Their cheers are original, funny, and memorable.

Each cheerleading group is composed of girls and guys, or girls. They dress in mismatched clothes, scarves, hats, Keds, ripped T-shirts, and the girls, most of them anyway, refuse to shave their legs. Anyway, the Jennings's house is where I first heard the Lauren Hill CD.

Later, I heard the same CD at Cara Jennings party when rented a cottage-sized bungalow just north of Lucerne, in Lake Worth, FL. At that party, Scott Thourot, an engineer by day and dumpster diver by night, who runs the Food Distro for Northlake Boulevard, and Ryan Cedar, this skater guy who I go evangelizing with, were there. Music can be such a memory trigger, an associative cue, releasing the floodgates of past events that have been dammed for some time.

around 1pm, Sunday, June 1, 2003

As this lithium carnival roars westward into Texas, the landscape outside slowly changes, beginning to resemble a rippled carpet, one that hasn't been pulled flat with tack strips. Instead, it's been rolled out with the air pockets left beneath it, leaving troughs, valleys, and peaks. The terrain is lumpy, pockmarked with weeds and desert brush. This is only the beginning. The further west we advance, the higher each ripple in the carpet, until we're driving into mountains. There's some cows and several buffalo. This is the kind of area--open, vast, barren--where UFO's are seen. I hope I see one.

Dumas, Texas, afternoon, Sunday, June 1, 2003

Stopped for a cigarette break at a small town littered with abandoned, industrial buildings, churches, restaurants, and fenced-yards guarding used cars and their rusting engines beside them. Weatherwise, it's warm and dry. Throughout Texas, there are a plethora of abandoned, warehouse-styled factories, indicating, perhaps, that some major industry flew south, maybe to Mexico, and never

returned. These towns ... Amarillo, Dumas, and Memphis, are tiny and strung together by narrow intrastates and sunbeaten exit ramps.

Boise City, Oklahoma, later afternoon, Sunday, June 1, 2003

The driver parks for a ten minute break in this small town. Outside, it's dry, dusty, hot, arid. This place is inhabited by denim wearing ghosts.

Here, I meet this kid named Ben. Turns out he's a writer and webpage designer in his early twenties. He's a good looking guy with glasses, blue eyes, and sideburns. He had an interesting answer when I asked him: "Where you headed?"

"To Boulder (Colorado," he answered. "Yesterday morning, when I got up, I decided to sell everything and move to a different place. So I go to the bus station and ask him how much is a one way ticket to Boulder. He says, '\$113 dollars'. I pull out my wallet and have exactly \$113 dollars. I figure that's a good sign," he grins.

"Wow," I smile. "Why'd you decide to go. Are you usually that impetuous?" I ask, using the word 'impetuous', as Mike Toby had told me its definition before I left.

"No. I'm not usually that impetuous. It's just, I have some friends who travel a lot. And I feel like they know something that I don't, and I wanna find out what it is. I'm together, too. That's the weird thing," he confesses. "I have my own business. I do real estate investing. I have two cars. I sold them."

"What did your parents say?"

"At first, they were surprised, but after I told them my reasons, they smiles and said: 'Go for it. Have fun.'

I've never asked them for anything, so they're not worried."
He paused. "All I brought is my music and some clothes."

He hands me a bag and pulls out a suitcase sized
book of CD's.

"Look through it. If there's any CD's you wanna
listen to, go ahead."

Then he hands me the CD player with headphones. I flip through
the pages. He has an interesting collection of music:
Depeche Mode, The Verve, REM, Maggie Star, The
Cranberries, Portishead, Radiohead, Tricky, techno
remixes, Fatboy Slim, Coldplay, The Beatles, Vast. He's
nice and I promise to e-mail him. Ben ... cypher@m-nus.org

Lamar, Colorado, Sunday, June 1, 2003

It's 4-something pm. The bus picked up 3 guys in Lamar, Colorado,
so I lost the free seat beside me. Bummer, as I was just getting a
good sleep.

We're stopping at McDonald's for 25 minutes for dinner. Where's a
good buffet like Iron Skillet or Golden Corral when you need one?
When you're driving cross country, those restaurants are the best.
You eat there once a day and you're good to go. Golden Corral has
the best sweetened iced tea that I've ever tasted.

I'm hungry but don't feel like eating McDonalds, so I skip the
grease and visit Subway across the street. It's raining and in the
high 60's as I hurdle over mud puddle potholes toward the yellow sign.

When I enter the store, though, there's a line of about 4-to-5 people.
The first lady in line, however, orders 3 subs and behind the
counter, the only employee on duty is running around looking for
provolone cheese. How frustrating, to be put in a position like
that--alone, working the register, assembling sandwiches, then
looking for ingredients that the previous employee didn't stock.
As I didn't want to risk missing the bus, I bolted, returning to

the rain outside, leaping over potholes, running toward the sanctuary of McDonald's.

I'll be glad to get to Elko, Nevada. My only worry is bridging the 150 mile distance from Elko to Eureka, Nevada, a place that Faith described as being "literally, in the middle of nowhere". Wherein lies the uncertainty lies the adventure. We'll see what happens.

6:50 pm, Sunday, June 1, 2003, Pueblo, Colorado

We're in Pueblo, Colorado and I'm staying put as I have a window seat. In a bus, a window seat is a coveted space. Trust me. We're idling at a bus terminal. Outside, a line of about 30-to-40 people forms--Mexicans, whites, blacks, Indians, Asians, Spanish--a medley of America's quiche du jour. Apparently, school's out so a lot of people are travelling. So far this trip has been alright, thank God.

Life itself, when you think about it, is like a bus ride. The destination is where you are headed, your goals. Along the way you meet people that board the bus--friends, strangers, acquaintances, best friends. What you carry on board--your carry-on--is what you value.

Take Ben for instance, the young man bound for Colorado. He had 2 or 3 bags, the biggest one carrying his CD collection, indicating his fondness for music. My belongings consist of a thin briefcase containing this journal, some music notes and poems, and Winn Dixie bag of Gospel tract literature to distribute along the way.

Metaphorically, the bus-drivers are the people that help us reach our goals, perhaps a mentor of some sort--best friend, counsellor, father, mother, teacher, pastor. Through the course of our life, we switch buses, make transfers, as we move from one mentor to another. The journey itself is memorable, as it yields valleys of sadness and mountains of joy,

while you clamor for a window seat to get a better view. The end of your busride represents the end of your life, or the meeting of a long term goal. The length of the busride represents the length of your life. The description of your ride, be it arduous, adventurous, bumpy, difficult, or a little of each, might describe your life's journey.

10:10 pm, Monday, June 1, 2003

I'm sitting on the floor of the Denver Greyhound bus terminal. So far, this station wins in terms of crowd control and being clean. The worst ones were Alabama, Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana, Mississippi, Houston and Dallas, Texas. Why? Run by blacks and overrun by blacks, most of them are loud, disruptive and disrespectful troublemakers. For some reason, blacks fail to discipline other blacks, even when creating problems. It's bullshit.

At the terminal, I spoke with a lady beside me. Turns out she lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. She's been living there for twelve years.

"But I miss my family," she expressed. "I'll be moving to Mississippi in a few years." She mentioned that Salt Lake City has gotten worse over the years, citing a big "crystal meth problem in the city" that creates a ripple effect for crime.

"You may wanna check out Park City, Utah," she suggested. "Apply there in August, when season starts. They always need people. They hire all the Mexicans."

7:05 am, June 2, Monday

The bus rolled into Livingston, Wyoming, east of Utah. The mountains are magnificent. I think of that verse in The Psalms, "The Heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament showeth his handiwork." The sky is stretched blue, pulled tight like a blanket canopy under the mattress of the horizon. The sun casts a warm glow

exposing the smallest of details in a bath of light. Further west, maybe an hour or less, we'll be in Utah.

In one way or another, this trip is propelling me into a situation where I have to trust God. Because of our relative comfort in the West, many Christians rely on a good credit line and a healthy bank account for their security, financial or otherwise. My situation in West Palm Beach, Florida--living cheaply and working at a relatively stress-free job--places me in a position of safety, a kind of cocoon that minimizes risk but may stunt personal progress. This security, although comforting, leaves little room for growth. My lifestyle, characterized by minimalism that nearly verges on stoicism, leaves me self-reliant. God needs and wants us to rely on Him, not ourselves. (By saying this, I'm not assuming the posture of a missions worker on a crusade to show mercy to someone that deserves judgement. Rather, I'm merely making a point.)

Some people that are materially wealthy and self-made, hide behind a shell of false bravado, a self-contained incubator that harbors the eggs of insecurity.

If anything, I hope to rely on God on this trip, trusting Him to lead the way. Unless we put ourselves out there for God, how will he be able to use us?

It's time to exit the hamster cage of security, turn off the TV, the A/C, and visit the world outside, telling them about the Gift of Salvation through repentance and turning to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Why aren't we visiting the orphans and widows in their need, visiting neighbors, praying for this lost world, reading The Bible, and telling them of an eternity that awaits following death, and the choice that they must make if they want to spend eternity in Heaven? What's stopping us? Our collection of cosmetics that beckon as we stare in the mirror? Our gym memberships? Our cable TV? Our internet addictions? What's stopping us? Many of us, myself included, rot in front of the television while exercising

the only form of control that we (feel we) have--the remote control. What gives?

Outside, the rippled carpet of mountains rolls by slowly. A cargo train snails alongside the vertical cliff walls. The landscape is composed of red clay, interrupted by clumps of brushes and patches of trees that sprinkle the vista.

Last night, while waiting for a transfer at the Denver terminal, I chatted with a lady nearby. She mentioned that Park Slope, Utah is always looking for people to work, especially in August and September, the beginning of snow season.

God-willing, I'll work as a raft handler in Tahoe City, California, from mid-June through September, then drive to Park Slope to look for work from September to January. :-)

9:30 am, Monday, June 2, 2003, somewhere in Utah

So far, the two cleanest bus terminals have been Denver, Colorado, and Salt Lake City, Utah. Both were spacious, clean, well organized. Denver, Colorado has a great downtown section consisting of cafes, pubs, restaurants along the street, with basement levels as well. Given the choice, though, I like Salt Lake City, Utah, as it is littered with cool, old buildings, and vintage signs. These buildings however, are still in operation, selling their merchandise while offering a peek of nostalgia.

The next stop is Wendover, Nevada. The bus ambles onward, it's aluminum roof baking in the arid desert sunshine. Around us, as far as the eye can see, lies miles of salt flats, white and crusty, with mountain ranges silhouetted at the edge of the horizon. The ground outside is so white that it glows from the sun's reflection.

"This is where they filmed 'Independence Day', a gray haired lady directly in front of me explains. We're

somewhere in Nevada.

By mid-afternoon, I expect to arrive at Elko, Nevada, my last stop, where I'll be deposited to fend for myself and find a ride to Eureka, Nevada, some 150 miles away. This should be interesting. Or horrifying. Or a little of both. If I end up dead, I hope someone finds this journal and gets a kick out of it. At least I tried, and that's where real faith is demonstrated--trying in the midst of uncertain circumstances.

Monday, 5:37 pm, Eureka Sheriff's Department, Eureka, Nevada,
June 2, 3003

I'm at Eureka Sheriff's Department in Eureka, Nevada. Thank God! I made it here, Praise The Lord!

Now, let's retrace my steps.

Monday, 2pm, Elko, Nevada

Around 2pm, the Greyhound veered into the small town of Elko, Nevada, off of Interstate 80. Elko is in the middle of nowhere, an oasis of hotels, gas stations, restaurant/buffets, casinos. This whole town seems to serve as a waystation for travellers, or people that have spare change to gamble after leaving from, or before arriving to, Las Vegas. What's noticeably absent is housing. Where do the townspeople live? They probably live ten-or-more miles from town, in trailer parks or manufactured homes situated closer toward the mountains. This is where they come to work, as waitresses, room attendants, cooks, and dishwashers. The service industry. Down and out in Elko, Nevada.

I don't want to sound apocalyptic, but the service industry may be the last refuge for jobworkers in the United States, as so many professional jobs are being outsourced to other countries. Americans, though, will always be

eating out, gambling, and getting sick.

Casinos put two of those excursions, eating out and gambling, under one roof. So, if you want a profession that won't go overseas, work as a cook, casino employee, or in the medical industry. But be prepared to learn Spanish, as the number of illegal immigrants in this country, last I heard, was up to ten million.

At an anonymous gas station, the bus slowed to a stop, and parked. The doors creaked open, unfolding vertically like those self-standing partitions used as dressing rooms. The glass was covered with a film of road dust. A hrrmmphhhh sound of air was released as it lowered toward the ground at the base of the steps. Travellers rose, stretched, and grabbed their wallets. Like so many other small towns en route here, this gas station doubles as a bus pickup/dropoff point.

Before leaving the bus, I said goodbye to Rich, a 29-year old who's been a Marine since age 19, but now plans to withdraw in a few months. I said farewell to two ladies who sat in front of me, a poet and a piano player.

When Rich boarded a few hours earlier, I asked him some questions, then sat quietly and listened. Slowly, he began talking, telling me the story of his experience in the Armed Services for the last ten years. Throughout his tales, he expressed the frustrations of having to answer to people in authority that lacked competence. He launched into a brief life history and the difficulties he had encountered as a marine, serving both in Kuwait, during the Gulf War, and time in Iraq. Now, it turns out, he wants to make use of the college G.I. Bill and, perhaps, return to school.

"I'd really like to travel some, maybe for two or three months," he explained. "Up the California coast, from Big Sur to Oregon." He mentioned that his mom has ten acres in Stockton, California.

"Let me know if you want to see Stockton, California," was his parting shot. "Call me, 'cuz that's what I plan to do, drive

from the north side to the south side, then visit Mexico. And I know you don't have a lot of money so I can swing it."

I jotted down his phone number and told him I'd call him, thanking him for the offer. Then I stepped from the bus onto the pavement. One small step for Kris Kemp, one giant leap for mankind.

Sucking in a big gulp of the dry mountain air, then releasing a long sigh, I strolled toward the gas station and stepped inside.

"How far is it to Eureka, from here?" I ask the clerk behind the counter.

"Eureka? Oh, honey, that's quite a ways from here," she answers, then turns to a coworker. "How far's Eureka from here?"

"Well," her friend begins, "there's two different routes you can take, but I'm not sure which one's quicker. Probably about 120, 150 miles."

Now what? I'm thinking. Now what? Eureka, Nevada is where the car is at, and that's about 150 miles away.

My heart sinks. I'm SOL. How am I gonna get there. It's already late afternoon and soon will be evening. Sitting on the curb outside, I unfold the map, hoping to find shortcuts. On the map, there's a bunch of green squiggles between Elko and Eureka. Curious, I look closer to what they represent. Diamond Mountains. Ruby Mountains. Oh, great. A mountain range between me and my destination. Is that thunder I hear? Or is it God laughing?

It's only 150 miles, right? That's only about two inches on a map. And isn't distance only a measurement that's determined by our size in the universe? And isn't our size in the universe determined by our state of mind? Maybe the potholes, the problems in our life, are only as big as we want them to be. Perhaps it's all a matter of perspective. Perhaps this mountain-- the mountain range, the distance, and the absence of transportation-- can become a mole hill given the right view.

Yes! It's not the size of the problem, it's the size of our perspective of the problem. For an ant, the width of a sidewalk may seem formidable. If God has helped me to reach this point, won't he help me reach my destination? Of course! My worrying is only showing my lack of trust in God. And, even if they do find my body-dehydrated, sunburned, on the side of a mountain between here and Eureka-- I'll probably have the a smile so big that it doesn't fit on my face, rigamortis and all! Hah!

Aspiring writer found dead in Nevada.

The level of adventure is inversely porportional to the level of certainty.

I've gotta catch a ride, somehow, someway, before evening. I'm in the middle of the desert and the towns here are hundreds of miles apart. I'm not panicking, but I have come to the realization that my own fate, from this point on, is not in my hands.

Returning inside the gas station/convenient store, I explain my situation to the clerks. One offers me a cup of water. I thank her and return outside. Standing under the awning, I watch the bus swallow the remaining passengers before floating away in a small cloud of dust. No turning back.

Throw the hat over the fence, as Carrie said earlier. There I am, Kris Kemp, stranded in Elko, Nevada, enduring uncertainty, buslag, hot dry weather, and the smiles of happy tourists gassing up their cars.

I gathered what little nerves I had remaining and trudged toward the nearest car. They did not run in horror, recoil in astonishment, or jump inside and lock the door.

This is a good sign. As I've been hibernating within the belly of the bus for three days, surely I must have morphed beyond the larvae stage by now.

Still, I probably appear frightful to behold, sunburned, wreaking with the stench of caked-on deodorant

layered body odor with matted tangled hair promising week old Easter eggs for those that dared to run their fingers through this thicket. My eyes, no doubt, had a glazed over hypnosis tint over them as well. I hesitated to look at my reflection in the nearby convenient store window.

"Hi. Are you heading to I-80?" I asked in the most polite voice I could muster.

"Why?" The gentleman asked.

"I'm getting a ride to Carson City," I explained.

"No. I'm heading east on I-80," he replied. "Sorry. I can't help ya."

Gilligan's Island in Nevada

Defeated, I sat under the gas station awning, parking my butt on the island between two gas pumps. I am Gilligan, and this is my island, I thought, smiling. This time, however, the Skipper is nowhere to be found. And Thurston has gone bankrupt, so Lovey's left him to dig for gold elsewhere. Ginger took a job offer as a spokesperson for Revlon. And the Professor is now a consultant for a large pharmaceutical firm.

Still, Gilligan continues on, fueled by sheer determination and a faith that cannot be contained. Beside the stranded castaway sit his belongings: a thin briefcase, a plastic grocery bag stuffed with Gospel tracts, and an outfolded map.

Cars approach, drivers exit, and I give my spiel. Their answers vary.

"I'm not going in that direction."

"There's not enough room in my car."

"No, sorry."

I even offered cash, but was still declined. Most people are afraid to pick up hitchhikers, I suppose. Then again, so many people have seen the horror stories on those dramatic TV shows based on true stories about crime. Who hasn't seen those TV shows? They become apprehensive about picking up a hitchhiker. Who wouldn't? To be honest, I probably wouldn't give me a ride either. I cannot blame them.

Still, the irony is this: hundreds do hitchhike every year, probably thousands, and safely reach their destination. For the driver, the hitchhiker is company, someone to talk to, someone with an interesting story to share. For the hitchhiker, the driver is a ride. That's it. Nothing more, nothing less.

But these happy endings don't earn high ratings, so viewers are treated to lurid stories about a hitchhiker who escaped a nearby jail or insane asylum (mental health facilities, yeah, whatever). If television was banned for an entire year, you'd see more people hitchhiking or picking up hitchhikers.

After an hour, my frustration level was rising. This was getting depressing. Random questions bounced around in my head, and their presence seemed to ameliorate my fears.

How is corn syrup made? What do they make hair weaves out of? And who are the people that make hair weaves? Is it true that tennis raquets are stringed with cat guts? When is someone gonnna open a drive-thru serving healthy, affordable Chinese food? How do people afford houses, new cars, health insurance, clothes from the mall, and dinners at restaurants three nights a week? Can they really afford it, or do they just have good credit? If everyone refused to buy car insurance, would everyone have their licence revoked? Why do I feel guilty unless I'm helping someone? What's behind the UFO phenomena? Is there really an underground city beneath the Denver Airport, as Phil Schneider mentioned? Why are aren't smarties sold in the United States? Why don't girls wear lip gloss anymore? Was that just a junior-high-school fad in the late eighties or did they find out it was toxic?

Asking for a ride

Releasing a sigh of exasperation that could start a small storm somewhere off the Pacific, I drag myself across the street, hoping the next gas station will provide better results.

My first target, a truckdriver, explains: "Most companies don't allow their drivers to pickup hitchhikers, but you still try."

Another blow, another puncture in my hot air balloon of hope which slowly plummets to the earth for a reality check. Still, I persist, asking people, while they fuel their vehicles, if they can give me a ride to Carson City. More of the same responses follow my request.

"No."

"Sorry."

"Car too full."

"Not headed that way."

Retreating to the front of the convenient store, I camp on the curb and squeeze out some SOS prayers. A car approaches and parks. It has Oregon plates, which means, if he's heading to Oregon, he should be passing through Eureka. A skinny, wizened man unfolds from the automobile, and steps toward the store.

"Hi," I greet him. "Are you, by chance, heading west on I-80?"

"Why?" He queries. "You need a ride?"

"Yes, to Eureka, right on the way."

"I'll give you a ride," he says quickly. "Let me go in the store. I'll be right back."

YES!!!! PRAISE JESUS for this guy!! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah!

I'm antsy while he's in the store. What if he changes his mind roaming the aisles? I ponder. (Dear LORD, I pray. Help him not to change his mind. Thank You. Amen.)

He exits the store, a titanic-sized plastic cup of Pepsi in his hand and unlocks the door. Eagerly, with a smile the size of Nebraska, I crawl inside his car and thank him profusely. Cool.

Sailing along in a Plymouth Valiant

"No problem," he smiles, slipping into the driver's seat and closing the door. He steers out of the gas station/convenient store parking lot and approaches the on-ramp, slowly gaining speed then merging with the onslaught of semis racing along the interstate. The car itself is a weatherbeaten, four-door, and looks like a Plymouth Valiant. The kind of car that accelerates slowly but has a strong engine beneath the hood.

I'm so happy to have gotten a ride that I feel like I'm sailing. The sunlight's shooting through the dirty, dustcaked windshield and dancing around in shafts of yellow and white light, revealing the mess, the history, of his travels -- the ripped, green, vinyl car seats, piles of crumpled food wrappers, pens, papers, pencils, a worn road map.

Silently, smiling, I soak in my surroundings. Watching the light dance around, I was reminded of a disco ball from rollerskating in the early eighties, when the DJ announces: "Now, it's a skate for couples only, couples only." And I'd skate to the side of the rink and watch couples skate hand-in-hand, feeling awkward because I didn't have a girlfriend. Elementary school memories. Not much has changed. Then I thought of rock-and-bowl nights at the local bowling alley, with blaring music, a spinning disco ball, and gregarious bowlers talking, drinking, knocking down pins. An aesthetic experience, a memory trigger. My mind may be gone but that's okay. At least I'm moving. Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa ... yeah!!! I suppose the desert is as good as any place to lose your mind.

While we roar along the freeway, the kind man behind the wheel mumbles through his silver whiskers, the words escaping like staccato bursts of air being released from a helium balloon, in indecipherable sequence. He's mumbling. I try to read his lips but it's no use as they're shrouded by salt-and-pepper stubble, which filters his sentences into gravy. Then I notice he has no teeth. That could be another setback to understanding him.

So, whenever he laughs, I laugh with him so he won't feel alone in the conversational woods, even though we're miles apart. His skinny fingers disappear deep into one pocket, wiggle around, and emerge with a small pipe.

"You wanna smoke?" He asks.

"No thanks. I don't smoke."

"No," he grins, patting the pipe. "Smoke. Not cigarettes."

"No. Cool. But thanks anyway," I smile politely.

As he drives, mumbling between puffs of his pipe, I watch Interstate 80 rush past in a blur. Outside the window, to the north, I can see the Independence Mountains, green at the base and white-capped at the summit. What would it be like to hike up one of those mountains, I wonder to myself.

According to the map, we're at an elevation of some 5,000 feet. This is my first time hitchhiking and it's not so bad. Sure, it took about an hour to get a ride, but, when you don't have money, you get used to waiting, especially for buses.

At Carlin, a small town about fifty miles west of Elko, he drops me off. As he's heading to Oregon, he'll continue driving west on State Road 80 until he hits the town of Winnemucca, where he'll take 95 north through the Santa Rosa Mountain Range and into Oregon where the Trout Creek Mountains are situated.

I've always wanted to visit Oregon, especially after I heard

that Eugene, Oregon is a hotbed for activists and environmentalists. According to friends who've travelled, Portland is full of college students, coffeehouses, tree huggers, and bookworms. Apparently, yellow-painted bikes are left in different places downtown, used for public transport, then left for the next bicyclist that comes along. Sounds like a cool place.

After the ride, I extend my hand, thank him, and offer him gas money. He declines the donation but gives me a hearty handshake, his hands rough, with stories to tell. His car slowly pulls away and disappears into the roaring late afternoon traffic.

Hitchhiking, hopeful

For the second time, I'm stranded at a gas station. This time, though, I'm in Carlin, another small town that's a pit stop for tourists on their way from, or to, Las Vegas or Reno. Carlin is at the intersection of State Road 80, which runs east and west, and Interstate 278, which runs north and south. From here, I need to take 278 south to Eureka, a little over a hundred miles away. My spirits are pretty high after the last hitch, so I take the same approach that I used at Elko, approaching cars while keeping watch from the gas station island. I am Gilligan, or his loser twin brother, trapped on the island of blind faith. Skipper! Where's the Skipper when you need him?

I spot a gray haired couple fueling their red pickup truck.

"Hi, are you heading south on 278?" I ask in the most polite voice I can muster.

"Yes." The man says.

"Can I get a ride with you?"

"Yes. Where are you headed?"

"Eureka, Nevada."

"I'm only going halfway."

"That's fine. I'll take what I can get."

"Okay. Hop in."

Gleefully (there's a word you haven't heard in a long while), I hop in the back of his pickup truck, among a beautiful, dusty symphony of junk: six, full gallon containers of distilled water (my favorite), an extra, full sized spare tire, lug nut changer, rope, clumps of hay and straw. From inside the car, his wife turns and gives me a flat stare. When he exits the gas station, I create a nest among the detritus and relax in the back. Hitchhiking rules.

The truck gains momentum as it descends the hill towards 278, gathering speed for the ascent further down the road. The air is very dry and I'm bombarded with warm breezes. Temperatures exceed 80 degrees, but it's arid and the humidity is non-existent. It's the kind of weather where you get sunburned but don't feel it. A benefit is that you don't sweat as much. It's a dry heat.

As we approach base of a mountain, the truck is moving fast. I glance through the window at the speedometer gage, and see the needle dance between 75 and 80 miles an hour. At first I'm thinking that the guy and his wife are arguing, that she's mad that he picked up a hitchhiker, and that he's silently accepting the criticism while taking it out on his Toyota. Then again, since this is only a two lane road with little traffic anyway, most drivers probably drive 75-or-85 miles an hour, racing from the town to town, or town to house, or house to town on their bi-weekly trips for goods and supplies. The road is a narrow, two-lane street, and the red Toyota is racing. The dry air roars around me, whipping my hair into a tangled mess, and I can hear the asphalt crackling beneath the spinning wheels. It sounds like popcorn in a microwave.

The beat up red truck accelerates as we ascend up the mountain, following the narrow, two lane road as it snakes its way towards Eureka. Around us, the Independence Mountains rise up in green

speckled lumps. Feeling the sun across my face, enjoying the gorgeous panorama view of mountain ranges and valleys that connect them, basking in the seemingly limitless futures that my journey may take, soaking in the absolute freedom of the moment, I laugh. I can't help but to laugh and to thank God Almighty for rescuing me from my deserted gas station island.

With my shoulders against the back of the driver window, the air screaming around me, and my butt vibrating against the truck bed, I feel like I'm on a roller coaster. This guy is a fast driver. We must be going about 70-to-85 miles per hour. If this truck flips, I'll probably be airborne for a good ? mile. Hmmm. I figure he knows the road though, as he's probably been up and down it hundreds of times.

What a view, though, watching the mountains crawl by as you race through them at 80 miles an hour from the back of an old truck. What a beautiful view. It's stunning enough to reduce your feeling of self-importance to that of a water boy for the track team, make that marching band.

Absorbing the spectacle of the American West, this close, out in the open with the mountains rising up all around me, a beautiful village of trees, creeks, deer, lynx, bugs, and another living creatures, I felt awestruck, nearly like an intruder that witnesses a miracle and feels convicted for the first time since childhood. As long as the truck sped onward, I assured myself--the wind in my hair reminding me--that I'm only passing through. We're all passing through on this unpredictable highway called life.

The battered red pickup swiftly maneuvered the twisting ribbon of asphalt that looped its way around the mountain.

Suddenly, I became apprehensive.

What am I going to do when he lets me out? There's no cars around here. So far, only two cars have passed us. And they were traveling in the opposite direction. In the twenty minutes since we've been driving, I haven't seen one car behind us. Not one. This is the middle of nowhere, like Faith explained. This

land is beautiful for the same reason that it's forboding-there aren't any people around. Isolation.

"Aspiring writer found eaten by birds south of Elko, Nevada".

Has my whole life boiled down to this-a precarious adventure that leads me to the middle of nowhere? What am I going to do when this guy arrives at his house, no doubt at the top of some mountain on this lonely stretch of road?

For the last ten minutes, I've been shooting prayer flares in to the Heavens. O LORD, I beg, please help me. YOU know what to do. Thanks for doing it. Thank YOU, LORD. PRAISE YOU JESUS. Amen.

Confirming my worst fears, the truck slows to a stop. Gazing around, I look for signs of life. Except for animals and insects and plants, I don't see any. It's just me, him, and his wife. Even his house appears to be a brown speck, miles at the end of his driveway. I hop out of the cab, and grab my thin suitcase and plastic bag of Gospel tracts.

"Thanks for the ride," I say. "I have gas money if you want some."

"That won't be necessary," he replies. Then he looks around, puts his calloused hands on the truck, and eyes me furtively. "What are you gonna do?"

"I don't know. Start walking and hitching," I suppose.

"Hmmm. Ain't been no cars around here for as far as the eye can see. When they do come, they're going to be going so fast they won't see you to stop in time."

"Yeah," I agree sad faced.

"Tell you what. I'll drive you."

"Wow. Oh my gosh, thank you." I gush, the dam of my frustration bursts open. I shower him with a flood of laudatory remarks.

Praise God! Hallelujah! Praise The Lord! God is Good!

Hoping in the truckbed, he turns the engine and hits the gas pedal, squeeling off from the shoulder of the road, leaving a wake of gravel, dirt, and dust behind us. The pickup bumbles along the mountain road, the engine whining, while I sit in the back. In the distance, I can see the Ruby Ridge Mountains, blue and gray and snowcapped at the top, looking like a flattened ice cream sundae, only blueberry ice cream with a white chocolate topping. As the truck ascends the Elko hills, the air temperature drops a few degrees. Bumping along, the dust and hay whipping around in the cab like a blender on frappe speed, I smile in the glorious fresh, crisp mountain air of Nevada. It's late afternoon. The sun is shining. I'm smiling, without a care in the world. I'm in a happy bubble, witnessing the world pass by as I assume my role as intentional drifter. A drifter with a purpose. Loitering with intent. Sheer adventure, the beauty of a moment, careless, relying on faith.

Five minutes later, the truck slows, then pulls off the side of the road.

Now what? I'm thinking. What'd, his wife talk him out of giving me a ride? Is he gonna drop me off for good this time? What's going on? After dropping me off earlier, he offered to give me a ride again. What happened? Did he change his mind?

My happy bubble bursts at the thought, and I succumb to the forces of gravity, plummeting to the earth. Maybe the meek really do inherit the earth. Does that include Nevada?

Like before, the man exits the truck and walks to the cab.

"I was thinking," he starts. "I'm gonna return home, put these groceries away, and we'll drive you in the other car. You just wait at the front gate. I'll only be fifteen minutes."

"Alright. Cool. No problem. Great." I fire off, nodding and smiling.

He turns his truck around and drives toward his house, a speck in the distance, at the end of a long road behind an iron gate. Another truck approaches. Our truck slows to a stop, then backs up towards it. The other truck backs up towards us. My driver rolls down his window.

“Hey,” he says to the other driver. “Where you headed?”

“South,” the other driver, a handsome man with a cowboy hat, answers.

“Are you going to Eureka?” My driver asks.

“Yeah.”

“Can you give my friend a ride there?”

“Yeah.”

HALLELUJAH!

I’m been pawned to the man with the big yellow hat. I am the orphaned Curious George, his stunt double, the one that was rejected because he refused to take medication for his hyperactivity.

When it comes down to it, ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) is a gift. Restless kids are sometimes the most gifted, watching filmstrips in their head, mimicking their own action heroes, creating their own. I know, I know, I’m romanticizing, but do I really have a choice?

Look at this world, with all the hurt, the suffering, the deceptions by the medical industry, the pharmaceutical companies, the governments war effort that cause thousands to suffer and die. Outside, the world is a giant mess, people reeling in ignorance, consumed by the trivial, trading a life of conviction for a life of pleasure, distracting themselves to death with entertainment and recreation. Without God at the center of things, life is meaningless.

Yet, I know there’s a plethora of people like me, besieged by creativity,

overwhelmed with an abundance of energy that finds no outlet in the life that's charted by suburban planners. This subculture on the fringe, in a nebulous space populated by drifters. They find hedonism unjustified and downright boring. They remain skeptical of organized religion, viewed as conforming and allowing little room for self expression.

Speaking of organized religion, I remember when I used to hit the streets, Gospel Tracts in a shoulder pouch, with my friend Ryan Cedar, a skateboarder and self-loathing jokester. When I ran into people who showed little interest in hearing about The Lord Jesus Christ, they would often remark that they're not interested in organized religion. At that comment, I would ask: "What about disorganized religion". Then pointing at Ryan and myself, I would add: "I mean, c'mon, do we look organized?"

Instead of embracing the future, I remain skeptical. Unconvinced by the parade before us, we retreat to a place inside our heads, deep within the cave of our imagination, allowing daydreams to converge with reality. For this reason, more than any other, I feel like I'm at odds with myself.

One side knows that my certainty rests in trusting The Lord Jesus Christ, The Son of God, reading His Word, The Word of God, The Bible, and doing what The Word says, recommends, and commands. The other side surrenders to the carnival inside my head, a dusty storage attic of ideas that cry out for my attention like orphaned toys in a stumbled-on secret room. I'm in a tug of war between faith and creativity. To many, I probably seem naive, immature, and using The Peter Pan Syndrome (the theory behind why men never grow up) as an excuse to remain puerile. Perhaps I do fear responsibility, but from what I have seen of this world, so far, in my 34 years, I don't see the point in being responsible for things that don't render any significant value.

When you put yourself out there, the adventure begins. This experience, so far, has led me to question what I value, and how and where I want to live.

All I need is The Bible, some journals, my keyboard and multi-track recorder. My experience working in a kitchen and at a moving company should land me a job wherever I go. I don't need the anchors of a house or a girlfriend or a career job where I spend a lifetime helping someone else become rich so they can spend exorbitant sums of money on a foreign sports car. Money sucks. More money means more options means more confusion. If it's being used to support the spread of The Gospel, then it's being used for a good cause. Maybe the road to Hell is paved with dead presidents.

Rich, the pump salesman

This driver, Rich, is really cool. He smiles often. His eyes twinkle merrily. I can tell he's genuinely happy. I ask him some questions and he tells me a brief life story. To be honest, though, I'm kind of lost, you see, because he's a pump salesman. Basically, this guy sells water pumps and big containers to hold water, or liquid fertilizer, to farmers in the area. Rich lives in another state, but has enough contracts to warrant driving to Nevada and California.

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone who is talking about something that you have little interest in, not even enough to conjure up a question? That's the scoop on this conversation.

"So, you sell pumps?" I ask him, feeling both happy for the ride, cold from the air conditioning, and doped up from baking in the sun earlier in the morning and noon.

He answers my question. Still, I'm lost. Silently, smiling, like a dog, I nod, trying to appear semi-coherent as he talks about converters, water levels, and crop yields. I'm not the sharpest knife in the rack, but around this guy I'm reduced to a butter knife, a plastic butter knife at that. When he finished explaining the challenges of volume stations and water pump procedures, my brain was like the size of a pea. Class dismissed.

"Would you mind if I stopped by this guy's house and dropped off a pump?" Rich asks me.

No, buddy. You bes' keep driving 'cuz I got a schedule to keep.

“No. Not at all.”

He veers his big, shiny new pickup truck onto a dirt road that leads to a farm and a trailer. A sunburned guy on a tractor waves, then heads toward us. Rich and I exit the truck. Rich introduces himself to the farmer, who walks him to the area where he wants the water tank to go. They return, Rich unstraps the tank from his cab, and we carry it towards a nearby Quonset hut, shuffling along the baked ground. For about forty minutes, Rich and the farmer chat while I play with his dog, which looks like a mix between a German shepherd and a collie.

The property itself is a farm, with 20-to-30 acres of wheat, barley, rye, alfalfa. Back in the truck, we continue south on 278 towards Eureka, driving through Pine Valley and the Sulphur Spring Range. At Eureka, Rich drops me off at the Sheriff Station on Main Street. By this time, it's approaching evening and the temperature is dropping. I thank Rich and offer him gas money, but he declines, just like the first ride.

At the entrance of Eureka is a sign that reads: “You are entering the friendliest town on the loneliest road in America. Eureka Nevada.”

Nice.

Monday, 5:37 pm, June 2, 2003, Eureka, Nevada

I'm in Eureka, Nevada. I have the car, the keys, and a \$27-dollar-a-night motel room with basic cable. I am here, Praise God! Earlier, when I arrived at the police station, I got the information for the tow truck driver to pick up my car. I call him. Fifteen minutes later this sunburned hick, unshaven, the kind that looks like he was born for construction, arrives in a battered white tow truck. I move into the front seat

and he drives to the tow yard-his driveway, at the top of a hill about a mile away. Unbelievable. \$100 towing fee when he only towed the car one mile. The towing fee, from the police station to his driveway, is \$100, flat rate of course, and his yard charges are \$10 a day. At least his yard charges are cheap. Should be since it's his yard.

This hotel is cheap, small, clean, nothing fancy. At least the water pressure is good and the showers are hot--good for cleaning off 3-day old bus slime. Around me sit my journals, a copy of Big Sur, by Jack Kerouac, and The Bible. Cool!

Tuesday, June 3, 2003, 11:17 pm, Ruby Hill Motel, Eureka, Nevada

This morning and last night, I made numerous phone calls.

I called Faith's mom, Stephanie Nelson, in Boyne City, Michigan, to let her know I arrived. She's concerned about Faith and wants to know how she is and how she physically looks. I told her that I will visit her, then let her know. My next call was to my mom, Grace Kemp, in West Palm Beach, Florida, to let her know that I had arrived. She doesn't know who stole my car, and I told her that I'd rather not go into details, being embarrassed by my own foolishness.

"It's cool," I reassured her. "I'm in this quaint, cheap hotel on main street, right across the street from the police station."

My mom typed in Eureka, Nevada on an internet search engine, and described what I saw outside my window.

The next call was to David Knight, a Bahamian entrepreneur who I work for on an on-call basis, whenever he needs property maintenance done. David lives in New York, in Brooklyn, in DUMBO, Down Under Manhattan Bridge Overpass.

"You should move to New York," he tells me. "You'd love it there." I ask him why he comes back and he kind of tilts his head away then says: "Well, it's complicated, you see."

I don't think David knows what he's looking for.

Before I left, I did some work for him.

"You can send the money to my mom's address," I told him.

My final call was to UPS to complain about the non-delivery of a package that I had scheduled twice. Because of the inconvenience, I told them, I wanted them to deliver it for free. They complied.

Praise God! The shipping price was \$139.000.

Dear LORD, help it to arrive safely. Thank You. Amen.

The bus fare, Greyhound from West Palm Beach, Florida to Elko, Nevada, was \$183 dollars. When I told my friend Ryan Johnson about my stolen car, he spoke with his mom and they agreed to pay the bus fare. I was humbled and surprised by their kindness, especially since neither he, nor his mom, are rich by any means. I thanked them verbally and via email. The cost of food, so far, has been about thirty dollars. The total costs for this trip, including the \$160 towing and storage fee charge, along with the cost of gas to drive this coupe back to Florida, will reach about \$600 dollars.

Searching for a cat

This afternoon, the hotel manager asked me if I could help retrieve her cat.

"He's wild," she cautioned. "So lemme get you a blanket."

She returns with a thin, yellow blanket and hands it to me.

What? I think to myself? Does this cat have rabies?
How's a thin blanket gonna help? He's wild, right?

The manager lives in a trailer on the same property of the Ruby Hill Motel, a collection of ten, one-story residences. On the north side of her trailer, about twelve feet deep, lies a

basement level area, one in which the floor was never laid. The basement floor is comprised of high grass, and broken cement. Around the floor, stand walls of concrete block. Exposed rebar shoots out at different places along the ground, tangled, rusting, like snakes charmed and flash frozen.

This is where the wild cat is hiding, somewhere in the tangled carpet of weeds where the floor used to be. To me, the overgrown weeds look like a perfect hiding place for snakes.

“What about snakes?”

“There are no damn snakes around here.” She spits fiercely.

Looking around the tall grass, I don't see anything initially. Nearby the corner of the house, I see some weeds shuffling. I spot the cat, a baby, an orange colored ball of rebelliousness curled up in a forest of weeds.

Slowly, I creep towards it, barely touching it when it disappears in a marmelade blur, racing below the corner of this forgotten edifice.

Like a submarine whose top portion is exposed, all I see is an orange fur ball parting the overgrowth as it scrambles toward freedom. It's cute. I'm giggling, chasing after it while the motel manager is cheering me on in croaky word bursts between puffs of her cigarette.

Following the wildball slowly as as not to bruise my shin on some hidden piece of rebar or concrete block, I watch as it submerges into a patch of knee high grass. Here's my chance. I chase it, toss the blanket over it, and pounce the unpredictable creature, quickly tightening my grip around the untamed feline. Gingerly, I cradle the squirming yellow blanket, and walk toward the manager. Balancing my foot against a wooden post that leans against the basement wall, I use one hand to pull myself up, handing the manager lady her cat.

“Let me get you \$5 dollars for your troubles. If a person don’t like cats or children, I don’t even wanna know ‘em,” she grunts. Handing me the fiver, she remarks: “Get yourself a Pepsi.”

“Yeah,” I agree. “I like cats and children. It’s adults that are difficult to get along with.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” she laughs croakily. “You got that right.”

Visiting Faith in jail

Sometimes the glimpses of seeing what a person can be helps you endure the horror of who they are. Like an anthropologist watching for clues, you note the kinder moments, documenting them to provide evidence for the hope you have. At the end of the day, you’re clinging to straws, mistaking crumbs for a nourishing meal.

I will never lose faith. Eventually, love will smother the flames of insecurity, leaving smoldering ashes where a fire once burned. In the end, kindness wins out.

Earlier this evening, at 6pm, I visited Faith in jail. Her visiting hours are between 6pm and 7pm on Tuesday and Saturday, with some hours on Sunday as well.

Faith is a tornado. Seeing her was the culmination of seven days spent trying to clean up, trying to make sense of the wreckage left in her path.

Seven days consumed by bicycling around downtown filling out paperwork, calling Faith’s mom, the State Attorney, the Nevada State Attorney, the Eureka County Sheriff’s Department, Greyhound, UPS, three days on a Greyhound, hours spent waiting for transfer buses in bad areas of town, molassified minutes deciding what bag of chips to choose from the civilian side of a vending machine, events documented in this journal, sketches to trigger my faulty memory-all moments in a short novel that’s still unfinished.

Seven days of frustration led to this moment, where I would see Faith, the quiet bunny that rolled me without a gun, the unassuming culprit behind this mess.

Now, the only distance that stood between me and her was a strip of I-80. A 50-yard strip of dry gravel and sun baked asphalt divided the Eureka Sheriff's Department and adjacent, windowless jail where Faith was caged, with the Ruby Hill motel where I was staying.

Feeling dry and thirsty from the lack of humidity in the high desert air, I gulped nearly a quarter gallon of water, wiped my mouth, then headed across the street.

I arrived at the Sheriff's Department, greeted the receptionist, and told her I was here to visit Faith. She led me to the visitors area, where I sat behind a plexiglass shield, while they called her. A few minutes later, Faith walks inside. Physically, she looks bad--thin, pale, wide eyed, and scared looking--like a cat that's been abused, in need of a decent meal. Her face registered no expression, nor did she say anything as she sat down. I expected her to apologize for taking the car, then ask me to help her get out of jail, like she did before when she called me in Florida. Silently, she sat down and looked at me. Her eyes were as big as saucers.

"God Kemp," she started. "You look like shit. Are you sick or something. Seriously. You look bad."

"You know, Faith, it's always a pleasure to see you," I joked. "I can always count on a kind remark."

"Well, I'm just being honest. You look sick," she persisted.

"Well, you're not looking like a supermodel either, okay?" I nodded.

"Why did you set me up like that?" She asked.

"Faith." I sighed. "What are you talking about?"

"You know exactly what I'm talking about. Don't play stupid, Kemp. You set me up. Who are you working for?"

"Faith, c'mon. Reality would be a place to start."

"You set me up." She continues.

"Listen, Faith. I helped you. Even after you stole my car with all my stuff in it, I helped you. And you don't even appreciate it. I'm the one who called the State Attorney, then biked there with a notarized affidavit to drop charges," I explained. "I'm the one who's been on the phone with your mom every night because she's worried sick about you. If it wasn't for me, you'd be in here for another two weeks."

"Yeah," she answered. "If it wasn't for me you wouldn't even be out here. You should thank me. You'd still be in Florida sweating to death. At least you finally left."

"Yeah, that's true," I conceded, seeing the tiny speck of gold in the wreckage. "I guess I should thank you for stealing my car." I returned sarcastically.

"You know," Faith concluded. "I don't want to talk about this anymore."

"What?!" I stormed. "I'm out about \$400 dollars from this and you don't want to talk about this? You're unbelievable."

"You see what money does? It makes you evil. The most important thing is being alive. Being able to walk and talk and see and breathe, too."

A typical criminal mindset, Faith had turned the entire incident around to justify her behaviour. Her defense, although spoken with confidence, was nothing more than a watered down batch of homeless strategy, squatters rights, and athleticism--a poor man's version of communism.

"As long as you're not footing the bill," I shrugged.

"In the end, everything that happened is completely irrelevant."

Typical, I think to myself. How typical of a criminal mindset--to justify their behaviour in the face of extraordinary evidence to the contrary. Even Claire, an artist who befriended Faith in West Palm Beach, explained that when someone helps Faith, she has a way of making them think she's doing them a favor by accepting the help. That's her M.O. That's her pattern.

"Yeah," I agreed, as my sails collapsed from the lack of wind.

"I have a hearing tomorrow, around 10 or 11, before a judge. After that, I should get out. My only charge is speeding. That's what the cop said. Are you gonna be at the hotel tomorrow?" She asked.

"Yeah. Room number ten. Just walk on over." I capitulated.

"Okay. I'll see you."

"You too, Faith."

I was disappointed that she showed no remorse for her behaviour, but I should have expected it by now. Foolishly, I panned for gold and thought I had found some minute specks. But they turned out to be fools gold, the only type of gold that I deserve at this point.

Tuesday night, June 3, 2003, Ruby Hill Motel, Eureka, Nevada

Faith gets released around 11am tomorrow. Then, she'll walk over here. As soon as I awake, I'll call Hernando, Mississippi Police Department to see if UPS picked up my package. If they haven't, I'll stay here another day to receive it, before making trails west.

My whole life is changing before my eyes. Whether through fortune or folly, the carpet of comfortability is being ripped out from under my feet. I don't want to own anything, or anyone, anymore. The only one I can be responsible for is myself. Life is not an apology. Life is to be lived. When you're free from material goods, you're free to be, unencumbered by the restricting weight of possession.

Leaving Florida is like escaping from quicksand--physically difficult, as the suffocating relationships of people and place cling to your hips. I hope, as Carrie Cutlip advised, I can live away from Florida for one year, experience the world without a safety net, watch carefully and document real life as it unfolds before my eyes. Once you've travelled this far, there's no going back. Or is there?

Faith Nelson, as difficult as she is, has proven to be a muse. Even though she stole my car, she gave me something to write about--the theft and subsequent travel adventure. Perhaps that's my attraction to people who are destructive. They're unpredictable. And the excitement of not knowing what's going to happen next keeps me following closely.

The world is burning
and I'm not turning around
The world is burning
My feet are leaving the ground

Now I get it. Faith is my interesting patient. I am her caseworker. She's a tornado. And I write about the chaos left in her wake. Also, I'm trying to fix Faith, hoping that the additional weight of kindness and patience will tilt the scales, balancing her towards sanity. With God's help, I helped nurse Carrie Cutlip to a healthier state, being there for her, listening, mending the emotional wounds. Carrie was a challenge, but has since gone onto a happy marriage, home ownership, and a stable career. If I can't

be their hero, at least I can be their doormat on their road to better life.

During her emotional outbursts, Faith reminded me of past relationships. Witnessing this, I felt compelled to help. Besides, Faith and I are friends, or we were friends, in spite of her disregard for rational behavior and her tendency towards recklessness. With Faith however, I'm beginning to think that an exorcism is in order. Why? Let's see. She's a former Jehovah's Witness and she ate a human hand. If that doesn't qualify you for disability, then what does? Insanity doesn't kill you. Worrying about it does.

Dear LORD Jesus,
Help me, if it's your will, to get the stuff back from Mississippi.
Thank You, LORD. Amen.

Tuesday night, June 3, 2003, Ruby Hill Motel, Eureka, Nevada

The hotel caretaker

After visiting Faith, I stepped outside and walked across the street to the Ruby Hill Motel. The caretaker of the motel watched from her perch, a wood framed porch attached to her trailer. I pretended not to notice her as she watched me approach from the jail-across-the-street, but I have good peripheral vision.

She leaned against the porch railing, legs crossed at the ankles, one elbow along the rail, the other elbow propped, holding her cigarette no further than twelve inches away. She wore a sober expression. Her eyes resembled small rocks that've been hardened by years of distrust.

I waved at her. She waved back. Gobs of makeup covered her face. Judging from her appearance, the makeup looked cheap--the oily kind used by mimes and clowns. Her eyebrows were painted on, commas that hung lifelessly above the caves of her eyes, whose openings were guarded by those impenetrable stones.

"I'm sixty years old, son, and I only make \$600 dollars a month," I remember her saying to me yesterday, after I jokingly asked if I could get a free day for helping retrieve a cat.

She has a number of cats that she has adopted. Her felines comprise a furry assembly, about six or so kittens that live under her trailer. The kittens look wild but scurry to the dish when she fills it with cat food.

Watching her, I think of her statement--"I'm sixty years old". She's sixty and still feels the need to be beautiful. I guess everyone feels that way, especially in America, where even the occupants of caskets are heavily made up to be presentable. When she was sixteen, she probably felt the same way about beauty as she does now. Even though she's in an older body, she's sixteen.

People rarely change. Outside, they age. But in their mind, they remain children, kids, teenagers, or young adults, enduring and embracing the amusement park of life while searching for a companion with which to share their journey.

8am, Wednesday morning, June 4, 2003, Ruby Hill Motel, Eureka, Nevada

By now, you probably don't understand why I'm going to all these lengths to get Faith out of jail. For the last week, including my time in Florida, I bicycled around, glommed rides, made numerous phone calls (police, state attorney Darren Schull, Faith's mom Stephanie, UPS to schedule the pickup, and then some). I even went so far as to drop the Grand Theft Auto charges. Why am I going to the trouble to help this ingrate?

Two reasons. One, I want to travel to Truckee, California with her. Two, the story is not finished. The irony of my effort lies in the fact that Faith was never charged with Grand Theft Auto anyway, as it takes ten to twelve days to process. In fact, when I dropped the charges and spoke with the Nevada state attorney, she had never received any charges pertaining to Faith's case. Her only

charge, according the Eureka cop: speeding. In spite of my effort on her behalf, she acts like I owe her an apology when I visit her yesterday evening in jail. By now, I know what you're thinking. He's codependent. True. He loves her. True, cautiously however. He's a junkie for the troubled ones. True. As I said before, she's my muse. And I'm the record keeper. The story is not finished. And yes, I know she doesn't love me or even care about me in the least. I'm well aware of that. My behavior is both irrational and risky. I know. The relationship is risky at best, foolhardy at worst. So why do I bother? Because this chapter in my life is not over yet. And I want to see what happens next. The adventure, sometimes, is inversely proportional to the level of uncertainty.

The website www.faithnelson.com <<http://www.faithnelson.com>> will stay up until I receive \$300 to recover the costs of this car theft and subsequent recovery.

Today, Faith will go before a judge for a hearing about her speeding charge--driving 45mpb in a 25mph, for which she's been in jail for nine days. Then she'll be released, no doubt, for time served.

11:30 am, Wednesday morning, June 4, 2003

Close encounters

Faith was released from jail today.

Anticipating her arrival, I tidied the hotel room, cleaned the car, and placed my travel gear at the door. I'm laying on the bed, staring up at the ceiling but seeing way beyond it, the big blue Nevada sky that stretches out to infinity. The windows are open and cool, high desert air, characterized by its lack of humidity, sweeps into the room in steady ripples.

It's weather to take a nap to, but I feel jumpy. I lay there like a junkie waiting for his dealer, and then I laugh to myself as I realize that I am the junkie, albeit of my own poor choices. I hear footsteps approaching. Then, I hear her soft, otherworldly voice.

"What are you doing?"

Her face is in the window, peering at me. With her petite frame, large eyes, shapeless body, and supersized digits, she resembles a Grey, the name given to a specific kind of extra terrestrial characterized by similar features.

The Greys are the kind of aliens depicted in police sketches, as described from shaken truck drivers travelling late at night through barren areas of the United States, like Texas, California, or, you guessed it, Nevada.

Like those truck drivers, I too fell victim to an own alien sighting, a close encounter with Faith Nelson. Like them, I recuperated in silence, paralyzed and lost in a haze of possibilities.

"Kemp. What are you doing?"

"Resting," I lie.

"Where are my bags?" She asks, referring to her waterproof totebags that I tossed onto the motel roof, since I didn't know if she was carrying drugs or weapons in them.

"Where are they?!" She demands. "Tell me now!"

And I'm thinking, why did I get this girl out of jail? Yes, I'll take the "c" for \$200. C_DEP_N___T. Almost there. Is it codependent? Congratulations, Kris Kemp. You've won a new car!!! Not wanting to argue, I cave in, walking her to the back of the motel, then pointing to the roof. Sighing, I step onto a rusting, 50-gallon trashcan, and hoist the bags to her.

Silently, she lugs them toward the car, one at a time, then opens the top and turns them over. Her gear slowly falls out--a constipated rainbow of shoes, clothes, makeup, haircarestuff, sleeping bag, and snorkel set.

The alien crouches down, sifting through her stuff.

"You're evil," she accuses. "And I know you're working for Jarosz. Who's been going through my clothes?"

Her nostrils start wiggling like a rabbit on a crack binge.

"They're all rearranged," she spat.

Silently, I listened, as she lobbed her verbal grenades, understanding that a soft answer turneth away wrath. Eventually, she ran out of ammo.

"Did you do this?"

"No. Maybe the cops went through them." I suggest.

"Ohhhh," Faith sighs. "That's what happened. I thought you did this. That's what happened. The cops were looking for drugs. I'm sorry. I thought you did that. The cops went through my stuff. That makes sense. I'm sorry. I should've known."

"I forgive you, Faith."

She continued squirreling through her belongings, carefully folding the clothes and placing her makeup into a zippered carrybag.

"Wait a second," she starts. "The cops did this, didn't they?" She repeated, as if she had wanted to make the discovery her own.

I nodded yes.

"Oh, it figures. They were looking for drugs. That's what it was. I'm sorry. I thought you did this. I'm sorry," she repeats."

"I forgive you, Faith. That's why I hid your stuff on the roof," I explained. "In case you had something on your person that was illegal. I didn't want to be responsible for it."

"Okay. I see. Okay. The cops did it. I should've figured that."

We drove to the Eureka library, where I'm now parked, then roamed the main street. Now, she's wandering around somewhere while I wait for the library to open at noon, so I can use the internet. At 2pm, God willing, the UPS truck will drop a box of my stuff to the Eureka Sheriff's Department.

Dear LORD,
Help them to deliver this.
In Jesus' Name,
Amen

The call of the wilderness
Then I'll head west with my crazy acquaintance Faith Maria Nelson.

Even though Faith stole my car, I'm still trying to salvage the plan that we had--to travel to Truckee, California, camp for a few days or even a week, then look for work. I went to this much trouble to retrieve my car, so I might as well enjoy some camping, right? With the car thief? Sure, why not.

In spite of what happened, I still want to camp in the mountains and explore the wilderness, experience the plethora of adventure that lies outside the confines of boxed-in, air-conditioned hypnosis and television magnetism, both which serve as a pacemaker (and fuse) for lethargy. (Knowing there's so many legitimate windmills with which to battle, how can anyone sleep anyway?) I have to know. I have to know.

June 4, Wednesday, 2003, 2:30pm, Eureka, Nevada

It's 2:30 pm. I'm parked at the Ruby Hills Motel, waiting, praying that the UPS package will arrive. The package contains my music journals, clothes, and a blankfaced notebook with pages begging for scribbles. Next day air means it should be delivered today, at 10:30, noon, or 3pm. So, I'm waiting 'til 3.

Dear Lord Jesus,

Help this package to arrive.
Thank you.
Amen.

I swim in a pool of frustration that is a result of my own folly.
Hey you! Jump on in! The water's green and full of frog eggs!
What? No, no, no. Of course you can swim in it. Just close
your eyes and close your mouth when you dive in. You know,
people pay big dollar to eat frog eggs in Japan, the city,
that is. Out here, we country folk would rather eat our
delicacies fresh. Hah!

When Faith and I arrive in Truckee, I hope to get a job
and part ways. She refuses to abide by the rules. And
people that don't play by the rules often blame others
for their misfortune, when they themselves are to blame.
Like dangerous sea creatures, they're better viewed from afar.

It's five minutes 'til 3, and still, no package.
Maybe I'll wait a while longer. I'm not sure.

I spot Faith walking toward me from the library.
I glance back toward the Sheriff's office and keep
watching for a brown truck. Faith approaches the
drivers side of the car.

"What are you doing?"

"Waiting. For a UPS package to arrive.
At the Sheriff's office at 3 o'Clock."

"Isn't it past 3 o'Clock?" She asks.

"Yes. Maybe they're running late."

"It's not gonna arrive today." She states flatly.
"Why don't you have the package shipped to Truckee?
It's not gonna cost a lot. It's only three hours away.
Just have it shipped there."

Heading West on I-50

Ten minutes later we were heading west on I-50 toward the Nevada/California border. I had the windows down, enjoying the brisk, high-desert air, the views of the mountains in the distance, and music by Lush from their "Split" LP. About a half hour into the trip I saw an incredible sight on the north side of the road--a mountain of sand. At the peak stood several ant-sized humans. One by one, they descended, riding sandboards in a zig-zag pattern descent to the bottom. Slowing the car, I turned into a dusty road to get a better view. After a few minutes, I returned to I-50.

"Let me drive," Faith said. "I'm a better driver. Besides, I know how to get there."

After she persisted, parroting her request, I conceded, pulling over to the shoulder and switching places with her. She drove like a banshee, chasing the late afternoon sun as it receded toward the mountains, 75-mph towards California. It was about five o'clock when we steered into the town of Truckee, California. Truckee is a small town nestled in the mountains of northern California. It's about twenty minutes north of Lake Tahoe, and seems to be a tourist haven, judging from the out-of-state license plates. Quaint shops, cafes, homegrown motels and eateries dot the town.

Tomorrow, I'm gonna apply for some resort jobs nearby, or even go further up the mountain. Maybe I'll look for housing. This whole scenario, if you've been keeping track, is weird. Hopefully, if God wants me here, I'll find a job, soon. If not, maybe I'll head to Salt Lake City, Utah, or Park Slope, Utah, and apply at a resort, work in a kitchen or something. Yes, you are correct. I don't know what I'm doing, but I do need to get out of Florida for a while, even if it means that I leave the nest and descend to the ground. One thing is certain--I hope not to bring anyone down with me. Flying solo eases the burden. If I crash and burn, I won't be responsible for anyone but myself. Next move: secure job, secure shelter, transfer stuff via UPS.

I am an emotional tornado watcher, witnessing the destruction left by those who refuse to confront, or tame, their own demons. Curiosity propels me to watch. Codependency compels me to help.

June 5, Thursday, 2003, 7am, Truckee, California

Camping in Truckee, California

Living begins when you bring your dreams and reality together.

I'm in Truckee, California, at a campground in the national forest. Yesterday evening, Faith mentioned that there was free camping around Donner Lake, toward the end of the road, higher up on the mountain. So I drove my little blue car, the hatchback Suzuki Swift, ascending the narrow, two lane road as it accordianed up the summit. By the time the road ended, it was so dark that we could barely see. And it was cold, probably about forty degrees. In front of us, a steel post barricaded the road. Past the obstruction, the road turned into dirt and gravel. A sign on the post said: "Dead End". Beyond that sign stood another: "No camping."

I looked at Faith, and pointed to the sign.

"Now what?" I asked, exasperated.

Then I start giggling hysterically at the madness of it all. Like a stranded traveller at the end of his journey for sanctuary, only to find he's lost again, I saw the humor in the situation.

"Dead end," I comment. "That's appropriate."

Parked in front of the barricade, beside us, was a pickup truck. Inside it were two people, a guy and a girl.

"I got an idea," Faith percolated.
"Ask them if they want to split a campsite."

"Hey." I waved to the guy in the truck.

He rolled down his window.

"You guys wanna split a campsite?"

"Hang on. Lemme ask my girlfriend." He rolls up the window and turns to her. A minute later, her turns around, rolls down the window, and says: "Alright. Where's there a place to camp?"

"I know where the campsite is," says Faith. "Tell them to follow us."

"I'll let you drive, since you know where the campsite is," I tell her, exiting the driver side and stepping around the car, shivering in the cold. Minutes later, we're racing down the winding road. From the car, I watch Donner Lake shimmering in the moonlight, growing larger as we get closer. Outside it's growing dark, a thick kind of blackness that's not intercepted by ambient light as there's only scattered cabins along the road at this altitude. The temperatures dropping.

Faith steers the car into a campsite that rests on a plateau on the side of the mountain. I run out to see how much it costs. \$19 for two vehicles. I ask the car behind us if they want to camp here. They agree. Faith presses the ticket button, the gate lifts, and we enter the site. She drives slowly to the end of a winding road that leads to a roundabout. Ahead of us, are camping grills, garbage cans, and stone picnic table in a small clearing surrounded by giant trees.

As it was getting very cold, I put on some extra jackets, then slipped inside my cheap sleeping bag. I slept outside under the stars. Faith slept in a one person tent.

It's June and it's cold. I never knew California got this cold in June.

Sleeping outside, in the woods of Truckee, California, I stared at the stars for hours, millions of them, and even spotted a shooting star. Later in the night, I watched a bright light zig-zagging across the sky. It turned at 90-degree angles, cutting a path from one side of the horizon to the other. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. No airplane could maneuver like that, at those angles, that fast. This was a UFO. I had a feeling I'd see a UFO on this trip. A feeling of amazement swept over

me, as I witnessed nature's secret symphony, an orchestra of great beauty and indescribable mystery.

All night, I stared at the stars, enjoying the natural beauty of this black canopy pinholed by white lights. Physically though, I am cold. And emotionally, a sick feeling seems to choke me, as if something bad is going to happen--that I'm surrounded by monsters on all sides. The only monster I've collected is Faith, a girl whose name belies her. I can even taste the copper in my mouth, a palpable omen.

The weather characteristic about the weather out here is this: you don't sweat, at least not in June. The air is not humid, like Florida. Here, it is dry, giving your hair a silky sheen. The lack of moisture in the air prevents sweat buildup. That is very cool. In Florida, I tend to work up a good stink, smelling like dirty wet socks, walking around in a force field of funk. Florida humidity induces perspiration, leaving my hair clumpy and greasy. Here, the air is frigid and brisk, not damp and soupy like the south. I haven't taken a shower in two days, and I don't smell bad. Seriously.

The fact that Faith sleeps a lot reminds me of Carrie Cutlip, a girl I used to date. Carrie used to sleep a lot too. Faith's attitude, though, reminds me of Christina Murphy, when Christina was at her worst. Christina was this feisty, tough Irish girl whose behaviour both intrigued me and scared me. She was a doll--blue eyes, great smile, a round face with short, dark-red hair. I fell in love with her beauty and tolerated her attitude. I was only eighteen at the time and she was my first real girlfriend.

Faith tends toward manipulative and selfish behaviour. In that way, she's a survivor, looking out for herself, surviving by her looks, wits, and smarts that she learned from travelling alone across the country. One attractive quality about Faith is this: She moves through life without apology. The flip side of the coin is that she denies responsibility for any wrongdoing on her part. Her fierce independence makes her an interesting person to watch, even if her flippant course of action reduces your life to rubble. Damn the rubble.

People chase ambulances. That's what my friend Audrey Simpson said one time. A devastating car wreck lures drivers to slow down, taking in an afterbreakfast snack on their way to work. Curiosity, morbid or otherwise, captures each of us at one point or another.

Another side of Faith that's interesting is her traits. She's clever, sarcastic, intelligent, insightful, and independent. And, she does not worry about anything. So her name, Faith, is fitting in that way. As I'm caught in her orbit, both as a friend and someone that truly cares about her, I find myself cleaning up after her. How so? As a wanderer, she leaves her belongings at various locations where she's stayed. Eventually, all her possessions are scattered at different locations before she enlists the help of friends to retrieve them. This happened in West Palm Beach, when she moved from place to place. She had her stuff at three different locations. When we arrived in Truckee yesterday evening, we visited her friends garage, where she had more of her stuff stored, including two snowboards, so she could dig out some blankets for me. If I stay in Truckee, I'll help her unload her stuff and find a nearby storage place, probably someones garage. That way, if I leave, I won't have her stuff in my car. Also, I'll help her find a job so she can earn some money, and more importantly, keep busy. As much as I want to help Faith, I'm beginning to understand that she needs to seek God for help. I've done my best, and now it's time to cut my losses. There's something askew with her, not right. She seems paranoid at times, accusing me of setting her up, then threatening me to keep my distance. I always do.

Faith probably thinks I'm attracted to her physically. But, at this point, I'm not. Rather, I merely want a travelling companion. And she has experience travelling.

Her paranoid behaviour manifests itself when she feels vulnerable or threatened. She reacts by lashing out, verbally, even physically, punching the perceived threat.

It happened once with a former roommate of hers, and once at Respectable Street where she says the guy was crowding her on the dance floor. Nonetheless, it's the tension that scares and attracts me at the same time. The feeling electrifies every gesture, polaroids every moment. Not knowing what's going to happen next,

you become the rubbernecker in this spontaneous car crash. Every noise, a siren. Every gesture, an emergency. She has a way, an intuitive presence, of converting the dullest of moments to the sharpest of realities. Despite what's happened, I pray that Faith will turn to God and use her talents to glorify Him. Somewhere beyond her tough, quiet exterior, she's got a lot to offer. God will multiply it, if she allows Him.

My mission is done, however. She's in Truckee, California, where she has friends.

She will be find from here. Now it's time for us to part ways.

Shelters are melting.

Adopting people

My experience with Faith, so far, has been a microcosm of what I've been doing for the past five years. That is, trying to place people into positions of safety so they can be less self destructive and more capable of engaging their God given talents. In doing this, however, I'm often resented by the ones I adopt. Like a psychiatrist, I view them as a patient, excusing their behavior. Instead, I should retreat. Most people are happy being themselves.

For years, I've been doing this. Formerly, I did it with various projects, the FLO zine, West Palm Beach Independent Film Festival, Philosophy Night, FLO Film Fest, Cinema Refuse, The Refuge Coffeehouse. Over time, I let the projects whither among the barren landscape of downtown, a place that, later, was over fertilized by developers.

Once the rents skyrocketed, the audience moved elsewhere. Then, I switched gears and concentrated more on people--the burdened souls, the fatherless, the powerless, the lonely, the orphaned, the abused, the neglected, the forgotten, misplaced castaways of our generation. If anything, the skills in this area came from my time attending a private Christian school, one in which I felt drawn to the outcasts because, whether real or imagined, I didn't fit in with the cool crowd.

I know what I'm doing is repetitive. In trying to witness the dirty human laundry as it swirls within the confines of civilizations washing machine, in trying to help, I have stepped to close, lost my balance, and fallen inside. Now, the only place I feel comfortable is with other outsiders, for I have been swallowed and absorbed by the drama, the reluctant, tumultuous transition of post adolescence into adulthood. It's frightening and cautiously beautiful at the same time.

LORD,

Help me to live only for YOU. And to find a good church which encourages me to live for YOU and use my talents for YOU.

Thanks a lot. Amen. :-)

June 5, Thursday, Truckee, California

It's 7:15 am. This park is gorgeous! Wow. Very, very beautiful.

Lotsa cool animals, sweaking and squawing, roaming deftly along the interstate of branches, gassing up on available nuts and berries.

I tossed a grape on the ground, then watched as a bluejay with a black mohawk hopped toward it, snatching it in his beak. He flies away, hopping from one branch to another, higher branch, toward his nest further up the tree. This is northern California, a real forest full of bears, porcupines, woodchucks, possums, birds, and a myriad of other creatures. There's probably a crashed spaceship further up the mountain somewhere, buried in snow. Wouldn't that be cool!

June 5, Thursday, same day, afternoon, 2003, Truckee, California

It's afternoon. I'm out of my mind, I think. But, I'm not worried about it. It's not the insanity that kills you, it's the worrying about it that does.

Faith and I camped last night. I could not sleep. So I tossed and turned, then surrendered to the night, laying flat on my back and gazing at the bazillion stars that sparked relentlessly, the most stars that I have ever seen, the sky looked crowded. God, it was beautiful. Like a kazillion pinholes in a black blanket, with a giant, soft lightbulb in the background, the light bleeding through in wonderful sparkles. You never see this many stars when you're close to a city, due to all the ambient light light fighting for its own attention. But out here in the wilderness, you see them.

It is awesome. One of the bright lights zigzagged at right angles, darting quickly from one side of the sky to the other. Judging from its speed this was no airplane or satellite. This, I concluded, was a UFO. A shooting star crossed from one end to the other, until it faded out and disappeared. Cool panorama action sequences played out on the movie screen of the Heavens. For hours, I watched the stars, wide eyed, lost in wonder. Around 5am probably,

I wandered to my car, threw my sleeping bag across the passenger seat, lowered the backrest, and curled up to sleep. Two hours later, I awoke, feeling mentally acute but physically spent. The sun was up and the birds were chirping.

Unfolding from my little car, the 1995 blue Suzuki Swift two-door, I stretched, then roamed around the woods for a while. Everyone was still asleep. Slowly, I walked the vicinity of the campsite, crunching over the carpet of leaves, twigs, and grass, drinking in them mountain air, listening to the animal noises, and watching the birds hunt for bugs. And then I realized something that I should have

recognized before, that I was an outsider. Even among outsiders, I'm an imposter.

Perhaps that's my destiny. At least I have my journals to keep track. Each story is

landmine, helping me recognize the tracks which I've laid, where I've been, and how

I've got here. Maybe that's how artists feel, as they see things from such a radically different point of view, that they cannot relate to the common perception.

The entire world is a drama, and the actors are the dramatists in a world that thinks too much and feels too little. Camping in Northern California in June ... a refrigerator of epiphanies. My introspection serves to keep me warm, though.

Someday, I have to return. Northern California is a place of great wonder. If you don't visit Truckee or Lake Tahoe, California in your lifetime, then you've missed a memorable experience. Someday, I have to come back, and visit Northern California, Park City, Utah, Oregon, Seattle. Someday.

Usually bathrooms at public parks are like their cousins at highway reststops--they're filthy, graffitied, trashed. The bathroom at this campsite, however, was a clean. Bathrooms remain a kind of sanctuary in this hurried world, a place to let go of things, usually while reading a book or perusing a magazine. That's probably where the name "Reader's Digest" came from. This bathroom was great, and it even had a pay shower. Cool!

Carefully, I walked to the car, navigating the prickly balls, mini-landmines, that littered the ground, and dug some quarters from my changeholder. Back at the bathroom, I stripped, fed the change into the thin mouth, and

relaxed under the warm cascade. Ahhh. Everything feels like new when you experience it less often. This includes showers.

Again, it's all about the joydrops, the little things. (As long as I expect nothing, I'll be happy with crumbs. Can you please pass the crumbs. Delicious, thank you.) Feeling refreshed, I returned to the car to arrange my backpack, then crept toward the cement bench where our food rested in plastic bags. There, I sat, wrote in my journal, ate red, seedless grapes, and listened to the music of the forest, an early morning symphony of birds, squirrels, chipmunks and other creatures.

An hour later, Faith emerges from the tent, her hair sticking everywhere. She has a dazed tired-eyed expression. Without a word, she approaches the table and forages for a snack among the bag of fruit.

"There's a shower in the bathroom. It only cost 75-cents for eight minutes."

"You have to pay for showers here?" She clucked. "Why didn't you just swim in the lake? It's right over there." She points.

"Where? Oh, I didn't know. The shower has hot water. I'm sure that the lake will be pretty frigid."

"They usually don't make you pay for showers. Not when you're camping." Faith explained.

The two people, a couple who we split the campsite with, surfaced from their tiny, bubble shaped tent.

"Morning," I greet. He proceeded to cook breakfast while his girlfriend broke camp. He offered us some, but we declined. Faith rolled her sleeping bag into a tight bundle and slipped it into its carrying case. While she showered at the pay shower, I broke camp and tidied any debris.

When Faith returned, we had a conversation about what we would do that day. Feeling amped, I wanted to look for a job. She, on the other hand, wanted to hike, or sit on the dock and find another campsite.

"Let's find a place to store your clothes and stuff," I suggest to

Faith, who's sitting there, silently, staring into the forest.

"We can do that tomorrow," she says flatly.

"I'd rather do that today." I persist.

We compromised and headed to Faith's friend's house, some guy that has a cottage across the street from Donner Lake. Apparently, Faith met him the last time she stayed here. For the last year, he's been storing Faith's stuff--clothes, shoes, two snowboards. For someone who travels a lot, this girl's really into clothes. Compared to most people, though, she's a minimalist.

I meet her friend, a stocky, friendly man in his late twenties I'd guess. He gives my hand a firm handshake, like I'm an old friend or something, then chats with Faith, telling her that he has use for the space in the garage, that he can't store her stuff there anymore. Instead of apologizing, Faith says how kind it was of him to let her use the space and that she'll have it cleared as soon as she finds a storage unit.

"Where are you gonna be later?" I ask her.

"If I'm not here, I'll be at the dock."

Leaving Faith to sort out her storage arrangement, I drive fourteen miles south, following the road signs to Tahoe City, California. The view is absolutely beautiful. The road winds through a mountain with great rock formations on both sides leading into a forest of green that stretches like a tall carpet toward the edge of the world.

Because I knew that Eureka, Nevada was close to Truckee, California, I searched online for jobs in Truckee. (Before stealing my car, Faith had told me about Truckee, a picturesque ski resort town with plenty of service jobs, small town atmosphere, natural beauty, and snowboarding possibilities.)

The job that interested me most was in Lake Tahoe a physical job that offered okay pay and cheap communal living within a mountainside cabin. The Truckee River Raft company was hiring for a raft handler,

someone who handles and carries 100 pound rafts. The job, I'm sure, would be grueling physically and somewhat boring mentally, but being in a different space, living at high altitudes in the mountains, would more than makeup the difference. Besides, I figured, I could ride the rapids in my spare time with, of course, a river guide. The road descended into a valley towards a small town at the base of the mountain. At the mouth of the town, on the right hand side, was The Truckee River Raft Company, complete with a dock, rafts, and an enclosed booth. My enthusiasm deflated when I spotted their adjacent sign: "Not open for 2-3 more weeks, until water levels are higher."

June 5, Thursday, same day, 2003, noon

Sitting on the dock of Donner Lake

I'm laying on the dock, one of the many that surround the perimeter of Donner Lake. Here, the docks emerge from shallow, grassy slope that runs alongside the road. The road itself winds around the lake. On the mountain side of the road sit small houses that double as rental units, motels, restaurants, and sporting good stores. Judging from the numbers of SUVs (Sports Utility Vehicles)

carrying ski racks, all these businesses rely on the nearby skiing and snowboarding destination spots. At Lake Tahoe, about fifteen miles south of Truckee, seven major ski resorts exist.

What I find beautiful is this--the docks, even though they sit across the road from businesses, are considered public property, since Donner Lake is a public lake. Translation: free place to camp (the docks, the bank), free place to pee or poop, free place to drink water. Not necessarily in that order, though. Reverse the last two.

Faith is shaving her legs. Not with an entire razor, rather with the top part only, the part that holds the blade in the plastic casing. Her right leg is covered in a mess of shaving cream. Adroitly, and in her own world, she holds the blade between her thumb and index finger and slowly travels down her leg. It's bright and sunny and the sky is a wonderful blue and a cool breeze that makes me think of Canada on a wonderful sunny day sweeps over the lake. Some twenty-somethings sit at the dock across from ours and attach water skis. I wave to them

and smile. They wave back in my direction, big smiles, sunburns, a scattered collection of beer bottles standing like sentries around them.

I'm working on my second bottle of Rolling Rock. This beer actually tastes good. Between Faith and I, sit a six pack of these bottled soldiers away without leave. Another six pack of Rolling Rocks is submerged near the shore, still in its cardboard carrier and inside its plastic bag. Faith tied it to a nail sticking from one of the posts that's holding up this dock. There it sits, bobbing in the cold waters of this lake which, incidentally, was born out of tragedy. According to Faith, Donner Lake was birthed when hundreds of workers, digging deep into the mountain, struck a natural spring. The water gushed in so quickly that no one escaped. All of them drowned. The death of the miners. The birth of Donner Lake.

This is my second beer and I'm drunk. Hey, at least I'm a cheap drunk, right? I'm happy, though. Earlier, about an hour ago, Faith convinced me to buy the beer. Why not? I figured. Maybe it'll help me to relax. That's one problem I suffer from: I'm plagued with guilt and cannot relax. For some reason or another, I always feel like I have to be doing something.

Beer has a way of reducing stress and the enormous responsibilities which tend to burden the soul. With beer, everything becomes mellow. I can imagine a scenario in which the employee is inebriated, and his boss approaches him with a job that needs completing. The sloshed employee answers: "Oh, you need that job done?" Pause. "Yes, it will be taken care of." Pause. "When, you say?" Pause. "Tomorrow? Okay." Pause. "Or, perhaps next year. How's that sound?"

"Drink more," Faith barks softly. "You have to keep drinking."

"I can't. I'm already drunk." I confess.

She fetches two more beers, walks them over, and uncaps them.

"Here, I opened them for you." She says.

Powerless, or at least pretending to be, I finish the bottle in my hand and start on the next one. Halfway through the third bottle, I really start to confess, launching into an endless stream of honest expression, bittersweet recollections, and blurry hopes for the future.

"I used to think I could save people," I step off the diving board, "but I can't. I used to think I could help people, but I can't. Only God can. And what I need to do is start pointing people in His direction. People need to know about Heaven, Hell, eternity, sin and the consequences of sin. They need to hear the Gospel of The Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord so they won't go to Hell when they die."

Then I talked about my other dreams and hopes, to compose music and write a musical that would have people nodding in agreement, laughing, hoping, crying.

"I have so many dreams, you don't even know. They're all competing for attention in my head like dogs at an animal shelter that want to be adopted, but I only have so much time and as soon as I begin to take care of one, another one whines to be fed, then I feed the whining one and another one cries out to be helped, so I run over to him, but I'm running out of dog food. It's like," I'm pointing to my head, standing in the beautiful California sunshine at the edge of the dock, "a popcorn machine in there with an endless amount of popcorn seeds. The idea for the musical, Dumpster Diver, the musical is really a story about two people who've grown apart over the years, and, the whole premise of dumpster diving represents the idea of doing your own thing, following your dreams, regardless of the consequences." And on and on I rambled. "I really care about you, Faith. I love you, Faith. I really do."

For fifteen minutes, my mouth was famous. The words erupted fast and furious, chasing wild horse dreams that were never meant to be captured, only sought after.

Gesturing wildly, I talked and explained and used my hands like the baton of a conductor, guiding his orchestra through an intricate arrangement. Meanwhile, Faith listened as I opened my heart with unedited revelation.

June 15, Thursday, same day, 2pm, 2003, Donner Lake, Truckee, CA

Faith is lying stomach side down on the dock, a blanket beneath her. She's wearing sunglasses and being herself, quiet. I'm sitting at the end of the dock, reading *Big Sur* by Jack Kerouac, which is turning into a kind of surrogate adventure to coincide with mine, except Jack is drunk and suffering from *delirium tremens*. I suffer from massive bouts of codependency. In one way or another, we're all addicts.

"I think we should part ways," Faith announces.

"Faith. I've been thinking you're right." I agree. "I need an outlet, an electrical outlet. I like to play keyboard or get online, and that requires electricity. I'm thinking I'll drive back to Eureka, Nevada."

"Why?" Faith cuts in.

"To pick up my stuff from UPS," I explain.

"I thought you were gonna have 'em deliver it here," she volleys.

"Well, not if I go back to West Palm. That way, I can pick it up on the way. Because I miss playing the keyboard and typing in the computer. And even if I'm gonna work at a restaurant here or in Salt Lake City, Utah, I'm gonna have to get that stuff shipped there and it'll be expensive." I concluded.

"Kemp," Faith starts. "You're gonna go back to West Palm, start working at America again, and be miserable. You'll go back to Florida and you'll end up sweating to death. And then you're gonna wish you'd never left."

She's right, I'm thinking. Maybe I have been in a rut.

"So," Faith continues. "Why don't you just stay here, drink beer, and not worry about a thing. Because that's what you need. Go buy another twelve pack and drink as much beer as you can. Inoculate yourself," she advised. "Because you're way too intense. And you can't relax. You need to learn to relax. You worry too much. Just take a week off and don't do anything. You've never even been on vacation. Don't even write. Swim and drink beer. After a week, your head will be much clearer. Trust me. By then, you'll know what to do. After a week, I'll tell you what to do."

Her words hit me like an unexpected, but much needed, shove. Intently, I listened to them quietly. Her advice is good. Her words fell around me like soldiers demanding an excuse. But I have none. I'm flummoxed. Usually, I have an answer for someone when they give advice. But this time, however, I didn't know what to say. Feeling paralyzed by her unfettered honesty, I said nothing.

Maybe this is what I need: A week of doing absolutely nothing. Not worrying. Not trying. Not thinking. I'm one of those people who's burdened with the idea they must always be producing, a person who cannot sit still because the guilt refuses to allow that calm state. Perhaps Faith is right--I need to learn to relax. Her propensity, whether intentional or accidental or by default, towards paranoia and manipulative behaviour may be balanced by her insight. Forthrightness and honest criticism seem nearly extinct today, as they've been left in the strainer of political correctness. Even if she needs the liberating trigger of alcohol to overcome her quietness, the glimpses of her intelligence still shine through.

Even in my twenties, I've never been sure of whose advice to take. Usually, I end up sifting through the sandbox of suggestions trying to find the buried treasure among the worthless grains of sand.

June 5, Thursday, same day, 2003, early evening, 5pm

After getting drunk with Faith, while sitting on the dock at Donner Lake, a small nest of Rolling Rock bottles in a pile between us, I cheerily said: "Hey, let's go out to dinner tonight."

Faith perked up, her eyes smiling, glowing.

"Sure," I said.

"We'll put it on your mom's credit card," Faith suggested.

"Okay," I smiled. The reality is that the credit card, although in my name, is signed because of my mom's good credit rating, and I have to pay for whatever charges I incur. For whatever reason though, perhaps a combination of Faith's advice and the beer, I felt wreckless and deserving of a good meal.

A half hour later, we're seated at a Chinese restaurant in a small shopping plaza somewhere in downtown Truckee. The menu is pricy but bearable.

"Kemp," Faith purrs softly. "Order me a merlot."

"No Faith," I counter. "If you want wine, I'll buy you a bottle at the store after we eat. For the price of one glass here, we can get a full bottle elsewhere."

"I want saki, too," she continues.

"I'll buy you a bottle of wine from the store afterwards," I reassure her.

"You said you were taking me out to dinner tonight," she states firmly, coldly.

"And I am, Faith. But I can't afford wine or saki."

"You have your mom's credit card," she pointed out.

"It's in my name. She merely cosigns for it." I explained.

"I'll just order the merlot," she states.

"No you won't," I disagree gently.

"You're a real piece of shit, Kemp."

"What? You're unbelievable." I reply. The drums in my head grow louder as the approaching tribe advances over the mountain.

The debate ended when I told Faith that, because of her belligerence, I wanted to leave. So far, we'd only been served drinks and a hot tea, of which I'd had a sip.

"I'm leaving Faith. Let's go." I slid from my seat in the booth and walked toward the exit. The waitress, a Chinese lady, appeared.

"Everything okay?" She asks.

"I'm sorry. We're gonna go. Sorry," I repeat, briskly walking outside. Fortunately, our booth was close to the door. Faith followed me out. She was ticked, angry, but I didn't care.

It was getting cold outside. I jumped in the car and headed back. At the stop

sign, she tossed out my journal, a smaller one that included entries about this bus trip on the way here. I kill the engine, extract the key, step outside, and retrieve it. Returning to the car with the journal, I start the car and continue down the road. Once we're rolling, she grabs the empty Rolling Rock bottle that's beside her and without looking, carelessly tosses it out the window. It sails through the air. Tinkling glass is heard as it lands.

"Take my stuff. Drop me off. And I never want to see you again. Get it? Or I'll fucking kick the shit out of you." She warns.

(Wow, she is playing hardball, isn't she? Should I continue to fight for her, show her love in spite of her antagonism? Or should I let her go and be a wrecking ball for someone else's life? Is that what she needs? Someone to endure her anger, find that tiny spark of light, and spend valuable oxygen blowing on it so it will catch fire? Perhaps it's time to cut my losses.)

I dropped her off at the dock. She unloaded her stuff, duffel bags and a sleeping bag, then walked off, disappearing into the woods as she trudged further down the lake bank. An hour later, she returned, wandering by me as I sat half asleep in the car. At this point, I was worried about her. The temperature was dropping and I didn't want her to die from hypothermia. But when she came closer I noticed that she had returned to her friend's garage to retrieve warmer clothes for camping. Maybe she wasn't crazy after all. Then she disappeared into the darkness along the bank of The Donner Lake.

Epilogue

June 5, Thursday night, 2003, Truckee, California

A part of me still wants to travel with Faith.

On the dock, we had a long conversation. In it, she mentioned that because we are friends who are not attracted to each other, we could camp the whole summer while working. That way, she concluded, we could save money instead of paying rent. The idea sounded promising. And as I've been camping, well camping on couches and living pretty cheaply for the last five or six years, I have some experience in the field. This time, however, I would be camping outside,

experiencing the wondrous beauty and the raw, untamed splendor of Northern California, the great wide West which still calls the few who are willing to listen, the few who will turn down the volume of their TV long enough to hear the voice that's in their hearts. Besides, Faith is a nut. So even if the camping didn't work out, at least the experience would be an interesting one. Yes, a part of me still wants to camp out with Faith, share expenses, and work out a buddy system of sorts, work the same job, etc. Then again, I should probably cut my losses, which grow larger everytime Faith is around. Around her, I'm like a codependent monkey who cannot leave his owner who uses him to perform tricks and trains him to snatch dollars from onlookers. I know it's my fault.

Faith, despite her evil attitude, is interesting. Initially, her quietness baited me. This happened unintentionally on her part. Then, her independence reeled me in. And I was hooked. She was pretty cute, too, even though she looked like an extra for hobbit on Lord of the Rings.

To sum it up, I really started to dig Faith Nelson. For one, I never knew what to expect from her. She was unpredictable. The combination of stress and excitement, that seemed to be a byproduct of her actions, became that alluring cocktail that led me to addiction. Another attractive quality is her fierce independence. Even when she is wrong, she refuses to admit it, never yielding to submission or regret in any form or fashion. Then again, the inability to admit wrongdoing seems a common trait of criminals. Another unique and attractive quality is her proclivity to quietness, to remain laconic. She rarely spoke. When she did talk, often the result of beer or wine, her insights remained noteworthy. Yet, she's clever, smart, cunning, mischevious, wreckless and knows how to survive in the woods, and she justifies herself. She likes cool music, the shoegazer bands like Lush, The Smiths, The Pet Shop Boys. Of Lush, Faith commented: "I love her voice." I smiled. "So do I," I agreed.

Dear LORD JESUS,

Please rescue Faith Maria Nelson and restore her mind. Maybe she's already a Christian, albeit a wacky one. I want to see her know You more personally, Jesus. Know my heart. You've seen my tears. I don't want to lose her. I don't want her to get lost in this world that promises much but offers little. Leaving her, as she roams around Truckee, California with her backpack, I feel like I've just had a miscarriage, maybe an emotional one. I love her and I tried to save her. Even when I was drunk on the dock, I told her that true happiness comes from a close relationship with Jesus Christ. She listened. Please LORD, I beseech You to help

draw her, and others, close to You. I cry and weep and remain on my stomach for this generation of orphans that need you, yet wander in darkness. You know I have ADD so, if it's your will, pull in the reins of my mind so I can follow the path set before me. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Thank You, JESUS. Amen.

June 6, Friday, 2003, 6:30am, the trip back

I'm at Iron Skillet, a buffet restaurant, in Sparks, Nevada. I'm eating, devouring is more like it, grits, scrambled eggs, hashbrowns, bacon. Slowly and deliberately, I shovel the food into my mouth feeling like a crane operator directing the movement of my limbs and hands. Even here, I feel guilty, alone, and out of place. The line between sanity and insanity touch, like the merging point where the earth meets the sky. Is this the price of freedom? Insanity? Does the end of the rainbow lead to a manhole cover? Is the level of creativity inversely proportional to the level of sanity? My mind is a battlefield. Ideas compete for attention, soldiers advance cautiously, hoping to avoid mines.

June 6, 10am, I think

Praise God! I stopped in at the Eureka Sheriff Department to retrieve the UPS package sent via Hernando, Mississippi Sheriff Department. My valuables are all inside--journals, song compositions, dumpster diver-the musical, notes, duffel bag of clothes, overnight bag. :-) Hallelujah!

Friday nightmare, June 6, 2003

The waking nightmare engulfed me as I roared down the freeway, eyeing the receding gas gage while I looked for a filling station. There was no sign of civilization. The lonely stretch of blacktop ribboned narrowly into the distance, disappearing over the oncoming mountain that seemed to move further as I made my approach, laughing at me. Outside, the sky grew darker, pulling the curtain for any hope of help if I run out of gas. What am I thinking? According to map,

this route appeared to be the quickest distance from I-80 to I-10, which is a straight east-west shot from Southern California to Northern Florida. In looking at the map, my mistake was that I neglected the shaded areas that represented mountains. Interstates through mountainous regions take longer to traverse as they involve winding roads and long ascents, both leading to slowdowns. Then you get stuck behind a slow moving vehicle driven by returning vacationers or a semi-truck carrying a heavy payload. To add to the horror, my car, a 1995 blue Suzuki Swift hatchback groaned like it was in one of the lower gears. Fifteen minutes passed. Still, no gas station. Darkness descended like the cape of some faceless nemesis, plunging the Nevada desert into blackness. I followed the other cars, machinemade snails of different sizes, chugging along the Great Basin Highway. What's so great about this highway? Here, they're using the word to mean "huge" or "big".

This area is huge. It's like driving through the bottom of a nearly empty salt shaker. All around you, as far as you can see, is a desert of white. The sense of isolation is palpable. As the car struggled to accelerate up a mountain road, I continued to watch the gas gage, so much in fact, that I could see the needle descend towards "E". Then it rested at the top of E. I shook my head quickly and the needle returned to its original position at a 1/4 tank. Worry was causing me to hallucinate. I began praying, launching SOS messages in machine-gun rapidity. Minutes later, Praise God!--I saw a gas station. :-)

Driving from Northern California (Truckee) south through Nevada and toward Arizona, I felt like I was in a matchbox car (The West has a way of putting you in your place, it's place) navigating my way through a giant sandbox, trying to escape the heat of the hairdryer left running, pushing waves of warm air in my direction, airwaves rolling off the sage-covered foothills, sweeping in from the high desert mountains across the salt flats. Nevada, though, is beautiful nonetheless, with its small cowboy towns that scatter the highways, soaring mountains, and a sky that stretches to forever. It's a place rich in history where the West is still the West, but even now, I can smell the developers from a distance, ready to pave, subdivide, and sell, sell, sell.

Approaching Las Vegas, Nevada is a surreal experience. Imagine yourself in the middle of a desert, feeling like you're inside a hot air dryer. Ahead, you see a mirage slowly coming into view. The mirage takes shape. It's a giant toilet bowl covered with glue, then sprinkled with silver and gold glitter. Lilliputian sized people crawl all over the toilet bowl, inching their heads over the rim for a peek

inside. These are the gamblers and the visitors. Other lilliputians are cleaning it and making repairs among chipped porcelain surface. These are members of the service industry (cooks, cocktail waitresses, plumbers, electricians, cleaning) that keeps the cogs of this bowl in working order. Suddenly, a siren is heard. Momentarily, everyone stops to watch the lucky winner and the sea of coins pouring from the machine in front of him. Someone is a winner! Royal flush! the toilet screams out a battlecry and a significant number of people watching from the rim tumble headfirst into the whirlpool below, swept beneath the churning waters of addiction that hold even the most cautious of gamers to their own vices. That's Las Vegas, Nevada. And you're glad to be leaving.

Saturday afternoon, June 7, maybe Sunday afternoon, June 8, East Texas, 2003

Last night, I decided to give the car a break. So far, I've been driving about sixteen hours a day, probably more. In Texas, I found a hotel for \$38 dollars a night, with one room left. So I grabbed it. For some reason, I always feel guilty when I'm at a hotel, like I don't deserve it. It's a nagging feeling that prevents me from sleeping most of the night. Usually, it's ameliorated by reading The Bible, doing pushups, walking around the hotel, swimming. The fact that I was alone at this hotel--that was the catalyst for my guilt. When you have no one to throw ideas off of, or sort things out with, you slowly lose it. Without reaction, arguments, encouragement, or criticism to help you sharpen your focus, you fade into the cracks. Slowly, the waters of introspection rise so high that your feet can no longer touch the bottom, and you're left to paddle in place, until you surrender to the waves around you. Loneliness pursues everyone. Isolation, however, remains the real sniper. Isolation is the lynchpin for introspection, that, if left unchecked, leaves a person to retreat so far into his own head that he forgets how to find his way out. Isolation, if not identified and eradicated, can convert the brightest desires into a bland memory. I took a long, hot shower, then flipped channels until I found a special, a documentary about the making of "Shallow Hal", a dramatic comedy starring Gwyneth Paltrow and Hal Black. The half-hour show was really eye opening.

In the movie "Shallow Hal", the main character Hal learns to see past physical beauty to the point that he sees inner beauty instead of physical beauty. To him, people look outwardly beautiful as long as they exhibit attractive inner qualities. The entire premise borrows from Rod Serling's "Twilight Zone" episode "The Eye of the Beholder". For the role as the lady that wins Hal's attention, actress

Gwenneth Paltrow, the glamorous celebrity, donned a fat suit and underwent three hours of makeup. Because of scheduling conflicts, makeup artists, to test their ideas, flew to New York City to do a practice run on Gwenneth Paltrow, actually converting her to a 300 pound lady. To judge the realism for her look, Gwenneth and her galpal, also her personal assistant/manager, rode the elevator down to the lobby and sat at the bar. Everyone ignored her, while the hidden camera rolled. The bartender looked away. No one even spoke to her. Gwenneth recalled: "I felt so isolated. I felt so alone. People pretended like I didn't even exist." Watching her sit there at the bar, the bartender completely ignoring her, I almost started crying.

What a sad testament of our society, revealing the depths of superficiality to which we've plummeted. It makes me angry. Whenever I go out, I seek those types--the ones that everyone ignores--to talk to. When I see them, I see myself. In high school especially, I felt the same way, like an outcast. Whether my feelings were grounded in evidence is not the issue because the feelings, in and of themselves, were real to me. That's one reason, among many, why my heart goes out to them. I will not neglect them. I will show interest. I will not look away, point or ridicule. God-willing, I will show them The Love of Jesus, an unconditional love that overflows the lives of them that surrender their hearts to Him. God willing, I will introduce them to real Christianity, the kind that overlooks the outward while slowly changing the heart.

Dear LORD JESUS,

Thanks for this trip. Thanks that my car got stolen. Thanks for Faith. Thanks for the future. Thanks for saving me. Allow me the privilege and burden, the beautiful burden, to save others by pointing them in your direction though action, word, song. Thanks.

Amen

July, 1:53 am, 2003, West Palm Beach, Florida

Hello. It's early July. I'm not working. My time has been spent recording songs and working on two websites. I haven't heard from Faith, but the website www.faithnelson.com will remain until she pays me the \$600 she put me out.

I've been here so long I feel like a ghost, a paperdoll, an aging superhero that's growing a pot belly, and continues to run into old friends who are picked off, like ducks in a shooting gallery, by careers, marriage partners, and dreams only they have goggles for viewing. Here, my past stares me in the face, haunting me, preventing me from sleeping, and worse, retarding my growth into adulthood and the process of moving forward. I feel that I must keep moving. I'll metamorphosis somewhere else, in a place that's more forgiving, perhaps a city whose inhabitants I can relate to in some way.

Sleep escapes me. What have I done to suffer this affliction? Am I in sin? Am I in a sin of omission (not doing something I should do)? I'm not sinning continually in any one area. Maybe the cure is finding someone that needs help, then suffering their abuse and resentment. Maybe I need a fix--my codependent pupil du jour who I will help while they leave me in wake, dust on my face, while I smile feeling that this required act of contrition provides the antidote necessary for my (guilt?) insomnia.

As long as your mind is gone, you don't have to worry about losing it.

The West is waiting for me to save it, help save it from slipping into an ocean of materialism that will only drown its inhabitants. All I can do is point them to Christ. This whole world is out of control, entropy unrestrained, technology untamed, morality unbridled. The West waits for me, silent, pensive, a rippled carpet of anticipation. I know so much that I cannot even bring up topics of UFO's, the FBI's continued evidence of child abduction and experimentation underneath the Denver Airport. The world is more evil than anyone can imagine. It is not worth working for. George Bush is a complete corporate puppet and anyone supporting this buffoon has been hypnotized by the collective wave of patriotism whipped by a controlled media that asks us to trade freedom for security. The activists protesting in the streets, arrested for their legal right to assemble and air their views, suffering the bruises from descending billy clubs, the sting from mace and pepper spray--they have conviction.

Gary Busey is beginning to make sense.

I've got to split. My bad judgement has come back to haunt me in abusive friendships among people downtown and people like Mike Toby, ghosts from the past that return to mend abandoned friendships forged on fragile foundations. All I seem to run into these days are ghosts. This gets tiresome.

At least I have some cool friends ... Viviana, the gifted singer and guitarist, Scott Thourot, dumpster diver by night and engineer by day, and Ryan Cedar, the witnesser and car transport driver, :-)) a 20-something year old that skateboards and looks like a 12-year old wearing a full beard.

When I have things, material acquisitions, money, a relationship with a girl that's rooted in common beliefs and grounded by a real friendship, I end up having to worry about losing these things. Eventually, everything valuable seems to get stolen or disappears between my fingers, as if I'm trying to close my hand on a cloud. This entire world fades into a blur. Everything disappears, or gets taken by someone who justifies their need. Everything collapses and I'm at the point where I'll watch quietly. Shelters are melting.

The beauty of music is that it is not your own. The music that God has given me does not belong to me, rather, it belongs to those that need to hear it. That's why I want to finish this CD. People need to hear it. I feel like God's dropped it in my lap and I'd be burying my talent if I did not feed it, nurture it, until it had wings to leave the nest. Music is just the football that's been passed to me while the opposing team, a forboding army of naysayers, rushes toward me, hoping to descend on my person before I can lob the football into the sky, aiming toward the running back who is most in the open. That's the beauty of art and poetry. Both of these do not belong to their creators; they belong to their audience. It's only good or of value, when it's shared, passed on to as many people as possible. In a way, experience is only real when it's shared.

July 2003, WPB, Florida

It's sometime in early July, 2003.

Since I returned from northern California, a lot has happened. Mike Toby, former pastor of Rock Church, lived with me for about five weeks. Then I kicked him out. For the most part, he'd sleep 16 hours a day, sometimes more, and always run the a/c. When he was awake, he'd be on the phone, talking. He was

constantly talking, usually about his favorite topic--himself. Letting my sympathy over ride my sense of reason, I got absorbed into his gravity field. Then, I came to my senses after listening to Carrie Cutlip's advice. "He's riding on your reputation," she explained. She was right. "He's using you for your reputation, in order to make him look valid." Then Carrie revealed that Jana had ran up her credit card to \$5,000 when Jana and Mike dated. Once Mike dumped Jana, Carrie said, Jana had to move in with her parents in order to save money to pay off the debt. I was angry when I heard that. Then Carrie told me that Mike still had some of Jana's furniture in storage, and blew her off when she called to arrange to retrieve it.

"I'm kicking him out," I announced to Carrie and Krissy Iverson, over our conversation at Shell's, a seafood restaurant. When Mike arrived home, I was fuming. I was livid.

"Kris, what's up?" He greeted with his phony grin.

"I want you out of here in an hour," I stated blankly.

"Kris, what's wrong?" Still smiling. "Are you mad at me? What'd I do?" He asked.

"Let's just say you came between me and a family member."

"Okay, I'll leave." Pause. "I'm not mad."

"Sorry to be so curt with you." I added.

"That's okay," he repeated. "I'm not mad."

For the last three weeks, I've been recording and mixing songs for a self-produced CD of Christian music. It's called Out of the Wilderness, a music project to support the persecuted church. JR & Heather Lawson have a terrific song on it called "Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit". Viviana Lang, a talented singer and acoustic guitarist, sang some vocal tracks. What a blessing she is. Her voice sounds like the singer of The Cranberries. :-)

destination: Denver, Colorado

This afternoon, I'm leaving for Denver, Colorado. I'm driving this ladies car up there, staying with her friend, then helping her move her junk into her place. She gave me \$350 for gas, food, lodging. Ryan Cedar, a friend who runs his own car transport business, told me: "She's ripping you off, man. Once I'm ready to return to Florida, she'll pay for a return flight. I think, if it all works out, God-willing, that Ryan will have a load going to Colorado and will pick me up there. "I have to pick up my car there anyway." He explained. That would be cool. Then, I could ask for cash in lieu of the plane ticket, and travel with Ryan around the US for a few days. :-)

When I return, I'm planning to ditch this apartment. It's a beautiful, wood-floored bohemian cave with high-gloss white rough-stuccoed walls, a termite problem, and resident roaches that surface late night. It's beautiful, a beautiful waste of money. And at the end of the day isn't that what we trade our lives for, a few paper dollars to exchange for namebrand lifestyle? What's the point, really? Is it worth it? Even after high school, the trademark lifestyles manifest themselves, posing for their mugshot with a yawn. The bohemian: creative insomniac with a penchant for chocolate, coffee, cigarettes or a combination of these. His fashion is thrift store chic, he goes for days without shaving, and his outlook seesaws between hyperkinetic and dour. The hippie: a combination of the hippie and yuppie. These groups tend to be married, well-dressed mall shoppers who frequent Starbucks and buy soap made from edible ingredients like oatmeal/pomegranite from places like The Body Shoppe. Along with an assortment of nice looking, unread cookbooks lining their kitchen, you'll find an assortment of five pound candles. One other giveaway: an espresso machine made by a company that makes lawn equipment in Europe. The filers: those that compartmentalize their entire lives, reducing a lifestyle to a set of filing cabinets. Their favorite item includes shelves with drawers, a delight as they have more spaces with which to store stuff, and industrial strength plastic containers that slide beneath different pieces of furniture. The socials: this kind of person is always communicating in some way, on the cell phone, via e-mail, talking to a nearby friend or family member. The bottom line is that they are constantly talking or typing. For them, human interaction remains paramount. Everything else is peripheral. Sure, there are others, but the aforementioned provide a basic starting point.

Yes, when I return I'll ditch this apartment, even though it is lovely, surrounded by mature trees, and on the second floor. I'll take a step backward and return to the hut, the warehouse, the unarmed underground art centre at 502 Kanuga Drive,

in Flamingo Park, in downtown West Palm Beach, Florida. There, I'll live cheaper and use any additional income to support \$25-dollar-a-month missionaries every month at Voice of the Martyrs. Praise God! :-) I want to be radical for Jesus Christ. The next world is worth working for, as long as it is Heaven. This world is just a mirage. :-)

July, 2003, Sunday night, Denver, Colorado
West Palm Beach, Florida to Denver Colorado in 30 hours :-)

Guess what? I'm in Denver, Colorado. I left yesterday afternoon at around 3:30'ish, maybe 5'ish, from West Palm Beach, Florida, and arrived here at Chad's grandma's house at 10:30 or 11pm. (Chad is a friend of Susie's.) For most of the way, I gunned it, driving around 80-85 miles per hour in Susie's Nissan Ultima LE. I parked at a Wal-Mart somewhere in North Georgia and slept for 2-3 hours in the car. To save time, I food shopped before the trip. At Publix, I bought 2 and 1/2 gallons of their sweetened iced tea, nectarines, one plum, a box of fried chicken for only \$3.99, eight pieces :-). Earlier, at Winn Dixie, I purchased a gallon of distilled water and a bunch of bananas. Anyway, I'm here. Praise God. On the drive here, God gave me a song for the persecuted church. It's sung by two people, who are writing to each other as the song plays. It's written from my perspective writing to a persecuted missionary girl, with her singing back to me as she writes. Perhaps Viviana can sing it. That'd be way cool. :-) She's got a terrific voice. Cool style, too.

Dear LORD JESUS,
Thank YOU, so much, for this interesting trip and the wonderful song you are birthing in me. Help me wake up the world to Who You are and raise support for the persecuted Christian church. Please bless Chad, the fellow who is allowing me to live with him while I'm here. Please bless Susie, the lady whose car I drove here. Help her to find a Godly, Christian husband so she won't be lonely. Thank YOU for being so wonderful to me. Thank YOU for the beauty of your creation. Please be with Viviana Lang and steer her heart towards You. Nudge Scott Thourot toward supporting Christian causes with his finances. Please protect Ryan Cedar, my skater friend, as he pulls his car transport out here to pick up some vehicles. Thank You, LORD JESUS, for saving me. May i never take that for granted.
In JESUS' NAME,
Amen :-)

July 2003, Monday night, Denver, Colorado

This morning, Chad, whose grandma's house I'm sleeping at, woke me up. I showered, shaved, dressed, then drove his car--a Toyota pickup truck, following him through the winding streets of Littleton, Colorado. This is the same Littleton made notorious by the Columbine High School shootings. Beyond the suburbs, we sped through the foothills of Conifer Mountain. The road steepened and snaked around the mountain in sharp loops. At a side road, covered with dirt and rocks, that appeared to rise at a 35-degree slope, Chad turned and ascended. I followed behind him, allowing about twenty feet in case he started sliding backwards, like that would do any good anyway. Ha, ha. At the top of the steep road, another road ran alongside the mountain, then disappeared into the forested area towards the center. This was the kind of road you would see on a miniature train set, climbing up a mountain that's speckled with tiny houses. Those model train sets are the most memorable things about the fair. You know what I'm talking about? ... those gigantic, model railroad tracks that you see every year at the state fair, usually manned by a wrinkled gentleman, with rough hands, yellow teeth, and a tin of Skoal in the front pocket of his flannel shirt. Even when I was a kid, I always wanted to live in the perfect little town that one on the train set: surrounded by mountains, inhabited by friendly folk, small enough to have a sense of community that supports one another in times of crisis. Sigh.

Chad has a beautiful, small, woodframed house that literally juts out from the steep side of the mountain. Supporting it are 4" x 4"s, both standing vertically and jutting out at 45-degree angles. Surrounding the house is a wraparound porch that overlooks the valley and provides a walkway to the sliding glass doors. Chad showed me the layout. The place even has a basement, a spacious one, too. "Help yourself to anything you want to eat, seriously," he offered.

He had to meet his pastor Howard for a breakfast appointment. He asked me to take his dog, Howard, for a walk, then split.

Immediately after I watched his car disappear down the hill, I explored the entire house, walking down the stairs to his basement, a massive living area with its own kitchen and bathroom, then scurrying on all fours like a wild animal up the stairs to the kitchen, opening every single cupboard and scanning the shelves for available treats. But alas, a peculiar assembly of canned soups, bottles of vitamins and prepared foods stared me in the face. They were silent, but I listened very closely and I heard the whole army of them laughing at me. Where's the opened

box of granola bars, the half-eaten bag of Cheetos, the package of Keebler Pecan Sandies or Chocolate Chip Cookies? Forget these prepared foods. I don't have time for that. Where's the snacks? Hasn't Chad heard of snack food? After perusing the shelves and finding no junk food, I almost felt inclined to try a dog biscuit. With a dash of cinammon and sugar of course.

So, I dumped myself on the couch and chomped a banana that I brought with me, then finished the cinammon Pop-Tart that he offered me for breakfast. Howard roamed in circles, battering his nose against my knee, restless for a walk. His enthusiasm rose when I grabbed the leash, hooked it to his collar, and walked outside into the cold, Colorado mountain air. The dirt along the road was hardpacked, almost clay like, reminding me of the dirt around my cousin Ronnie's house in Toronto, Canada. "C'mon Howie!" I shouted, as I ran up the dirt road. After twenty yards, I was out of breath. A combination of the thin mountain air and the fact I hadn't exercised for a while left me out of breath. Sitting on a rock for a few minutes, I caught my breath, then returned to the road, walking this time. According to Chad, his house sits at 13,000 or 14,000 feet above sea level. All around, the view was beautiful, rippled carpets of forest green, mountains nobly serving their purpose with loquacious gestures or iconoclastic taunts, and rare air everywhere. Even the forest seemed to sing--birds joyfully chirping, bugs humming, frogs burping, squirrels squeaking--knowing that their havens were safe from developers, at least for the time being anyway. After a twenty minute walk/jog, I returned to Chad's cottage and leashed Howard, then plopped into the couch and wrote song lyrics to "remember me", a song dedicated to the persecuted church.

Chad is one of the nicest guys that I have ever met. We have the same interests. We both like to talk about human behaviour, social anthropology, people, relationships, and what motivates them. Judging from his conversation skills and line of work as an insurance adjustor working with statistics, he is very bright. He reads a lot. Most of his books deal with human behaviour or apologetics. He gave me a book by Jon Eldredge called "Wild at Heart". "It changed my life," he said.

Chad is one of the reasons why Susie moved to Colorado. Apparently, they met a Christians singles meetup, a two-week whitewater rafting excursion somewhere in Colorado that puts together likeminded people, or at least introduces them. A job promotion in Colorado, plus a change in geography from Florida, was another motivating factor for her.

When Susie first introduced me to Chad, we hit it off like two buddies who

haven't seen each other in years. Perhaps it was the fact that I was delirious after having driven for about twenty hours straight, but my mouth was like a broken water fountain, and he was laughing in the puddle. So was Susie. We talked about God, life, man, the state of the world, in rapid word bursts without any commas or apologies.

Later that morning, after Chad returned from breakfast, he commented: "If you ever need a place to stay, you're always welcome to stay here. I want you to keep in touch with me. You have a real fire," he smiled. "You have an enthusiasm that's contagious. That's rare."

Later in the afternoon, Chad, Susie, and I went to a movie at Bowles Creek Movie Theatre. We saw "Terminator - The Rise of the Machines". On the way out, we shot a picture of ourselves standing on the theatre steps. "These are the same steps where they had the memorial service for the Columbine shooting victims," Chad pointed out. "Wow," I sighed. "Did you go?"

"Yes I did. It was really good. They had Christian musicians and a really good Word. I was suprised at how evangelical it was, it was good."

After the movie, we crosed the street and ate an early dinner at Hop's. Elna, Chad's grandma, met us there. She's really nice and cool, hip even. Chad ordered a micro-brewed beer before she met us. When she arrived, she ordered a beer, too. I was laughing to myself. I like that. No apologies. A grandma ordering a beer. That's cool.

When Chad and Susie talked, I chatted with Elna, asking her questions, then silently waiting for her to answer. She married twice. Both husbands are now dead. The first husband was actually a prisoner of war (P.O.W.) in World War II. Isn't that wild?!

me: "Wow. How long were you married before he went off to war?"

Elna: "Since August. Less than a year."

me: "How did you deal with that?"

Elna: "I went to live with my parents."

me: "No kidding."

Elna: "Yeah."

me: "Did you know he was captured?"

Elna: "Yes. They told us."

me: "We're you able to write him?"

Elna: "I did, but the letters didn't get to him. A lot of people knew he was a prisoner of war, so I received letters from all over the country."

me: "Wow. That's cool. Still, though, all those letters probably served as little consolation for having him back."

Elna: "Oh yeah."

me: "Did you recognize him when he returned?"

Elna: "Yes."

me: "He was skinnier, huh."

Elna: "Oh yeah," smiling, nodding.

me: "How'd he return, on a plane?"

Elna: "A plane, yes. I gave him a big hug. Before we got home, we stopped at a hotel. Ha, ha, ha."

me: "Ha, ha, ha."

Elna: "We were married, so you know. Ha, ha, ha."

me: "Awesome. You're hilarious, Elna."

The food at Hop's was adequate. Chad paid for everyone, a supersized gesture of kindness. He also paid for everyone at the movies. That guy is tremendously generous. Thanks Chad!

July 2003, Denver, Colorado

No place is safe anymore. Everything cushioned by naivety is soon shattered by reality. Shelters are melting. Knowing God has given me these songs/poems--63 so far, I feel obligated to record them and get them heard by as many people as possible. Music is a common language that travels to the soul and creates shifts in thinking, opening doors of possibility amidst the hallways of convention.

Colorado is beautiful. God-willing, I want to return. If I cannot find a cheap living space, perhaps I'll move to Salt Lake City, Utah or Park City, Utah. Once there, I'll find an area near the college, rent a cheap room, work an anonymous job at a restaurant closeby, and continue writing in journals and composing songs. Susie mentioned that some ski resorts have inexpensive or free housing for their employees. That sounds promising. However, the kind of lodging she's talking about is pretty cramped, usually involving bunks and at least two people to a room. I need my own private room for recording and writing purposes. Then again, I'm used to living with roommates and would probably like the company, as long as they're travellers who like going out often which would leave me time to be alone to gel my thoughts into some sort of creative output.

After I make copies of my finished CD, I'll mail them to independent record labels. I would love to travel and tour. I need another singer who can play acoustic guitar, someone like Viviana would be perfect. Maybe I'm just fantasizing, but the idea of playing at churches, then crashing at peoples houses afterwards and eating their kids "Cap'n Crunch" in the morning before jumping back into the van to head to another church sounds wonderfully appealing. I know what you're thinking, but just go with me on this, okay? Using a laptop computer, and a cellphone, I could keep track of scheduled concert dates and let churches know of any unforeseen problems like engine trouble, roadblocks, or sickness along the way. The laptop would provide a way to e-mail members of the church, encouraging them to see our show. Travelling the country and playing music would be an interesting life, wouldn't it? Maybe it's merely a dream. But all great plans usually hatch from a dream, right?

July 2003, Tuesday night

I slept in this morning. At first, I woke up wondering where I was, then understanding that I was at Elena's house, in the second floor library room

beneath a pile of blankets, in an upper class suburb of Littleton, Colorado, I returned to slumber. The night before, I had opened the window a little, enough for the cool mountain air, rare air, to blow through and wash over me in waves. Aaaaa. :-) Invigorating. Below, I could hear Elena roaming around the living room and kitchen, on the first floor. Once she left with her grandkids, I padded downstairs to search for food. Even though I was an invited guest and Elena had, like Chad had, told me to help myself to anything I want to eat, I felt a bit like an indian tiptoeing around a house where I didn't belong, hoping the sleeping Pilgrims wouldn't hear my rumbing stomach. Kimosabe hungry. Kimosabe eat. Kimosabe look for sweet cereal. I guess I'll always be an imposter. Okay, enough of the guilt. Opening the cupboard, I felt like a kid on Christmas, because, whenever you open the cupboard at the house of someone you're staying at, what greets you behind those cupboard doors is the gift. Know what I mean? Neither do I, but anyway! ... A beautiful assortment of brightly colored packages smiled at me--cookies, chips, snacks. Apparently, Chad did his snacking at his mom's place. But my biggest surprise came when I eyed the countertop. Four boxes of cereal stood in an appetizing assembly beside a container of sugar and a bowl of fruit. Elna, being terrifically considerate, had set them out for breakfast for Susie and I. Hallelujah! Goodbye you fake continental breakfast of bagels and lukewarm orange juice, hello you quadplex of cereals! What a beautiful life ... shhh.

Eventually, Susie stumbled downstairs and extracted a grapefruit from the fridge. Carelessly, I watched while working on my fourth bowl of cereal. Because milk causes a large of mucous, I added water, but this combination couldn't stop my ravenous hunger. Visit milksucks.com for details.

After breakfast, Susie and I visited the Littleton library. There, we used the internet and read. I was using one of the internet computers, when a pretty, pale girl began typing on the computer beside me. She had red hair, soft pale skin, and wore earth-colored shorts, and a longsleeved pullover under a buttonup vest. Judging from her appearance, I formed a mental picture of her. She's an avid reader, knows who Jack Kerouac is, and is a registered independent. Although she drives a VW Golf, her preferred transportation is her mountain bike, which is parked outside. Her hobbies include mountain biking, hiking, camping, and working on her thesis for her graduate degree. I wanted to ask her to show me around, but I said nothing. I'm so shy with girls. When one comes near I fall into a kind of paralysis. Sometimes, if I don't let my imagination run wild with the idea of who I think they are, I chat with them. Often though, I don't say a word. The reason why so many girls date jerks is simple--jerks are aggressive.

And girls like aggressive men. The aggressive types tend to be sarcastic, a bit mean, and somewhat funny. Girls consider this a challenge, and are lured in by it. There's a plethora of nice guys out there that roam the streets alone. Meanwhile, women wonder why all men are jerks when they refuse to seek out the kind, shy ones found in libraries, grocery stores, and churches. If only girls would seek them out.

Susie drove me to her apartment, to show the size and where she wanted the furniture to go. It's a nice piece of real estate, a massive two bedroom, two bath with a private, first floor garage that leads to a stairwell which leads to the upstairs apartment. Her place is in a gated community about thirty minutes from Denver, and on the outskirts of Littleton. Both bedrooms, the kitchen, and the living room have sliding glass doors which lead to a back patio which has a great view of mountains to the north.

Around evening time, Susie and I drove back to Elna's for dinner. Elna's son, Roy, who is Chad's father, was there. They said they didn't need any help preparing dinner, so I went upstairs and read. I don't want to wear out my welcome while I'm here, so I figured that making myself less available might help demonstrate value as a guest.

Dinner was terrific--a well-chopped salad by Elna, grilled chicken breasts, steamed broccoli, whole grain bread with butter (yeah!), water. Dessert consisted of chocolate and vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce.

Roy is one of the most interesting people I have ever met. He's a Christian who knows The Bible, and he believes in conspiracy--vaccines, the Clinton murders, Kennedy, the Federal Reserve, income tax, our government. What a breath of fresh air to meet someone that actually looks beneath the meniscus of our culture and the see the reality behind it. Roy has 22 acres in Wyoming.

Roy said: "I like you, Kris. I want you to come out and visit us." Praise God! Another couch to surf with someone who I can relate to--a conservative Christian who believes the conspiracy is real. Another couch to surf as I wander America and chew up the landscape with a ferocious grin. Hallelujah! Praise God! :-)

July, 2003, Wednesday

Today, Susie drove me to her apartment, a second-floor walkup in a gated

residential community. Her place has two bedrooms, two baths, a living room, kitchen, back porch, front porch, huge walk-in closets, and a first-floor, private garage entrance. There, we helped the movers unload. After they left, we got lunch at the biggest "Wild Oat's" store I've ever seen, then returned to unload her boxes. Susie has quite a bit of belongings, especially books, boxes and boxes of them. As I write this, I'm at Elna's, Chad's grandmas house. Today, we're gonna head over there to put the remaining belongings in place.

Whenever I help someone move, I'm so glad I don't own much. My belongs consist of two duffel bags of clothes, a computer, a keyboard, and a suitcase full of journals. Possessions merely block your view. Material acquisitions, as justified as they may be, cry out for attention on many levels--warranties, repairs, upgrades, cleaning, protecting from stray hands of untrustworthy visitors or relatives. Once you buy something, especially electronic, you have to commit to the inevitable upgrade. The whole exercise becomes a treadmill of consumerism that promises leisure but produces distraction, often resulting in a plethora of options that leave ones head spinning.

Susie is an interesting study. She's 39, wants to get married, has her own house--the one she recently purchased in Littleton, Colorado--has a well-paying career as a financial consultant that has set her up with a job here in the Denver/Littleton area where she can work out of her home, and has comfortable furniture and nice things. The irony is this: She has everything but the man. "I want to get married and have kids," she parrots at least once a day. Her independent and tough nature, though, fail to attract guys. At 39, she is in need of nothing. So, why would a man feel needed around her? A man wants to be more than a sperm donor. (Well, most of us anyway.) A man, like a woman, needs to be valued and needed. Feminism and television depict women as fierce and independent, devouring males for breakfast and washing them down with a latte, all on the go of course, while chatting on a cell phone and racing toward the house she's planning to show her clients, a \$2 million dollar property that, at closing, will earn her a cool \$70,000 commission. As women have become so dominant and aggressive, men have stepped into the shadows, watching quietly from the sidelines as females cross the 30-yard line carrying the football--her leather purse containing her Palm Planner and credit cards--to glory. So many women work out, too. They spend three and four and even six days at the gym every week, toning their bodies into something truly unfeminine, chiseling their stomach into six-pack abs and turning delicate frames into broad, running back shoulders. Instead of doing chores or running errands--being productive while they use energy to burn calories, they've chosen to burn calories and create muscle. They've forgotten the

means and gone straight for the ends. It's all vain glory. Does Susie work out? Yes. She has a Bow-Flex in her garage. A Bow-Flex, for those who have missed the half-hour infomercials on late night TV, is a home gym that uses rubber bars and techniques of resistance to build muscle and tone.

All this to say, if a woman wants a man all she has to do is two things.

- 1) Demonstrate value.
- 2) Put herself in a position of need.

1) Demonstrate value

You demonstrate value by finding out what men, or your man du jour, wants and then being that person, or at least sharpening the areas of your life that fall into those categories. Most men I know want a woman who is attractive (pretty and has a good figure), quiet, a good cook, smart with money, not a spend thrift, clotheshorse or makeup junkie, and able to be feminine. Sadly, many women believe they have to be the man. This scares men away. Then, the woman wonders why she's so lonely or unapproachable.

2) Put herself in a position of need

You put yourself in a position of need by not having everything in place. Not owning your own home. This creates the possibility, and the potential, for a man to take you on the adventure with him. Leave room for him to add something to your life, whether it's adventure, security (financial, emotional, physical, mental), strength, stability, wisdom. Leave room for him to add value to your life. Anyone can be a sperm donor. But not anyone can add value. Leave room in your life, space in your life, for him to fill this need. Allow room for you and him to grow together, decide on a living space, choose a future together. Together is the key word here. The tragic fact is that so many women have done this without a man. Then, they expect a man to be attracted to them once everything is in place. But that's the problem. Once everything is in place, there's little room left for them. And the woman by then has grown cemented in her opinion because she has made all these decisions, both minor and major, by herself. Although she may be physically flexible, she is mentally rigid. By this time in her life, compromise is not something she has had to face. Compromise is foreign to her.

Another simple fact is this: Women like Susie, and countless others, do not ask guys what they want. Instead, they watch women's shows on TV and read books by women and watch other single women turn into men around them. Slowly,

they join the race and become as faceless as a runner in a marathon. At the end of the day, they are buried by treasure (things) but have no one to share it with. Maybe happiness is only real when it's shared.

July, 2003, Thursday morning

I'm gonna eat breakfast now. I'm at Elna's house. The air is cool and breezy and the sun is out. The birds are chirping.

July, 2003, Thursday night

I helped Susie unpack stuff all afternoon. This morning at breakfast with Elna, she told me an incredible story about an experience she had sharing The Gospel with a stranger beside her on a plane.

She was about to board a flight from California to New Jersey, with a stopoff halfway.

"I prayed that God would put a cute guy on the seat beside me," she smiled, "because I knew it was gonna be a long flight. So, I'm sitting there and a 75-year old man sits down beside me, and I'm like: 'Thanks God. Real funny.'"

Elna and I burst out laughing at this comment.

"Anyway," Susie continues. "We start talking and we get on the topic of God. I start explaining that he needs to accept Jesus as his Saviour so he can be saved from his sins and go to Heaven and that if he doesn't, he'll go to Hell. I knew I was getting off at the Houston stop so I asked him if he wanted to accept Jesus and he said 'yes'."

"Praise God!" I interrupted gleefully. "Hallelujah!"

"So this guy says the prayer, thanks me, and gives me his daughters phone number. 'I want you to call her,' he said. 'And tell her what happened.' Later on, I call his daughter and I explain who I am and I ask her: 'Are you sitting down?' and she says 'Yes' and I tell her that her dad said the Salvation prayer and gave his life to Jesus. She was sooo happy. You should've heard her. She kept on thanking me and said: 'I wanna be friends with you forever!'"

Is that an awesome story, or what?

"She told me that she had been praying for him for years. It's so awesome the way that God works!" Susie exclaimed, smiling.

PRAISE THE LORD!

July, 2003, Friday

Chad, Susie and I are on our way to Wyoming. Chad's driving. His father lives there on a 22-acre ranch. We're spending the night tonight, Saturday, and maybe Sunday, too. This whole experience has been truly incredible--beautiful geography, rolling hills, majestic mountains, progressive thinking people. Hallelujah! :-)

July, 2003, Friday

Before heading to Chad's father's house where Roy, his father, and Gloria, his mom (not biological) live, we stopped at The Shamrock Saloon, a cozy restaurant bar littered with picnic benches and a friendly, denim-wearing crowd of cowboys exchanging stories in a low volume roar. Susie and Chad got into a conversation with a nearby group, so I park myself at a nearby bench and introduce myself. "Hi, I'm Kris. What's your name?" I meet Gloria, Chris, who happens to be Chad's brother, and a portent gentleman who, when he hears of my interest in piano playing, says: "I have two pianos, actually one piano and one keyboard at my place. Why don't you come over with me. I'll show you around." Hmm. Later, I'm pulled aside by a local who warns: "You might wanna decline on his offer, or go with someone. I think he may be, uh ... "

"Gay?" I offer.

"Yeah. I'm sure he's harmless, though."

A gay cowboy, huh. And I thought that was a sterotype.

After asking questions to everyone and anyone in earshot, patting them on the back and acting like a conversational cheerleader, I excuse myself and succumb to

the old, upright piano in the corner of the room. Carefully, I sit on the bench. It creaks to life. Gently, I press a key. A soft sound escapes, a warm stringed tap that can only be made by an acoustic piano. How beautiful. Quietly, so as not to compete with nearby conversation, I bang out some music. Some people walk over. One of them introduces himself as Clint, Chad's other brother. He sits down and hammers out a melodic swing tune, then shows me how to play it.

"You're good," I tell him. But he waves it off. "That's all I know," he smiles.

Hours later, Chad, Susie and I exit the watering hole. Outside, the sky is so pitch black that I'm scared. The darkness feels more like a presence. It's thick. It's so dark that the road disappears into the night fifty feet in each direction. It's cold, too.

"Wow," I shudder. "It's so dark it's almost claustrophobic."

We climbed into Chad's car and drove only about a 1/4 mile down the road. Then Chad flips off the headlights and we're cast into pitch darkness. Although it gave us a scare, it was safe. Around us, the road was desolate, with no cars as far as the eye could see.

As Chad veered into his parents driveway, a gravel road that snaked into a valley, a rabbit hopped beside the car. In front, a field mouse scampered past the headlights reaching the dry grass on the other side. A whole world around us running their errands across this acreage, I thought.

Chad parked the car, then turned off the lights. We got out and laid across the hood, watching the stars. A shooting star arced across sky, flashed brightly, then disappeared. This reminded me of stargazing in Truckee, California, when I camped, except here, I was with friends. For some reason, I saw a lot more stars in Truckee. That puzzled me, because out here it seemed even more remote. The elevation in Truckee, California, as it is in the mountains, is probably a lot greater.

July, 2003, Saturday

Roy showed me how to ride a horse today without a bridle. He has about ten-to-fourteen horses on his 2,200 or is it 22,000 acre ranch. Then he asked me: "Wanna shoot a gun?"

"Sure." I answered.

He leads me outside and gives me a fifteen minute lesson, actually more like a ten minute lesson, then hands me a .45 semi-automatic. After three shots, I was done. The weapon had quite a kick to it. By the third shot, however, I knocked over the target, a bullet-ridden piece of metal thirty or forty feet away. :-) Yeah! Ha, ha, ha :-)

Saturday afternoon, Chad's family took a boat out to the Gray Rock Reservoir in Wheatland, Wyoming. I made an attempt at wakeboarding but couldn't stand up. Susie excels at skiing.

Later that night, Clint, Chris, their buddies, and Gloria swarmed around the kitchen table to play poker. I plunked away on the piano, feeling gloriously alive. Vicky and Mark arrived and Chad introduced them to me. Vicky is Chad's sister. We talked about God, life, death. Mark said: "You know who you remind me of? Keith Green." I thanked him and said: "That's an honor."

That's the second time someone told me I reminded them of Keith Green. The first time someone mentioned that, I wrote about it in a previous journal called "Pictures from the Leftover Generation". What a compliment.

July, 2003, Sunday

I spoke at Vicky and Mark's church today. Susie said my speaking was better than the pastors, because I, she said, "spoke with enthusiasm and passion and had practical examples. You started out with a story, then you gave Bible verses, then you challenged us. I would rate the pastor a one. I would rate you a ten."

July, 2003, Monday

Helped Susie put away her things.

July 2003, Tuesday

Helped Susie put away her things. She cut my hair, said I looked like a model,

shot some pictures,
then dropped me at the Greyhound station in downtown Denver, Colorado.

July 2003, Wednesday

Amarillo, Texas, 9:50 am, the bus to Dallas leaves in ten minutes

July 2003, Wednesday

Dallas, Texas - on another bus, at the terminal, idling, heading to Tyler, Texas, then points south. At the last stop in Amarillo, Texas, a lady crammed her belongings into the baggage compartment above me, then sat down beside me.

"Greetings earthling," I smiled.

She shot me a nervous glance, looking like an overweight pirhana, her eyes bulging, without saying a word. Some people have no personality. I guess I scared her. To ease her fears, I asked her some polite questions. Her answers were quick, curt, and without emotion. Some people have no personality, I thought to myself. So I gave up. Why bother?

July 2003, Wednesday

At Shreveport, Louisiana bus terminal, I met Tony, a Christian reading "The Purpose Driven Life". He attends a Bible study with a lot of young people, he told me. I told him about the music that God has given me and promised to send him a CD.

"My friend works at a family radio station," Tony smiled. I smiled, too. Thank YOU, GOD, for your hookups! :-)

July 2003, Thursday

I'm sitting crosslegged on the floor of the bus terminal in Tallahassee, Florida. At a pickup in Alabama, Zach boarded. We talked. Turns out he's a runaway visiting his mom in Pompano Beach, Florida. Hasn't seen her in a year-and-a-

half. Now, he's going to live with her. I asked him for his address and told him that I'd send him a CD. "Get in touch with me," he suggested. "Cuz I'm not gonna know anyone."

Also, in Alabama, I talked with with two Christians, a cowboy and a blind gentleman. The cowboy bragged about his daughter and her work for The Lord. The blind guy, who sat in front of me, was really interesting.

"I had gout," he spouted, "but God healed it. One day I came home and God told me to put olive oil on my head and then fast for three days. I did. And God healed me."

"Praise God. Praise Jesus!" I declared.

"The doctor didn't want to hear about it," he added. "They never do, unless it costs money."

July 2003, Thursday

Around 9pm, the big dog docked at the Amtrak/Greyhound Station on Tamarind Avenue, in downtown West Palm Beach, Florida. "Thank you for riding Greyhound. Please wait until the bus comes to a full stop before leaving your seats. Remember to take all your bags and carry-on luggage with you as you leave. This is the last stop for The Greyhound trip from Denver, Colorado to West Palm Beach, Florida, so everyone must leave the bus at this stop. Again, thank you for going Greyhound."

The hundred-or-so passengers unglued themselves from creaky chairs, fought with luggage that had been crammed into the narrow overhead crevice known as the carry-on rack, said goodbyes to their busmates, and then inched their way forward. A sad feeling surfaces at the end of a bustrip. This is the same feeling I experience at the end of a movie when the overhead lights come on, and people shuffle toward the exit. Back to reality. It's a sad feeling, bittersweet with a heavy dose of nostalgia, like hunting for a memory whose existence is kept alive by the exaggerations that surround it, a pound of hyperbole covering a pinch of truth. And sitting on the bus, with the sleeping Mexican guy beside me, watching the travellers advance like ants on lithium, a slow motion avalanche of totebags, backpacks, and uncombed hair, I could see the credits rolling down the screen. Main character ... Kris Kemp. Supporting actress ... Faith Maria Nelson.

Soundtrack by Sigur Ros', David Gray, Jeff Buckley, Sunny Day Real Estate, Keith Green, Don Francisco, 2nd Chapter of Acts, Joy Electric, Lush, Coldplay, Pet Shop Boys. Based on a true story, my story.

If you look closely, you'll see the things that others overlook. If you listen closely, you'll hear the sounds that others miss. If you're willing to have faith, you may experience the adventure of a lifetime.

tick tock girl

v.1

she's waiting for me
waiting for me
watching me

she's waiting for me
waiting for me
watching me

but i don't know who she is
but i don't know who she is

v.2

she's a psycho
but i wouldn't want it any other way
she's interesting
she'll convince me to stay
she's spontaneous
like a volatile ticking clock
nothing miscellaneous
like a girl who whispers ...

chorus

tick tock, tick tock, ticktock
tick tock, tick tock, ticktock
tick tock, tick tock, ticktock
tick tock, tick tock, tick

v.3

she's a patient
i've assigned myself to her case
a map of questions
written across her face
curiosity
collecting stars in outer space
we'll watch the world from above
as we move from place to place, she whispers ...

chorus

-30-

quotes

"The most dangerous man on earth is the man who has reckoned with his own death. All men die; few men ever really live. Sure, you can create a safe life for yourself ... and end your days in a rest home babbling on about some forgotten misfortune. I'd rather go down swinging. Besides, the less we are trying to "save ourselves," the more effective a warrior we will be."

- John Eldredge, from his book Wild at Heart

"Find something worth dying for, and then live for it. Find Someone worth dying for, and then live for Him."

- Kris Kemp, from his journal Shelters are Melting

"Fix your eyes on The Lord Jesus Christ, as Peter did, and you will be able to walk on water. Keep your eyes on Jesus, and the fear of what man can do to you will be replaced by the promise of what God can do through you."

- Kris Kemp, from his journal Shelters are Melting

"The place where God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

- Frederick Buechner

"Everyone is a slave to someone or something. Who is your master? To whom or what do you pledge your allegiance, time, money, attention, thoughts? Be a

slave to Jesus Christ."

- Kris Kemp

"With each sip of wine, clarity returned, parting the sea of torment that bridged the gap between his current state and the possibilities that cried for his attention on the other shore."

- Kris Kemp

"I don't want to get to Heaven, look back and think, 'I screwed up'."

- Jana Tatham, witnesser

"He who wants to win this world for Christ must have the courage to come into conflict with it."

- Tina Brandsema, Dutch martyr, Nazi concentration camp

"You're only as good as your pen."

- Kris Kemp, Book of Quotes

"Everyone is a slave to someone or something. Who is your master? To whom or what do you pledge your allegiance, time, money, attention, thoughts? Be a slave to Jesus Christ."

- Kris Kemp, Book of Quotes

"... if a man succeeds in securing his life against all risk, he'll wind up in a cocoon of self-protection and wonder all the while why he's suffocating."

- John Eldredge, Wild at Heart

"Living begins when you bring dreams and reality together."

- Kris Kemp, Book of Quotes

"I wanted movement and not a calm course of existence. I wanted excitement and danger and the chance to sacrifice myself for love. I felt in myself a superabundance of energy which found no outlet in our quiet life."

- Leo Tolstoy, Family Happiness

"Sell it all. Give it all. Heaven is the worthy call. Sell it all. Give it all. JESUS, He is worth it all."

- Kris Kemp, "Sell it all"

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship

"Some men are destroyed by an inner rebelliousness which keeps them at odds with themselves and the world; some become destroyers; and some achieve a precarious balance whereby they may make a lasting contributions ... "

- Robert A.W. Lowndes, introduction to The Call of The Wild

"From cradles to classrooms to cars to cubicles to coffins. We spend our lives in boxes, only to end up in one. If we're willing to risk the safety of four walls, God has something bigger in store."

- Kris Kemp, Book of Quotes

"Once you step to the edge, the world you left loses its appeal."

- Kris Kemp, Book of Quotes

"In one way or another, everyone is a drug addict."

- Kris Kemp, Book of Quotes

"It is the experiences, the memories, the great triumphant joy of living to the fullest extent in which real meaning is found. God it's great to be alive. Thank you. Thank you."

- from the journal of Chris McCandless

- Jon Krakauer, Into the Wild

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