

FREE!

#2

the philadelphia
citywide

"HELP!"





HELP!

FEBRUARY 2025

What do you do when your country becomes openly, undeniably fascist? That's the question many of us are wrestling with right now. Some of us are worried about our jobs. Some of us are worried about being deported. Some of us are worried about losing the medical care that keeps us alive. And we're all trying to figure out what to do to push back against these seemingly unstoppable forces of mass death and dehumanization.

We at the Citywide don't claim to have all the answers. But we do know that it is better to do *something* than it is to do nothing, no matter how small or inadequate it may feel. Within these pages you will find inspiration from our contributors, like how to spend less time on your phone or how to organize your workplace. You'll also find some genuine freak shit, because that's what we're all about, baybee! We hope that reading this issue will make you feel like you are part of a community. The soulless fucks in Washington would like nothing more than for us to be atomized and isolated. Community is how we survive.

There's no question that we're in for some difficult years. Hell, we've had a few difficult years already! But remember that nothing lasts forever. Look for the opportunities, stay together, and don't give up. The seeds of liberation are already in the soil.

XOXO citywide team <3

NEW, USED AND RARE BOOKS



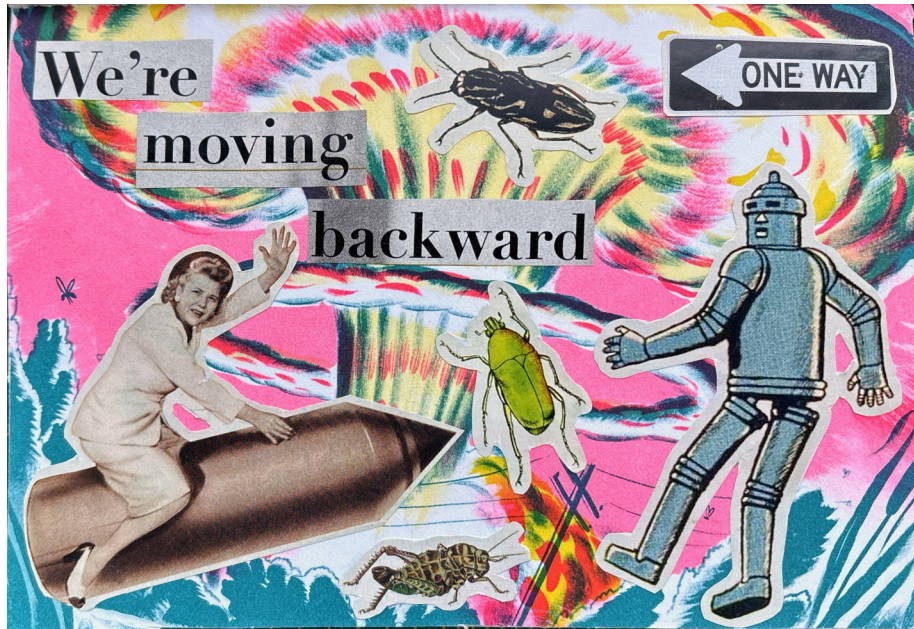
NEW, USED AND RARE BOOKS



Risky Standard is a podcast featuring a rowdy group of best friends playing tabletop roleplaying games together and using them to tell stories in original science-fantasy settings with thoughtful worldbuilding where we explore big ideas around revolutionary struggle, the possibilities and limits of utopian dreaming, and the constraints and challenges of building a better world.

www.risky-standard.com

ART BY MEGAN JONES



ART BY MOONPRISM // moonprism.com

I need help coming back to spirituality. I need help understanding death, how to place myself here, me, this organism, earth, this decaying. I want a mother to hug, I need help finding maternity where I can only find self preservation, a starving, a hand I've drawn outstretched, I can reach only as far as my fingers go. Beyond that is beyond me, beyond understanding, and how can I? It's incomprehensible, the wreck left after an accident, all that noise and all that dust, the smell of copper and flesh and burnt rubber, where God is asked to help but can He? To have it all turn black, completely dark, all of the wiring turned off, like a laptop drowned in water, first go the sparks, then the complete powering down, the saved files gone and forgotten—what was I saying again? I need comfort. What happens when I die?
—MOON

I'M ALL MOUTH, YOU'RE ALL EARS

ART BY TRENT JOHNSON



MY COUNTRY TOO I GUESS

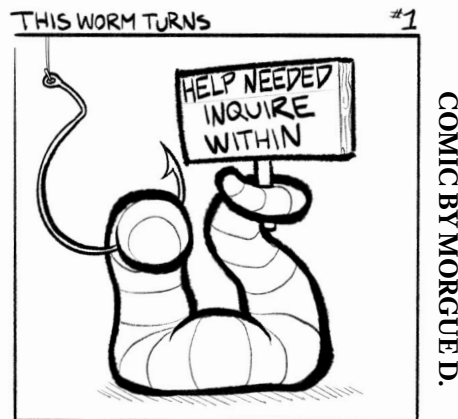
After the election, my (older, white) therapist asked me how I was feeling. I told her I wasn't surprised by the results because I've gotten used to living in a country that hates me. Her face fell. I learned years ago that the only progress I can make is through being honest, and people REALLY hate that sometimes. Oh well, I hate it too. All my life I was raised to believe if I was so good and worked so hard, everything right would happen to me. It didn't. Many such cases, I've heard from my peers.

In school I was taught about the horrors of the Holocaust, and that Never Again should we permit these atrocities to happen to anyone. My child self swore to protect all others against such a fate to the best of my abilities. Later I learned Never Again is conditional based on a few things such as the color of your skin, the value of the land you were born on's natural resources, and how much those in power consider you human or not, among many other factors the compassionate mind cannot begin to fathom or comprehend.

I've had friends and family discuss leaving America for greener pastures on the other side of the fence or the sea, and I wonder if there is a point to that. Most of the people with the means to leave will probably be fine if they stay. The ones who can't are the ones who will need the most help, I think. So I made up my mind to stay. I'm going to learn how to safely handle and fire a gun. Maybe get one of my own. It's a defensive move for a child of a homeland that hates her. But it's my right (for now), because for better (or mostly worse), I'm from here. I'm an American too.
—AK

SO YOU WANT TO ORGANIZE YOUR WORKPLACE

BY ANONYMOUS



So! Something is happening at your job that you're not happy with. It's time to get organized, baby! Here's a brief guide on how to get started. Please do not use this guide as your **ONLY** tool for organizing. There are other resources for you mentioned below. Hop to it!

1. Map your workplace. Good news for judgmental bitches – a certain amount of judgmental bitchery is necessary for workplace organizing. Put another way, you have to be able to objectively assess your coworkers. Literally write down the names, ages, pronouns, and roles of every single person who works with you (not managers – they legally can't unionize). Then go one by one down the list and write down what you know about this person. What is their life like outside of work? Do they work hard? What issues do they care about at work? What issues do they care about not at work (for instance, do they have children)? Has anything fucked up ever happened to them at work? Have they ever taken a stand about anything at work? Do you think they would be supportive of organizing efforts, or would they rat you out, or would they sit on the fence? Ideally you eventually want answers to all of these questions, and you also want to include yourself in this assessment, because we're about to...

2. Look for potential leaders. If you're taking the initiative to start a workplace organizing drive, you may think of yourself as a potential leader, simply because nobody else is taking this step. And you may, in fact, be a worker leader! But there's also a really good chance you are not. Worker leaders aren't always the people with the best politics – in fact, they rarely are. Typically, a leader is someone who has worked at the company for a decent amount of time, not someone who's brand new. They are hard workers and are respected by their coworkers. Here's a thought experiment that labor organizers sometimes use to help identify potential leaders: If someone were to get injured at work, who is the person who would run and grab the first aid kit? Who is the person who would go talk to management and ask for safety improvements? Those are your leaders, not necessarily someone who knows words like "praxis." Someone who, if they take a stand in favor of the union/walkout/whatever, other people will follow them because they like them and respect their judgment.

3. Spread your wings, little social butterfly. The backbone of any organizing movement is solidarity. To have solidarity you gotta care what happens to your coworkers. To care about your coworkers, you gotta see them as full human beings. To see them as full human beings, you gotta spend time with them outside work, without bosses there. Make it happen. **AND DON'T TALK ABOUT ORGANIZING. TALK ABOUT SPORTS OR SOMETHING.** You cannot, **CANNOT** jump in and immediately start talking about organizing, because you will scare the shit out of everyone. You can start doing this step while you are doing step one; in fact, you should get started on this as soon as possible. The more everyone hangs out, the stronger your union will eventually be. And also, it's just nice.

4. Decide when to have your first organizing conversation. It will be easier if you have an organizing conversation with someone you're already friends with and trust. This part can be scary! But all you're trying to do is find out how they would feel about a **HYPOTHETICAL** organizing effort. If they feel good about it, then feel free to reveal that actually there's nothing hypothetical about it at all! There are loads of resources online about how to have an organizing conversation with sample scripts. I would take a look at some of those (Labor Notes has a good one), but don't feel like you have to stick too closely to a script. Trust your gut and feel it out. Ask questions and listen more than you talk.

5. Strategize. Once you've got two or three other people on board, you've got the beginnings of an organizing committee! Well done! At this point, it's probably a good idea to start looking for outside help. If it's obvious to you which union you want to organize with, go ahead and reach out to the union's local – meaning, a local branch of that union. If you're undecided, or nobody from the local gets back to you, or you don't want to get started on your own, go ahead and drop the **Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee** a line. Not only are all EWOC organizers dazzlingly hot, they are also super smart and have loads of experience. They can definitely help you out.

6. Do the rest of the stuff, but don't stop doing the other stuff. The mapping, social event organizing, bonding, organizing conversations – all of that stuff needs to happen continuously for the duration of your organizing campaign. It's how you build a strong union. I'm going to briefly run down the rest of the steps of a union drive, but this guide is mostly to just get you started. Again, please **DO NOT** use this guide as your only guide to organizing.

7. Build out your organizing committee. This should be ~10% of your workplace and demographically representative of the whole workplace. It should not look like a DSA meeting unless that's what your whole workplace looks like.

8. Choose what union you are going to affiliate with, or start your own. Pros and cons to both. Ask a more seasoned organizer about it and prepare to sit silently for 45 minutes while they punish you about it.

9. Get those numbers up. You should be as well informed as possible about how many people are definitely going to vote yes and how many are definitely going to vote no. Ideally you do not want to go public with a union drive until you have a strong majority of definite yes votes. When you go public expect some people to get scared – you may lose some support so you want some padding.

10. Go public. Try and control the circumstances around the union going public. You may be found out by management beforehand – this does not mean you have to stop organizing. It just means you should maybe go slower; take a breath and regroup, then strategize and keep going. Try to prevent management from finding out for as long as possible.

11. Prepare for the boss to fuck with you. God knows what kind of horrid behavior Trump's Labor Board will allow companies to get away with, but rest assured: They will try to fuck with you. They will try to scare you. This part of a union drive is called the Boss Fight, and it sucks. It's really annoying at best. But it can also backfire and consolidate union support – that's what happened at my workplace.

12. Win your union! Eventually (unless your employer decides to be cool and voluntarily recognize your union) you will have a union election, where the bargaining unit votes on whether or not to get union representation. You win the union with 50% + 1 of the vote. There are other steps to come, like bargaining your first contract, but first you should take a moment to celebrate! You have just done something tremendous that not many people get a chance to do. Congratulations! Now go take a nap!

quail island

BY COLLEEN ITANI

As Astrid slipped, she didn't call out for help. Her clawlike grip released on her jangly keys. The two bags in the crook of her elbows (one leather, one Baggu), the dog-eared copy of Bluets, and the tub of coffee went flying, as did she. Onto her back, feet tipping toward the sky, ass toward the pavement, she moved through the air and the wind wooooooshed right out of her. Where to? she wondered. She was flying.

No, she realized. She was floating. Supine. Her eyes went up, up, up—skyward.

Actually, into the sun. Directly. It was piercing. How? It was winter in upstate and the sun was seldom available for a moment when she wanted it for a stupid menty-b walk.

Now upended, midair, she was locking eyes with the sun and SNEEZING. Sun sneezing had cursed her since her youth. "Fuck-choo," she said into the crisp air. She was surprised the sneeze didn't slam her body to the ground like one of those theatrical WWE moments. There were so many people around. Were they there the whole time? she questioned. Now, she clocked that her coffee was on the ground, keys uncomfortably close to a neighboring sewer grate. All other objects: locations unknown.

The block had charm and in the morning everyone walked their dogs up and down, stopping at every twiggy tree. All the leaves had fallen a month ago. She noticed these changes, as she kept tabs on the eagle that would circle her apartment's periphery. Today Astrid was wearing a miniskirt. It had made sense when she was getting ready. Nothing made sense now. She tried to fidget but it was pointless. She hoped it wasn't completely around her waist now as she tried to recall which underwear she put on before leaving the house.

How could time feel eternal and so quick all at once? Did she take the wrong gummy vitamin this morning? Edibles were in a different cabinet altogether. While her heart was thud-thumping, her body remained remarkably steady. The last time she fell in a miniskirt was when she passed out after donating blood in college. The campus green was full of people then. She wound up in the hospital, was deemed anemic, and took the next decade off from giving blood.

Still midair, Astrid wondered again, how was this happening?, a ringing buzzing through her ears like an incessant alarm.

And then a shift. Her eyes loosened their grip on the sun. Or the sun demanded that she loosen her view. Suddenly it clicked. He was there. She still couldn't breathe, but she knew. Their relationship was so muddled, so betwixt, she didn't need more than this sensing. So she turned into a bird. No... an island. The onlookers were mystified at this woman changing shape right in front of them. Again she was floating, but this time over the ocean.

From the oak branch in front of Astrid's home, the eagle watched it all.

THE JUICER

#1

By Deacon Mackin

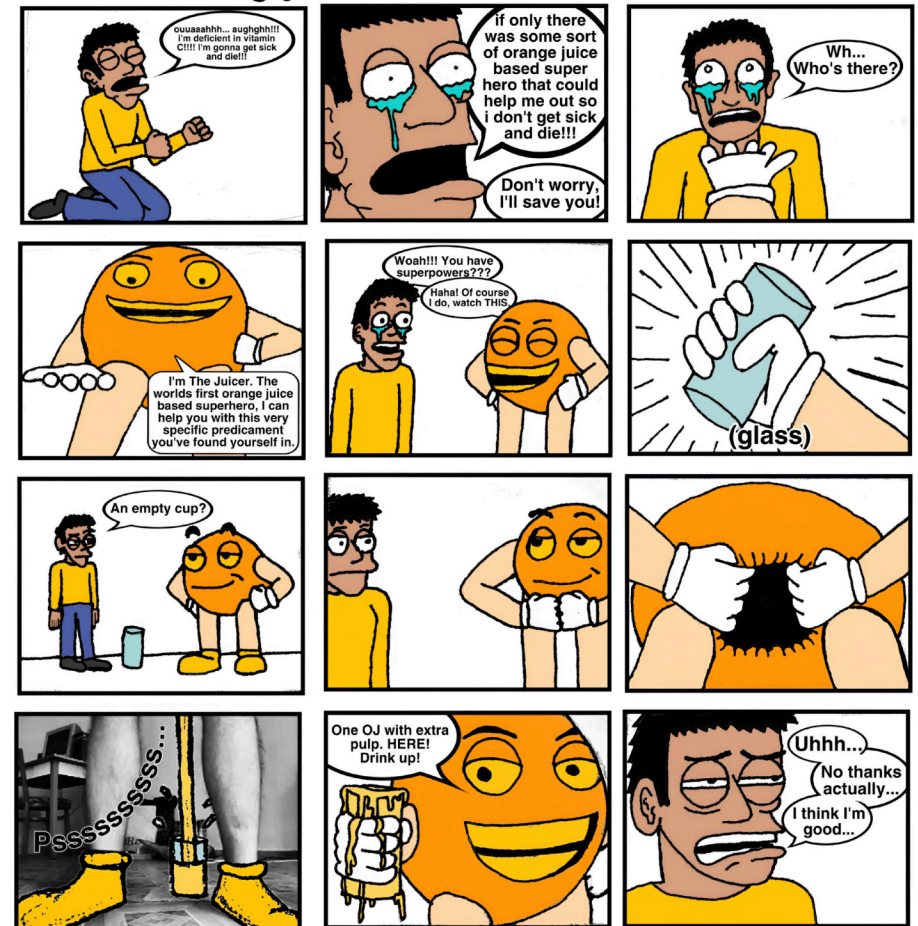


PHOTO BY VINCE BARRERAS



BY MOONPRISM

Recently I realized that I desperately wanted a break from the noise, the ads, and the constant pull I felt towards my phone and decided it was time to do something about it. Quitting social media was the catalyst for changing my addictive phone behavior, but here I'd like to focus on the enabling aspect—the role of the phone itself. I'd love to show you some strategies I've been using to break away from my phone to reclaim my time and sanity!

1. Enjoy The Silence

Turning on Silent Mode is a great start. I'd also advocate for turning off haptics that make your phone buzz. Not being able to hear the phone will help tone down the Pavlovian conditioning that makes us reach for it the second we hear/feel it go off. Sure, it could be important (and you can make exceptions for emergency contacts)... but what if it's not? I recommend turning notifications off for everything you consider to be inessential.

What about messages? We have become accustomed to being available to everyone at all times, but we don't have to be. You deserve time for yourself and for activities that don't require you to constantly be "on-call." The next time you feel like reading a book or cooking a meal, why not experiment with putting your phone in a different room for an hour or two? Out of sight (and earshot), out of mind.

2. Fade To Grayscale

Like sounds and haptics may trigger an automatic response from us, so too can visual stimuli. For example, there is a reason that notifications are red. Red draws our attention, and is associated with warnings and urgency for something that must be addressed immediately. Besides this, your phone's home screen is likely full of a bright assortment of colors and shapes for each icon and widget vying for your attention. This is where turning on Grayscale mode, which turns your screen black and white, can be useful.

Usually found in the accessibility settings of your device, it is included to help those with visual impairments but can also be a great way to dull the overstimulating effects of a colorful phone screen. It's a lot easier to ignore notifications when nothing is standing out, and it reduces eye strain. I set up a shortcut on my iPhone to switch easily from grayscale to default by triple-clicking the right side button. (Here's a guide you can follow that covers both iPhone and many Android devices: <https://www.androidpolice.com/how-to-activate-grayscale-on-mobile/>)

3. Killer In The Home Screen

Try cleaning up the home screen! When I unlock my phone, I'm met with only the icons for making a call, messaging, weather, and the clock. For everything else I have to look in the app library. Having to search makes a difference—it keeps me from mindlessly clicking on whatever catches my eye and instead, I have to make intentional choices. Autonomy!

Some people like to use productivity apps that lock you out of opening other apps. The iPhone has a function called Screen Time (Android devices call their version 'Digital Wellbeing') that can block apps for you for certain amounts of time. I've tried these kinds of tools in the past but I find it more satisfying to make a stronger attempt at exercising self control. Maybe I'm just romanticizing becoming self-disciplined (yes, I'm a Capricorn, why do you ask?), but I do find it more useful. Besides, is the answer to having too many apps really "download another app"?

4. Apps To Ashes

A step further than the above could be deleting everything that isn't a necessity, instead of merely hiding apps from the home screen. Your phone is less appealing when you can only use it for a few functions.

I'm fortunate enough to have a computer at home, and I have an iPad as well. I made a decision to designate those devices with the apps/activities that I don't think I need on my phone—mainly, whatever I tend to use for entertainment. Keeping that stuff on devices I don't always have with me adds just enough friction to help me think before I reach for them.

5. All We Ever Wanted Was...Everything?

So, now your phone is quiet, boring to look at, and slightly less convenient. Now what? Well, maybe start by taking a look around. You're in the middle of something, somewhere, aren't you? Notice what sounds you're hearing, what the temperature is like, how it feels to be where you are right now at this moment. My friends and I made this thing in the hopes that you'd be holding it in your hands like this and thinking about the stuff inside these pages because we wanted to put something into the physical world.

I'm often thinking about life before I was constantly tethered to a single device that held connection with everyone I knew (or DIDN'T know!), to the internet where all the information I could ever want (or NOT want!) is fed to me along with access to every song/movie/TV show/book/video game ever made, a map to make sure I never stray from the most algorithmically optimized route, the weather and the time here and everywhere, a camera, a video camera, a notebook, a voice recorder, a shopping mall, a bank, a taxi service, and more more more...basically, I think the phone is just doing too much. I'm overwhelmed and bored at the same time.

I've been replacing aspects of it by going "backwards". Real books instead of e-books, a pocket notebook to jot down my random thoughts instead of the Notes app, a physical planner, an old iPod with my own curated music library to replace Spotify and an old digital camera. All of these activities became more meaningful for me because they stopped having to compete with each other. The camera and the iPod and the notebooks don't ping me with notifications or get interrupted by ads or texts or calls. I've slowed down, and in doing that, so has my brain. I don't feel as aimless or as anxious as I used to and I think it has a lot to do with not being distracted by my phone—which was always trying to pull me in a million different directions. Taking time to think and paying more attention to what is actually happening around me helps me feel so much better than I used to.

I realize not everybody has access to separate devices as alternatives to the phone—a lot of people rely on their phone because it's their most accessible tool for both social and creative stuff. And if that's you, please don't feel bad if you can't replace your phone with a bunch of old junk like me. Remember that this is about having more control over your device. It IS a tool, so make it work for you! Ask yourself why you're picking up your phone the next time you reach for it. That moment you take for yourself can make a difference in how you spend your time, which is valuable and fleeting.

[illegible]

LOCAL MUSIC: **SOFT NO**

FRIENDSHIP and ROAD TWEAS:
SOFT NO Fall TOUR



PHOTOS AND WRITING BY VINCE BARRERAS



SOFT NO - *Soft No*

GET IN THE VAN! IT'S TOUR TIME with **Soft No**! Is it shoegaze? Is it punk? Is it New Wave? I'm not sure, but their new record is dope, and you should check it out. The band consists of lifelong friends making music together, and it's beautiful. The energy of the live performance is really crazy because everyone is kind of pulling from their backgrounds and blending it all together. Dudes who have played in punk bands their whole life, having synth melodies in their songs is probably something they have never anticipated happening haha.

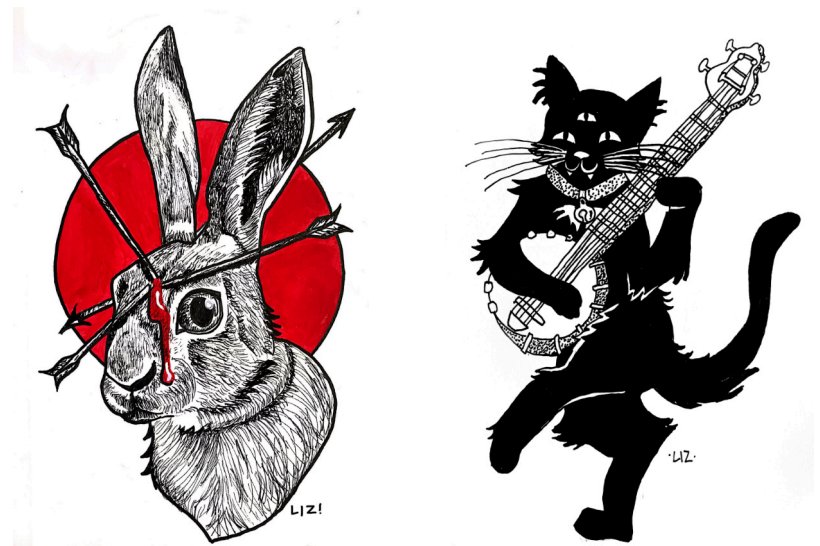
I was lucky enough to join the band on tour: Brooklyn (Gold Sounds), Norfolk CT (Art Monster Studio), Salem Mass (Bit Bar), and Wilkes Barre PA (shoutout to our homie Jared for throwing a gig at his crib). Tour can be grueling and sleep-deprived, but one thing I think everyone will agree on is that the bond you form with your friends on these long drives is a memory you will probably hold for the rest of your life. Talking shit, goofing off, making playlists or drinking tweas in the back of the van with your best friend (allegedly)... The only things that matter are making it to the next city, the next gig; making new friends; and the sights you may see. The lack of sleep or a sore back may bog you down, but the task is always the same: get to the gig.





ARTIST SPOTLIGHT:

LIZZARDRAWZ



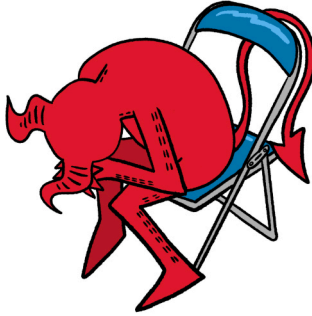
Liz AKA Lizzardrawz is an illustrative artist whose multimedia works are bold, bright, and eclectic. For them, art is a vital form of self-care, a way to process and celebrate life through creativity. They draw inspiration from various tattooing styles and their love for animation. Outside of drawing, they immerse themselves in photography, philosophy, film, music, and caring for their beloved cats.

Find more of Lizzardrawz online:

instagram: @lizzardrawz

What Do We Do When the Rich Are Buying Space In Our Newspapers?

BY ANONYMOUS



With Bezos making editorial decisions for the Washington Post, Musk blowing up Twitter, TikTok setting up Trump to be a hero, and Trump winning 91% of the vote in counties classified as “news deserts,” the importance of ownership of media platforms has never been clearer.

Social media, AI, and wealth inequality have fueled a gnarly brew of disinformation. They are making it ever harder to find reliable news, while creating subgroups of people who have entirely different versions of facts about what is going on in the world.

At our local paper of record, the Philadelphia Inquirer, we have a number of great investigative journalists who bring to light critical information about the goings-on around town. However, there have been troubling developments in the opinion section the past few years.

In 2022, the Inquirer began publishing biweekly columns by Jennifer Stefano and Kyle Sammin, two people with close connections to the right-wing political network associated with the Commonwealth Foundation and billionaire education privatization zealot Jeff Yass.

The PACs affiliated with this political network are by far the largest spenders on political campaigns in PA, almost entirely bankrolled by Yass, to the tune of over \$67 million since 2019.

Stefano is Executive Vice President of the Commonwealth Foundation. Sammin is Managing Editor for Philly-based conservative media outlet Broad+Liberty, which received over \$80,000 from Commonwealth Foundation and related organizations during 2018-2021.

From mid-2022 through mid-2024, the Inquirer op-ed page was inundated with conservative op-eds from Stefano and Sammin, including over a dozen pieces expressing the pair's anti-public school and anti-teachers union views. Members of the public raised eyebrows, but the Inquirer never gave any explanation.

Now, nonprofit 990 filings have shown that Stefano and Sammin's presence in the op-ed pages may have likely been funded by a foundation run by the treasurer of a charter school organization. During 2021-2023, Henry L

Kimelman Family Foundation gave \$225,000 to the Lenfest Institute for Journalism, which owns the Inquirer.

In 2022, the Kimelman Foundation's filing states that their donation was "TO CREATE A MORE ROBUST OPINION SECTION OF THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER AND [HTTP://INQUIRER.COM](http://inquirer.com) WITH A GREATER DIVERSITY OF VIEWS AND TO SUPPORT INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING AT THE INQUIRER".

The president of the Kimelman Foundation is Donald Kimelman, who during those years was the Treasurer of Mastery Charter Schools, the largest charter school management organization in Philadelphia, which operates 18 schools in the city. A founding sponsor of Mastery Charter Schools is Brook Lenfest, son of Gerry Lenfest (the media executive and philanthropist who provided \$70 million toward the endowment of the Lenfest Institute for Journalism).

Brook Lenfest's own foundation donated \$8.2 million to Mastery Charter Schools during 2017-2020 and \$600,000 to the Commonwealth Foundation 2017-2023. Mastery Charter Schools also received \$2.7 million from Susquehanna Foundation, where Jeff Yass is Vice President, during 2018-2019.

This intertwined network of education privatization organizations, foundations, and individuals connected with the Philadelphia Inquirer forces one to wonder, was the uptick in pro-privatization opinions on the Inquirer's pages due to a concerted effort by monied pro-privatization interests with influence on the newspaper's opinion section? If the Inquirer's true goal was to present a more diverse array of viewpoints, why did they choose two writers with connections to the same political network, one of whom (Stefano) is a paid lobbyist who doesn't even live in Philadelphia?

Meanwhile, the expansion of charter schools in Philadelphia over the past few decades has coincided with declining public school enrollment and a growing charter school patronage network involving sketchy real estate deals, huge and redundant management fees paid to suburban consultants, and exorbitant salaries and benefits for charter administrators. When students leave the School District for charter schools, they take tax dollars with them, leaving the district with a shrinking pool of money to meet the education needs of the rest of the population, including those students who charter schools refuse to admit. Combine this with deteriorating school conditions due to billions of dollars of deferred maintenance, and we have a return of the specter of mass public school closures in the coming years.

Interestingly, there haven't been any new op-ed pieces in the Inquirer from Sammin or Stefano since September 3. Perhaps the public questioning of the independence of its opinion page decisions caused the Inquirer to decide to end their relationship with these contributors, or perhaps the funding for their slots just ended. In any case, it's deeply concerning if the Inquirer allowed a foundation run by a charter school network leader to pay to influence the content of its opinion pages.

In a media ecosystem where the wealthy have such power to purchase media platforms, steer hiring decisions, censor or prop up information and perspectives, and/or influence decision-making through grants, what are we to do?

Some potential strategies could be to throw more support toward worker-owned media companies like Defector, decentralized social media models like Mastodon, and local DIY publications like this very one (thank you, dear reader)! The Trump administration is sure to try to make things worse for journalism, but this is all the more reason for us to build up platforms that are more difficult for the rich and powerful to control.

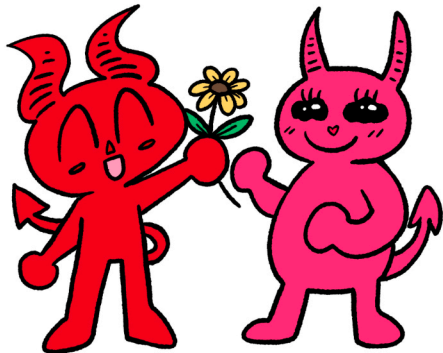
CARING FOR OTHERS

I love being alone, tbh. I was a pretty solitary kid and even as an adult, I'm often perfectly content to just totally immerse myself in my hobbies and shut the world out. It can be nice because it helps me to have time to be creative, figure out my shit, and just like...breathe, you know? But even so, I have learned that I can only comfort myself so much—I'm a social creature no matter how many memes about being a weird little introvert I used to reblog on my Tumblr. When it comes down to it, when I'm feeling lost, scared and sad, I turn to other people even when I'm alone. The music someone wrote, the movie someone filmed, the food someone cooked, the garden someone planted, the game someone designed...behind everything in this world are the people who made it so you could enjoy it.

A glass of wine in the bathtub rules, but to me a heart-to-heart over beers in the backyard beats it by miles. You can buy a face mask but you can't buy real friendship. As much as making myself feel better about a bad day can feel like a small win, that pales in comparison to helping a friend feel better about theirs. I'm not an expert in anything and I'm not here to tell you what to do....but the next time you're down, why don't you talk to someone? Text your friends. When you make someone else know that they aren't all alone in the world, you're also reminding yourself that you're not alone, either. An act of self-care can cheer us up for a moment when we're feeling like shit, but it's when we reach out and care for others that we build bonds. Shared empathy becomes resilience, and the ability to gain insight and strength that endures far longer than the temporary comfort of something you impulse buy to make yourself feel better. (Looking at you, \$15 lipstick that doesn't suit me sitting in the bottom of my makeup bag.)

Here are a few ideas to help you be kind to both yourself and others when things get tough (like now). My hope is that you might feel inspired to try one or two and find that over time, if you consistently care for others you'll find that they care for you too. We often hear people telling us that we need community to survive, but what does that look like for you? Maybe like me, you've tried getting involved with a group but ultimately felt overwhelmed. Perhaps one way of showing up for broader community efforts is by attending to and nurturing the relationships you already have. With consistent effort these bonds you cultivate can create a network of trust and support. Your inner circle can be a source of comfort and strength. And when you feel secure there, the idea of joining/starting a local community project might not seem overwhelming anymore.

—L



IS SELF-CARE, TOO

I wanna treat myself to takeout tonight + I'll host a potluck with my friends next week

Gonna re-read my favorite book + Maybe I could start or join a book club

Taking a mental health walk + I'll invite a friend next time

Listening to my favorite music + I'll make a playlist to share with others

Wanna buy myself a fancy coffee + Maybe my roommate could use one too?

I love to crochet + I wonder if my neighbor would like to learn how I do it?

Drawing is relaxing + Maybe my friend needs a flyer for their event?

Feel like going for a drive + Could I help someone out with a ride today?

I got those new clothes + I could give the things I don't wear anymore to someone in need

I'm gonna play a video game + I'm gonna take my dog for a walk/toss a toy around with my cat

Turning my phone off tonight cause I need some space + I'll call someone to catch up tomorrow

I love walking through the park + I bet I could get involved with a community garden or a trash cleanup!

I just want to be lazy and watch a movie + I will invite a friend I haven't seen in a while to come over and watch with me!

I'm gonna bake cookies + I can drop some off at a community fridge

Today I'll relax and "turn my brain off" + Tomorrow I'm going to join an organization that is working on issues I care about

MUTUAL AID AT JTD

BY CHARLIE ALLISON, DECEMBER 2024

PHOTOS USED WITH PERMISSION FROM CAMPJTD'S IG



Crocodile and Winky were present for the entirety of the JTD encampment in 2020.

Could you tell me in a few words what the JTD was?

Crocodile: The James Talib Dean encampment was a homeless encampment on the parkway, right by the art museum.

Winky: The Von Colln Field.

Crocodile: It grew to be very, very big.

Winky: Our highest headcount was 489, and our lowest (which were the ones that were reported on) was around 150 people.

Crocodile: It was a no-cop zone. The people came from a lot of different places. That's the short version.

Winky: Yeah. It was where over 180 homeless people lived at any given time and generally had access to medical care...

Crocodile: Yeah, and running water, that's a big one.

Winky: A shower.

Crocodile: Lighting. Supply tents, though we did run low at times. Medical station. An entire, quite elaborate kitchen with four gas burners. A lot of food.

Winky: Yeah, there was always food there. A lot of restaurants dropped off food they'd made at JTD—some because they couldn't sell it and some who had made it specifically for the camp.

Crocodile: We had a constant stream of people. We had to get a lot of Porta-Potties too! There was laundry service, which was a big deal.

Who made up the population of the JTD and how did they get there?

Winky: JTD was founded June 11, 2020. It was a combination of activists and homeless Philadelphians who decided to go to Von Colln Field and put the call out for everyone from there, whether you were houseless or not, to hold the space. We kinda went from there.

Crocodile: And once the call for defense went out...

Winky: By the second day when people saw this was going to be a thing and it wasn't getting raided, it really clicked and more people showed up.

Cops depend on not being seen when they enact their violence on houseless people.

Crocodile: This was at the height of George Floyd Uprising energy. A lot of the bigger actions had died down. The city had stepped back from tear gas and a lot of people were asking, "What can we do next, collaboratively?" And then JTD happened and within a couple weeks we had a couple hundred people.

Winky: Oh, absolutely. At one point donations were not keeping up with demand. But it was still of interest to a lot of Philadelphia. We had people marching for Black lives but not doing much else—so when you create a cop-free zone, people were interested. Cops depend on not being seen when they enact their violence on houseless people.



What were some of the ways that people gave aid there?

Crocodile: There was food at JTD all the time, always someone cooking in the kitchen. A lot of excess food and donations from restaurants.

Winky: There was medical support! Though there were some major medical problems in the camp, especially diabetes and heart disease. People got clean at JTD, in their own way and in their own time. But even through all this, the laundry service was huge for a number of reasons. The camp itself helped people feel as if they weren't invisible, they couldn't be abstracted away and ignored. And the proof of that was that there were always way more residents than there ever were volunteers—everyone aided each other as best they could.

What practical steps did the JTD and its inhabitants and volunteers take to provide for itself?

Crocodile: There was always cleaning the toilets. And trash was always a problem, but people helped out because they felt they were contributing to something bigger than themselves, like you said. The camp managed to get water out of a fountain and, through clever use of a hose network through the trees, make a shower from it.

Winky: Even with these problems, the camp's Covid rates were way lower than in the city shelters. People built things—barricades when the cops got too nosy, blocked off streets with bleachers so they couldn't stage if they wanted to try and break up the camp. Everyone was doing something.

Walk us through a typical day at JTD.

Winky: It was a lively community—cooking, building. Weeks were lived in a day. There was always something to do, something to help with. I lived there for a while myself when I was housing-insecure.

Crocodile: It's hard to have a typical day at an autonomous zone. You'd start doing one thing and end up doing about twelve by the end of the day... wound care, food prep, infrastructure. JTD lasted six months. People came in to help from NYC, from Atlanta, from Wilmington, when they saw that JTD wasn't going away.

How did the JTD survive as long as it did in the face of a hostile/indifferent city government?

Crocodile: Someone sold JTD out and forced a deal where those who had done the most got no say. The deal that was made dissolved the camps and most people were forced back into living on the street alone.

Winky: Before that, the city put up a bunch of orange notices, signs telling the residents of JTD to leave or else. JTD ignored those notices and trained. Crocodile: JTD survived as long as it did for a reason. We built barricades, ran shield drills in public, and made it clear that nobody was going anywhere without a fight. The city and cops couldn't have gotten us out of there without teargas. The one time the city was staging for a big raid, probably with teargas, it rained, which made the gas useless, so they called it off.

JTD survived as long as it did for a reason. We built barricades, ran shield drills in public, and made it clear that nobody was going anywhere without a fight.

What lessons can we learn now from the experience of JTD?

Remember that solidarity is shared risk.

Crocodile: Decentralize. No spokespeople, no self-appointed leaders that can cut deals behind the back of the residents. Don't ever trust the city. Don't concentrate power; no vanguards, no professional activists or revolutionaries can ever be the voice of a movement. Remember that courage is contagious.

Winky: If you must deal with the city, make sure what they offer actually exists! If an autonomous zone is a shared space, it needs to be a shared movement. Don't default to normal ideas. There is huge potential in the houseless people and activists working together. Remember that solidarity is shared risk—not just a buzzword.



TRANSIT CHRONICLES:

808' TIME LOOP

CONTINUED FROM CITYWIDE #1

BY ROXANNA LEIGH ALVINI

“Happy Halloween to all our Phillies fans out there celebrating our World Series win after these 28 grueling years!” J.D.’s old radio alarm clock rang out from across the room. “Be prepared for a hell of a crowd out there on Broad Street today.”

J.D. flung the covers off his body and sprang out of his childhood bed as 91.7 started playing Kanye West’s “Heartless.” He was in his parents’ house on Brookfield Road, which made no sense since they had sold the house after the divorce. He felt his head spinning. He leaned against the wall, his hand landing on his Day After Tomorrow poster. He ran his hand down the Statue of Liberty’s frozen arm.

“Jared, if you don’t start moving soon, you’ll miss the 101 with your friends to get downtown!” his mom yelled from downstairs. He felt a tug around his waist, an invisible lasso that pulled him to the dresser. He started throwing on whatever was on top of the drawers, then swung around and continued into the brightly lit hallway.

He stopped himself to glance up and down its length. He felt like he had stepped into a time capsule. He shook his head, feeling the weight of a bowling ball between his shoulders. He felt the sudden tug again towards the bathroom in front of him. It wasn’t until he looked in the mirror while brushing his teeth that he realized he wasn’t just in his past. The brush dropped from his hand with a light ping against the porcelain sink. He was a part of this time capsule.

He quickly ran his hands over the sixteen-year-old face that stared back at him. He stuck his face under the faucet in a mad rush. The cold water hit him like sheets of ice. *Please wake up, wake up*, he kept repeating to himself. J.D. brought his face out of the water, keeping his eyes shut tight. He took a long inhale before opening them again. He was still sixteen. *What the actual fuck is going on here?*

His arm shot to the sink to retrieve the toothbrush, placing it back in the holder. He felt himself swing around again to continue downstairs. He walked into the kitchen to see his parents eating breakfast together. J.D. slowed his pace, his body continuing on autopilot. He kept his eyes focused on them with hesitation as he crossed the length of the room. When they had decided to separate in the future—or *was that still the present?*—the news felt like it had come from nowhere.

They were eating together in silence. His mom had her head bent over one of the books she was reading for her Friday night mom’s club. His dad was frantically writing last-minute orders for the shop. J.D. could feel the canyon already between them. It made a sudden chill run up his spine.

“Don’t you want some eggs, honey?” His mom popped her head out of her book to look up at him.

“No, thanks,” he said slowly. It felt weird conversing with this forty-year-old version of her versus the sixty-year-old one he had become accustomed to.

“All right, please grab a jacket before you go!” she yelled as he sprinted to the front door.

“Angie, if he needs a jacket, he’ll grab one,” he heard his dad respond to her as he shut the door behind him. He felt his heart racing a million miles a minute. He had to take a few breaths again while he leaned back into the front door. Why the hell was he back here? Also, why was his body moving without permission from his neural transmitters? The invisible force tugged at his navel again and he jolted forward across the path that crossed the lawn. He looked over to see a “Yes We Can” sign sticking up in front of their house.

~

Rosie half walked, half ran for the 47 bus, hopping on right as it pulled up next to her. She frantically searched her freshman backpack which she had been able to identify before getting the hell out of there and felt the cool, sleek coins against her hand. *No way*. She had three SEPTA tokens. When was the last time she even held one of these?

The bus driver glared at her. “Sorry,” she whispered, coming out of the recurring shock that was this morning. She put two tokens back where she found them and paid the fare then continued to an open seat in the back of the bus. She looked down at the blue fabric and cringed. She slowly seated herself, staying on the edge of the seat. Around her, everyone was talking in loud excitement, dressed in their best Phillies gear.

Rosie felt the buzz of a phone in the outside pocket of her backpack. She reached in and pulled out her old Razr phone, then held it in her outstretched palm just staring at the sleek pink design. *This can’t be possible. It just can’t be. Right?*

The phone buzzed again. She flipped it open and, remembering like it was yesterday, she used the arrow keys to get to the messages screen. There were two messages from Ryan:

babe wtf where’d u go?
btw you left your necklace :{



Rosie stared at the messages like a bomb had been detonated in her brain. *Michael’s necklace*. She had left it back then, or today, whatever. Her memories started to flood back. *Air, Rosie, you need to breathe*. She took a deep breath and looked out of the bus window at a sea of red and white pinstripe jerseys milling around 9th Street Market.

She slumped against the seat, forgetting the ugly old fabric that probably housed years of dust, urine, and god knew what else. The last thing she remembered was that creepy man smiling at her while she fell through a hole into this sort of time loop, back to a day she had hidden from herself for the last sixteen years.

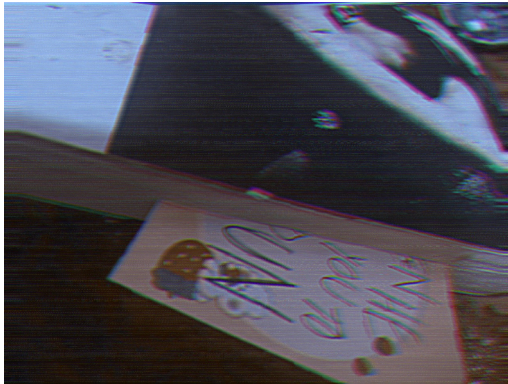
She felt lost and alone, very much like her fourteen-year-old self would’ve felt. She decided to focus on her surroundings again to ground herself. The sun blindly glinted off the cars the bus moved past. There wasn’t a cloud visible in the pastel blue sky. They passed South Street, officially crossing over into Center City territory, when she felt another buzz from her phone. A deep sense of dread hit her chest. *What now?* It was a message from J.D.:



Rosie, I need your help.

WANNA DANCE?

BY ALEX TIMMONS



"When he asks you to dance, *RUN*"

The message is clearly in your handwriting. The post-it note was stuck in your favorite book. But you know you didn't write it. When would you have? You've been doing homework nonstop for weeks now, trying to catch up on everything you missed while you were recovering after the accident. You certainly haven't had the time to read, at least not for pleasure, and given that your book couldn't have less to do with dancing, you doubt it was a bookmark or notes you had taken. It couldn't be a reminder to yourself—you missed senior prom because of the surgery you needed to heal your broken body, though it's not like boys were lining up around the block to ask you to dance anyway. This short note on a post-it... You feel so surely that this was not written by you, but instead by a you that hasn't happened yet. A warning.

Graduation comes and goes. Your recovery has been long and painful, but come Fall you're ready for college, despite that warning hanging over your head. Every time someone invites you to a party or suggests you come along to one of the school-sponsored dances, you politely refuse—after all, someone might ask you to dance. You often wish your future self had been a bit more descriptive. A time and date, a context—hell, even a year would suffice. "When a guy named Greg asks you to dance in the Spring of 2027, walk away" might be too much to ask, but "When he asks you to dance, *RUN*" is a little... vague. Your warning may be destroying your social life, but you know this is for your protection.

Years pass, and you occasionally wonder if you've already succeeded. Maybe avoiding dances, parties, or anything social, really, has allowed you to obey your future's warning without even realizing it. It must be okay by now, you catch yourself thinking. Besides, it's not like you could say "yes" to a dance at this point. You may not remember your accident, but your body does, and your old injuries are beginning to re-emerge, leaving you bedridden in agony during frequent flare-ups. Soon, you find yourself rooting around in the basement for your old wheelchair, the one they gave you after the hospital. Thank goodness you kept it.

It's your 40th birthday, and you blow out your candles from your brand new wheelchair. You've made few acquaintances over the years, but you came from a small family and you got used to the solitude. Your fear of the warning never waned, so you remained single and not-so-ready to mingle. You used to worry that no one could love someone so damaged, but by now you've accepted it. He couldn't ask you to dance if you never met him, right?

You're 60. Your damaged body has degraded far past what the doctors can repair. You've been in hospice for some time, and you can feel it—tonight's the night. As the life begins to leave your eyes, it flashes before them. You see many miserable years rewind in your mind until you get back to the night you were hurt, the night you could never remember but your body never forgot.

You're walking home from a friend's house. There's a... man. You don't think you recognize him. You're... arguing? You can only see clips and phrases, but it looks like it's getting heated.

"Wanna dance?" he says as you stare, puzzled.

Then he lunges.

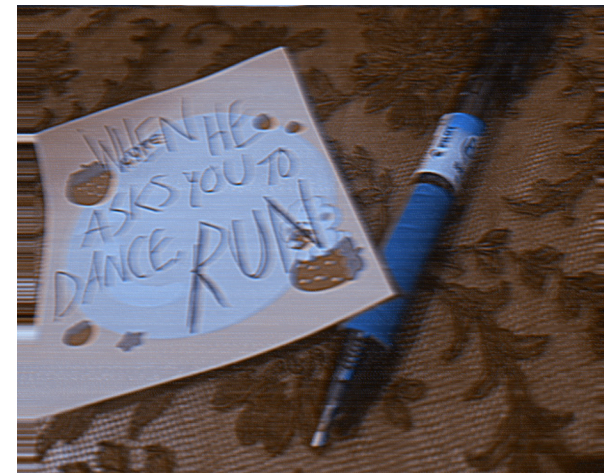
It's no accident.

With your last breath, you reach for your bed stand. A pen, and a post-it.

"When he asks you to dance, *RUN*"

It disappears.

Maybe this time, you'll find the warning before it's too late.



.....
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FREE CONSULTATION.

PROTECT YOURSELF, PROTECT YOUR PEACE



NANNY BUA'S ORZO SOUP FOR ONE

BY MADELYN

I dream about this soup. Every night I put it in the oven for Barney and me, sit down at the TV, and wake up with a burnt tongue. This has been happening since spring and it's about to be soup season.

Did you know hunger is not about the amount of food you've had, but flavors? I found this out when my taste buds went to shit mid-May. Unfortunate, but now I can scarf down an entire family dinner! I can do it twice. The chairs too. Impressive, right? And when I'm dabbing my chin clean of upholstery foam, there's still a growling. Like the groans of a settling home. My organs shift about as my stomach walls dry out. I've thought extremely hard about it and I figured out the cause is a real-life void in my middle that's pulling all my outsides in.

I went to the butcher to see about stopping it. It seemed like something he would understand. He broke down bodies for a living and must be familiar with the not-supposed-to-be-holes. I mean, when was the last time your doctor had their hands up some sad broad's breast bone? When I asked, he insisted I already knew what to do. Didn't even look up from his soppessata. Nextttt. If anything, I admire his efficiency. The man behind me let out a sob when he was handed his shingled pack of pepper jack. I decided I was the better off one, left with my pound of greasy turkey and threw it out past the doors.

Per his suggestion, I tried everything I thought I knew.

Snorting chlorine water.

Potions of shampoo.

Grating erasers over my coffee.

Dissolving family photos between my gums.

Chewing on polly pocket shoes.

My tongue feels like rubber.

The spider living in the cup holder of my car sent me a message through a window wide web. It spelled out O R Z O. Maybe that was it. To my defense, how often is the problem the solution? She said it had to be exact. Right down to the busted pot we threw out when we packed up my Nanny's house when she croaked. I've been digging in trash cans for a bit now. I'm beginning to think I've misplaced it and there are unfortunately no substitutions.

I called my Mom for the recipe. She asked who was calling, so I hung up.

For the last few weeks I've been determined to recreate the recipe from gestational memory alone, but to my knowledge none of them came out right. My tongue has fallen lame, remember?

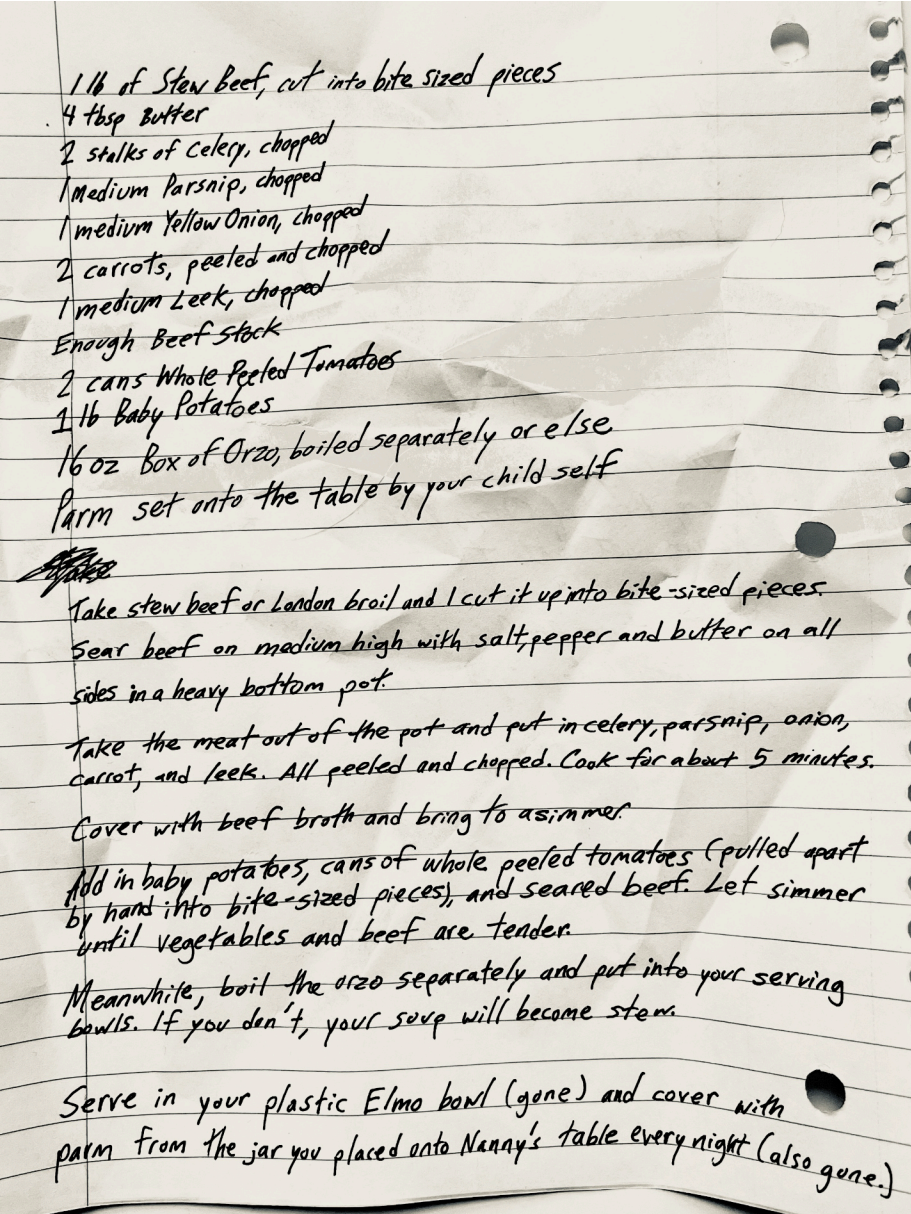
My fridge is overflowing with Corningware mold. Remember.

I have to walk in lieu of sleep now. The smell of spoiled broth and the stomach pains are gnarly. Last night I took the row homes down to number 531. There was a green light on and a dutch oven on the stoop. It was familiar, but not at all. Someone else's memory maybe.

Inside was a piece of paper with a recipe.

I'd cook it, but I don't think it's mine and a part of me is worried it won't solve anything anyway.

I'd appreciate it if you could try it and let me know.



1 lb of Stew Beef, cut into bite sized pieces
4 tbsp Butter
2 stalks of Celery, chopped
1 medium Parsnip, chopped
1 medium Yellow Onion, chopped
2 carrots, peeled and chopped
1 medium Leek, chopped
Enough Beef Stock
2 cans Whole Peeled Tomatoes
1 lb Baby Potatoes
16 oz Box of Orzo, boiled separately or else
Parm set onto the table by your child self

~~Take~~
Take stew beef or London broil and I cut it up into bite-sized pieces.
Sear beef on medium high with salt, pepper and butter on all sides in a heavy bottom pot.
Take the meat out of the pot and put in celery, parsnip, onion, carrot, and leeks. All peeled and chopped. Cook for about 5 minutes.
Cover with beef broth and bring to a simmer.
Add in baby potatoes, cans of whole peeled tomatoes (pulled apart by hand into bite-sized pieces), and seared beef. Let simmer until vegetables and beef are tender.
Meanwhile, boil the orzo separately and put into your serving bowls. If you don't, your soup will become starchy.
Serve in your plastic Elmo bowl (gone) and cover with parm from the jar you placed onto Nanny's table every night (also gone.)



Essential to their craft, I'm told, is the father & son sharing the same bed. Together in a house with no electricity. Together in a house with no running water. Together in the house where father & son share the same bed so that they might work.

Once a year on the outskirts of a village in Southern France the father brings up his son, a teenager, to work with him in the late stages of cheese development. Together they tend to the cows & the grasses & they collaborate with their hands to the heating of milk & when they finish they go in silence together to their shared bed.

For a month the father & the son rise together in the morning & once their work is done they lay down together to rest. At the end of the month they will have taken out the wheels aging from the previous year & they will place new curds in molds with brine & bacteria to be taken out & packaged by the same father & son the following year. The son will go up to work with the father for a month's time wherein they will share a bed together in the house with no running water & no electricity.

The father tells the son that the grasses in springtime at their specific elevation, once metabolized by their cows, yield from the milk the highest quality butterfat—a butterfat superior in riches to that of their competitors. The father tells the son their specific pastures at their specific elevation are devoid of invasive vegetable growth that could potentially pass on unwanted flavor to the milk.

In many ways, father is teaching son how to control & monitor the materials which go in that then result in the forms that come out. Father teaches son the threat of onion & garlic. Father shows son how to put his hands on the milking cows. Son learns he is heavy in possession of a thin border.

This is information told to me by a man working the counter of a cheese shop I frequent. This storefront is far from the isolated hills of Southern France where cheese is cultivated by the bonds of father & son. The cheese is delivered to us in an American city where the man at the counter & I share samples in tandem while he tells me of a father & his son.

At night, when father & son are bedded together, the father injects history into their lightless cocoon. He tells his son that 200 million years ago where their bed is now was a bed of water that exists now only as salt. Men in mines work together to extract this salt so that they, the father & son asleep in their shared bed, may purchase their product in order to enhance the flavor of their own.

200 million years ago in the same darkness where son lay silently was organic life contributing salinity to the water where father now holds deed to land. Organic life in the water where there is no light or vegetal threat. In the bed where father & son lay anabolic together. In the same dark room where the father was once a son who laid in bed with his father & learned of what was 200 million years ago. In the processes which form the intimacy between son & father, tended to in shared isolation & in the dark together. In the tension created by the hand so as to encourage milk from a tit. In the lactate crystals which form in cheese through the aging process. In the bed & in the work & then into me where father & son & the men who mine the salt of fish are subsumed into the broader aggregate together.

In the morning there is light in the room of son & father. The light agitates the men back into their point of the continuum. They work & spend the day & then they lay to rest in a bed that fits two. In their bed is all of the body that is emitted nocturnally: skin, dander, salt. The materials of leather. All that is fundamental to their work. The cheese of them—the father & son who share the same bed. The son who may become the father concerned with the work of 200 million years. The man at the counter tells all of this to me while instructing me to hold the cheese in my mouth. He tells me to hold, not swallow. There is a difference. The enzymes in my spit will activate what lies dormant in the cheese so I may experience the whole of it before I digest it. Before it is removed from my body later. We maintain eye contact as he commands the space. I do what he tells me. People, I'm told, often ignore this process & instead just swallow. They do not hold the togetherness. The togetherness in my mouth for him & for him & for the him before & after him. All of us in the bed of my mouth where there are reactions to salt but not light.

I purchase a small wedge of this cheese for 17 USD. The man at the counter wraps it loosely in parchment paper. He tells me that because this is a fermented product it is technically a living organism & wrapping it too tightly could restrict the functions of its living things. I thank him—the man whose priority is life & its forms of taking.

I return to my apartment where I stand alone & hold small pieces of the cheese in my mouth. They dissolve. I experience the whole of it. Fat is broken down & then released into my blood so that my body may utilize it & arm the labor of men who cultivate the work of time that now only exists as dark.



ART BY MARK HENKEL *AVALANCHE*

HAVE YOU MAYBE CONSIDERED THAT THIS IS ALL IN YOUR HEAD?

BY ANONYMOUS



Like most Americans, I've lived my life surrounded by people with ill-managed chronic conditions. My mother has had an autoimmune condition for her entire adult life which has consistently been undiagnosed, misdiagnosed, or written off altogether. You'd never know she was suffering unless you saw her when it got really bad, her eyes and voice swallowed by a reaction to god knows what, though she'd deny through her closed throat that she needed anything from anyone—a stance that has real utility in a nation like this, which is the only nation like this. My dear friend Sarah passed away at 27 from a heart condition which, as I understand it, could have been managed if her care team had just performed the tests

that she and her family insisted she needed. She put her faith in doctors because what else could she do, and she died on the treadmill.

I'm fortunate to have had exceptionally good health throughout my life, but recently I got really sick. From September through December I went to no less than ten doctors in an effort to identify the source of some nebulous pain in my left side that had me on the couch for stretches of hours and sometimes days on end, calling out of work, forgoing all engagements. At one point, a specialist suggested that my lasting pain—which had begun concurrently with a confirmed infection—had been spurred on by the anxiety I'd been experiencing, triggering a kind of mind-body feedback loop. Though I've softened to this idea, I initially balked at this, as many of us understandably bristle at the word “psychosomatic” because it's so often been used to usher hysterical women out of the doctor's office. No one could tell me where the pain was actually coming from, and while most doctors were kind and attentive, no one seemed that concerned, and some prescribed meds that didn't work or weren't even intended to manage the symptoms I was describing. The pain was so intense that there were days I couldn't walk.

My decision to write about my own recent experience with the U.S. healthcare system feels prescient in the wake of cuts to federal healthcare funding and the UnitedHealth CEO shooting. It also feels less revelatory than ever, because everyone in this country has a story. Having exhausted conversation with my peers, I have concluded that care for women my age—among, of course, many others—is inevitably spotty, its coordination disrupted at best and downright refused at worst. I've questioned whether my own story at the periphery of the wreckage of American healthcare is even worth sharing so openly; my story was old news before I sat down to write, was old news even before my symptoms began. And as I write this in January, having taken a pack of steroids, my pain has expired save for the occasional pang. (Conveniently, my Medicaid coverage is also due to expire.)

During one of my worst couch days in November I watched the 1995 movie “Safe,” wherein young Julianne Moore plays a woman named Carol who falls victim to an illness allegedly triggered by exposure to common chemicals in her environment. Upon discovering that her illness is not widely accepted or understood by conventional doctors, Carol retreats to a commune with other individuals apparently suffering from similar ailments. There, she physically deteriorates—despite having moved far away from the alleged sources of her pain. The implicit question arises as to whether something psychological is perpetuating her illness.

As I laid there with my own mystifying pain coursing down my back and into my leg, I felt next to nothing for poor Carol. She was lonely, sure, but she was the kind of mentally vacuous rich LA housewife who took her loneliness out on the maid and the guys delivering her new three-thousand-dollar couch. If she was being poisoned, it was by more than engine fumes or surface cleaner. But nearing the two-hour mark, when she's hobbling with an oxygen tank, spots all over her skin, it's obvious if it wasn't before that her pain is real, regardless of its source.

I could identify acutely with Carol, and I kind of hated her. It has since occurred to me that I felt this way precisely because I had begun to hate myself, too, for having an unverifiable illness that I couldn't convince anyone, even myself, was real. Feeling alone and discouraged from conveying it to anyone for fear of not being taken seriously, I had been sinking deeper and deeper into my well of pain without knowing when or how I'd be able to claw myself out.

I still don't know the source of the intense and alien pain that consumed me last season. I feel so lucky to have shaken it off (fingers crossed), but through my experience I learned a great deal about the people around me. Once I opened up to them, friends, family, coworkers have compassionately offered their own tales of frustration and agony with complex illness and the ingrained lack of compassion in our healthcare system. Since hearing their stories, I have become gentler with myself, and I am convinced that this gentleness took some of the edge off my symptoms.* I am coming to believe that continuing to talk about our pain, even at the risk of courting cliché, of rehashing “old news,” is fundamental to our survival. We don't have to live in isolation, and in fact our isolation perpetuates our pain, sometimes in very real and measurable ways.



*There is a contemporary theory posited by a Dr. John Sarno that some psychosomatic illness is rooted in self-directed rage. I read an essay (“Unspeakable Pain: A Personal Journey Through Psychosomatic Illness”) by a ‘productivity coach’ named Tiago Forte whose personal experience corroborates this theory. His story and brand seem a bit bootstrappy on first skim, and I am taking this story with a grain of salt—however, I do think that for the most part, regular people in the US have adapted to conventional doctors' close-minded, isolationist approach to health, and we all could benefit from thinking more holistically about how our bodies function.

EPICENE FESTSCHRIFT

BY PETER WAKEMAN SCHRANZ

My five year old daughter Gwen whispered in my ear "Father, lie back down: the nail has not yet been removed from your foot!"

And "O, darling," I said, delirious with the rust-poison that had exploded throughout me, "bellow the fireplace and re-enwetten my forehead cloth--I'm nearly finished the speech I am to deliver on the occasion of my colleague's retirement."

"But wait, Father," pled Gwen, "Wait for Doctor Trachtenberg. He refused to visit until I promised him all the dolls of my childhood, in which life stage I, a five-year-old, shall be lodged for æons."

A firm and emotionless sleep grasped me by the head, and when it released me, I found Doctor Trachtenberg standing over me, combing the hair of a doll that had recently come into his possession. "It is late, Mr. Schranz," he said. "Your daughter has put herself to bed, but not before she bid me direct your gaze upon waking to the document on your nightstand."

I elbowed across my bed to the document, a page in blue crayon, and in my daughter's early handwriting. "My Speech," she'd titled it, "by Peter Schranz." This is how it went:

"Thank you all for letting me speak about my friend, who is retiring. Retiring is when you don't have a job anymore. I like my friend, which is why I don't want them to retire. My daughter, Gwendolyn Isidore Schranz, earned a four out of four on her spelling test, and misses my dad's friend, who is retiring. For goodness's sake, is there any apple pie at this party? Love, Peter."

I let the document fall from my fingers and said, "I shall have to thank my daughter when she awakens, Doctor, but now must flee to my colleagues. Since you've taken care of things, I suppose I shall flee on foot."

But "Not so fast," warned Doctor Trachtenberg, "For you see, the nail in your foot was trapped as if born within it, and so medicine demanded that I remove your foot, in toto, and toss it into your fireplace. On the floor by your daughter's document you'll find the nail's charred remains, which I tonged from the fire after the chief matter of your foot floated up the chimney."

I stared down at my body, awash in its own fluid, and died minutes later, as the drool of Doctor Trachtenberg fell into my eyes. And such are the events that led to my death, which is how I came to be here, where we all are now, in Hell!



THANK YOU FOR PICKING UP OUR SECOND ISSUE!



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